

Òpá Òrànmíyàn and Ògún Láàdìn Shrines in Ile-Ife as Purveyors of Religious Tourism

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Abstract

Ile-Ife, the cradle and spiritual enclave city of the Yoruba, accommodates shrines, groves and worship of many pantheons or deities. Some of the groves have gained the attention of the current Oòni of Ife for promotion and development of tourism which will enhance socioeconomic growth. The phenomenon has led to the recent beautification of nearly all known shrines in the city with the hope of bringing out their tourism potentials. This study reveals that the mythological powers and history attached to two cultural heritages—namely Òpá Òrànmíyàn and Ògún Láàdìn—are making them to draw tourists across the globe. Furthermore, the infrequent art work, particularly the one carried out in the installation of Òpá Òrànmíyàn, makes it a pride of the Yorùbá race and black Africa at large. All the beautification in the two shrines were carried out with utmost attention to their sacredness, which is reflected in the materials used, hence a promotion of spirituality and tourism without desecration. To this end, the paper posits that the two cultural sites can change the fortunes of Ile-Ife and as well contribute to economic diversification in Nigeria if the current promotion embarked upon by the Oòni is sustained and more support given by Local, state and federal governments.

Keywords: Ilé-Ifè, Ògún Láàdìn, Òpá Òrànmíyàn, shrine, religious tourism

Introduction

Ile-Ife, known in Yorùbá mythology as the birthplace of humankind, is an ancient town in present-day Osun State, South-West Nigeria (Lotha, 2019; Boakye, 2019). The name is a compound word with *Ilé* meaning house while the *Ifè* means wide. The name therefore speaks about the creation of the world and Ile-Ife as the place where everything started and from where people dispersed or spread to other places in the world. Another name for Ile-Ife is *Ilúrùn* meaning the gateway to heaven (Egu, 2011; Williams, 2014), a place of origin.

As an ancient city with high respect for culture and tradition it has the record of having not less than 401 deities to which sacrifices are made daily, except a particular day in a year which is known to the traditionalists and the Ooni. Any reigning Oòni is considered the 401st of the deities; the only deity that speaks (Olupona, 2011; Olaoye, 2019). The shrines and groves set aside for the worship of some of the deities are occasionally visited by people including foreigners either for religious or tourism purposes. According to Fárótìmi,

the Obadió of Òdùduwà shrine (personal interview, 2019) each custodian of the shrines holds a chieftaincy title.

Ile-Ife is enriched with a number of sacred and historical sites that can be world-class tourist destinations. This paper therefore explores two sites, Òpá Òrànmíyàn and Ògún Láàdìn shrines as indices or marks of religious tourism in Ile-Ife. Ògún Láàdìn is right inside *Ooni's* palace while Òpá Òrànmíyàn is in Arùbîdì area of Ile-Ife. The choice of the two is the potent power and spiritual importance attached to them by every typical Ife indigene for the peace, growth and corporate existence of the life in the ancient city, which also attract outsiders to the two antiquities, either for spiritual consultation or tourism reasons.

Overview of Religious Tourism in Nigeria

Tourism, refers to

the activities of a person or persons outside his or her usual environment for less than a specific period of time whose main purpose of travel is other than exercise of an activity remunerated from the place visited. (Obasola 2014)

Religious tourism also known as faith or spiritual tourism, involves devotees travelling to a location, a building or a shrine that are considered as sacred either to observe or take part in religious aspects in accordance with individual faith. However, as note, Timothy and Boyd (2003), religious sites are not only visited by devotees but also by visited nonreligious tourists for reasons of culture, history, education and religious significance.

Tourism generally and religious tourism in particular, has benefits. It raises the profile of the host community (opportunity to show off its profile to the world) and as well serve as incentives to the community to preserve, regenerate, and promote its cultural and religious heritage. It paves the way for learning opportunity between the tourists and the host community which can help to reduce negative perception about other cultures and customs. It increases economic opportunity and provides job for the locals and as well contributes to national income generation (Goodman, 2017; Heintman, 2013; Mirbabayel & Shagazatora, 2009).

