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A Study of the Relationship Between the Benin Kingdom's Pre-Colonial Embassy System and the Present-Day Embassy System

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Abstract: The aim of the research was to investigate the relationship between the Benin Kingdom's Pre-colonial Embassy system and the present-day Embassy system. The work was carried out using oral history information, library materials and internet sources of verifiable evidences. It was discovered from the results that the first international diplomatic relationship between an African leader and another leader outside Africa was between the king of Benin Kingdom and that of Portugal, and it occurred in 1486. The results also showed that the pre-colonial Embassy system is different from the present-day Embassy system in some ways such as; the Ambassador does not have other staff members or employees as seen in Embassies today, the Ambassador is like a messenger and does not have the power to negotiate on his own, and so, would return home to the king if some questions are being asked and he was not given the answer as part of the message by the king while traveling to the host country, the Ambassador does not travel with his or her family as done by Nigerian Ambassadors and High commissioners of today, etc. However, irrespective of the differences, both the Pre-colonial Embassy and the present-day Embassies are meant for the exchange of business ideas, goods, services, collaborations, partnership, etc. In the case of Benin, goods such as ivory, pepper, ... were imported from Benin to Portugal in exchange for coral beads, textile materials, tools, etc. The diplomatic relationship also led to the building of a Benin embassy in Portugal and some factories in Benin by the Portuguese as well as the building of Portugal's embassy in the court of the Oba of Benin. Furthermore, Ughoton, the town founded by Prince Ekaladerhan (later named Oduduwa while Idah; meaning it is God that brought him) before he went on exile in Igala land, where married and stayed in Ife Omala in the present-day Kogi State before moving to Ile Ife in Osun state around 13th century according to Igala version of the history of Oduduwa, played an important role in the diplomatic relationship between the two kings due to the seaport in Ughoton, and the head and Chief Priest Ohen Okun of Ughoton been the Ambassador of the Oba to Portugal. It was concluded that though the present-day Embassy has developed to a great level with various sections or units, the Benin Kingdom's Pre-colonial Embassy serves as a template to many embassies of today, taking into cognizance the many roles played by the Pre-colonial Embassy that are being played by the present-day Embassies.

Keywords: *Ambassador, Benin, Embassy, Portugal, Ughoton.*

I. INTRODUCTION

An embassy is a building where a representative of a king, or president lives or works in the host country. It is also the residence or place of official business of an ambassador. An ambassador is a diplomatic agent of the highest rank accredited to a foreign government or sovereign as the resident representative of his or her own government. Ambassadors usually reside in the country where they are posted and maintain an embassy or consulate. They are also responsible for managing the embassy's staff as well as ensuring the safety and security of their country's citizens who are living or traveling in the host country.

No country is an island unto itself and no country or kingdom can provide all the resources it needs for development within her territorial borders. Therefore, every country is relevant in the exchange of goods and services provided in the international system (Ediagbonya, 2015). As a result of this, there was need for diplomatic relations between different countries or groups. A diplomatic relationship is an arrangement between two countries or kingdoms by which each has representatives in the other country or kingdom.

Five hundred or more years ago it took a Portuguese envoy travelling in a caravel an average of two months to get to the Bight of Benin, in the present-day Nigeria, from the port of Lisbon in Portugal, and another three or four days to trek from the ancient Benin Sea Port of Ughoton to the capital city, Benin city itself, to seek audience with the Oba. But today it takes only a few hours to make the same journey (Ebiuwa and Felix, 2013). Although some related works have been done, there is no one which has studied the relationship between the pre-colonial embassy system of Benin Kingdom and the present-day embassy system. This necessitated this work.

A. Roles or Duties of an Ambassador

1.1.1 They represent their country or kingdom: An ambassador is the official representative of their country or kingdom in a foreign country or kingdom. They are the link between the head of their home country or kingdom and the host country or kingdom.

1.1.2 Ambassador provide information to the home country or kingdom: Ambassadors provides information and advice to their home or kingdom's government about the conditions of the host country or kingdom such as political, economic, and social conditions.

