



Traditional History of Benin Kingdom in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the undisputed history of the Binis in Nigeria's Benin Kingdom, Edo State of Nigeria. A significant population in Nigeria's Midwest exist as the Bini. However, there are no confirmed records on when and if the Bini (Edo) left the Nile Valley. It was discovered that Ogiso was the name of Benin's first leader. This paper tries to evaluate the Binis evolution through a multidisciplinary process. The paper using a perceptual, interpretive, observable, and elucidative methodology goes through records to explore the history of the Bini people. Some previously unknown facts about the history of the Bini are revealed by through the review and materials studied. One main point arising from the examination of Bini traditional history is the fact that there are information concerning the evolution of Bini people and there is the need to research further in authentication of the truth of how the Binis came to where they inhabit presently.

Keywords Multidisciplinary, Mid-West Nigeria, Igodomigodo, Bini, Edo Kingdom

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AUTHOR'S BIO



MAMUDU, Ganni Kashetu, PhD, hailed from Agbede Town in Etsako West Local Government Area of Edo State. Born on the 9th of November, 1969. He started his early education in his own town at Athebeda Primary School, Agbede between 1976 and 1981. He proceeded to the Prestigious Momodu College Agbede, between 1981 and 1986. He later moved to Lagos for further studies where he obtained his first Degree, B.A. (Hons) in History, P.G.D.E and Masters, M.A. in History and Diplomatic Studies at the Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos State. He further obtained M.Ed Degree in Social Studies Education at the University of Lagos, Akoka, Lagos State. He finally obtained Ph.D Degree in History and Diplomacy from the Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos State. Dr. Mamudu, Ganni Kashetu has written several scholarly articles in both notable National and International Journals. Among are:

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 2. Nigerian Social Studies pre-service teachers: Attitudes and Readiness for Digital Technologies in Teaching and Learning, U.S.A., IISTE Publishers.
 3. Security and Terrorism Challenges in Nigeria: Effects and Prospects. Ijagun, Ogun State Nigeria.
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Introduction

A History of the Bini in the Kingdom of Benin

Verifiable documents are ambiguous as to when and if the Bini (Edo) left the Nile Valley. Unquestionably, Ogoiso was the name of Benin's founding leaders.¹ When Ogoiso firmly dominated the Benin territory, sometime between 900 and 1200 AD, it is the earliest period of Benin history that has been examined to date.¹ The Bini administration demonstrates a hazy authority, greatness, and an abundance of love from the subjects, exhibiting a close link of affection with the gods and pharaohs of ancient Egypt. The hairstyle of Bini managers is similar to that of the renowned head defender of Pharaoh Ramses II, and the little circles on the cap are similar to those of various Bini. The Bini cosmic record heavily references the Egyptian cosmological record. The Egyptian adaption said that chaos and a primordial (or ancient) sea formed the basis for the universe and eventually served as the inspiration for the opening of the Bible. A kid deity, sometimes called deity's child or child god, named Molecule arose on the land made by the slope known as Tatjenen when it rose from the depths of the sea. Without the sun, life on Earth would not be possible. The sun is a molecule. The infant god Iota then created eight distinct divine beings, who, together with him, made nine other divine beings. According to modern science, the nine major planets in the universe will be symbolic of these nine celestial creatures.²

There was only water when the Bini form originally materialised. Owonwon, the toucan chosen by Osanobua, the world's creator, to live in a tree immersed in the water, was present. That's why the creator sent three children, each with a unique gift. One of the three kids decided to have the matching mystery powers and to be affluent. As Owonwon got ready to deliver the news, he yelled at the youngest to settle for a snail shell. When the three children's kayak reached the middle of the water, he succeeded in doing so, and

the busiest youngster spun his snail shell to send a never-ending torrent of sand that improved the land from the waters.³ At first, the three kids were hesitant to climb out of the kayak and onto the land. The reason the chameleon stumbles around is because they sent it to test the stability of the soil. Then Osanobua fell on a chain from the sky to mark the boundaries of the world and to assign responsibility. Osanobua was named the youngest child planet leader. The boy named Agbon the soil, and shortly after, he set up camp in Igodomigodo. The child with the most seafaring experience was given charge over the waterways by Osanobua. This infant was given the Bini name *Olokun*, which means "the Lord of the Waterway". The other child has the chance to use his magical abilities to change the natural world's good and negative energy. Naturally, he talks of perniciousness. The Bini call him Ogiuwu, occasionally Esu, which translates to "The Harbinger of Death." All living things' lifeblood should be pledged by Ogiuwu. When everything is taken into account, no living thing can survive forever.⁴

