

Commentary

BLACK AFRICAN JEWS, THE NIGERIAN QUESTION AND THE LOST TEN TRIBES OF ISRAEL: A COMPARISON OF IGBO AND YORUBA CLAIMS TO JEWISH AND JUDAIC TRADITIONS

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Abstract: In the last two decades, small communities within Igbo (and other smaller ethnic groups in Eastern Nigeria); and the Yoruba speaking ethnic groups of Nigeria have been calling for State/Provincial, National and International attention that, they have Jewish blood connections. But they lack synergy in mounting common campaign for their joint cause. Rather, they have been campaigning separately for local, national and international recognition as Jews. While both already have local recognition, they are yet to have national and international ones. How true are these conflicting claims? And how far has international community reacted to these?

Keywords: Black Africa, Jews, Igbo, Yoruba, Jewish and Judaic Traditions

Introduction

Yorubas and Igbos are two major ethnic groups in the Southern part of Nigeria. They have been interacting right from pre-colonial period. Though politically enemies, they have some cultural and linguistic similarities occasioned by the 17th century political, social and economic interaction (Nweke, 2013:2, Akinjogbin, 2002:131, Aremo, 2009:5). These two major Southern Nigeria ethnic groups (and in the case of Igbos) their minority ethnic groups (The Annang, Efik and Ibibio people of Akwa Ibom and Cross River States), claim to have Jewish origin. And have been struggling for national and international recognition without success due in part to their lack of synergy of efforts towards these recognitions (Wikipedia, 2013:1; Uguru, 2006:30). Today, of all Black Africa, only Ethiopia and South Africa Jews have national and international recognitions. In the pre-colonial period however, “Through trade and travel of North African Jews, most Jews settled in “West African kingdoms of

Mali, Songhai and Kanem-Bornu” (The Ibo Benei-Yisrael Jews of Nigeira, 2013:2; online, 20/07/2013:2). “It is even, arguably, believed “that several rulers of the Songhai Empire had Jewish roots”.

What therefore led to extinction of West African Jews are the two forms of colonialism which the sub-region experienced. First and most was Islamic colonialism. It is strongly felt that influence of Jews in West Africa came to abrupt end “when Askia Muhammad came to power in 1492”, and, “ordered that all Jews convert to Islam or face expulsion”(Ibo Benei-Yisrael Jews of Nigeira, 2013:2). European colonial authorities that also invaded West Africa about three centuries ago did not also help matters (Galak&Galak, 2013:1). Being mainly Europeans with mainly Christian background, they had little or no respect for the Jews and their religion; in the extreme, some of them, Germany for instance, intensely hated Jews because of their talents. If they could expel them from their territory, what would they do to them when they became colonial power in West Africa? Northern Cameroon and the Southern counterpart were initially held by Germans before they were taken away from them by the allied powers. The north went to British while the south went to France. Today, northern Cameroon, known now as Gongola State, is part of Nigeria while the southern part belongs to English speaking area of Cameroon Republic.

Cultural renaissance is taking place all over the world today and not least in some communities, in some ethnic groups in Nigeria, searching for their true origin. Such communities in Igbo and Yoruba ethnic groups are tracing their roots or origin to Israel. How are they doing this and to what extent are they succeeding in this enterprise? This is going to be the focus of this paper.



The Awujale: Link to Sheba? Source: BBC.

Origins of Igbo and Yoruba Claims to Being Jews

While the Igbo are predominantly Christians, Yorubas are admixture of both Islamic and Christian religions. While Yorubas are made up of about seven kingdoms: Ife, Oyo, Benin, Ijesha, Ijebu, Ibadan, Egba, Ondo, Ekiti kingdoms, their rival ethnic group (Igbo) is made up of Igbo Jewish stock, Benin or Oduduwa stock and the Benue River Region origin (Nweke, 2013:2). Of all Yoruba kingdoms, only one, (Ijebu), claims existence of Jews among them. But the claims are divergent though united in the fact that they are lost Jews. One version of it was made by Ijebus' Paramount Traditional rulers, Oba (King) Alhaji Sikiru Adetona, The Awujale of Ijebu land. In an interview he granted TheNews Magazine to mark his 70th birthday on the 10th of May 2004, he categorically stated this (Cover, 2004:11). These team of reporters: Ademola Adegbmigbe, Ernest Omoarelojie and Idowu Ogunleye, had posed these question to him:

“Q: Still on the history, some people say the Ijebus came from Wadai in the Sudan or that they were the Jebusites from Jerusalem. Which is correct?”