Religious tourism is a fashionable trend in Nigeria involving the adherents of the three principal religions (African Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity) in the expression of their beliefs or fulfillment of religious obligations. Of course, part of the historical heritage of both Christianity and Islam is tourism. Thus, every year, a significant number of Christian and Islamic faithfuls go on religious visits to Israel and Saudi Arabia, where they gather to pray, celebrate their histories and also visit sites of historical and religious importance.

Nigeria also has a plethora of religious and cultural sites and festivals, some of which are already attracting people from within and outside the country and it cuts across the three religions, although to varying degrees. Some of the tra-

ditional religious festivals, groves and shrines that have given boosts to tourism as acknowledged by Ele (2015), Obasola (2014), and Ibagere & Adeseye (2016) include Eyo festival in Lagos state, Osun Osogbo festival in Osun, *Iwhurie* festival in Warri, Delta, and a host of others in the East, where people go for reconciliation, oath-taking etc.

All the above position Nigeria as a preferred destination for religious tourism, which if properly harnessed can contribute towards changing the economic fortunes of the country for better.

Oranmiyan in Ife and Yoruba History

Òrànmíyàn Omolúàbí Odédé also known as Òrànyàn, is a legendary figure in Ife and the entire Yoruba history (historicalsocietynigeria.org). He was the youngest of Oduduwa's children and the 4th Ooni (allafrica.com/stories/2). Among all Oonis that ever reigned, he is the only one reported in multiple traditions such as Nupe, Borgu, Edo and some others (Adedoyin, 2016). He was a warlord and an exceptionally tall man, which also informed the height of the staff that was erected in his remembrance.

The name Òrànmíyàn is symptomatic of a controversial child at birth. He was born two-toned in complexion with half of his body light-skinned and the other ebony black, which incited the name “Òrà̀n ni omo yí yàn” (“the child has chosen to be controversial.”) Tradition also has it that Òrànmíyàn was a man of two fathers—Òdùduwà and Ògún, two men who had relations with the same woman, Lá̀kangbé Aníhuúnkà, that gave birth to him (Beier, 1980). With his light-skinned body, he resembled Ògún while the other half ebony black made him look similar to Oduduwa. His other name Odédé revealed him as a skillful hunter and a renowned warrior which made him to assume the role of “Ako-gun,” the defender of Ife, at the time ancient town did not have any standing army (Osasona, Ogunfolakan, and Ewemade, 2010).

Adeleke (2013) reveals that Oranmiyan left Benin to Òyó-Ilé which expanded to become Òyó Empire, and he was the pioneer Aláàfin. His son Àjàkà that was born for him by Àtìbà, an Oyo woman, replaced him as the Aláàfin as he was returning to Ile-Ife. As Oranmiyan returned to Ife, he deposed the king he met on the throne to become the Oòni. The deposed king he sent to Ifè-Òdàn to become the king in the small town. While reigning as Oòni, Òrànmíyàn as a warlord occasionally went on expeditions against hostile neighbour. However, according to Famoriyo (2019), Oranmiyan physically appeared back at home with his mystical sword for the defense of his people anytime he heard the magical word *Gbàjúre* screamed by his people which he already taught them to say in order to invite him back home in case of any attack or threat of war. This habit of inviting Oranmiyan for defense led to the saying in Ife *Ijò ogun ni Ifè òpe Òrànmíyàn*, meaning “in the time of war the Ife always called on Oranmiyan” (Omidiora,

2016). Consequently, the culture of always relying on the ability of the king to resolve their problems still persists among indigenes at home till today.

However, there was a day Òrànmíyàn was invited back home by his people but without any threat of war but out of their desire to see their king, whom they had missed for long. Nonetheless, as soon as Òrànmíyàn appeared at the outskirts town, thinking his people were under attack, thus he started killing people and decapitating them with his sword. Before he was informed that there was no war, many lives had been taken. When he realized that he had been killing his own people he angrily pitched his mystical sword on the ground and vowed never to use it anymore. The spot and the neighborhood where Oranmiyan stopped the killing is named “*Ìrémo*” (*Ibití Òrànmíyàn ré orí mo*) till date, which literarily means the spot at which Òrànmíyàn stopped decapitating (Famoriyo, 2019).

