

## Heritage, Memory, and the Manifestation of Tradition: The Olufon Festival in the Historical Narrative of Yorubaland

**Ayowole S. ELUGBAJU\*** and **Inioluwa T. TOLUWALOPE\*\***

### Abstract

Olufon is featured in the history of Ile-Ife as one of its cultural heroes. This includes both as an offspring of Orisa, also known as Obatala, one of the renowned kings of the city, and as a ruler of Ile-Ifon, one of the ancient cities in Yorubaland, perhaps known today as Ifon Orolu. However, despite being associated with a status of prominence in the historical traditions of both cities, the prefatory narratives associated with Olufon in Ile-Ife before his emergence as a ruler in Ile-Ifon remain a gap in existing literature. The consequence of this has been that the narratives preceding the emergence of Olufon as a ruler in Ile-Ifon have not been textually documented and ultimately remain a missing part of a broader historical narrative among the Yoruba. Therefore, this study examines the Olufon festival within the framework of the historical narratives that underpin it in Ile-Ife, ultimately offering the missing pieces of the history of Olufon in Yorubaland. By doing this, this study seeks to bridge the gap between the narratives associated with Olufon in the histories of the two cities, thereby setting the stage for a possible reconciliation of the traditions of both cities, which will aid in reconstructing the history of Olufon and certain sections of the historical timelines of Ile-Ife and Ile-Ifon. This study employs a combination of historical and ethnographic research methods, and for analysis, it adopts a thematic approach. This study relies on oral interviews, participant observations, archival documents, newspapers, and secondary sources.

**Keywords:** Olufon, Ile-Ife, Ifon, Ritual, Yoruba Heritage

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1. Department of History and International Studies, Redeemer's University, Ede, Osun State, Nigeria; ORCID ID: 0000-0001-6616-4153, [elugbajuayo@gmail.com](mailto:elugbajuayo@gmail.com)
2. Department of History and International Studies, Redeemer's University, Ede, Osun State, Nigeria; [timothyinioluwa20@gmail.com](mailto:timothyinioluwa20@gmail.com)

## Introduction

In addition to acquiring the status of holiness due to “historical circumstances or events, or because either in theory or in actual fact they were constructed to reflect cosmic reality – a kind of microcosmic spatial reflection of the macrocosm and its divine ground,” a place may be considered sacred if they possess “a holy object, a shrine, or a tomb.”<sup>1</sup> This reflects the conclusion of European explorers who visited Yorubaland, specifically Ile-Ife, between the 19th and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The earliest documented reference to Ile-Ife dates back to the report of the Lander brothers in the third decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> This was followed by the comments of Daniel May, the first European to visit Ile-Ife, who, in addition to stating that the city was a “much-talked-of town,” described it as a city “the reputed seat of idolatry.”<sup>3</sup> This suggests that Ile-Ife may have been prominent among Europeans due to the religious importance associated with the city in the ethnographic information collected during the exploration of the different sections of Yorubaland. However, May stopped short of providing further narrative concerning the political and religious character of the city owing to what he regarded as the difficulty of collecting information in this section of Yorubaland.<sup>4</sup> However, in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, European exploration of Yorubaland would again extend to Ile-Ife, initiating the revelation of the intricate socio-political and, most importantly, religious and cultural systems of the city. In specific terms, both explorers who visited the city at different times within the same decade documented its significance to the Yoruba Religion, reflected in the plethora of deified culture heroes represented in various forms and associated with sacred sites, rituals, and festivals, among others. Some of these include the groves, obelisks, stones, and temples dedicated to deified culture heroes such as Ore, Ogun, Oluorogbo, Oranmiyan, and Olokun, among others, whose memories are commemorated in festivals.<sup>5</sup>

