

THE CALABAR HISTORICAL JOURNAL

Volume 8, No. 1 January, 2018

ISSN: 2315-8816

Published by
Department of History & International Studies
University of Calabar,
Calabar, Nigeria

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Okwende Okwale
Dep. of Hist. & Int. Stud.,
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Department of History & International Studies,
University of Calabar
Calabar - Nigeria

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ISSN: 2315-8816

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A CRITIQUE OF ORAL HISTORY AND THE CHALLENGE OF ORIGINALITY: INSIGHTS FROM *IFÁ*, *ORÍKÌ* AND *ORILÈ* AMONG THE YORUBÁ OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

Till today, in an oral society like Yorùbá, historical facts, the challenge of originality or the veracity of the information arising from lack of incomplete history ranging from conflict of ideas to absence of information and dates are inevitable. Therefore, this study addresses some historical challenges associated with the oral history. The study seeks to address some "historical distortions" in some Yorùbá ancient histories relating to the Yorùbá divinities, cities and individuals. *Ifá*, (the foundation of the Yorùbá culture), *oriki* (panegyrics) and *orilẹ* (totem) are major dependable sources of historical documents or materials used for analyses. The study demonstrates the inadequacies or weaknesses associated with these oral historical genres and their strengths. The work concludes that, where there are historical inadequacies, related historical texts are relevant historical documents useful as trace for the source historical text. It is found out that, this will go a long way of producing comprehensive historical account on event or issue under investigation.

Introduction

To the Yorùbá people, *b'omọ ò bá bá àtàn, yòò bá àrọbá, àrọbá sì ni baba àtàn*. Meaning that, if a child does know history, he will be accessible to orality, orality is the basic history. This proverb shows how the Yorùbá tradition cherishes their histories in oral mode. The relationship among the Yorùbá is built on history; that is, *àtàn ni í mú'ni tan, ẹnì tí ò ní'àtàn, kì í pẹ́tán*. Meaning that, history makes the basis for relationship, whoever has no history will soon be forgotten. For instance, till the present time, before a king or chief is installed or coronated, he must be able to orally relate the history behind or surrounding the traditional office or throne¹. For example, the *Arọkin*- "are the rhapsodists or national historians, an hereditary title; they have an apartment to themselves where they repeat daily in songs the genealogy of the kings, the principal events of their lives and other notable events in the history of the Yorùbá country."² Furthermore, most of the Yorùbá cities were founded based on the inquiry, prescriptions and guidance of *Ifá*. Volumes of the Yorùbá histories are encapsulated in *Ifá*,³ *oriki*⁴ and *orilẹ*⁵. These histories are evinced from *Ifá*. For example, the work of Akinyelẹ (1951), explains that, Ibadan city was founded on the *IfáỌ́sẹ̀ Mèjì* corpus. Ilésanmí⁶ buttresses further on Akinyelẹ's findings that, *Ifá* corpus *Ọ́sẹ̀ Mèjì*; that, "òun ló mọ Odù tí a fì tẹ ilú kọọkan dó." Meaning that, *Ọ́sẹ̀ Mèjì* encapsulates the histories behind the founding of all the Yorùbá towns.

In addition, there are histories of some Yorùbá towns deduced into writing form their oral forms. This effort produces works such as "*Ìwé àtàn Èkó* (The book of Lagos history) by Losi (1913), *Ìwé àtàn Àjàṣẹ* (The book of Àjàṣẹ history) by Akinṣẹwọn (1914), *Ìtàn Ìbàdàn*, *Ìtàn Ìwó*, *Ìtàn Ìkírún*, *Ìtàn Ọ̀gbo* and *Ìtàn Ọ̀yọ* published by Ègbẹ̀ àgbà-ò tán, Ìbàdàn. Literarily speaking, it means "The elders still remains". This is a psychological statement that whatever the reactions of the young generation of their days to the Yorùbá language, yet, elders still remain that feel concerned for the Yorùbá culture and language."⁷

In addition, some of the towns were founded by the divinities. For example, *Ògún*, the divinity of iron and war is believed to found *Àkí* town in *Ọ̀yọ́* state of Nigeria.⁸ This shows that, "The history of *Ifá* divination among the *Yorùbá* can be said to be as old as the people themselves."⁹