Oranmiyan left *Ìrémo* for the present location of Òrànmíyàn grove at *Ìdí-Òmò*, *Arùbùdì* where with words of incantation he commanded his magical staff to turn into stone. He then moved about 200 metres away from there to another spot where with words of incantation both he and his horse turned to stone (Odeyale, 2019). These two spots made up the Òrànmíyàn shrine, a renowned place for the worship of Oranmiyan and tourist centre. Whereas the grove is open to tourists, there are certain parts of it that can be reached only by the initiates and certain traditional rites must be performed to do so.

The Mythical Origin of Ògún Láàdìn

Ògún Láàdìn is another popular shrine. According to Elusakin (2019), Ògún Láàdìn is worshipped and highly revered by Ife indigenes as a deity of justice or the heartbeat for adjudication of difficult matters.

Ògún Láàdìn, as opined by Lodoko, the Emese of Ooni (interview, 2019) was the first blacksmith on earth whose domain traced back to heaven. He had his workshop here on earth and very close to Oòni’s palace where he produced cutlasses, knives, guns and farm implements. He comes down from heaven to his workshop each morning through a chain and returns the same way in the evening at the end of his work. The noise from his workshop produced by his working implements used to disturb the then Ooni (name unknown). Thus an emissary was sent by the king to invite him to the palace to know his identity. Láàdìn however spurned the invitation with the claim that the chain that brings him down to earth and takes him back could not go beyond his *máaró* (smithery) in Ife dialect. By implication the king himself should come to him, which was exactly what happened and which is the reason as averred by Awol-eye (interview, 2019). Láàdìn is considered the highest authority in the palace.

Howbeit, getting to the workshop, the king became impressed by Láàdìn’s products, which made him to place two requests: The first was that Láàdìn

should agree to marry an earthly woman and secondly that he should allow some of the king's children or subjects to undergo blacksmith apprenticeship under him. Láàdìn envisaged the two requests might portend a danger for him yet acceded. Consequently, he was given a woman named Ìja, which in Ife dialect refers to a beautiful woman, to marry and some of the king's subjects to undergo the training (Lodoko, 2019).

After training, each of the trainees went to different directions to start their blacksmith work but they all realized that Láàdìn's products were well patronized and sold far better than their own. They therefore conspired to find out the secret of Láàdìn's power from Ija, his wife, from whom they realized that the secret was the chain that brings him to earth every day. To disempower him, the chain must be cut which they could do only by providing him the food he loves. As his usual habit after eating he would sleep before going back to heaven, during which they could cut the chain and thereby disempower him. The food Láàdìn enjoyed eating included roasted yam, palm oil, dog meat, kola-nut, palm-wine and any alcoholic beverage (Lodoko, 2019).

All the items were provided by the people, but prepared into food and presented to Ògún Láàdìn by his wife. Having slept off after eating, the people were invited in by Ìja and they came with different ammunitions to attack Ògún Láàdìn. As they were attempting to cut the chain Ògún Láàdìn woke up and caused all of them to be partially blinded, following which, with words of incantations he descended into the ground and a stone covered him up. When the assailants finally regained their sight they saw the trace of his chain at the spot where he entered the ground and they shot their guns severally to it but could not get at Ògún Láàdìn. When it became obvious that their efforts amounted to a stark failure they took Ìja to Enu-Gèru (the entrance of Oòni's palace) in Ife dialect and killed her there. They immediately returned to Ògún Láàdìn's workshop with the aim of carrying away all his working implements but regrettably each of the implements had become stone. At Ògún Láàdìn's shrine today, there are about seven different stones each representing an implement that Ògún Láàdìn used while the biggest stone is at the acclaimed spot where he entered into the ground (Lodoko, 2019).