Extant studies have described festivals within numerous contexts including being an integral or institutionalised aspect of a culture.<sup>6</sup> Thus, it suggests that the festival is deeply intertwined with culture, which is defined as the distinctive intellectual, emotional, material, and spiritual characteristics of a society or social group.<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, in contrast with the view expressed elsewhere<sup>8</sup>, a festival incorporates the material and non-material components of a culture, consisting of living expressions or traditions such as oral traditions, rites, festivals, and rituals, monuments and sites limited to architectural heritage, material signs, including the artistic and symbolic bequeathed across generations.<sup>9</sup> In essence, a festival as a socio-cultural practice captures these qualities selectively, and in some cases, wholly, as is the case with festivals among the Yoruba, particularly in Ile-Ife. As demonstrated elsewhere, festivals in Yorubaland include a combination of the otherworldly and secular.<sup>10</sup> This, therefore, reflects a succinctly argued viewpoint that outlines the multifaceted characteristics of a festival, including its sacred or profane nature as a time of celebration. This is marked by special observances, including the annual celebration of a notable person or event, the harvest of an important agricultural product, and a cultural event consisting of a series of performances.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the aggregation of extant studies on festival into a condensed view shows that it is considered to

be a “periodically recurrent, social occasion in which, through a multiplicity of forms and a series of coordinated events, participate directly or indirectly and to various degrees, all members of a whole community, united by ethnic, linguistic, religious, historical bonds and sharing a worldview.”<sup>12</sup> This perspective describes the nature of festivals among the Yoruba, which recur at specific periods, expressed through coordinated activities that draw participation directly from individuals, groups, and lineages whose ancestors<sup>13</sup> and histories are connected to the significant events underpinning the festival, and indirectly through spectatorship, among other means.<sup>14</sup>

Macaulay and Balogun emphasised the linkage between festival and culture when they averred that the former is a communal product rooted in the latter.<sup>15</sup> To expound this view, they argued further that festivals were rooted in rituals and were not only attached by humans to major activities but to “to control, manage and understand his universe.”<sup>16</sup> It is commonly stated that rituals, and particularly, festivals, are a daily recurrence in Ile-Ife except for a specific day, a knowledge of which only the king of the city possesses. This suggests that the diverse festivals associated with numerous deified culture heroes of the city feature significantly in the cultural expressions of the city. Effort has been made to examine some of the festivals of the city within varying contexts, such as phenomenological documentation<sup>17</sup>, investigation of sacred spaces<sup>18</sup>, social transformations<sup>19</sup>, dance<sup>20</sup>, songs<sup>21</sup>, and as a historical source<sup>22</sup>, among others. In addition to examining the festivals of Ile-Ife through different paradigms and themes, existing studies have thus far contributed to knowledge through the documentation of the practices, rituals, and rites associated with these festivals, most of which have significantly declined, and in some cases lost as a consequence of social transformation precipitated by religious change and colonialism. Festivals remain a significant component of cultural heritage, reflecting the collective memory of a people. Cultural heritage has been conceptualised within the paradigm of several disciplines and organisations. This precipitates the absence of a generally accepted perspective. Whereas effort will not be expended here to examine all of the existing arguments attempting to make sense of what cultural heritage should connote, a few will be highlighted. Mounir Bouchenaki described it as monuments and sites.<sup>23</sup> The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) offers a comprehensive perspective. It averred that cultural heritage “is an entire corpus of material signs, consisting of the artistic and symbolic bequeathed across generations within a culture”<sup>24</sup> and, therefore, “to the whole of humankind.”<sup>25</sup>

An aggregation of these views and others shows cultural heritage to be an ensemble of many “complex and interdependent manifestations consisting of living expressions or traditions inherited and passed across generations, such as performing arts, oral traditions, rites, festivals, rituals, knowledge corpus and practices that concern nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts.”<sup>26</sup> Indeed, collective memory is not history<sup>27</sup>, but it does show how the members of a cultural group comprehend, construe, and transmit the crucial events associated with the past. Within the context of this study, the narrative surrounding