“A: Well you see, we are the Jews of Africa. So a lot of corruption must have gone into it but what we have left is what they have told us. And they tried to justify by relating it to the holy war in Mecca, purposely because Oduduwa migrated far away from Mecca, went to Egypt, Addis Ababa, and later moved to Wadai, South of Sudan before eventually moving down to this place. We have a number of people in Benue. The Kanuris are of our stock. We have some in the East like some Ijebu Igbos. They are there.

Itsekiris are Ijebus. They retained the old Ijebu dialects – Omatsola, Omotwase etc. (There are also Ijebu-Ife and Ijebu-Jesha although His Royal Highness did not mention these). And the journey here was not just of migration; it was in waves. Your Oduduwa was never an Oba” (Cover, 2004:11, Aremo, 2009:5-6).

“Q: So the Ijebus are not tracing their roots to Oduduwa?”

“A: No. When thy initiated Egbe Omo Odua Ijebu, it was that of Ijewa not Oduduwa.”

The second account states that when Bilikisu Sungbo (Queen of Sheba) arrived, she came with a retinue of slaves who after sometime must have intermarried with the people of Oke-Eri, a town in a Muslim area just north of the Eredo, Ijebu East Local Government area of Ogun State (Wikipedia, 2013:1, Amzat, 2013:2).

Attempt is made to link these two different accounts together. See picture below. While the people of Oke-Eri limited their own account to happenings at Oke-Eri, the paramount ruler of all Ijebus, Oba (King) Sikiru Adetona, the Awujale of Ijebuland, extended the fact that Ijebus are Jews to some other areas in Nigeria. According to him, there are Kanuri, Igbo, Benue and Itsekiris Ijebus that are also Jews (Cover, 2004:11; The Ibo Benei-Yisrael Jews of Nigeira, 2013:2; online, 20/07/2013:2)

“We are not linking what we found to a city, but to a vast kingdom boundary rampart,” he told the BBC. “The vertical sided ditches go around the area for 100 miles and it is more than 1,000 years old. “That makes it the earliest proof of an kingdom founded in the African rainforest.”



Bilikisu Sungbo (Queen of Sheba) Shrine at Oke-Eri in Ijebu-East Local Government of Ogun-State in Nigeria.
 Source. Ajibola Amzat. (2013) “Welcome to Bilikisu Sungbo’s Shrine: ‘Women and Dogs Are Not Allowed Here’
 in *The Guardian* of Saturday 22.

Further linking these two accounts together is Sungbo Eredo said to have been built by Bilikisu Sungbo (Queen of Sheba) at Oke-Eri. But this extended beyond that remote environ of Oke-Eri to even some other Yoruba kingdoms of Ijebu-Ode, Ibadan, Ife and Benin. Nyame Akuma puts it this way “This massive, 20 meter high, thousand year old kingdom boundary rampart snakes through 160 kilometers of thick rainforest undergrowth and freshwater swamp forest around Ijebu-Ode in southwest Nigeria. It lies close to Lagos, Ibadan and Ife, centers of learning, where many of leading Nigeria’s archaeologists have worked” (Akuma, 1998:55; Wikipedia, 2013:1; Olokojobi, 2011:2; Babatunde, 2010:2; BBC News; 1999:2). These demonstrate connectivity between the accounts of Alhaji Sikiru Adetona, the Awujale and the spiritual leader of the Ijebus; and that of Baale of Oke-Eri, Baale Bisiriyu Olaitan Olugbosi, a dependant of Awujale.

Among the Igbo, a number of clans laying claims to being Jews include Aguleri, Umuleri, Oreri, Enugwu Ikwu, Ogbunike, Awkuzu, Nteje and Igbariam. What are the evidences of these mutual but conflicting claims of these two different ethnic communities that are yet to synergize their efforts at gaining national and international recognitions as Jews?

Evidences:

In considering evidences of some communities in these two Southern Nigerian ethnic groups laying claim to being Jews, two approaches shall be

followed: Local and International evidences. The parameters for doing this, using Nweke’s terms, shall be through “basic ways of providing the historical claims of any people or tribe. These ways are by written documents, by oral tradition and by archeological evidence” (Nweke, 2013:1).

Yoruba-Igbo Local evidences

(a) Oral

The entire community of Oke Eiriri and, indeed, the entire Ijebu people of Ogun State believe that the Biblical “Queen of Sheba” known to them as “Bilikisu Sungbo” was buried in a shrine in their domain. See the shrine below. Myth about her says she arrived there through magical power. On arrival, she came with a lot of riches and retinue of slaves. But her presence was said not to have been noticed until a hunter discovered her. By then, according to the myth, she had already established a domain for herself (Amzat, 2013:2). She is also credited with being the brain behind one of the biggest moats in Africa, the Sugbo Eredo, said to span over a stretch of more than 160 kilometers long and with a ditch of about 20 meters deep (Uguru, 2006:30). At her death, she was said to have been interred there in what is described as “larger than life grave in its forest”. Because Bilikisu Sugbo (Queen Sheba) is prominently mentioned in the holy books “Pilgrims of Christians, Muslim and African Traditional