1.1.3 Protecting the interests of their citizens: Ambassadors protect the interests of their citizens who are living or traveling in the host country or kingdom. They could help them solve some problems including some unforeseen challenges faced while in the foreign country or kingdom.

1.1.4 Maintaining good relationships between the host country: An ambassador is to maintain the cordial relationships with the

government and people of the country they are posted to. Their home country had already established the relationship, the ambassador has the duty of ensuring that the rules and regulations of the host country or kingdom are obeyed, or would not do anything that will ruin the established relationship.

1.1.5 Acting as a reporter and a representative: The Ambassador in addition to the provision of information to the home government, also has the duty of relaying the official messages from the host country's or kingdom's government to the home country's or kingdom's head.

1.1.6 Maintenance of the properties of the home country in the host country: Ambassadors stay in the embassy of the home country. These embassies are mostly built or rented by the home country or kingdom in the host country or kingdom. The materials in it are also owned by the home country or kingdom. It is the role of the Ambassador that all these items including the building are well-maintained or taken care of.

II. BENIN KINGDOM

Benin kingdom became an organized city State around 40 BC from a gerontocratic system of government to hereditary sytem. The kingdom, at the beginning, was ruled by a king with a title of Ogiso, which means "king from the sky". This is related with the title, Anu, of Igala kingdom, which means "the sky god". The earliest name of the present-day Benin kingdom was Igodomigodo, and the first Ogiso (king) was called Ogiso Obagodo nicknamed Igodo who was the son of Odudu, a great farmer and warrior from Udo community who came to the present areas of Idumwun-Ivbiotor and adjoining area of Ugbekun(where the first palace of the earliest Ogiso's where domiciled). Benin kingdom is known with various crafts such as bronze casting, blacksmith, wood carving, etc. Benin had/has greater influence in Nigeria, and till date, various towns and people in southsouth, southeast and southwest Nigeria trace their origin to Benin Kingdom. The present title of the king of Benin is Oba of Benin. Before the era of the Oba, Benin kingdom had already been ruled by 31 kings or Ogisos. The Prince from Ife called Oranmiyan, son of Oduduwa, the Benin prince who went on exile in Ife, Omala Igala land at the Benue confluence, and later became king in Ile Ife in Osun sate, was the one who changed the title from Ogiso to Oba. Oba in Igala is associated with light or evening sun, which is almost the same in Benin too. The new king (Oba), now seen as the light, protector and lord over the entire kingdom. The Oba title in Benin is the oldest Oba title in Nigeria because it was commenced by the son of Oduduwa when there was no such title in the Oduduwa territory in Ile Ife. Oduduwa himself was Oni of Ife and not Oba. The present Oba of Benin, HRM Omo N'Oba N'Edo, Uku Akpolokpolo Oba Ewuare II, is the 40th Oba, after 31 Ogisos from Ogiso Igodo who ruled 40 BC – 16 CE as the first Ogiso to the 31st and last Ogiso, Ogiso Owodo who ruled from 1059 – 1100 (Peavy, 2010). Benin, which is now the capital of Edo State, Nigeria, used to be the cultural and political hub of an ancient kingdom, "which stretched from the lower Niger in the East, to the frontiers of modern Dahomey in the West, and far in land, taking in much of Yorubaland (Odunlami and Olukayode, 2020). This is still seen is some towns in Ondo, Ekiti and even in Lagos, where their kings still wear their Benin Royal regalia.

A. Diplomatic relationship between Benin Kingdom and Portugal

The international relationship between Benin and the Europeans started in a 15th century. The first Portuguese to visit Benin was Ruy-de Sequeira. He was the first Portuguese to visit Benin territory in 1472 during the reign of Oba Ewuare I. But he stopped at the coast and began to gather information about the goings on in the kingdom because Oba Ewuare who was the king at that time was busy with domestic restructuring of Ubini to enable him to hold the entire territory of Iduland under his firm control and so showed little interest on the visitors (Ediagbonya, 2015). The situation was not the same when John Affonso d' Aveiro visited Benin in 1485 during the reign of Oba Ozolua. This made Oba Ozolua to be the first Oba of Benin to receive Europeans at his court (Philip, 1995).

