

Ancient Odogo Building of Igala Kingdom: the Oldest Storey Building in Nigeria

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Abstract: The aim of this work is study the chemistry or composition of the ancient Odogo two storey building in Attah Igala's palace, Idah, Kogi state, as well as investigating the difference between the age of the Odogo in Idah and the storey building in Badagry, Lagos state. The result showed that the storey building in Idah was built 629 years ago (1391) while that in Badagry was built 175 years ago (1845). It was then concluded that the two storey building of the Igala nation in Idah is the first storey building in Nigeria not the one in Badagry built 454 years after. It was then recommended that the building be recognized as one of the National tourist structures by the Federal Government of Nigeria and that the palace of Attah be given the necessary monthly support for the maintenance of the Odogo building. A portable status of this ancient building be made and kept in Idah museum and national museums as well as other important museums across the Nigeria.

Keywords: Ancient, Badagry, Idah, Odogo, Storey building

I. INTRODUCTION

A storey building is any level part of a building with a floor which can be used for work, storage, living, relaxation, recreation, etc. It is a building having another floor after the ground one. The number of floors determines the type of the storey building it is. A two storey building has a ground floor and the first floor or the ground floor and upstairs. A three storey building has a ground floor, first floor and second floor, and so on.

The Odogo (Odo-ogo) building of the Igala Nation is a two storey building because it comprises the ground floor and first floor. In fact, as ancient as the Odogo storey building is, the style still being built in Nigeria till date. The second picture (picture) is a modern storey building built in Asokoko Abuja presently.

The Odogo storey building is located in Idah, the headquarters of the entire Igala people indigenous in FCT and twenty nine states of Nigeria. Idah is the where the seat of Attah Igala of all Igala, the supreme ruler of Igala people is located. The present Attah Igala is HRM Agabaidu Idakwo Ameh Oboni II.

II. DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

The name, Odogo was from two Igala words; Odo and Ogo. While Odo means wall, Ogo means valley, pit or hole. The name arose from the type of building it is as well as its location. The valley or pit referred to in this case is the vertical pit of the Ubiogba cliff. The location of the Attah Igala's palace where the building is standing is near or very close the Ubiogba cliff or Ubiogba Valley. In other words, the Odogo (Odo ogo from Odo eti Ogo) means the wall beside a valley or pit (Ubiogba pit).



Plate1: Odogo two storey building in Attah Igala's palace, Idah, Kogi state. (The oldest storey building in Nigeria)



Plate 2: A modern three storey building in Asokoro Abuja, Nigeria with the semblance style of ancient Odogo building.

Around the 7th century BC, Igala migrated to the Benue valley, mostly in the present day Wukari, Taraba state, Nigeria from Egypt after Egypt was conquered by the Kush kingdom coupled with regular wars and foreign invasions by external people. Around 500 BC, Nine clans in one group- The Igalamela and Other clans in another group- The Igala ogba, making up two groups migrated forward from Wukari to Idah where they continued to have Attah from the two groups though not without occasional conflicts. In the 14th AD century, Abutu Ejeh migrated along with some remaining Igala families left behind in Wukari in addition to some related Idoma-Igala groups and others to Idah. It was during Attah Olema's reign as Attah but there was too much conflict then between Igalamela and Igalogba, and that led Abutu Ejeh to be asked by the first two groups to take over Attah Igala's throne after Abutu Ejeh had appealed to them for the Attah's throne, though with special agreement as the two were assigned their own roles in Attah Igala's council.

It was during this period that the seat of Attah Igala was relocated from Opu-Attah (Opata) where the Igalamela are staying to a neutral ground beside the Ubiogba valley or cliff where the palace is till date. The Odogo was built in 1391 AD when Abutu Ejeh became the Attah Igala after Olema II. Note: Attah Aji, Attah Olema I, Attah Anoge, Attah Agbo, Attah Agoshi, Attah Olema II ruled for 18 years from 1373 to 1391. Attah Ogala also known as the Eri, who later left Idah and founded Aguleria was the Attah Igala of Igalamela clan who ruled from 1371- 1373 when he was chased by Igalogba group

from the throne. From the 1391, which is 629 years in this 2020, the building had been put into use by successive Attah Igala including Attah Ayegba Oma Idoko during whose reign as Attah Igala the Igala-Benin war of 1515-1516 was fought.

III. PURPOSES FOR WHICH ABUTU EJEH BUILT THE ODOGO (PLATE 1.0)

Some of the roles the building was built for are as follows:

1. As a security tower: In those days, wars were common as strong ethnic groups or tribes would fight the weak ones, chase them away and take over their land or capture them, and have them annexed to their land. Thus, there was need for every leader to always be prepared for war or to prevent such event taken him or his people unaware. The size of Idah then was not much as they were mostly concentrated at Opata and Igalogba areas, the two communities which are just stone's throw from the palace, so, all the Idah town could be guarded or watched over from the tower. The first floor or upstairs has four wide windows- each towards the north, south, west and east respectively, and each manned by a soldier to watch the four cardinal points of Idah town in general and the palace in particular. The room has the capacity to accommodate up to sixteen persons should there be need for joint fight of enemies using arrows, local guns or others. The big size of the room also enabled some soldiers to rest while others guard; that is shifting role.