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TRAVEL with OKORIE UGURU
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THE NATION SATURDAY DECEMBER 9, 2006



Ijebu's serene abode of Queen of Sheba

THE Holy Bible in the book of First Kings 10: 1-13 spoke about the Queen of Sheba from the continent of Africa. She was rich, strong and endowed with ethereal beauty and comeliness that makes a woman desirable by men most especially kings. Having heard about the legendary wisdom of the Hebrew king, Solomon, son of David, she decided to personally come to see for herself what she heard. She came with wealth. One thing led to another, she became one of the wives of King Solomon. She later left for her home country in Africa. That is the last recording the Bible had about her. Archaeologists had not been able to come out with much about her besides what is known about her in the Bible.

However, in Oke Eiri, Ijebu East local government area of Ogun State there is larger than life grave in its forest said to be the final resting place of the queen of Sheba. The people of Oke Eiri do not call her Queen of Sheba, rather Bilikisu Sungbo, but they are unanimous that she is one and the same person as the Biblical Queen of Sheba.

According to the myth, Bilikisu Sungbo was one and the same person as the Queen of Sheba, that she came to Oke Eiri through magical powers, after settling for some time at Oke-eki, an extinct village. According to the myth, she came with a lot of riches and slaves. She has also been credited as being the brain behind one of the biggest moats in Africa, the Sugbo Eredo, said to span over a stretch of more than 160 kilometers long and with a ditch of about 21 meters deep.

To get to the shrine of Bilikisu Sungbo from Lagos, a tourist would get to Ijebu Ode. From there take a vehicle to Oke Eiri. At the village, there is only a road that runs across the village. At what looks like the end of the main road, there is an old unrepainted road that continued towards the shrine. The best is however to ask for the shrine keeper, an elderly man in his 70's. He has the key to the shrine and one needs to pay a token to be taken round the shrine.

The road that leads to Bilikisu Sungbo's shrine is bad, probably the best is to use a motorcycle to get there. At the entrance to the shrine is a gate painted white. To get to the main grave one needs to walk for about four to five minutes. The grave has shade covered with corrugated iron sheets. It is demarcated by chains.

According to the keeper, the queen was a very clean woman, and as such all year round, the shrine is always clean. One of the important taboos of the shrine is that no woman is allowed to enter into the shrine. According to the old shrine keeper, the barring of woman from the shrine is rooted in history as myth that the women had disobeyed her hence their barring from the shrine. Another taboo is that nobody is permitted to enter the shrine wearing shoes, so all shoes must be removed before heading for the shrine.

The old in-keeper who has been taking care of the shrine as a national historical monument lamented the state of its disrepair, showing the different chalets that used to be part of the shrine but has been overtaken by bush and rodents. He lamented that he had not had his salary for many years from the federal authority in charge, that is the National Council Museum and Monuments (NCMM) which had abandoned the site. However, when contacted, a source from the NCMM explained that the Bilikisu Sungbo shrine is one of the places the NCMM is trying to prepare so that it can be listed as a United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) World Heritage site like the Osun Grove in Oun State and Sukur in Adamawa State. However, this has been hampered by the poor budget allocation to the Parastatal. On the old keeper's non-payment, the source said the old man had retired from the services of the NCMM and was told to bring his son to be employed in his stead. However, the source was not sure whether this has been done. The bottom line is that the shrine as a national monument is crying for repairs. It is only then it can be attractive for visit by tourists.

The Baale of Oke Eiri, Baale Olaitan Bisiyuru Oluqbosi also expressed his unhappiness with the state of the site. His words: "There has been a lot of promises from the government, especially at the state level, but there has been no action to back up such promises. Some weeks back, Governor Gbenga Daniel promised to do something concerning the monument but there is no result yet. There is a Yoruba adage that says: 'Mecca is a neat place and it is the people living there that keep it neat. The Bilikisu Sungbo monument is supposed to be our Mecca, yet, there has been no attention paid to it'."

Transplant tourism booms in China

AFTER a prolonged denial, China has acknowledged the practice of transplant tourism. Under the prevalent practice, the organs of executed prisoners are sold to foreigners, something which has been repeatedly denied by the government over the years.

The acknowledgement is in response to suspicion that hospitals are conducting a lucrative and expanding trade in selling organs to foreigners who arrive in the country on tourist visas.

Deputy Health Minister Huang Jiefu called for a strict code of conduct and better record-keeping to stem China's thriving illegal organ trade, state media reported.

"Apart from a small portion of traffic victims, most of the organs from cadavers are from executed prisoners," said Huang, according to China Daily newspaper.