Ògún Láàdìn's workshop therefore, and the stones representing him and his working implements became the shrine where he is worshipped today in Ile-Ife. A strong power is associated to the shrine as a place where prayer is answered and final place for adjudication in the palace of Ooni and the entire Ife. It is this unusual power that is attributed to Ògún Láàdìn shrine that attracts people from far and near to it both for worship and in search of solutions to certain problems or for tourism purpose (personal interview with Lodoko). No photograph is allowed to be taken there with the taboo that whoever attempts it will become blind.

Òpá Òrànmiyàn and Ògún Láàdìn as Purveyors of Religious Tourism in Ile-Ife

Both Òpá Òrànmiyàn and Ògún Láàdìn shrines were originally sacred sites and they still remain as such today attracting devotees or votaries. However, because of unique histories attached to those deities during their life time (that later made them to be deified) coupled with unusual power still being heard or mentioned today in and about those sites, seekers, ordinary admirers and tourists from far and near are also attracted to them, either for knowledge or for leisure. As opined by Timothy and Boyd (2003) religious sites are not only visited by non-religious tourists for reasons of cultural, historical, educational and religious significances. Òpá Òrànmiyàn and Ògún Láàdìn, therefore are indices or expressions of ample religious tourism opportunities that abound in Ife. As asserted by Chief Odeyale (personal interview), they are opportunities that can be harnessed for the socioeconomic growth of the town, the state and the country at large without necessarily affecting negatively the sacredness of those sites. Below are some of the unique or intriguing things that make interfacing of spirituality and tourism a possible reality in both Òpá Òrànmiyàn and Ògún Láàdìn shrines.

Òpá Òrànmiyàn: its features and responsibilities

Everything about Òpá-Òrànmiyàn are mysteries which draw people regularly to the object from far and near. Below are some of the mysteries associated with Òpá Òrànmiyàn.

The size: According to Famoriyo (June 5, 2019) a member of Eredumi family in Ife that is the custodian of the shrine, the staff is a representation of the walking stick and war instrument of Òrànmiyàn during his life time. It is a very tall monument said to be of the very height of Òrànmiyàn himself, who was an exceptionally tall person. Onigegewura (2018) put the height at 20 feet above the ground and one foot underground (comparatively the height of an average storey building) while Omipidan (2018) put it at 5.5 metres. As opined by Uguru (2015), the unusual physical magnitude especially the height and the roundness of the obelisk, makes it a bit difficult to accept as a walking stick that a human being could carry. However, that is the myth attached to it which is yet to be verified through archeological research. Comparing the obelisk of Òrànmiyàn with similar monuments in all sub-Saharan Africa it is the tallest (Omipidan, 2018) and in the world at large it is among the tallest (Babarinsa, 2019), hence the wonder and pride of Africa (Moore, 2018).

The artwork: Òpá Òrànmiyàn is both a religious object and a great artwork revealing the artistic prowess of the ancient Yorubas and in particular Ile-Ife. Omipidan (2018) avers that it was constructed around the year 1300 as a commemorative monument by the family of Òrànmiyàn at the place they believed he ended his life. It is made up of granite material in the form of a monolithic

pole that gradually tapers as it rises until it terminates like the tusk of an elephant. The monument is also ornamented with 123 nails that appear like bullets on the object. The nails are arranged on a straight line but became a trident or a three-prong spear from about a quarter to the top part of it. The line that stands at the middle takes off from the bottom upward having 61 nails altogether, while the two lines (one on the left and another on the right) that join the straight line to form the trident have 31 nails each. At the point the trident is formed is a carving with inscriptions that are very close to the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic writing – Resh and Yod. Onigegewura (2018) asserts that the technique and technology that produced and hoisted up the gigantic stone work at that ancient time, especially how they were able to hammer the nails into the granite, remain a mystery till today.