Orality and History: A Review

Some authors and scholars have examined their opinions on the oral form of history. For example, *Agíri* (1975)¹⁰ examines the roles of the *Yorùbá* oral tradition in the establishment of *Ọ̀yọ́* kingdom. He differentiates between "*itàn iṣẹ́dálẹ̀*" (origin of kingdom) and "*itàn*" (history). In his view, stories of origin are associated with legend and myths "closely linked with cosmology of the people." He opines that, myths and legend "are useful as variables for historical reconstruction provided it is recognized that they often synthesize actions and events that have occurred over many centuries into one simple story."¹¹ These will finally account for events "concerning the early history of a non-literate people."¹² *Awẹ́*¹³ examines the roles played by *oríkì* in warfare in *Yorùbáland*. She observes three forms of *oríkì*: *oríkì ilú* (symbolized in town), *oríkì-orilẹ̀* (lineage) and *oríkì bọ̀rọ̀kinni* (individual). Today, efforts have been made by scholars and authors to document *Yorùbá* oral histories, for example, *Babalọ́la* (1981)¹⁴ and *Babalọ́la* (2000).¹⁵

On one hand, *Barber*¹⁶ demonstrates that, *Oríkì* provides a valuable source of historical data. She opines that, "*Oríkì* are essentially historical in the sense that they are one of the ways in which the relationship of the present with the past is constituted." On the other hand, "*Orilẹ̀* suggest idea of origin, custom, religion and taboos"¹⁷ *Ọlájubù* reiterates that, oral history has no author. The authorship belongs to the community at large. The oral poets are spoke persons or "proclaimers." The story cannot be manipulated as they are handed down from generation to generation orally. For example, "No hunter can validly claim the authorship of an *ijálá* piece which he is the first to chant. The god *Ogun* is the source and

author of all *ijálá* chants. Every *ijálá* artist is merely *Ògún's* mouth piece."¹⁸ He is of the opinion that, "*oríkì* including *orilẹ̀* is in fact the essence, and the most dominant element of the content of all forms of *Yorùbá* oral poetry."¹⁹

Fálọ́lá discusses how the *Yorùbá* society witnessed the emergence of academic history. The various writings of the local historians, "colonial ethnographers and the increasing availability of both oral and material evidence convinced many foreign and foreign trained historians that it is possible to apply the techniques of Western historiography to the study of *Yorùbá* history."²⁰ It is argued that, few Western-trained Nigerian historians discovered that, it is unnecessary to rely solely on written or documentary source material. Scholars such as *S. O. Biobaku*, *K. O. Dike*, *J. Alagoa* and *I. A. Akinjogbin* examined the value and pitfalls of oral traditions in historical reconstruction and demonstrate that, it was possible to make use of non-documentary sources to reconstruct the history of the past.

Èṣẹ-Ìfá, Oríkì, and Orilẹ̀ as Sources of Yorùbá Oral history

In Africa generally, and among the *Yorùbá* in particular, oral genres are societal commodities in which, their cultural values are guaranteed and more flavored in orality. "Orality was the means by which Africa made its existence, its history long before the colonial and imperial presence of the west manifested itself. In this sense, orality needs to be seen not simply as 'the absence of literacy' but as something self-constitutes *Sui generis*."²¹

The oral tradition

relies on the memory, an imperfect and unreliable storehouse of information. It may be distorted. A tradition may even represent the narrator's own view about an episode. Oftentimes, some important facts are forgotten and others are substituted for it. Simply put, the chances of exaggeration and

omission are great. The chronology of dating is lacking in non-literate societies of Africa largely because of the late arrival of writing. This makes their dating system to be defective. Thus the type of statement as "a long time ago" or "once upon a time" in periodizing historical events²²

In Yorùbá tradition, "*Ifá* divination protocols are the closest an 'oral' society could develop to fulfill the requirement of genuinely divine writing and speaking."²³ Tradition of the people is believed to have a vital role in peoples' life, including religion. The oral form of history as a dependable form of information is not limited to the Yorùbá tradition or religion alone but, is also associated with other traditions and religions. For example, the Catholics and Hebrews, Jews or Greeks are traditionally influenced by religion. Okonda reports about tradition and Catholics that, "The Catholic Counter-Reformation, on the other hand, traditionally understood the words and actions of Christ and the Apostles transmitted orally and the liturgy. It wanted to mark the difference between the apostolic tradition, the singular, and the traditions of the people, in the plural."²⁴ The opinion above demonstrates that, orality, with which the Africans generally and the Yorùbá (*Ifá*) in particular holds in high esteem is a formidable historical means among the Catholic community.