At that point, Osanobua began to adjust to life on the other side of the earth-sky boundary—the realm of the soul. While Osanobua and Olokun discuss parts of life that man could pursue through customary ethics, such as amazing affluence, long life, good luck, prosperity, and euphoria, Ogiuwu concentrates on sad, deceptive signals and sicknesses. As Earth's leader, the youngest kid speaks the truth and guards the various gods' abilities. The significance of the tree's emergence before man is understood by modern science, which recognises that life on Earth would not have been conceivable if the tree had not produced oxygen. These same profound and subtle impacts are the cornerstones of all advanced faiths. The Bini cosmology, which holds that animals like birds, insects, and other species were on Earth before humans, has also been confirmed by modern science. The fantasy world of Bini had Earth as its core. The Binis

were clearly in agreement with the Ogiso Leaders of the Sky since they were directly descended from the youngest child of Osanobua (God), who dropped from the sky. Generally speaking, the Ogiso tried to encourage these in several ways. For example, they would refuse to eat in front of other people, implying that they could go without food. They are God's rulers with a divine persona attached to them, but they are not human. They are not humans but rather the rulers of God, endowed with a divine persona. The Bini gurus, called Ogisos, are extremely respected by their disciples, who usually approach them from a distance and on their knees. In all that he undertakes, the Bini king is capable of extraordinary achievements.⁶

Bini lords have great political power since they are chief executive officers, legislators, executioners, tax and honour collectors, money controllers, CEOs, and chief overseers of customs. To prevent abuses, balanced governance, however, maintains its enormous authority. The entire region is under the ruler's jurisdiction, which cannot be used without first consulting higher authorities, such as Edionism, the kingmakers.⁷

Ogiso Igodo was the main Ogiso ruler, and Igodomigodo was his dominion, located in Ugbekun. Ogiso Ere shifted the capital from Ugbekun to Umudumivunrun instead of Ogiso Igodo. This true story of Bini's life was written to show the incredible power and influence African rulers possessed, as well as how prehistoric people tried to revive myths. Dreams were transformed into reality by older people; this included the Christian faith, Egypt, and the child supernatural might of the Bini. Similarly, nothing amazing is taught in religious classrooms these days. The probability of the Younger God or God's progeny is roughly equivalent to the age of an elderly African. They called the remaining Ogiso rulers Owodo. He governed in the twelfth century and had just lately become the father of one kid (a male) despite having had several romantic partners throughout his life. He sent three male couriers and his loving wife Esagho to see a prophet and discover why his partners had failed. The prophet Esagho gave justification. Based on

the assumption that they had discovered the prophecy, Esagho then tricked the Lord into thinking that the men were having sex with her to avoid the ruler's wrath and punishment. The messengers informed the Lord, together with Esagho, that the prophet blamed his only kid and that Ekhaladerhan, the sovereign, had to be killed to atone for his spouse's transgressions. Disturbed by this turn of events but unable to part with his only child, the Lord relocated the boy and his mother to a location near the Igodomigodo realm's borders known as Ughobon. Owodo's wife had not produced any fruit for three years following their exile. So, he sent the prophet forth with still more messengers. It was then that Esagho's transgression came to light. Even after being punished by Esagho, the ruler's wives kept failing. Naturally, the Lord's money was the main cause of the problem, although nobody thought about it at the time. Women were often criticised for being unsanitary.⁸

Even still, Ogiso Owodo was not a very popular king, even with his difficulties in the community. Owodo's departure from power resulted from his major transgression of executing a pregnant woman for a minor violation, which infuriated many of his subjects and high-ranking officials. He sought safety at a location known as Uhinwinrin, where a few years later, he passed away in misery. Ogiso Owodo's death left an extraordinary power vacuum in Igodomigodo's government. The people were unable to accept a common person leading them who wasn't from an Ogiso family. During this turbulent period, the senior group known as the Edionisen, commanded by Oliha and composed of leaders like Edohen and Ero, started looking for their exiled emperor, Ekaladerhan.⁹ Meanwhile, Ekaladerhan created what he called "Ilefe," which means effective break, and took on the name "Izoduwa," which translates to "I chose the path that leads to success".