As per the information available, a ministry spokesman also said that "wealthier people, including foreign patients, have the luxury of getting preference over those in the waiting list due to their financial strength."

However, under new rules, foreigners would only be allowed to come to China for transplants under regulations yet to be announced but that would conform to international standards. Priority would be given to an estimated one million Chinese on waiting lists. All practitioners would have to sign up to the rules, which also include a ban on "organ trading" — buying organs from live donors — and transporting organs to sell outside China.

"There are about 1.5 million people in China who need transplants each year, but only around 10,000 operations can be carried out due to shortages," said Jiefu.

The ministry banned the sale of human organs in July in an apparent attempt to clean up the lucrative but poorly regulated transplant business.

Gate into the shrine

Above is 90 years old Pa Moses Awofeso, the keeper of the Shrine.

Source: Fatai Ayisa Olasupo, (2013) "The Role of Arabian and Western Civilization in Extinction of African Traditional Religion: The case studies of Senegal, South Africa and Nigeria" in International Journal of Sustainable Development Canada: International Development Agency. Vol.05 Issue12 P23.

Igbo oral tradition on the other hand states that the Igbos have resided in "Iboland," a region of modern-day Nigeria, for over 1500 years. Before then however, tradition asserts that they were migrants from ancient Israel. There exist a number of theories that explain how they came to reside in Nigeria. One theory contends that the Ibo are the descendant of a number of Jacob's son. Within the Ibo, there exist three ethnic sub-identities. They are Benei Gath, Benei Zevulum and Benei Menashshen (The Ibo Benei-Yisrael Jews of Nigeira, 2013:1). "The Ibo of Benei said these clans of Igbo Jews claimed to have descended from Gath (Gad), the eight son of Jacob. Besides these are "The Ibo of Benei Zevulun who trace their ancestry to Jacob's fifth son, Zevulun. Tradition holds that a descendant of the tribe of Zevulun named Zevulun married Oji, a descendant of the tribe of Judah. They had a son: Ozubulu ben-Zevulun. Ozubulu had four sons who are said to have settled in various areas located in what is now Nigeria. The resulting ethnic sub-identities are the Neni, Egbema Ugwuta, and Ohaji Egbema" (The Ibo Benei-Yisrael Jews of Nigeira, 2013:1)

The Ibo of Benei Menashsheh are believed to be descendant from Menashsheh (Menashe), the son of Joseph, Jacob's eleventh son. The Amichi, Ichi and Nnewi-Ichi ethnicities trace their lineage to Menashe. There are other theories that explain how the Ibo Benei Yisrael is the descendants of ancient Israelites (Arema, 2009:5-6). Another version of Igbo Jews origin states that "the Igbo are Ethiopian Jews and this belief made the Jewish faith attractive to many people" (Akioye, 2013:63)

However, these oral evidences of Igbo Jews have come under blistering attack from none other person than an Igbo man. According to Chika, "No, we are certainly not Jews. Linguistics, archaeological, oral history and DNA science disproves the myth easily. First, Igbo has always being Igbo, not Ibo (colonial distortion and problematically Igbo use Ibo which is incorrect). Secondly, most of the myth arises from researchers during the colonial era of the 19 and 20th centuries who remarked on SIMILARITIES (there are many similarities across populations; however, you need stronger evidence to draw conclusions of origin). Some Igbo researchers have been influenced by foreigners, the fact that Israel supported Biafra during the civil war, and a host of other recent phenomena do not make Igbos Israelites. Our oral history never pointed to a Jewish /Hebrew point of origin until RECENTLY. Looking at the history of

Nigeria (missionary influence, civil war and so forth) it is clear why we are not Israelites. There were no documented Jewish communities in Nigeria pre-19th century; in fact we can even push the date up further.

Linked to oral tradition, as basis for Jewish connections, are certain religious practices of the Igbo Jews that tallies with the mainstream Jewish practices. These include: (a) Circumcision eight days after the birth of a male child; (b) Observation of some kosher dietary laws; (c) Separation of men and women during menstruation; (d) The celebration of holidays such as Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah; Sukkot and Passover (e) In recent times, the communities have also adopted holidays such as Hanukkah and Purim, which were instituted only after the tribes of Israel had already dispersed (Igbo Jews, 2013:3; The Ibo Benei-Yisrael Jews of Nigeira, 2013:2) Again, these came under sever attack from Chika. For him, the comparison between Jews and ndi Igbo of circumcision practices as basis for Jewish linkage is weak. First, 8th day practice of circumcision, he argued, is not universally practiced in Igboland. But it should be noted that advocates of Igbo Jews never claimed totality of Igbos as Jews. In fact the population of Igbo Jews is put at about 3,000 to 5, 000 which is in conformity with those black African Jews of South Africa and Ethiopia (Afsai, 2013:1; 2013:2). Secondly, Chika argues on, "ndi Igbo is not special from other West African groups in their circumcision practice. "Another comparison is our method of slaughtering animal and refusal to eat pork in our diet. This is a blatant lie" says Chika.