Eṣe-Ifá, *oriki* and *orilẹ̀* are mostly rendered in poetic mode. *Ifá* poetry is an important aspect of Yorùbá oral poetry. All the contents of oral poetry belong to the community. Matterson and Jones assert that, "in oral cultures the 'author' of a poem or story may not have been that work's 'author' at all. He must just be an 'elaborator.'"²⁵ The implication of this is that, *eṣe-Ifá* literary collections should be regarded as material belonging to the 'community' of the Yorùbá nation that produces it (the language, structure, participants and so on belong to the Yorùbá society that

produces it). This can also be buttressed by the difference between the Yorùbá divinity and the religious historical poems associated with it. For instance, "just as *ÒGÚN* is not iron, and Mohammed is not the Quran...*Òrúnmìlà* is the herbing and interpreter of the Divine Message of *Olódùmarè*. That message is *Ifá*."²⁶ It is noted here that, one is able to establish that some issues on *Ifá* can be resolved by recent *Ifá* corpus collections.

The veracity of the Yorùbá culture is authenticated in *Ifá*. *Ifá* also serves as trace element on the Yorùbá history in various ways. This is because, "nínú *Ifá* nì a tí lẹ̀ rí ìjìnlẹ̀ Yorùbá tí kò ní àbàwọ̀n...Ìtàn t'ó farasin, itúmọ̀ orúkọ tí ó farasin, àti litiré ọ t'ó pinmirin kún inú ohùn ẹnu *Ifá* fọfọ."²⁷ Meaning that, it is in *Ifá* we can get an undiluted Yorùbá language...hidden history, the meanings of hidden names and literature are *Ifá*. *Ifá* poetry is one of the important Yorùbá oral genres, through which the Yorùbá present or relate their view and understanding of the world and things around them. Matterson and Jones (2000)²⁸ further assert that, poem survives the historical content in which it was created and speaks to us not of things locked in the past alone but, our present and future. Every *Ifá* corpus relates to the past, present and the future.

The understanding of the voice of *Òrúnmìlà*²⁹ or *Ifá* depends upon the context and content of the manifestation of relevant *Odù Ifá*, which can exclusively be read and interpreted by an initiated *Ifá* priest. That is, "We must locate it in a context. To do so involves the breaking down of that very boundary between poem and the world...The act of interpretations involves reducing the remoteness of the poem by invoking comparisons, associations and contexts; if it did not, then poetry might mean very little to us, because its capacity to enter lives would be lost."³⁰ This means that the production of an oral poem is not restricted or limited to the period of production, but it is a reflection of the past, present and future of the society that produces it. In other words, the historical events in *eṣe-Ifá* are not restricted to the past alone but, have impact, input and effects on the Yorùbá present ways of life. This is why "*Ifá* serves as the entire

historical pedestal with which the Yorùbá culture rests."³¹ In other words, there is no aspect of Yorùbá history that is not chronicled by *odù* or *Ifá* verses. This is because *ese-Ifá* represents the accumulated wisdom of generations of Yorùbá nation Finnegan (1970).³²

It is observed that, *Ifá* poetry is a sacred Yorùbá genre that nobody may add or subtract from. The epistle is, according to Abimbólá, "preserved and disseminated from ancient times. It is believed that in this way the texts in *Ifá* literary corpus have been kept free from errors. The corpus, therefore, till today, is one of the reliable genres of the Yorùbá oral literature."³³ One can describe *Orikì* as the micro-historical account of individual, group, thing or something; *Orilẹ̀* is macro-historical. This means that, *Orilẹ̀* incorporates different *Orikì*. It encapsulates the origin or the root of somebody. *Orikì* is associated with almost everything that has a name; while *Orilẹ̀* is confined to towns associated with human beings. The Yorùbá people trace their origin or relationship with one another through the use of *Orilẹ̀*.