"Ilefe," Izoduwa's new home, was situated in

the centre of Yoruba land. He quickly won the trust of his Yoruba tribe because of his extraordinary magical talents. Some Uzebu, also known as Ijebu in Yoruba, who had followed him from Igodomigodo thought he was a god. The Yoruba transformed his name Izoduwa to 'Oduduwa' and referred to his settlement, 'Ilefe', as 'Ile-Ife'. Oduduwa rose to prominence as the Ifa's spiritual leader. The Yoruba distinguish themselves from Oduduwa's relationship with the God-Children (Ogisos), referring to the Creator as Olodumare and considering Oduduwa as close relatives. The Yoruba did recognise him as a god, and they held him in high regard as their spiritual leader. The Bini and Egyptian traditions are heavily included in the Ifa creation story. It informs us that Orunmila, also called Oduduwa, was sent to Earth by Olodumare (The Creator) along with a rooster that held a tiny bit of sand in its claws. All of the planet was covered in water before this catastrophe. The sand was subsequently dispersed over the water by the rooster, creating land. As a result, Oduduwa had eight children who later founded and oversaw several Yoruba towns. A familial link to its ancestral (earth-based Bini and cosmos-based Egyptian) roots is emphasised in the Yoruba creation narrative.¹⁰ Okanbi, a Yoruba woman, gave birth to Oduduwa's most significant kid. This child's name was changed by the Yoruba from "Omonoyan," which means "Precious Child" in Bini, to "Oranmiyan." Upon eventually locating Ekaladerhan (Oduduwa) in Ile-Ife, the Edionisan of Igodomigodo failed to persuade him to retake his father's reign in Igodomigodo. Let down by their failure to convince Izoduwa to resume his royal position; the Edionisen designated a transient commander, Evian, to manage Igodomigodo affairs.¹¹

As a leader, Evian was much admired. He invented the gymnastic dance Amufi as well as the traditional dance Emeghute. He ruled until he was very old, and before he passed away, he named his oldest son, Irebor, to succeed him. Senior leaders and a sizable section of the Igodomigodo populace would not accept this.

They rejected Irebor because his father, Evian, was not an Ogiso, and Ogieship—the right to rule—required supernatural approval for his successors to be granted.¹² There was a power vacuum in Igodomigodo, so the Edionisen decided to work their way up to their son Izoduwa, who was already known as "Ooni" in Yoruba. The Ooni decided to put the residents of Igodomigodo to the test following much discussion in which the Edionisen pleaded with him to permit his oldest son to assume the prestigious position of Igodomigodo. He gave the Edionesan a few lice and told them to come back in three years with the cure.

When Boss Oliha kept lice in one of his slaves' hair for three years and gave the lice back to Izoduwa, the latter was shocked to see how much healthier and well-maintained the lice had become. This caused Izoduwa to consider that his infant would probably be okay if the Edionisen could control the lice so well. In the meantime, as the Ife monarch was upsetting the people of Igodomigodo, Irebor was warning them about something he called "Ogie a disposition," meaning that an Ogie, not an Oba, was in charge of Igodomigodo. At that point, Ogiamen acquired the nickname of Irebor, and the title was passed down through the generations to the Igodomigodo leader of Irebor. Ogiamen Irebor prevented King Oranmiyan from going to the core part of Igodomigodo. The Igodomigodo people built King Oranmiyan a palace in Usama. Unable to stand the evil for too long, King Oranmiyan resigned and called the land of Igodomigodo Ile Ibinu, which means Burden and Vexation. He asserted that rearing misbehaving kids who are taught Igodomigodo's traditions and way of life would enable the kingdom to prosper.¹³

Ruler Oranmiyan stopped briefly at his Inner Self on his way back to Ife. It was there that Princess Erimwinde, the daughter of the Enogie of Self-image, was born. The child's birth marked the beginning of Princess Erimwonde's informal relationship with sovereign Oranmiyan. Although the infant was nonverbal

in his early years, he delighted in playing marble games. Upon discovering his child's hardship, Oranmiyan—who had already made his Alafin ancestry known in Oyo—sent the child's mother seven marbles. When he was playing marbles with other youngsters, and one of his throws landed flawlessly, he would say, “Owomika,” which means “I hit the target.” He was referred to as Oba Eweka for this reason, and he ordered Usama to rename Ile-Ibinu outside of Igodomigodo. Ogiamen Ubi was a resident of Ile Ibinu during the reign of Oba Eweka. The reign of Oba Eweka was not very noteworthy. Oba Ewahun, Oba Ehenmihen, and Oba Ewedo succeeded him. Ile-Ibinu was called Ubini by Oba Ewedo, and Benin or Bini was eventually abbreviated by the Portuguese.¹⁴