The main purpose of this international relationship between Benin and the Portuguese was trade. Other reasons include diplomatic purposes and Christianity. At least, from the point of view of the Portuguese, it was also an opportunity to introduce Christianity to Benin apart from trade (Ediagbonya, 2015). Oba Ozolua of Benin who showed readiness to permit trade with the Europeans, allowed the Portuguese to establish a factory at the port of Ughoton. Ughoton also known to the Europeans as Gwatto, lies about 42 kilometries Southeast of Benin. It was said to have been founded in about the eleventh century by Prince Ekaladerhan, the only child of Ogiso Owodo, the last Ogiso of Ogiso dynasty of the Benin Kingdom (Oronsaye, 1995).

It was reported that, the decision to send an emissary in search of Benin has to be seen against a background of intense African activity inspired by John II who ascended the throne of Portugal in 1481 (Parry, 1963). Oba was ready to allow the Portuguese to trade in products or items that may interest the Portuguese especially their king. That was why the Oba sent one of his leading officials, the chief of Ughoton back to Portugal with the emissary to meet the king and discuss the opening of trade relation (Ediagbonya, 2023).

B. Benin Kingdom Ambassador

An ambassador is a person who represents a president or leader, in this case, a king in another land. The Ambassador of Benin then was the Ohen-Okun of Ughoton, the chief priest of Olokun temple, who was a direct descendant of Prince Ekaladerhan, the founder of Ughoton village. In the ancient times, Ohen-Okun, was the Chief Priest of Olokun temple and the political head of Ughoton (Ediagbonya and Oluwafemi, 2023). It was not only during the reign of Oba Ozolua that the chief of Ughoton served as Ambassador to Portugal. When John Afonso d'Aveiro came to Benin City, for the second time, during the reign of Oba Esigie, he advised the Oba to become a Christian. Oba Esigie therefore sent Ohen-Okun, the Olokun priest at Ughoton with him as an Ambassador to the king of Portugal asking him to send priests who would teach him and his people the faith (Egharevba, 2005). It is said that one of the Ohen-Okun, the priest of Olokun in Ughoton himself visited Portugal in the time of Oba Orhogbua, the son of Oba Esigie. The first time that Ohen Okun, or the Ambassador of Benin went to Portugal was in 1486 (Femi, 2011).

But this was made possible by Oba Ozolua who established the foundation through the warm reception accorded to John Afonso, the Portugal Ambassador. They were well received by Oba Ozolua, who subsequently agreed that the Chief of Ughoton should accompany them to Lisbon so that he could learn more about the ways of the Whiteman and to discuss the business (Ryder, 1962). Furthermore, Benin Kingdom is known worldwide for its arts. The artistic traditions of pre-colonial Benin were firmly established in the peoples way of life and maintained by traditional guilds specially designed for this purpose (Kimble, 1937). This was part of what attracted the Portugues to Benin after they were received by Oba Ozolua of Benin. The embassy of Benin in Portugal was built in 1486

(Michal, 2020). It was located in Lisbon, Portugal. The king of Portugal during this period was John II. And just like Ohen Okun been the Ambassador or envoy of the Oba of Benin, the envoy of the king of Portugal, King John II was John Affonso d'Aveira.

III. COMPARISONS BETWEEN THE BENIN KINGDOM'S PRE-COLONIAL EMBASSY SYSTEM AND THE PRESENT-DAY EMBASSIES

3.1 The king's Ambassador delivers important messages between their King and heads of other government, they do not have power to initiate another discussion or activities on their own. In the case of the modern-day Ambassadors, they have the power to discuss some things and even carry out some projects on their own in the host country without coming home to take permission from their home leader or president.

3.2. The king's or Oba's Ambassador and the Portugues Ambassadors then did not have other employees under them as they were sent to and from one king to the other. The present-day embassies or ambassadors

3.3. In the Benin kingdom's pre-colonial embassy, the Ambassador does not travel with his family to Lisbon in Portugal where the Benin embassy was, or the one from the king of Portugal travelling with his family to Benin court where the Portugal embassy was. The king could only send them with some other people. The present-day embassy system has the arrangement which allows the ambassador to travel with his wife and a number of children and some staff members.