*Bi ó tilẹ̀ jẹ̀ pé púpọ̀ nínú àwọn ilú tí òjẹ̀ orilẹ̀ Yorùbá-Ọ̀yọ̀ tí parẹ̀ lójọ̀ pípẹ̀, tí àwọn ẹ̀táhóró tò kù láàrin wọn kò fì bẹ̀ẹ̀ ní láàrí dàbí aláàrà lóde-oní, àwọn Orikì orilẹ̀ ọ̀kọ̀ọ̀kan wọn ní kò jẹ̀ kí á gbàgbé àwọn orilẹ̀ tàbí ilú wọn yìi. Ó sì jẹ̀ kí iran tàbí ẹ̀bí kọ̀ọ̀kan lè mọ̀ orísum wọn. Bi ó tilẹ̀ jẹ̀ pé wọn tan káàkiri orilẹ̀ ayé. Ǽ é okùn kò lè gùn gùn ká mọ̀ mọ̀ ibi tí a tí fà á wá. Ìdì rẹ̀ tí kò fì ní yà wá lẹ̀nu tí a bá rí orí Ǽ iri Ǽ ẹ̀yà tí wọn ní fì Orikì Orilẹ̀ wọn kì wọn bí ó tilẹ̀ jẹ̀ pé àwọn ilú tí iran díràn wọn tí sẹ̀ tí parẹ̀ mọ̀ ayé lára ráúrúu tàbí pé wọn kò fì bẹ̀ẹ̀ ní láàrí dàbí aláàrà mọ̀ lóde-oní. Orikì Orilẹ̀ wọn máa ń ń yọ̀ láàrin iran kan de ẹ̀kẹ̀jì àti bẹ̀ẹ̀bẹ̀ lẹ̀.*³⁴

Even though, most of the towns of Yorùbá nations—Ọ̀yọ̀ are no more and the few that remains are no more relevant as such today. These towns are remembered today by their totems. It makes some clans and descendants know themselves. Eventhough, they relate with different nations of the world. No matter how long a rope, it must have a source; this is why there are associated with their totem despite the deserted towns of their origin today. Their totems surface at one time or the other between a nation and the other and so on.

From the opinion above, one can say that *Orilẹ̀* and *Orikì* are means of historical memories among the Yorùbá people. This perhaps informs the major reason why these genres serve as store or wire house of other oral materials. The Yorùbá peoples' history are related and differentiated with the application of these Yorùbá valuable oral materials. Those individuals that shared the same *Orikì Orilẹ̀* have related *Orikì Orilẹ̀*. However, *Orilẹ̀* is restricted to towns (where people live) alone; while the scopes of *Orikì* cover all things-living and non-living, animals and human beings: those that are called by names.

Since the cultural value of *Orikì* in some instances links the present with the past like any other Yorùbá oral genres, it forms the largest part of the text. By the collection of *Orikì*, one can gather personal, community and town history. Therefore, *Orikì* is an identity. On one hand, *Orikì* has to do with a profile or a biography relating to an individual family, thing, animal or place. If *Orikì* is historical account that relates to the background of individual or thing, then, it gives way for continuity. That is, the past, living or dead are brought together as an indivisible and inseparable entity.

In the west, the *oriki* (praise poetry) of the Yorùbá interwove personal and public history and provided poetic vehicle for the powerful as well as the ordinary...Forms such as *oriki* recreated the past in the present; they made and, in the present, still "make possible the crossing from the world of the dead to the world of the living, making the past present again."³⁵

Oriki provides a valuable source of historical data. Therefore, we must accept the authenticity of *Oriki* as a dependable historical source. *Oriki*, then, can open windows simultaneously unto the past and the present. They are the principal means by which a living relationship with the past is daily comprehended and reconstructed in the present...This relationship with the past cannot be properly apprehended by treating *Oriki* as a rather problematic and incomplete historical 'account.'³⁶

This means that, *Oriki* and *Orilẹ̀* are sources of historical document by which individual, group, family or town among the Yorùbá people. "Oriki are essentially historical in the sense that they are one of the ways in which the relationship of the present with past is constituted. On the other hand, *Orilẹ̀* suggest idea of origin, custom, religion and taboos."³⁷ One can establish from the interrelationship of *Oriki* and *Orilẹ̀* that, the scope of historical descriptive account of one is wider than the other.