The Era of Warrior Kings in Benin History

The history of Benin was dominated by military rulers from the middle of the fifteenth century to the sixteenth century. Together, Ewuare the Great, Ozolua, Esigie, Orhogbua, and Ehengbude used inventive leadership, meticulous craftsmanship, well-organised local government, battles, and conquests to expand and improve the world. Ling Roth, an English explorer, was eager to praise Benin for the size of the Benin Empire as well as the highly developed, intricate, and efficient administrative structure that the inhabitants had established over more than 1,000 years. The population of Yorubaland, which the Bini reigned over at its height, was several times greater than that of Benin. The Benin Empire had connections with Lagos, where people built a strategically located settlement, they called Eko. The Benin established their dominance and strength along Africa's west coast, giving rise to the Kingdom of Benin. The Benin and the Ashante people of Ghana had a close association and are said to have identical ancestry. Despite this, the Benin Empire's boundaries were constantly growing and shrinking as fresh triumphs were won and as frontier warships rebelled only to be recaptured. Other typical activities were the deployment of royal kin to supervise tributary states, the practice

of training conquered rulers' offspring in Benin City, and the sponsorship of candidates for subjugated region leadership. Vassal chiefs were given items like the ADA-cutlass and metal helmet as tokens of their rank, and these symbols remained in many of the regions that fell under Bini rule. The Oba of Benin was in such a prominent position that he arbitrated authority issues even in areas where Benin had little direct power, like the Niger Delta. As part of their administrative customs, the champions would wear Benin's ceremonial clothes when they returned home. Similar to the ancient Egyptian cities protected against invaders, Benin boasts an amazing defensive canal that was excavated between 1280 and 1295 AD without the use of modern machinery. Even by the standards of today, this engineering achievement is very remarkable. The Great Wall of China is wider than the Benin Channel, according to the Guinness Book of Records.¹⁵

Due to his exile as a young leader, the main hero, Ewuare, rarely reached the pinnacle of the Benin hierarchy. Under danger of punishment for some unspecified transgression, he would often flee into the bush and spend the evenings peacefully touring the city of Benin. When the elders of Edionisen learned of his covert trips, they hatched a scheme to kidnap and murder him.

He ran to Ogiava Nomuekpo's house just as he was going to be discovered, where she hidden him in a specially designed pot covered in leaves. The ruler, now known as Ogun, was pursued by Ogiava, who then went to call the elders to apprehend him. While Ogiava was travelling to gather the elders, Ogiava's senior advisor, Edo, told King Ogun of his master's cunning plan and helped him escape. When Ogiava arrived with the elders, they learned that he had been misled, and he sincerely blamed Edo for this. After going into hiding for a long while, the monarch Ogun, who was given the title of Oba Ewuare of Bini country in the middle of the fifteenth century, started to acquire the skills of a vagabond. His father had

vacated his high position for a while, and he was his most notable heir. Giving Edo many valuable gifts as compensation was one of his first actions after taking over. After Edo's death, he moved his body from Ogieva and buried it at the inner peak of the castle. Then he said that the region that was previously called Bini should now be called Edo. Later on, in appreciation of Edo's affection, which helped to save the life of the young ruler Ogun and give Benin its most significant monarch, this was extended to Edo O'Evhohire, also referred to as Edo the City of Love. He gained notoriety as Oba Ewuare the Great throughout time and was acknowledged as the most inventive, foresighted, and powerful Oba in the Edo kingdom's history. Benin saw significant changes in all spheres—cultural, social, and physical—under his direction.¹⁶

Originally, mud-packed homes made with shafts or palm ribs were redesigned with compressed mud. The city was carefully planned, with highways extending outward from the centre after it was reevaluated. It was divided into two independent areas, with Orene Okhua developing the public area and the Oba's area (Ogbe) on the other side. The royal home was constructed on a grand scale, spanning several acres at its current location, unlike previous ideas that lacked a stable site. It transformed into a hive of activity that functioned as the wide world's political and strategic operational hub. According to Bini, there will never be quiet in Oba's palace. The complex includes places of worship, spaces for gatherings of leaders, offices for royal officials, eminent academics, and experts, storage rooms, and individual residences for the Oba's numerous wives, kids, and bodyguards. The palace described by seventeenth-century European traveller Olifert Neat, published in Amsterdam in 1668, lends credence to the earlier claim:

"The monarch's royal residence, or court, is a square area nearly as expansive as the town of Idaarlem, entirely enclosed by a distinctive wall that resembles the town's fortifications. This space is organised

into several magnificent royal homes, lofts, and apartments from various nations. Also, it features beautiful, lengthy, square displays that are likely comparable in size to the trade fair in Amsterdam. Each display is larger than the previous one and is supported by wooden stands completely encased in cast copper. On these stands, the fragrances of their battles and achievements are inscribed, and they are carefully maintained. Most of the Lord's royal dwellings and areas are adorned with palm leaves instead of flat wooden boards. Each column is crowned with a small turret that tapers to a point where birds perch—¹⁷ copper birds with lengthy wings artfully designed to resemble living creatures.