Interpretation of the decoration: The embedded marks on the staff of Oranmiyan are not ordinary but carry hidden meanings and messages (Babarinosa, 2019). The 61-nail design in the middle of the trident according to Kareem (2016), means the number of years that Oranmiyan spent on earth with the 31 nails on either side to the longest line, indicate that he was 31 years old when he began to reign and he ruled for 31 years. However, the decorations are better interpreted from historical perspective with the understanding that Òrànmíyàn was a Yoruba king who ruled on three different occasions in three different kingdoms. Thus to the people of Ile-Ife, the longest line represents Ile-Ife while the other two lines represent Benin and Oyo, respectively, which have the source of their crowns linked to Oduduwa in Ile-Ife. The trident pattern of nails on the obelisk therefore reveals Òrànmíyàn as a trident king, the only one who reigned in three different kingdoms and after him no other Yoruba king has reigned or would ever reign in three different kingdoms.

Ogun Laadin Shrine in Ile-Ife

As opined Lodoko (personal interview, June 5, 2019) Láàdìn is a trusted god of justice in Ife to which typical indigenes will prefer to go for adjudication. There are up to three or four courts in the Ooni's palace. The first, which is the lowest court, is Emesè court made up of the King's emissaries headed by Chief Lówá, who is third in command to Ooni. Any case taken to the palace begins at Emesè Court and it is empowered to handle lesser cases. The second court is the court of high chiefs made up of Obas under Ooni, headed by Chief Obalùfòn, who is second in command to Ooni. The third court is that of Ooni where the King is the sole authority to pass judgment. However, any case that is difficult for Ooni to settle or decide on is taken to Ogun Ladìn shrine, which is the highest arbiter in the land. Some ideas, concepts and mysterious power associated with Ògún Láàdìn shrine like Òrànmíyàn shrine make it another index of religious tourism

that attracts people from different places to Ile-Ife. Below are the features and responsibilities of the shrine.

Ogún Laadin and the notion of truth

The myth is that Ògún Láàdìn brooks no untruth and deception and nobody is taken there telling lies escapes unpunished. This belief creates fear in people about the shrine and anybody being taken there is warned ahead of the repercussion and must be prepared to tell the truth. Consequently, difficult cases such as stealing, in which all suspects denying involvement, are decided there. The people involved are made to drink water from the Láàdìn shrine, following which the truth is revealed and the offender exposed (Lodoko, June 5, 2019).

Ogún Laadin and the notion of fair and instant judgement

The belief in the truth associated to Ògún Láàdìn dovetails with the belief in fair judgment at the shrine. According to Lodoko (personal interview, June 5, 2019), typical Ife indigenes believe in the judgment at Ògún Láàdìn shrine than they believe in any official court of law. Ògún Láàdìn will not vindicate the guilty and punish the innocent. Ògún Láàdìn does not delay judgment but gives instant rulings. Latest and within seven days the offender is judged and punishment meted out which can be in the form of accident, instant death and other forms of negativity. Thus if anything happens in Ile-Ife and there are argument as touching the truth over the matter, it is usually taken to Ògún Láàdìn to decide. Ògún Láàdìn is the last arbiter whose judgment at his shrine is regarded as supreme and final in the traditional process of settling dispute in Ile-Ife.

Ogún Laadin and the notion of “ilé-àse”

Àse simply means “so be it, so it is, or it definitely shall be” (embracingspirituality.com). *Ilé-Àse* therefore means a house of prayer where one receives answer to his prayer or heart’s desires. Lodoko and Elusakin (personal interview June 5, 2019), asserts that whatsoever request is presented at the shrine with strong faith in Ògún Láàdìn, the person would surely receive the desired request. Thus many important dignitaries in Nigeria do visit the shrine in search of relevance, monies, political powers and fame and have returned with testimonies of answered prayers. Lodoko (personnel interview) further opined that many international politicians, governors and some Nigerian presidents have also visited the shrine. Only prayer should be said and no one should curse at the shrine because whatsoever is said there shall in a sure manner come to pass. Some of the visitors have from mere visitation become devotees of Ògún Láàdìn.