2. For safety of the Attah in case of sudden problem in the palace: Igala at a particular point had a war with the Jukun, though the war stopped at Inachalo without coming to Idah town. Queen Amina of Zaria was coming to Idah to kill Attah as she used to do to other kings, and then had a Hausa man installed there and the land annexed to Hausa land though she was killed by Igala warriors and buried at Efoko Ichekepa forest at Okpachala Ogbagbada close to Idah. Uthman Danfodio men were coming to Idah when the Igala soldiers brought almost all of them down at Koto Karfe Igala land near Abuja, and remaining few survivors ran away, etc. This was how different enemies were taking wars to various kings in those days, and when the king was killed, they now take over the town. The Odogo storey building was acting as a safe place for some Attah in those days especially when the war was getting closer. Staying in such a place with some security personnel and strategists allows him to give necessary and planned orders to the soldiers too. Igala had never been defeated in any war, it is either we won with strength or spiritually. Note: War or fight has no formula, the bottom line is to win, and win well.

3. For safety keeping of some traditional materials: The palace is the headquarters of Igala culture and traditions. In those days, the British and other Europeans who came to our land to introduce their culture and have them imposed on our people by force entered our various shrines, ancestral temples and took various symbols of our ancestors, gods and goddesses and as well as some materials handed to us by our ancestors. This led to some problems in our land as the replacement was not easy. Thus, this made some very important traditional materials to be kept under serious security watch like the Odogo security tower.

4. Praying room of Attah Igala

Attah Igala is both humans and God or the representative of God on earth. Many Attahs, including the present one had stated on several occasions that he is the representative of God on earth. So whoever Attah blesses is blessed and whoever he curses is cursed. Attah prays always for peace in his land, as well as progress and good health to all the Igalas all over the

world. He prayed to God whom he (Attah) is representing as well his ancestors- his father, grandfather, and all the Attahs and all the Igala elders in the other world. He speaks with them or hears from them, a role in which the earring he is wearing play. Till date, in Nigeria as a whole, it is only Attah Igala that wears earring just like ancient Egyptian Pharaohs. This is because Igala ruled for ninety years (2130 BC – 2040 BC) as the tenth Dynasty ancient Egyptian Pharaoh as reported by Petrie Flinders, Lewis Spence, Oxford, ...

5. As a temporal resting place for any "sleeping" Attah Igala before taking him or her to the final resting place: Just like in ancient Egypt, when any Pharaoh joins the ancestors, he or she will be rested in a particular special room to sleep for three months while other traditional processes relating to him or her including taking care of the sleeping body will be going on. After the three months, if he did not wake up, he will then be taken to the Pyramid for final resting. This ritual or processes is same for any Attah Igala who has joined the ancestors or having a waste pain as Igala would say. The Odogo storey building is where the Attah will rest for about three months before he will be taken to the holy or sacred land of Attah called Oja Attah-Ina or Ojaina in a short form.

6. For a paramount palace traditional announcement: The position of the roof of the first floor or upstairs of the Odogo building has a meaning or message in Igala culture. It is like a national flag which is lowered when mourning or when the country's head has passed on. Whenever the roof of the Odogo building is being bent to one side instead of the normal upright position, it means the reigning Attah Igala has travelled to the other world or sleeping (having a 'waste pain') because Attah will never die, he sleeps, and if does wake after three months, another Attah will come. When such happens, Igala would say *Oji Odogo mubu* or *Oji Odogo muchi*, that is; the head of Odogo has removed or has cut. Any cultured Igala son or daughter who hears this knows what has happened already.

IV. PRESENT USES OF THE BUILDING

Although, the role of palace soldiers guarding the entire Idah has been taken over by the modern security agents coupled with the expansion of Idah town which makes the watching of entire Idah impossible, the building still play all other roles listed above. That is; people no longer watch from the upstairs.

V. MATERIALS USED FOR THE BUILDING

Mud wall: In those days, modern building materials were not available; hence people use local materials available then. The building is a mud house. It was made using mud (soil, silt, loam, water/oily liquid), bricks and *Oji*, (*Oji* is an Igala name for a thick liquid in which palm oil is extracted from). The use of oily liquid instead of water was to allow the wall (mud and bricks) to be very strong and sticky since it will be a storey building. The oily liquid prevents the cracking of the wall as it will allow expansion and contraction due to its elastic properties. The oily fluid or liquid prevents the absorption of rain water by the wall as it will act like viscous preventive skin (surface tension) on the wall when wet. It allows for durability, the property which has retained the building in its form till date after 629 years of existence (1391 - 2020).