Olufon as an important figure in the traditions of Ile-Ife and the establishment of Ile-Ifon is a collective memory reenacted in the festivals associated with him in both cities. In addition to suggesting a strong linkage exists between Olufon and both places, observations at the festivals conducted at different times in both cities reflect a fissure in the collective memories about Olufon in Ile-Ife and Ile-Ifon. To be specific, the provenance, emergence, and migrations of Olufon are well known in Ile-Ife, whereas the accounts of his kingship are well known in Olufon. While the latter appears to be well-known and textually documented<sup>28</sup>, the former has not received sufficient attention in existing literature. The consequence of this has been that the narratives preceding the emergence of Olufon as a ruler in Ile-Ifon have not been textually documented and ultimately remain a missing part of a broader historical narrative among the Yoruba. Therefore, this study examines the Olufon festival within the framework of the historical narratives that underpin it in Ile-Ife, ultimately bringing to the fore a missing aspect of the history of Olufon in Yorubaland. This study employs a combination of historical and ethnographic research methods, and for analysis, it adopts a thematic approach. In addition to the secondary sources, the primary sources explored include oral interviews with votaries of the deified culture hero, participant observations of the festival, newspapers, and archival documents.

### **Olufon in Traditional History**

As noted by Akinjogbin, the memories of significant events and culture heroes in Ile-Ife, which include Olufon, “go back not just to three or four generations but to about a thousand years or more.” Indeed, such recollections may not be considered as precise historical facts; however, they may be regarded as understandings of the past shaped by ritualistic ceremonies and orature.<sup>29</sup> This view echoes an anecdote contained in a verse of the Ifa corpus, which describes the deified culture heroes as humans whose significant attributes or contributions to social, economic, and political developments precipitated their immortalisation and veneration. These deified culture heroes, variously numbered in the hundreds and thousands, have been variously described as divinities, spirits, and other entities, possessing capabilities that meet the religious expectations of their votaries.<sup>30</sup> Consequently, these culture heroes are almost entirely described within a religio-mythical context, serving to illustrate the divine character and capabilities ascribed to them. This, perhaps, prompted an assertion evaluating the general understanding of these figures among the Yoruba, which stated that “The divinities are, in fact, so real to the worshippers that they have, for practical purposes, almost become ends in themselves, instead of the means to an end which, technically, they are according to Yoruba theology.”<sup>31</sup> Be that as it may, this religious understanding plays a significant role in the narratives and traditions associated with these ancient figures, including Olufon, whose history is intertwined with the early history of Ile-Ife, specifically with that of Orisa, also known as Obatala.<sup>32</sup> The early history of Ile-Ife has been a subject of continuous study, and while much remains to be uncovered, significant progress has been made in expanding existing knowledge. The various

theories propounded in an attempt to reconstruct the emergence of monarchy in the city generally describe Orisa as a political leader, either as the head of a confederacy or as a monarch within a centralised political system, and the Olufon as his offspring.

The exact name of this important historical figure is not particularly clear. However, in Ile-Ife, he is known as Olufon, an appellation derived from his political leadership of the ancient city of Ile-Ifon. In other parts of Yorubaland, he is known by various terms, including Orolu, Akogun Erujeje, and Aladikun Olaosa, among others.<sup>33</sup> In any case, he is reported to be the offspring of Orisa and his consort, Yemoo. As stated by a member of the Olufon lineage who heads the cult of the deity in Ile-Ife, the parturition of Olufon by Yemoo occurred while the divinities were in the otherworld, and when the process of cosmogenesis had been completed, Olufon descended to earth as a part of the first 201 deities generally described as the first to have peopled the earth. This account is mythico-religious in nature, thus fantastic. Another account related that while Olufon may have existed in the era during which Orisa reigned as the king of Ile-Ife, he was not the first child of Orisa but rather, his first male offspring. This account points out further that, contrary to the widely circulated view, Orisa had a female offspring known as Laariowu<sup>34</sup> and that it was this figure that nurtured Olufon till he came of age. There is a possibility that Laariowu may have been the maternal ancestor of Olufon rather than Yemoo, but further research into uncovering the place of Laariowu in Ife history and, most importantly, her connections with Orisa and Olufon did not yield anything meaningful beyond the sacred site associated with her, which appears to have fallen into disuse, which suggests that Laariowu may have been one of the numerous deified culture heroes in Ile-Ife whose history the people of Ile-Ife appear to no longer readily recollect.