As explained earlier, *Oriki* is historical and descriptive. History is not all about good or praise; but an account of what took place or description of what thing(s) is/are. For example, an aspect of the *Oriki* of Ọsanyin is,

Ẹlẹ̀sẹ̀ kan ju ẹlẹ̀sẹ̀ méjì lọ

Arọ̀ abi-okó liẹliẹ.

Ewé gbogbo kiki oògùn...

Ó gbà wọn là tán, wọn dúpẹ̀ tènìtènì...

Ẹlẹ̀sẹ̀ kan tí ó lẹ̀ ẹlẹ̀sẹ̀ méjì sáré

*Àrọ̀nì já sí kòtò dī òògùn máyà.*³⁸

One with one leg and purses the one with two legs

One with a leg greater than one with two legs

A lame with small penis

All leaves are medicine

He saved them and they appreciated him with gifts

One with one leg and purses the one with two legs

Àrọ̀nì limping in pot hole and on the surface level

The above is the *Oriki* of Ọsanyin divinity.³⁹ From the *Oriki*, One can describe him as a person with physical disability. The opinion about *Oriki* of Ọsanyin is a proof that, *Oriki* is one of the ways the historical documents of the Yorùbá people are preserved. The living periods of the divinities have been dated back to time immemorial; but we are able to remember the historical events through the *Oriki*. By Ọsanyin's profession as an herbalist, one can establish from his *Oriki*, how famous he was. Without *Oriki*, we may not in the present time be familiar with this history both the good and the bad; as the *Oriki* above does not only praise Ọsanyin but, as well presents the other side of him; including his physical disability. This shows that, *Oriki* is a reliable oral medium of Yorùbá history. The form of history is hereditary and, therefore, cannot be manipulated.

The Strengths and Weaknesses of Oral Materials as Historical Documents

As explained earlier, the use of the oral materials in establishing history in African countries cannot be overestimated. Therefore, the limitations against the oral tradition should be seen and believed to be part of society's historical development. *Oriki* and

Orilẹ̀ among the Yorùbá remain reliable sources of historical materials "history was also preserved in appellations and cognomens such as the *Oriki* (praise poem) of people and towns among the Yorùbá."⁴⁰ One of the pitfalls of the oral form of history is its perceived subject to manipulations since it is rendered orally from one generation to another. As a result of this limitation, a lot of details are lost. The oral form of history relies on memory, which is described by some as an imperfect and unreliable storehouse of information. It may be distorted. A tradition may even represent the narrator's own view about an episode. It is equally argued against oral form of history that, some important facts are forgotten and others are substituted for it. It is prone to exaggeration and omission of some historical facts.⁴¹

One of the disadvantages of the oral form of history is that the chronology of dating is lacking in non-literate society of Africa largely because of the late arrival of writing. This makes their dating system to be defective. Some historical discourses are coded as "a long time ago", "once upon a time"⁴² in periodicity of historical events. In the light of the above, a researcher relying on oral tradition for information should learn to distinguish significant evidence from trivial matters. However, the oldest source of Africa and Yorùbá cannot be underestimated. It is as old as man himself.

A Critique of Oral History and the Challenge of Originality: Insights from *Ifá* and *Oriki* and *Orilẹ̀*

The use of oral history relating to the Yorùbá divinities and individuals, cities or family are examined through the oral sources such as *Ifá*, *oriki* and *orilẹ̀*. A source historical text is used as a trace to other historical account of the basic text. By this method the historical information in the main text is complemented by the secondary historical means or method.

Yorùbá Oral History in Relation to the Divinities

Each of the principal *Odù Ifá* listed had one time lived on the surface of the earth by the names as human, but today deified, so as

to preserve their sacredness. This is the reason why the names are uncommon with human among the Yorùbá. For example, some *esẹ Ifá* testified to the fact that, *Ogbè* domesticated a dog when he lived as human-being. The *Ifá* corpus as evinced from *Ogbè-Wẹ̀yìn*, verse one says:

Ogbè wẹ̀yìn bí ajá rẹ̀ yóò pa ikún
*Kò sí ohun tí ó wà lẹ̀yìn tí ó ju Ifá lọ*⁴³

Ogbè look back, probably your dog may kill a squirrel
There is nothing at the back other than *Ifá*.

The above *esẹ-Ifá* attests to the claim that, the major *Ifá* corpus existed in form of human-beings in the time past, even though there is no documentary history of the period of existence.