Thatched roof: Thatched roof is a roof made of up spear grasses covering a framework of moderate sized woods formed and held together with plants ropes fetched from the bush. Although, this was the only roofing available in the present day Nigeria then, thatched roofing makes the room cool because it does not allow heat into the room because of its thickness as a

result of many layers of the grasses on the roof compared to the single layer zinc of today. The thatched roof spear grasses were undergoing regular replacement after four or five years until the roof was partly affected for the first time by wind in 1995 during the reign of Attah Aliyu Otulukpe Obaje. It was then the thatched roofing was changed to zinc for durability, while all other properties of the building remained untouched.

Suspended wooden floor: The first floor of the building was made with horizontal woods (hardwoods that caver be eaten by termites) and then covered with leaves, and then mud and oily liquid making it a concrete floor like the wall, though not as thick as the wall because no brick in the floor.

The roofing on the ground floor: Although, having roofing for a ground floor or lower floors of a storey building is not common, it still exists. The second picture (Picture 2) is a modern two storey building similar to that of Attah's palace presently around Asokoro, Abuja, Nigeria. Although, the style still exist, that of Igala palace has some importance, some of which are; to prevent water from penetrating through the floor into the room since the upstairs is smaller in size than the ground floor, thus, making some spaces uncovered by the upstairs. The ground floor roofing also helps to prevent the washing down of the soil used for covering the wood of the floor of the upstairs. It also provides cover to the ground floor wall which is the one carrying the load thereby reducing the amount of rain splash on the wall. If the building was to have only the top roof, occasional excess rainfall would not allowed it to stay till this time in its original form because when it is too wet, it can collapse with a little effect of wind storm.

VI. REDUCED TOP ROOFING OF THE UPSTAIRS

The size of the first floor of the Odogo building is not the same as the size of the ground floor. In the same way, the size of the roofing of the ground floor is smaller than the size of the roofing of the ground floor. Here are some reasons for the reduced roofing of the upstairs compared to the ground floor. The roofing is not nailed or clamped to the top of the wall but just tied to it by roap. Note: No metal clamp in those days but rope, hence the rope is still used till date. The reduced size is also to reduce the pressure on the ground floor that may be caused by wind effect on the top floor's roof. Another major reason for the reduced size of the top building and the roof is because of the occasional "movability" of the roofing of the upstairs whenever any Attah Igala has travelled to the other world. If the size is much, carrying it as such height will be difficult. In addition, when it is big, bending it towards one side to send the "journey" message of Attah Igala can make the load to be much on one side of the building, and could collapse when hit by wind storm. In summary, it allows for easy carrying, it reduces pressure on the ground floor, it allows the rope used for holding it to the wall to be able to hold it firmly to it.

VII. THE STOREY HOUSE IN BADAGRY, LAGOS STATE

This building was erroneously said to be the oldest storey building in Nigeria due to incomplete investigation on dates of early buildings in Nigeria. The storey building was built by Rev Henry Townsend of the church missionary society in 1845 which just 175 years ago. The storey building of the Igala Nation was built by Attah Abutu Ejeh, the then Attah Igala in 1391 is 629 years old, hence that in Badagry, Lagos state cannot be the first storey building in Nigeria but the second one, and even younger than the first one, the Odogo storey building of Igala nation by 454 years.



Plate 3: A two storey building Badagry, Lagos, Nigeria. (The second in Nigeria in terms of age)

CONCLUSION

The study of the chemistry or composition of the Odogo storey building in the palace of Attah Igala in Idah, Kogi state, ranging from the components of the building, the materials used for the building, the importance of the materials, the reasons for the variation in the ground roofing from that of the upstairs as well as the Attah Igala who built it, which year and the purposes of the ancient two storey building have been discussed. Considering the year of the Odogo storey building of Igala Nation was built which is 1391 (629 years) by Attah Abutu Ejeh, the then Attah Igala, and the year the Badagry, Lagos state storey building was built which is 1845 (175) by Rev Henry Townsend of the church missionary society, it can be concluded that the oldest storey building or two storey building in Nigeria is the Odogo two storey building of the Igala nation located in Attah Igala's palace, Idah, Kogi state and not the storey building in Badagry Lagos state which was erroneously thought by many across Nigeria, as it 454 years younger than that in Idah, Kogi state.

Recommendation

Having stayed for over six hundred and twenty nine years and still intact and perfectly in its original form, I hereby recommended that the building be recognized as one of the National tourist structures by the Federal Government of Nigeria and that the palace of Attah Igala be given the necessary monthly support for the maintenance of the Odogo building. I also recommend that portable status of this ancient building be made and kept in Idah museum and national museums as well as other important museums across the Nigeria.

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