(b) Written

International contributors and scholars to the debate on the authenticity of the claims of the Oke Eri people, and the larger Ijebu kingdom as a whole, to the fact that they have Jewish connections, are diverse. They began with the critique of the claim. According to them, "There are more than enough reasons to be skeptical about the claim that Bilkis Sungbo was actually the Queen of Sheba. How could the final resting place of the legendary queen be far away from where the stories of the Bible and Quran were written? What are the connections of Oke Eri village and the woman of such great virtue, with ancient and Holy Books background? Notwithstanding however, they contend that up till today, no concrete story or evidence contradicts the monumental grave that is tagged " Her Royal Majesty Queen Sheba Pure Holy and Caring" "(Olokojobi, 2011:3).

Reading: Stories of the Past

G. Read the following stories and answer the following questions:



There is a small village in Ogun State. Its name is Oke-Eri. It is not far from Ijebu-Ode. In the past, it was famous for one thing. The people there made clay pots. But it has now become famous for another thing. Near the town is the grave of Sungbo. She was the famous Queen of Sheba. People said she came from Ethiopia. She travelled through Sudan into Nigeria thousands of years ago. In fact, there is a moat round Ijebu-Ode, which her slaves dug. A moat is a large, deep pit round a town. It protects the town from enemies. The moat is named after Sungbo. When she died, she was buried at Oke-Eri. Leaves do not fall on her grave. This is a mystery. The whole place is always clean. Yet no one sweeps it. Many people now visit the place every year.

Questions

1. Where is the village of Oke-Eri?
2. What was the village famous for?
3. Who was Sungbo?
4. Who dug the moat round Ijebu-Ode?
5. Mention one strange thing about Sungbo's grave.



Professor Lynne Teather with local traditional priest and associate, chief, community and National Commission of Museums and Monument representatives at the Bilikisu Sungbo Shrine Project at Oke-Eri, near Ijebu Ode. (Image Credit: Lynne Teather)

Source: Science Daily of May 18, 2005.

Today, one of the recommended English text books for primary school pupils in Nigeria has the story of this Bilikisu Sungbo (Queen of Sheba). Find the page containing the story below (Ayodele, Olafimihan and Isiugo-Abanihe, 1994: 41)

Thus, if no other site of such magnitude has been authenticated as her final resting place, then this must be upheld pending the discovery of more superior evidence. According to Andrew Wilson, “There are always some elements of truth to beliefs passed down through generations. I would not disregard the notion that she lived in West Africa”. Corroborating Wilson, Darling said “I don’t want to overplay the Sheba theory, but it cannot be discounted...The local people believe it and that’s what is important” (Olokojobi, 2011:4). Last but not the least is the contribution of Professor Lynne Teather, a museologist, of Museum Studies program at University of Toronto. According to her, “Indigenous knowledge and oral traditions

maintain that this is the shrine of the queen and through working with the Bilikisu Sungbo Project, we are trying to not only learn more about this fabulous queen, but to establish a feasibility study on how we can marry tourism to this heritage site” (University of Toronto, 2005:1).

To date, the entire Yorubaland boast of many powerful kingdoms (Ife and Ijebu kingdoms) and one worldwide and historically recognized empire – Oyo Empire. Powerful women in the past had ruled these kingdoms and empire as monarchs and had their resting places in the palaces of these kingdoms and empire. See the statistic below. None of these resting places of these female monarchs have the magnitude of that of Bilikisu Sungbo (Queen of Sheba) believed to be in Oke Eri in Ijebu East Local Government area of Ogun State (Olasupo, 2013: Forthcoming). If Bilikisu Sungbo (Queen of Sheba) was none of these, then who was she and where was she from?