Harnessing the Tourism Potentials in Òrànmíyàn and Láàdìn Shrines

Tourism is considered as second only to oil as the single largest item of world trade. It contributes greatly to the world’s gross domestic product and in particular has helped to boost the economy of countries like Gambia, Kenya, South

Africa, Morocco and a host of others in the world (WTO, 1980). In other words, tourism can contribute immensely to economic growth. Thus it must not be underestimated but rightly employed by the community or nation where such opportunities exist.

From the study of the two cultural heritages in Ile-Ife, it is obvious that they have enormous potential for tourism. One way to fully tap into tourism is to initiate a yearly festival in the name of the two or any of the two heritages to attract attention far and wide. An example is Osun Osogbo festival that holds in the city of Osogbo in the month of August every year. Another is Èyò festival that holds in Lagos every year. The two cultural heritages draw tourists from far and near every year and the economy of the two cities are usually affected positively during the period they lasted. Osun Osogbo which is one of the biggest art festivals in Nigeria gather over 235,516 tourist in 2014 and 199,860 tourists in 2013 and research shows consistent increase every year (<http://derigpart.org>). The festival is one of the high points of tourism in Osun today, serving to preserve Yoruba culture and helping boost the economy of the people. There is nothing bad in initiating such a festival that can also turn Ile-Ife to the *Mecca* of Nigeria with many cultural endowments resident in the city. In 2012 and in recognition of the place of Òrànmíyàn in the history of Oyo town as a progenitor and a deity, Alaafin Lamidi Adeyemi initiated the first Oranmiyan Festival. It holds in September of every year. Ile-Ife that has the staff and the shrine of Òrànmíyàn has a better advantage to organize such a yearly festival more than Oyo that has initiated it if she will appropriate.

What makes a festival also includes the aesthetics that go with it. Aesthetic in this sense embraces drumming, dancing, musical performance, elaborate costumes, recitation of praise poetry and singing of family totem. All these elements make festival and add pomp and color to it (myproject.com.ng). Thus activities that will showcase the virtue, power, dressing as well as singing of the totem of Òranmiyan can be entrenched in what will be done during the festival. Oranmiyan is still considered today as a unifying force for the Yorubas. Thus a programme will draw many Yorubas to the town as well as Benin people and people from other traditions that Òrànmíyàn had touched in his time. Local people will definitely make some income from the sales of food items and other consumables, photography, allocation of space to business owners, all representing some indirect benefits to the community. The programme, if appropriated by Ile-Ife, will also serve as a unifying factor for the indigenes of the ancient city, bringing them together at least once a year, home and abroad, irrespective of social, economic, religious and political conviction. The programme will also serve as an opportunity for Ife to promote and project its salable artwork. As avers, Biller (2015), Ile-Ife was known as a city of art for centuries. Between 700 and 900 AD Ife was a world art centre. Some of the artwork included

clay ceramic, stone, terracotta and obelisk. All these can be promoted and projected to enhance economic growth of the city.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the foregoing, it is obvious that Ile-Ife, the cradle and religious city of the Yoruba, is replete with a number of cultural and spiritual properties that can be harnessed through tourism for the economic benefits of the city, Yoruba race and Nigeria at large. Òpá Òrànmiyàn and Ògún Láàdìn shrines studied are examples and hint of latent opportunity. The unique myths associated with the two sites and the infrequent artistic wisdom demonstrated, particularly in the installation of Òrànmiyàn obelisk, continue to draw tourists from far and wide. Religious tourism is a goldmine or employed to improve economy in some of the countries of the world. The opportunities in Òpá-Òrànmiyàn and Ògún Láàdìn also remain for Ile-Ife and Nigeria to tap. It is therefore recommended that the various governments at the local, state and federal levels should show more support for these cultural heritage towards turning them to wealth stokers and spinners for the socio-economy growth of Ile-Ife and the country at large.



Fig. 1: The researcher with Michael Famoriyo and other devotees at the Oranmiyan shrine.

Fig. 2: Procession at Ogun Laadin shrine.

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