

**A CONTEMPORARY HISTORY OF OYO TOWN: CASE STUDY OF ORANMIYAN
FESTIVAL**

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Ancestor worship is an essential aspect of Yorùbá culture. For worshippers of deities like *Oranmiyan* and other Yorùbá pantheon gods known collectively as the òrìsà, festivals serve as a connector of the social world of the Yorùbá to the unseen world.¹ The Yoruba pantheon consists of hundreds of gods, worshipped for an immense variety of purposes, each representative of some natural or spiritual element or human emotion. Some gods existed before the creation of the earth and others are heroes or heroines from the past that became gods after their deaths. Other gods are even natural objects in their environment such as mountains, hills and rivers that have influenced people's lives and history. Important to the Yoruba religion are storytelling and the journey of life, and these are connected to many sacred rituals.²

In Oyo, these gods are honored, revered and worshipped particularly during festivals which often begin with the retelling of a Yorùbá myth. This is evident during *Oranmiyan* festival which explores Oyo history in order to explain the foundation of Oyo and the ultimate destiny of Oyo Empire.³ *Oranmiyan* worship establishes a body of relationships and transformations with the adherents. This includes, maintaining a relationship between an individual and the past history of his or her lineage. Learning and teaching of incantations, traditional dances, songs, and ontology, thus establishing continuity in the cultural tradition of Oyo town.

Many traditional African festivals are celebrated in Oyo town, and are as old as the people, they are being celebrated in different ways and specified period of the year. A quick classification of these festivals into three categories further

¹ O.A. Oderinde, "The Lore of Religious Festivals among the Yoruba and its Social Relevance". In *LUMINA Journal*, Vol. 22, No.2, p. 3

² R. T. Oyelakin, Yoruba Traditional Medicine and the Challenge of Integration". In *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol.3, no.3, 2009, p. 73

³ Observations of the researcher doing the *Oranmiyan* festival in Oyo, 2012

establishes the nature of traditional worship and festivals in Oyo town. First are festivals used to celebrate agricultural products such as the new yam festival. Another festival is celebrated in memory of some powerful and historical figures in a particular community, who had achieved and fought for that community and made history. Festivals are thereby organized annually to celebrate them. Examples of such festivals in Oyo include Ogun festival, Shango festival, Oranmiyan festival, etc. The third category falls under historical festivals are organized in remembrance of a particular incident that happened in a community be it good or bad.⁴ Thus, rituals are carried out to honor those who have passed on to the world of the ancestors and provide a space where people may explore the profound and experience phenomena.

Existing also among the Oyo, a sub-group of Yoruba's of Western Nigeria are festivals that are rich, which can as well influence the world both artistically and in moral values and at the same time earn foreign exchange for the Nigerian nation as a whole. One of such festivals is the *Oranmiyan* festival. The festival has its inherent aesthetic structures, such as dances and songs which are linked with ancestors worship, historical figures and notable events either in the lives of its adherents or in Oyo town. However, while scholars have researched other Yoruba gods, no comprehensive study have been carried out on the place of *Oranmiyan* worship and festival in Oyo town.

This study therefore intends to examine *Oranmiyan* worship and festival in Oyo town. Look at *Oranmiyan* shrines in Oyo town, their uniqueness and relevance to the socio-economic growth of Oyo town. It also examines *Oranmiya* connectedness to the centre of political administration of Oyoland from its foundation up to year 2012.

⁴ R. T. Oyelakin, *Yoruba Traditional Medicine and the Challenge of Integration*”.



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