**Statistics of Some Women Monarchs Who Ruled Oyo Empire, Ife and Ijebu Kingdoms
in The Pre-Colonial Days**

Table 1

S/N	NAME	TOWN OR VILLAGE	L.G.A	STATE	TYPE OF RULERSHIP	DATE	TIME SPENT IN OFFICE
1	Oduduwa	Ife	Ife	Osun	Progenitor	Pre-colonial	
2	Terracotta evidence	Ife	Ife	Osun	Queen or Ooni of Ife	Between 12 th and 13 th centuries	-
3	LuwoGbadiga	Ife	Ife Cent. L.G	Osun	Ooni of Ife	Pre-colonial days	-
4	Debooye	Ife	Ife Cent. LG	Osun	Ooni of Ife	-	-
5	Moremi	Ife	Ife Cent. LG	Osun	6 th Ooni of Ife	-	-
6	Iyayun	Oyo	Oyo L.G	Oyo	Alaafin	-	-
7	Orompoto	Oyo	Oyo L.G	Oyo	Alaafin	-	-
8	Jomijomi	Oyo	Oyo L G	Oyo	Alaafin	-	
9	Jepojepo	Oyo	Oyo L G	Oyo	Alaafin	-	
10	AjiwonArobosete	Oyo	Oyo L.G	Oyo	Alaafin	-	
11	Oreyeye	Ijebu-Ode	Ijebu-Ode	Ogun	Awujale	-	
12	Oregeje	Ijebu-Ode	Ijebu-Ode	Ogun	Awujale	-	
13	Rubakoye	Ijebu-Ode	Ijebu-Ode	Ogun	Awujale	-	

Source: Fatai Ayisa Olasupo (2013) "Women's Associational Life within Traditional Institutions in Yoruba State" in Mojubaolu Olufunke Okome (Ed.) Contesting the Nigerian State: Civil Society and the Contradictions of Self-Organization, USA: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN. P188. See also the conferment of Otunba Tayese Obaruwa and Yeye Tayese Obaruwa of Makun Kingdom of Shagamu on Otunba (Asiwaju) and Chief Dr. Mrs Tayo Ajayi By HRH Oba T.O Akinsanya, The Ewusi of Makun kingdom, on Friday 12th December, 2008, P11.



The Eredo ramparts: More earth than the pyramids

SOURCE: "World: Africa Searching for the Queen of Sheba": Monday, May 31, 1999 Published at 00:41 GMT 01:4

On the Igbo side, early this year, Professor William Miles of Northeastern University published *Jews of Nigeria: An Afro-Judaic Odyssey*, based on his two visits to Igbo Jews in Nigeria's capital, Abuja. Another book on Nigeria's Jews, written by Daniel Lis of the University of Basel will be coming out in 2013 as well. These foreign writers on Igbo Jews are having problem getting to the roots of Igbo Jews origin hence the entrance of Igbo Jews intellectuals. Since they consider themselves as to be descendants of the lost tribes of Israel, and view much of Igbo tradition and culture as being essentially Israelite, it is proper they and only they undertake the task of locating and recording the similarities between Igbo and Jews religious practices. As at today, only one Igbo Jew scholar has written a book titled: *Our roots: Igbo Israel Heritage* (Afsai, 2013:3). Professor Miles summarizes everything up by saying that "Igbo Jews are probably the world's first internet Jews, and the internet has indeed helped them study Hebrew and Judaism" (Afsai, 2013:4). Reacting to all these, this is Chika's view; "If these Igbo want to convert to Judaism fine that's their issue, however we are Not Jews and never have been. We have our own origin stories and traditions. We don't need to align ourselves with others to feel a sense of importance or feel we are the "chosen" people (Robinson, 2013:5).

Recently, there came another dimension to the theories of "Igbo Jews". One Jeff L. Lieberman came up with a documentary films titled "Re-Emerging: The Jews of Nigeria" depicting that "these Nigerian Jews are warm and welcoming group, eager for knowledge of and contact with the rest of the Jewish world, vocal supporters of Israel and spirited worshippers, a small but charming community" (Robinson, 2013:3). Again, this is dismissed by critics who see it as "one of those peculiar documentary films that makes a sort of nonsense of everything I know about film, which is produced, written, directed, shot and edited by Jeff L. Lieberman, is a baggy, often shapeless mess, meandering and repetitive, filled with side roads that lead nowhere and a narration that borders on the amateur" (Robinson, 2013:3). For Chika, "The film is revisiting an old theory about the Hebraic origins of certain West African groups that reputed and non-Igbo scholars have crushed already".

Archeological

Way back in 1994, Dr. Patrick Darling of Bournemouth University visited the burial site of

Bilikisu Osungbo (Queen of Sheba) at Oke Eri in Ijebu East Local Government of Ogun State. He confirmed that "there is no doubt that Bilikisu Sungbo Grave in Oke Eri is the burial site".

"To him, some of the signs on ground when he visited it in 1994 were not far from what is expected. And he has ticked it as the most likely site, in the absence of another to contradict it". Darling went on "We have living proof that it was a powerful kingdom, and there are many links that have similarities to the Queen of Sheba legend" (Olokojobi, 2011:4). "The earthwork, which is larger than the pyramids in Egypt, was built in remembrance of some great figure. Stories talk of a powerful goddess or giantess". Trying to draw the attention of the world to this in 1999, Darling had said "What is exiting about this for me is that we are beginning to bring out the tremendous political and cultural achievements of black Africa". What is surprising however is that "If a British archeologist could say this about Sungbo's shrine and her Eredo, why have our various levels of government – Local, State and Federal governments not seen it? Indeed, Why are our Tourism industries as well as philanthropies not seen this?"