By bringing the public power together and putting a comprehensive strategy for three powerful governing bodies into action, Ewuare reformed it. The world's highest political class consisted of named leaders and members of the royal family. The Uzama, who had significant power over the ruler, was made up of the seven most senior leaders in Benin, all descended from well-respected elders. The king's brothers, who were normally rivals, were selected as the region's hereditary leaders, or Enogies. The mother of the monarch lived in her palace outside of Uselu and was referred to as Sovereign Mother. Ewuare brought back the yearly custom of significant rituals, the most prominent of which were Igue to strengthen the king's magical abilities and UgieErha Oba to honour royal ancestors. Ewuare's time is when the opulent clothing worn by Benin's monarchs and leaders first became on show.¹⁸

During the reign of Ozolua between 1472 and 1486 AD, the Portuguese first arrived in Benin, which they called Beny or Benin (although the Bini identified themselves, their language,

their capital city, and their kingdom as Edo). During the process of expanding their territory, the Portuguese came across a highly developed culture with unique and intricate political, cultural, linguistic, economic, social, and military customs. From 1504 until 1550 AD, they developed and preserved diplomatic and commercial ties with Oba Esigie and his Benin kingdom as the leading European power at the time. After the pact was signed, lucky Portuguese soldiers fought numerous minor wars around the Biniin. The principal commodities traded by the Portuguese with Benin were metal manilas, which the Dini craftsmen melted down to cast, textiles for ceremonial clothing, and coral beads. Benin acquired a variety of things from Portugal in exchange, including tobacco, spices, kola nuts, ivory, pottery,¹⁹ jewellery, antiquities, and domestic slaves.

Many people were seized as war prizes from places like Edo, which resulted in the commencement of the European slave trade in West Africa with the apprehension of soldiers and domestic servants. Because it was forbidden to sell or take a local Bini into slavery, their faces and chests developed intricate, one-of-a-kind identifying markings. Similarly, no Europeans nor Middle Easterners ever held Binis as slaves. It was left to one of the leading palace associations to manage relations with the Portuguese. People from this clan still speak a distinct language, which some say is descended from Portuguese. Oba Overamwen Nogbaisi, also known as The Unique, held authority in Benin City during the British invasion in 1897. The British sought an excuse to sack Benin because they saw it as a significant barrier to their attempts to advance along the West African coast from the Niger River. They disobeyed the Bini conventions and traditions by sending their scouts to Benin continuously, even during a holy public holiday when they were not allowed to receive new guests. What the British desired was for the adventurers from Britain to be perceived as dangerous intruders. They then launched a

full-scale conflict, supported by their superior firepower, that lasted eight days. They dispersed the residents of the ancient city of Benin to various towns and properties after taking control of it. While the Bini were away, the invaders plundered the chiefs' residences, the Oba's palace, and every Bini shrine.

Along with other goods, they removed a significant number of holy Benin artefacts, many of which are currently on exhibit in well-known museums across Europe and the US. Dissatisfied with their plundering, they destroyed every building in the city by setting it on fire. The floors, lintels, and rafters of the conference chambers and the ruler's residence in the palace were covered in sheets of embroidered metal with intricate patterns and images of men and jaguars, according to reports from the British forces that raided Benin City in 1897. The doors were adorned with ornate ivory locks, and within were carved ivory figurines on the exhibit. A metal serpent, glimpsed by a European in the eighteenth century, was still visible atop the meeting chamber house.²⁰

Conclusion

No trustworthy source mentions the precise time or location of the Bini (Edo) 's departure from the Nile Valley, although it is commonly known that the first Beninese rulers were known by the name Ogiso. The kingdom of Benin gave birth to several capable leaders who contributed significantly to global progress and safety. Even in light of the English contempt for Bini culture and their denigration of Bini history, the magnificence of the Edo civilisation never ceases to astound and have a profound influence. The kingdom of Benin is still well-known for its intricate social structure and governance, and its artefacts are among the purest and most sought-after in the world of experiences.²¹ One of the oldest and most revered conveyance traditions in the world is still the Bini Oba practice.

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