It would appear that not so much is remembered about the exploits of Olufon in Ile-Ife. However, traditions indicate that Olufon had a brother named Osoosi with whom he had a contest, which precipitated his emigration.<sup>35</sup> According to an account of this event, a practice existed in the house of Orisa that forbade its members from consuming the meat of certain animals. However, for reasons that were not clearly stated, Osoosi seemed to have been exempted from this prohibition. The immunity enjoyed by Osoosi would rouse Olufon to do the same. As a result this would play a part in the emigration of Olufon from Iranje, leading him to establish his lineage within a section of Ile-Ife and eventually emigrate to Ile-Ifon, where he would become a king. If this tradition is valid, it may then explain the widely circulated narrative associated with the emergence of Ile-Ifon, described as a city established by Olufon after he emigrated from Ile-Ife. To be specific, a tradition in Ifon relates that the town emerged from a settlement founded by Olufon after he failed in a bid for kingship in Ile-Ife, as specifically stated in the account, which occurred after the death of Oduduwa.<sup>36</sup> This account further stated that this factor, alongside the intimacy he shared with Obalufon, the successful contestant, and his possession of a crown made of white beads, precipitated ill will towards Olufon, who was instructed to leave Ile-Ife.<sup>37</sup> Thus, leading to the establishment of Ifon. The attempt made through this tradition to explicate the origin of the Ifon town is interesting. Nonetheless, it

appears that it fails to take into account the nature of the interactions between these deified culture heroes, as recorded in the ritual drama of Ile-Ife and the Ifa corpus.

Rather than Olufon, it was his father, Orisa, who shared a close affinity with Obamakin, also known as Obalufon, and the establishment of the city of Ile-Ifon was a combined effort of these deified culture heroes, particularly the latter, rather than Olufon.<sup>38</sup> As reported in the Ifa corpus, following the establishment of the town, Orisa was approached to assume kingship, but he declined and instead opted to be regarded as the father of the city.<sup>39</sup> This, in addition to his return to Ile-Ife with Obalufon, may have created an opportunity for his son, Olufon, to emerge as the king of the city. Extensive details concerning the events and actions associated with Olufon in Ile-Ife appear to be scanty, and this may, perhaps, be associated with his sojourn to Ile-Ifon. Be that as it may, it would seem the traditions of Ile-Ife, specifically in ritual drama, show that despite being a king of a separate city situated elsewhere, Olufon retained a connection with Ile-Ife, specifically Iranje, the seat of power strongly associated with the past rulers of the city, including Orisa and Osangangan Obamakin otherwise known as Obalufon Ogbogbodirin. It may have been that Olufon visited Ile-Ife periodically to participate in the festival of Orisa. However, the specifics of this are not particularly clear. An aspect of the ritual drama in the festival of Orisa, otherwise known as *Odun Itapa* or *Odun Obatala* in Ile-Ife, features the presence of a Chief, known as Olufon, a descendant and representative of the culture hero, as well as the custodian of his cult.<sup>40</sup> During one of the preparatory stages of the festival, specifically during the *Ijo Oka*, as indicated elsewhere<sup>41</sup>, Olufon occupies one of the foremost positions in the sitting arrangements specific to the ritual and participates in the associated rites. In addition, another account indicates Olufon returned to Ile-Ife at different times or, as shown in another view, some of his offspring migrated from Ile-Ifon and settled in Ile-Ife.