3.4. In the pre-colonial embassy system, before the Ambassador could respond to any answer given to them by the host country or kingdom, they would have to go to the home country for further instructions from the king or the government who sent them to the other country. The present-day Ambassadors, after the discussion, would communicate with the home president about some steps taken which will be in the interest of the home country. In some cases, the discussion can be made through phone call instead of travelling back home before going back again as done in pre-colonial era.

3.5. The Benin kingdom's pre-colonial embassy or the Portugal's embassy in Benin court was of little size compared to the present-day embassies or high commissions. This is because the present-day embassy has many sections or units as well as staff members compared to the pre-colonial embassies.

But irrespective of the differences, both the Pre-colonial Embassy and the present-day Embassies are meant for the exchange of business ideas, goods, services, collaborations, partnership, trades, etc. between the home country or kingdom and the host country or kingdom.

3.6. In 1514 when Oba Ozolua sent some envoys to John II of Portugal, he had to specifically seek out Edo men who had served as interpreters in the Island of Sao Tome. He paid for their passage to Lisbon as well as something for their upkeep in Lisbon, Portugal where the embassy of Benin is located (Ebiuwa and Felix, 2013). The present-day Ambassador or diplomats do not bear the travelling costs, as well as looking for interpreters as some Ambassadors are multilinguals.

IV. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN IGALA AND BENIN

Although there is no evidence of blood relationship between Igala and Benin for now, the two kingdoms have been doing things together in brotherly ways before the coming of Europeans to Nigeria. According to Igala oral and written History, the Oba of Benin and Attah Igala did send gifts to each other. While Attah did send meat and tusks of elephant to the Oba, the Oba on his own part also would send different gifts. One of such gifts was coconut which was never in Igala Kingdom or Idah until the ones sent by the Oba. The ones sent to Attah, some of them were planted, and that was the Genesis of coconut in Igala Kingdom. As result of the Oba been the one who sent it to Attah Igala, coconut was named by Igala people as Uno-Oba, meaning the Nut of Oba. According to the oral history of the Ukala people of Delta State, they were sent from the palace of Attah Igala to take part in the building of Benin wall. The Benin wall was made through a special technology. It could withstand rain even though it was an ordinary mud wall without cement. This is because of the traditional technology applied. This technology was the same used in the building of the Odogo storey building in the palace of Attah Igala. It was made with ordinary mud but it is still standing in the palace till date. This would have been the case of the wall of Benin if it was not destroyed in 1897 by the British. The two walls were made through the mixture of mud and palm oil waste. The presence of palm oil in it makes it difficult for water to penetrate. This made it to be dry inside no matter the amount of rainfall. It was the brotherly relationship that was responsible for the sending of some Igala people to take part in the Benin wall work. Even before this period, Benin and Igala were doing things together. It was reported that even Pa Idu, the ancestor or progenitor of Benin people, went to Ife Igala land in the present-day Kogi State, when Benin Kingdom, then Igodomigodo was hit by a terrible flood. It was even stated that he established one deity in Ife/Ufe there, his descendants were coming from Benin to worship or pay homage to the Idu deity until after they moved it to Benin. This tells that Igala and Benin might have some far ancestors who were related by blood. When the only son of Ogiso Owodo, Prince Ekaladerhan, was leaving Ughoton, a community he founded due to certain problem, and he had to go on exile, he crossed River Niger (River Niger is the river that separated Idah, headquarters of Igala kingdom from Edo state or Benin Kingdom) to Idah. This was around 11th century. Been found by the Attah Igala Royal Navy across the river, and brought to the palace after crossing him in canoe to Idah side, the Attah decided to give him a name Odu-duwa (Oduduwa), meaning it is God that brought him. This was because Igala could not understand him well, and he too could not understand Igala well, but he was well-dressed as a prince that he was. It was in Idah that Oduduwa married an Igala woman. Due to the proximity of Idah to Benin for fear of being tracked by Benin people, coupled with the foreknowledge that he had concerning the temporary resting of his ancestor, Pa Idu in Uhe/Ife, and his setting up of deity there, he decided to move from Idah to Ife. He stayed in Ife, in Igala land for many years, had many children, and after some time, notified Attah Igala, that as a prince, he would like to migrate from Igala kingdom to go establish his own Kingdom. As it was done in the olden days, new settlers can be attacked and annexed or enslaved by powerful ones. This made Attah Igala to send some Igala warriors with him while leaving Igala land for Ile Ife in the present-day Kogi state. According to Igala oral history, this Igala people had to settle a bit close to Ile Ife where Oduduwa settled down. The location of Igala people is called Igila ancient town (Abdullahi, 2018), and it is still in Osun State, on the way from Ondo to Ile Ife but very close to Ile Ife, for quick intervention should there be an attack on the prince now King at Ile Ife. The Igala mother of the descendants of Oduduwa was responsible for the much similarities between Igala and Yoruba languages as the children understood their mother's language (Igala) more than their father's language (Benin). This was the reason why when the son of Oduduwa known as Oranmiyan