Apart from this present neglect another danger is said to be looming. Eredo, the defensive purpose built around 800-1,000 AD, a period of political confrontation and consolidation in the Southern Nigeria rainforest, is still intact. Sungbo (Queen Sheba) Eredo is a "massive 20 metre high, thousand year old kingdom boundary rampart snakes through 160 kilometers of thick rainforest undergrowth and freshwater swamp forest around Ijebu-Ode in south west Nigeria"(Akuma, 1998:55).

This is however being "threatened by forest clearance and encroaching farmers. Beside the side-walls of the trench that are giving in, the bottom is also gradually being eroded because of trees being cut down to create farm land (Olokojobi, 2011:4). All the publicity needed to bring this to the notice of the world should therefore be given, he submitted. Darling puts it this way: "I am worried about it because unless it is properly protected it won't last more than another couple of decades".

Interestingly, the believers of the Oke-Eri site have also had the story of Bilikisu Sungbo (Queen of Sheba) recorded in DVD and sold to the members of the public. Find a copy of the DVD with the photograph of Queen Sheba.



However, the most important area of archeological survey is the tomb of the Bilikisu Sungbo (Queen of Sheba). Her tomb is said to be “delineated by four pairs of pillar, painted green and supported by iron rod. Fine grain of sand, which spreads across the burial ground, gives a soft feel to the feet...It is a

space almost the size of a long tennis court, but Bilikisu’s tomb only occupies a small section of the ground. Yet the burial chamber is long enough to accommodate body of four or five adults” (Amzat, 2013:2).



Dilapidated building at the grave site of Bilikisu Sungbo (Queen of Sheba)

Source: Sakibu Olokojobi, (2011) "Bilikisu Sungbo or Queen of Sheba?" in National Mirror of 03/09/. P 3.

All said and done, "One of the challenges" according to Teather "for archeologist and researchers such as me is that while there might be a lot of oral tradition of Bilikisu Sungbo at this location, no one is allowed to excavate anything as it's a religious site. Therefore we will have to employ other research methods" she concluded.

What may be considered archeological evidence of Igbo Jews is the presence of Synagogues in Ibo and non-Igbo speaking areas of Eastern Nigeria. Non-Igbo speaking areas of Eastern Nigeria comprises of Efik/Ibibio/Annang. There are also key synagogues in Port-Harcourt. The actual numbers of synagogues in Nigeria have not been determined but conflicting records put it at between 26 and 40 with majority in the Eastern part of the country (Wikipedia, 2013:1; Akioye, 2013:63). As with the precise number of it yet to be determined, the oldest one is also yet to be determined so as to properly authenticate genuine origin of Igbo Jews. However, it appears most of the synagogues in Nigeria today are recent and foreign sponsored. For instance, it is said that individual Israelis, American Jews who work in Nigeria, outreach organizations like the American Kulanu and African-American Jewish communities in America founded two synagogues in Nigeria, which are attended and maintained by Igbos (Wikipedia, 2013:1).

Of recent, synagogues have spread to Lagos area of Western part of Nigeria although the practitioners here do not claim to be Jews but mere adherents of Judaism. See the paper cutting below. Interestingly, the Yoruba areas that claim Jewish blood are mainly Muslims and Christians and do not have a single synagogue. But they claim that they have the burial site of Bilikisu Sungbo (Queen of Sheba). The Quran, Bible and Coptic Orthodox Christianity recognize Bilikisu Sungbo (Queen of Sheba) as African Black Queen whose grave is yet unknown (Olokojobi, 2011:1).

Given these claims and counter claims, one might wish to consider worldwide reactions of Jewish communities to these claims and counterclaims. Evidences abound of "Western rabbis and educators who have since sent books, computers, and religious articles to Nigeria. Besides, Jews from outside Nigeria are said to have founded two synagogues in Nigeria, which are attended and maintained by Igbo (Wikipedia, 2013:1; Online, 2013:2). Above all, in 1995, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin sent a team to Nigeria to search for the "Ten Lost Tribes of Israel". The outcome of the search has not been made public up till today; nor did "the State of Israel officially recognize the Igbo as one of the Lost Tribes (Online, 2013:2; Wikipedia, 2013:1)

Life

THE NATION ON SUNDAY, AUGUST 4, 2013 63

Benefits of eating watermelon

Weird world of 'Jewish' Nigerians

They keep the Sabbath and the Torah (Law) and live their lives by the strict code of Jewish religious rituals. Their synagogues are scattered around Lagos metropolis. Seun Akioye joined them to celebrate the feast of Shavuot (Pentecost) and reports on the peculiarities of their religion.