This account points to the existence of lineages described to have descended from the offspring of Olufon, and while, as stated earlier, Olufon established a lineage known as Elusala following his departure from Iranje, several other lineages have been associated with him and the founders of these were purported to have returned to Ile-Ife from Ile-Ifon along with some of the offspring of Obalufon.<sup>42</sup> Whatever the case, these lineages are collectively considered to be sections of the progeny of Olufon, with the Elusala compound regarded as the site of the Olufon sacred site and the nerve centre of his cult in Ile-Ife. The importance of the Elusala lineage settlement site to the memorialisation of Olufon in Ile-Ife is perhaps further illustrated by the domiciliation of the Olufon priest-chief title within this lineage, as opposed to being rotated across the different sections of other lineages associated with Olufon.<sup>43</sup> The other sections of the broader Olufon lineages include the Awuruwara, Agbesinyowa, Arogbatesun and Owin lineages. Of these lineages, the Owin appears to have an entitlement to participation in the Olufon cult, rituals, and priestly titles.<sup>44</sup> However, this lineage is described as having descended from a female descendant of Olufon, who is otherwise regarded as a

counterpart or a sibling to the Elusala lineage.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, these two lineages are of great significance to the Olufon cult.

### **The Olufon Festival in Ile-Ife**

The commemoration of Olufon is one of the numerous processes designed for the memorialisation of the deified culture heroes of Ile-Ife. This commemoration of deified historical figures or events takes the form of festivals, specifically a celebration on the surface. However, when closely assessed, it becomes evident that it is a re-narration of the life and times of an important figure in the history of the city, couched in the components of the Yoruba Religion, which include rituals, sacred sites, processions, and effigies, among others. It is no wonder that ritual in a festival has been described as “more than mere drama since what ritual embodies is more than the total summation of the conventional drama.”<sup>46</sup> This holds for the Olufon festival, which, in addition, features a series of rituals spanning seven days, known as Idijo, Osan, Ipaleda, Oru, Egbelu, and two others, not mentioned, as they are considered sacred due to the ritualistic importance attached to them.<sup>47</sup> The festival takes place annually in January, between the 25th and 30th. The festival begins, as with several others in Ile-Ife, with the *Idijo*, which loosely translates to the “day of fixing dates.” This aspect of the festival includes interacting with the palace of the king of the city and concerned chiefs, through ritual drama and certain rites, to create an awareness about the commencement of the festival. This aspect of the festival is headed by one of the chiefs in the Olufon cult, known as the Iyalotun, who, along with other chiefs, votaries, and members of the Olufon lineages, conducts certain activities in the palace. Additionally, this crop of individuals, led by the titled woman priest, Iyalotun, draws up plans and activities associated with the festival, including making provisions for some of the material resources considered essential to certain rites of the festival.<sup>48</sup>

This is followed by what is known as the *Osan*, also referred to as *Itonini*, the second day of the festival. At a specific time in the morning, the votaries of Olufon and the members of the lineage who had yet to undergo initiations into the cult gathered at the sacred site of the culture heroes, located at the Elusala family compound in the Irewo quarter of the city. Here, the participants queued in a specific order, maintaining the mandated silence, a feature of the ritual, and conducted a procession to *Otun*, a holy well located in a designated section of Ile-Ife. According to certain studies, this site can serve as a sacred location with associated rituals.<sup>49</sup> Upon arrival at the *Otun*, the Iyalotun performs certain rites, and the water is fetched afterwards. With silence retained, a procession is conducted back to the shrine of Olufon. The significance of this is probably that a nexus existed between the *Otun* holy well and Olufon. However, the exact details of this linkage appear to have been forgotten. Nevertheless, at noon, which translates to *Osan* in the local language and marks the high point of the ritual activities for the day, the effigy of Olufon, which, like several sacred representations of the deified culture heroes of the city, had been deposited in the museum for safekeeping among other reasons<sup>50</sup>, would have, before this moment, been recovered. At this juncture, Olufon is

subjected to a ritual cleansing, which includes bathing his effigy with a combination of water from *Otun* and leaves from certain plants considered specifically potent for this rite.<sup>51</sup> In addition to serving as an avenue to prepare the effigy for the festival, this particular ritual provides individuals looking to be enlisted into the Olufon cult with the first stage of the initiation process. The underpinning objective of this first stage of the initiation is to facilitate the transition of the interested individuals from the state of *ogberi* (a profane person) to that of an *Awo* (an initiate) and this flows through the process of partaking in the processing to procure the sacred water and during the cleansing of the effigy, not only do they get to behold the presence of Olufon but also engage in establishing a connection with him by rubbing the fluid from the cleansing on different parts of the body.