could not communicate well with his Benin people when his father asked him to go rule Benin when he (Oduduwa) was requested by Benin people to come take over the throne of his ancestors after the passing of his father, Ogiso Owodo, as the tradition demanded. But in as much as Benin language is different from Igala language, they have some similar traditions like the coronation processes of the kings, some burial practices or processes as well as some cultural festivals like new yam festival and even planting festival. Some similar vocabularies between Igala and Benin are:

1. Servant/Aid: Edibo in Igala, Odibo in Benin
2. Head/leader: Oji or Agboji in Igala, Ogie in Benin
3. Mother is Iye in Igala and Benin
4. Child: Oma in Igala, Omo in Benin
5. Onoji in Igala, Enogie/Onogie in Benin, some chiefs in Igala or Benin
6. Banana: ogede in Igala, Oghede in Benin.
7. Cup: Ukpa in Igala,Ukpu in Benin
8. Water: Omi in Igala, Ame in Benin
9. Forest: Efoko in Igala, Egbo in Benin
10. Hill: Oke in Igala and Benin
11. Farm: Oko in Igala, Ugbo in Benin
12. Cutlass: Opia in Igala, Opia in Benin
13. Very old woman: Inene/Iyeogijo in Igala, Iye in Benin
14. Plate: Okpa in Igala. Okpan in Benin
15. Town: Ewo/Ugbo in Igala, Ogbe in Benin
16. Air: Afu in Igala, Afere in Benin
17. Small: Okekele in Igala, Okhere in Benin
18. Neighbour: Arogbe in Igala. Edogbo in Benin
19. Joy: Uyo in Igala, Ogho in Benin
20. Prison: Ugah in Igala, Eghan in Benin
21. Mirror: Egigo in Igala, Ughegbe in Benin
22. Box: Akpati in Igala. Ekpeti in Benin
23. War: Ogu in Igala, Ogun in Benin
24. Secretary: Akowe in Igala, Akowe in Benin
25. Family: Ugbe in Igala, Igbe in Benin.

CONCLUSION

The investigation on the relationship between the Benin Kingdom's Pre-colonial Embassy system and the present-day Embassy system has been carried out using oral history information, library materials and internet sources of verifiable evidences. The results show that the first international diplomatic relationship between an African leader and another leader outside Africa was between the king of Benin Kingdom and that of Portugal, and it occurred in 1486. The results also showed that the pre-colonial Embassy system is different from the present-day Embassy system in some ways such as; the Ambassador does not have other staff members or employees as seen in Embassies today, the Ambassador does not travel with his or her family as done by Nigerian Ambassadors and High commissioners of today, etc. But, despite some of these differences, both the Pre-colonial Embassy and the present-day Embassies are meant for the exchange of business ideas, goods, services, collaborations, partnership, etc. goods such as ivory, pepper, artworks, ... were imported from Benin to Portugal in exchange for coral beads, textile materials, tools, etc.

It can be concluded that though the present-day Embassy is more complex with various sections or units, the Benin Kingdom's Pre-colonial Embassy serves as a template to many embassies of today, taking into cognizance the many roles played by the Pre-colonial Embassy that are being played by the present-day Embassies.

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