Origin in Nigeria

The Nazarenes are still largely overlooked by those who practice Judaism and, in fact, they remain the neglected minority. The origin of the faith in Nigeria is still a subject of speculation. There are said to be more than 100 synagogues in Nigeria, the majority of them in Lagos state. East. There is a myth that the Igbo are Ethiopian Jews and this belief made the Jewish faith attractive to many people. But according to the strict foundation of the Nazarenes was laid by an Israeli Rabbi in Ibadan, a Lagos suburb, Rabbi Chaim, who had earlier preached the gospel of 'Yahweh and Yeshua' to a certain brother Abasi in U.S. The new convert, who became the first Rabbi, Chaim, is now present in Lagos alone.

Chaim's role

Chaim's role in the development of the Nazarenes was laid by an Israeli Rabbi in Ibadan, a Lagos suburb, Rabbi Chaim, who had earlier preached the gospel of 'Yahweh and Yeshua' to a certain brother Abasi in U.S. The new convert, who became the first Rabbi, Chaim, is now present in Lagos alone.

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Life

THE NATION ON SUNDAY, AUGUST 4, 2013

Living as 'Israelites' in Nigeria

The Nazarenes are wasting their time Rev Bolariwa

A new Nazarene and pastor of the Church of Christ in Lagos, Ibeju-Okoko, says that the Nazarenes are wasting their time by trying to convert people to their faith. He says that the Nazarenes are not following the Bible and are not living as 'Israelites' in Nigeria.

Sharing the Scripture at the Jewish synagogue

...I would be able to ask for the Nazarenes' others come for the feast of Shavuot. I think the Nazarenes are wasting their time by trying to convert people to their faith. He says that the Nazarenes are not following the Bible and are not living as 'Israelites' in Nigeria.

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Observations

A number of observations are made in this paper. The Jewish claims of some communities in Igbo and Yoruba speaking areas of Southern Nigeria are not strong enough. This is more so in the case of the Igbos. The oral evidence presented in the case of the Ijebus is much powerful than that of the Igbo because a powerful monarch of Ijebu kingdom, Oba (King) Sikiru Adetona, the Awujale and spiritual leader of Ijebus has come out forcefully to proclaim that Ijebus have Jewish connection. There has not been such powerful counter proclamation from any Igbo monarchs.

Written account of existence of Igbo Jews however outweighs those of the Yorubas, particularly in the areas of support from foreign lands such as Israeli, American and Austrian Jews. These places have been providing some material and financial assistance to Igbo Jews in Abuja. At least two synagogues have

Oral tradition of Oke-Eri maintains that the site of Queen Sheba burial ground is in that shrine. But they are also opposed to anybody excavating the burial site as it is a religious site; a situation that forced Professor Lynne Teather to say that "Therefore, we will have to employ other research methods". It is however generally agreed that even if the burial site is not that of Queen of Sheba, the "world is beginning to bring out the tremendous political and cultural achievements of black Africa through such discovery"

Conclusion

The Queen of Sheba is unquestionably black Queen born and buried in Africa. But while birth place is known and is undoubted, the burial place and site remain contentious between Ethiopia and Nigeria. The only strong evidence that Nigeria can provide for this claim is to allow for national and international archaeologists to carry out extensive excavation of these areas, particularly the burial site. This is very important to Black Africa in particular and the World in general. If Israelis don't want to be bias against blacks, they should develop in this; who knows the "Ten lost tribes of Israel may be found here. Nigeria is the most populous black nation in the word with more than two hundred and fifty ethnic groups. Nigeria is not big for nothing.

The assistance of the Non-governmental organization, particularly the tourist industry, State/Provincial as well as those of the Federal governments are needed to prevail on the Oke-Eri community to allow for excavation of this burial site

been built for them by African-American Jews. Even then, Israeli government has not yet accorded them recognition; nor has the national and, even, provincial governments in Nigeria.

Archaeologically, Sungbo Eredo in Oke-Eri in Ijebu East Local Government of Ogun State is receiving national and international supports. The Eredo was said to have been created by Bilikisu Sungbo (Queen of Sheba) and her shrine as well as tomb are said to be located there. International archaeologists from Canada and Austria are said to have visited the place and have reported that the site is most likely to be the burial site of the Queen of Sheba, in the absence of another contradiction.

Ethiopia, the birthplace of the Queen of Sheba, is already contesting this. According to Professor Teather, "Ethiopia maintains that she is actually buried in their country" but they have failed to provide evidence of her burial site. and solved the riddle of Queen Sheba's burial's site once and for all. A synergy of efforts between Nigeria and Israeli governments could break the jinx.

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