The return of Olufon to the site of the settlement he established after his departure from Iranje prompts the sanitation of the entire space, which had become built up by the members of his lineage. Consequently, the third day of the festival is known as *Ipaleda*. This entails the cleaning, scrubbing, waste disposal, and ritual components from the previous year within the Elusala lineage settlement, but most especially, the shrine of Olufon. Interestingly, this sanitation is extended to the temple of Obatala.<sup>52</sup> The exact reasons for this are not clear. However, it may be that conducting sanitations at the temple of Obatala may be a way of commemorating the connection between the Olufon and Obatala lineages. When the cleaning activities are concluded, the participants congregate at the sacred site of Olufon to collect the liquid from the mixture of *Otun* water and herbs employed in bathing the effigy of Olufon. This liquid is known as *ero* due to the curative and sacred properties attributed to it, which are expected to ease the challenges associated with meeting the needs of users.<sup>53</sup> The high point of the initiation process for new votaries was concluded after midnight of the following day; therefore, the rites are known as *Oru* (past midnight), in addition to keeping vigil with the effigy of Olufon, which is again cleansed with clean water acquired from the *Otun* holy well and certain leaves considered sacred. However, during this rite, the newly initiated individuals, along with other votaries present, were expected to partake in the cleansing Olufon to whom requests were expected to be muttered.<sup>54</sup> The rites and rituals conducted in the *Oru* set the stage for feasting known as *Egbelu*, which takes place on the final day of the festival. During this feast, the eponymous priest of Olufon hosts the priest-king of Iranje-Ideta and the chiefs of Iranje-Ideta, as well as a collection of priests associated with different deified culture heroes, including Oluorogbo, Akire, Ijugbe, and Daponderi, among others.<sup>55</sup> In addition to victuals to be consumed by all present, which suggests it may be a repast to celebrate the conclusion of the festival, this feast is significant in that certain rites were conducted by the groups present to commemorate the connections shared by the deified culture heroes they represent.

### **Significance of the Olufon Festival**

Festivals in Ile-Ife are an essential aspect of the indigenous culture. This can be explained within the context of the significance they hold, given their historical and religious importance.

Extant studies that have examined numerous aspects of the socio-cultural history of the city, as well as the documentations conducted by the explorers, show that Ile-Ife is a religious city, as indicated by the plethora of rites and rituals that take place daily, weekly venerations, and the annual festivals that serve as the apogee of religious expressions. However, it can be suggested that the propitiations that appear to occur mainly at the individual level and the weekly veneration, which requires joint veneration by the votaries of deities, are indicative of the religious aspect of the socio-cultural practices within Ile-Ife. The festivals, which occur annually, create an avenue for commemorating deified culture heroes within the framework of significant events, including their interactions with the environment and notable persons who have impacted the history of the city, its institutions, and specific lineages. The festival of Olufon reflects the history and religious practices of Ile-Ife, as well as those of Ile-Ifon. The traditions explaining the origin of Ifon-Orolu, as previously stated, indicate an emigration of Olufon from Ife, which led to the establishment of the town. At the same time, this tradition highlights the complexities associated with the process of establishing the city, which, according to the tradition, was the place where Olufon died. It fails to take into account the narratives concerning Olufon in Ile-Ife. The festival of Olufon demonstrates that indeed there was a connection between Ile-Ife and Ifon-Orolu, as well as between Olufon and Orisa, including Iranje, an important ancient town within Ile-Ife. Additionally, the Elusala settlement, which serves as a lineage settlement, sacred site, and veneration space for Olufon, indicates that he may have resided in Ile-Ife for a considerable period.

Furthermore, it is likely that despite emigrating and perhaps becoming a king in another city, Olufon retained a connection with the city as reflected in the presence of the priest of Olufon, along with a plethora of other priests, at the sacred site of Orisa to participate in certain rites considered essential to the *itapa* festival. Additionally, as indicated above, during the *ipaleda* rite of the Olufon festival, members of the Elusala lineage would visit the sacred site of Orisa to conduct sanitation. These activities, like others embedded within other festivals in Ile-Ife, are commemorations of the past that are reenacted to recount past occurrences. Similarly, it was commonplace in Ile-Ife, as is the case with different parts of Yorubaland, to represent individuals who died at a suitable age with effigies made of various materials.<sup>56</sup> This practice appears to be limited to deceased individuals considered to have exhibited specific characteristics associated with elderliness in Yoruba culture. As documented elsewhere, this representation was intended to facilitate recurring commemoration, conducted in the form of feasts.<sup>57</sup> With reference to Olufon, it can be suggested that members of the Elusala lineage likely considered Olufon to have died in Ile-Ife and been buried there. Hence, a representation of Olufon in the form of an effigy exists to indicate that he may have returned to Ile-Ife at some point and died there. Whatever the case, further examination of the Olufon festival holds potential for filling the gaps in the history of Ile-Ifon and situating it within the context of the life and times of Olufon before emigration and factors underpinning it.

**The Olufon Festival: Change and Continuity**

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, explorers, including missionaries, documented reports across different sections of Yorubaland, indicating that the ancestors of the various sub-groups that would make up the Yoruba ethnicity originated from Ile-Ife, and therefore, making it one of the earliest cities to have existed among the ethnic groups. Later archaeological work, stimulated in part by early reports such as those of Dennett<sup>58</sup> and, especially, Frobenius<sup>59</sup>, has supported the view that the city dates back to antiquity.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, it can be suggested that the antiquity of the city indicates the possibility that socio-cultural practices, including sacred spaces and components employed, were likely to have undergone changes as a result of several factors, including wars<sup>61</sup> and diseases<sup>62</sup>, among others. Studies show that Ile-Ife has not been immune to the outbreak of epidemics, some of which have facilitated emigration and the emergence of sacred sites. However, no extensive evidence exists to establish the impact of this on festivals within the city. Interestingly, the wars of the 19<sup>th</sup> century have had a profound effect on sacred components, circuitous routes for processions, and sacred spaces in general, leading to transformations and, in some cases, complete obliteration.<sup>63</sup> The most important agents of social change appear to be Islam, Christianity, and colonialism. Scholars have shown that the measures employed by missionaries of these religions in introducing and proselytising them — including social advancement, association with the emerging elite, the restoration of social order after the internecine wars, and the economic appeal of a concept of sin that inner change rather than costly rituals could remedy — were highly effective.<sup>64</sup> These factors, responsible for the advent and establishment of introduced religions, in addition to colonialism, are also applicable to Ile-Ife, as examined elsewhere. However, a fascinating consequence of this is the encounters that these religions and colonialism had with Yoruba Religion in the city, which, as documented elsewhere, took the process of conflict, concord, and co-existence. Nevertheless, significant transformations impacting festivals and the practice of Yoruba Religion generally within the city have been remarkable.

Over the years, numerous studies have examined the social transformations that have occurred within the city, particularly in relation to festivals. Therefore, the case of the Olufon festival may not be very different, in that, apart from the decline in votary population and participation, many of the rites or rituals associated with the festival appear to have been lost, including the important sacred sites. To begin with, the civil war within the city, otherwise regarded as a slave uprising<sup>65</sup> but widely known as the Ife-Modakeke war, led to the evacuation and destruction of the city in 1849<sup>66</sup> and again in 1882<sup>67</sup> during the internecine wars, after which it was reoccupied in 1894.<sup>68</sup> During his visit to the city in 1859, May, who referred to the war, remarked that there was nothing of note in the city. It may be suggested that the city was still recovering from the war that had occurred eight years before his visit, and therefore, the vestiges of the war lingered. In 1894, Governor Carter, during his short visit to Ile-Ife, recorded that his observation was that of a “very melancholy spectacle.” Additionally, he indicated that there were ruins of houses within which birds could be hunted. Thus, suggesting

the city was desolate and had become overrun by animals. Frobenius, who visited about sixteen years after Carter, provided a far more graphic detail of the consequences of the war. Therefore, it can be inferred that the destruction of the city was extensive. At any rate, the resettlement process involved relocating individuals and lineages to new parts of the city, rather than reoccupying their old sites. This raises the question of whether the site of the Elusala lineage settlement was the actual settlement established by Olufon, and whether he indeed referred to his settlement as Elusala.

However, while no substantial evidence exists to suggest otherwise, it may be tempting to conclude that the current site of the Olufon sacred space occupies the settlement established by the culture hero when consideration is given to the comments that they have never had to relocate and that their kin are settled in proximity to one another. Be that as it may, the site of the sacred space for Olufon is a built-up settlement with the building dedicated to housing the effigy of Olufon and associated materials restricted to a minor section within the larger settlement situated within the Iremo section of the city, which holds an important place in the history of the advent, establishment, and spread of Christianity in Ile-Ife. The history of Christianity and Islam in Ile-Ife has been well-documented in other studies.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, effort will not be made here to examine it in detail. Nevertheless, the establishment of these religions had a significant impact on socio-cultural practices within the city. The establishment of Christianity and Islam in the city, which rapidly spread into different sections of the city, including Iremo, where the sacred space of Olufon is located, facilitated religious change among individuals who would spearhead proselytisation within their lineages. The process through which these religions permeated the Elusala lineage is not specifically clear. Still, it appears that they adopted both faiths, and this significantly impacted their devotion to sustaining the rites, rituals, and festivals associated with Olufon, their progenitor. In the words of the eponymous priest of Olufon, his family within the larger section of the lineage had adopted Islam, while other families had equally adopted Christianity.<sup>70</sup> Consequently, this has impacted participation in the festival specifically and facilitated the loss of components essential to the memorialisation of Olufon generally.

In addition to the withdrawal of members of the lineage from the religious activities associated with Olufon, which has reduced the family following of Olufon to just the priest, the general disposition of Ooni Okunade Sijuade, the indigenous ruler of the city until 2015, significantly facilitated the decline of the religio-cultural practices of Ile-Ife. Studies have shown that the Ooni, who would become a devout Christian, not only constructed a church within the palace, one of the most sacred grounds in Yoruba Religion in Ile-Ife, but also distanced the connections his throne had with indigenous festivals.<sup>71</sup> This was followed by widespread religious change among the chiefs of Ife, both the temporal and spiritual. This would lead to a rapid decline in the importance associated with the deities of Ile-Ife, whose festivals, including that of Olufon, experienced a significant decline. Indeed, the followership and significance associated with Olufon significantly declined to such an extent that the population of votaries and the sacred

space within which veneration takes place have diminished. However, it appears that, due to a growing trend of the resurgence of Yoruba Religion in Ile-Ife over the last decade, the festival of Olufon has continued to witness a gradual revival through the increased presence of pilgrims seeking to be votaries of Olufon for specific reasons.

### Conclusion

The traditions explaining the origin of the different sub-groups of the Yoruba, perennially feature narratives of emigrations of certain characters out of Ile-Ife due to a plethora of reasons. An instance of this is Olufon, whose emigration is strongly identified with the traditions of the kingdom of Ifon. However, unlike several other culture heroes, Olufon appears to feature in the traditions of Ile-Ife and the accounts of which are commemorated in rites, rituals and festivals. As shown in this study, the memories of Olufon are strongly recollected in the traditions of Ile-Ife, and, in addition to fitting into the traditions of Ifon, which suggests he migrated, provide an explanation for the factors underpinning the sojourn of Olufon elsewhere. By doing this, this study seeks to bridge the gap between the narratives associated with Olufon in the histories of the two cities, thereby setting the stage for a possible reconciliation of the traditions of both cities, which will aid in reconstructing the history of Olufon and certain sections of the historical timelines of Ile-Ife and Ifon.

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38. This is the common tradition in Ile-Ife. The reasons for the establishment of this town by both parties is not particularly clear but it would appear Obatala allowed for the participation of certain persons in the process of establishing certain towns across Yorubaland such as Ipetumodu which was established by Orisa and Orunmila.
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