The period of existence of the Yorùbá divinities were dated back to a period that cannot be substantiated with dates. However, one can gather some historical facts through some oral modes of history. For example, one of the areas of Yorùbá history is inability to account for the all four hundred and one (401) divinities projected by most authors and scholars. This arises as a result of lack of documentation. We can only account for 193 out of 401. Meaning that efforts must be made to research into 208 Yorùbá divinities that are yet to be documented Adéoyè.⁴⁴ Although, there are different postulations on the number of Yorùbá pantheon of gods, 400 and 401 figures have gained prominence over projected number of Yorùbá divinities. For example, Fátókun reports that, "Africans believe in a great pantheon of gods variously estimated among the Yorùbá of Nigeria at 200, 201, 400, 401, 460, 600, 601, 1,700 or even more."⁴⁵ Adéoyè opines that, "Irinwó ni iyejú àwọn tí wọ̀n rọ̀. Mèrindínlógún-Mèrindínlógún ni wọ̀n ń rọ̀ mọ̀ Ọ̀rúnmìlà ní rírọ̀ ẹ̀ẹ̀kọ̀ọ̀kan. Ọ̀jọ̀ mẹ́ẹ̀dọ̀gbọ̀n tí í ẹ̀e ọ̀ù kan ayé igbà náà ni wọ̀n sì fí rọ̀."⁴⁶ Meaning that, four hundred gods descended from heaven. A batch of sixteen descended by holding Ọ̀rúnmìlà for twenty five days that makes a month in the ancient time that they descended). If twenty-

five (a month) is multiplied by sixteen the total is four hundred and one ($25 \times 16 = 400 + 1$ (Ọ́rúnmílà) = 401). However, the period of this historical event is hazy.

Apart from the history that accounts for the Yorùbá divinities generally, the historical life of each of the divinity is also unaccounted for. For instance, Adéoyè⁴⁷ differentiates between the two àngó; àngó that came to the world along with other deities is different from the àngó, the fourth king of Ọ̀yọ́ Aláàfin. In the opinion of Adéoyè,

àngó irínmọ̀lẹ̀ tó rọ̀ láti ọ̀de ọ̀run kí í ẹ̀
àngó tí ó jẹ̀ aláàfin ní Ọ̀yọ́ Ilẹ̀. Ìtúlú
Olúkò o, ọmọ Ọ̀dẹ̀dẹ̀ (Ọ̀rànmiyàn) ní
àngó tí Ọ̀yọ́ Ilẹ̀. Àngó tí irínmọ̀lẹ̀ ní
àdàpẹ̀ rẹ̀ ń jẹ̀ 'Ayilégbẹ̀-Ọ̀run'. Ọ̀un ní
Ọ̀rúnmílà sọ ní 'Àjùwọ̀n'.⁴⁸

àngó the divinity that descended from heaven is different from àngó the fourth king of Ọ̀yọ́ Ilẹ̀. àngó the king of Ọ̀yọ́ is a son of Ọ̀dẹ̀dẹ̀ (Ọ̀rànmiyàn). àngó the deity is otherwise known as 'Ayilégbẹ̀-Ọ̀run'. The one Ọ̀rúnmílà named as 'Àjùwọ̀n'.

From the quotation above, it is easy to observe a mistaken of identity; as the attributes of personalities of àngó the Yorùbá deity have been associated with àngó the fourth king of Ọ̀yọ́. According to Adéoyè,⁴⁹ àngó (deity) descended along with other co-deities and lived in Ifẹ̀-Oòyè, while the àngó the king of Ọ̀yọ́ was the son of Ọ̀rànmiyàn and lived in Ahoro-Òkò (near Ọ̀yọ́). The àngó of Ọ̀yọ́ was a king, and àngó the deity is greater than a king. "Ọ̀ba ní ó ní ayé, Ọ̀rì à ní ó sì ní Ọ̀ba."⁵⁰ Meaning that, King owns the earth, and the divinity owns the king. Kings are respected as they are regarded as "second to the divinities."⁵¹ The àngó (deity) went out of Ifẹ̀-Oòyè through Àìbà before he apotheosized (entered the ground); but the àngó of Ọ̀yọ́ hanged himself at Kòò. Furthermore, àngó

(the deity) descended with Odù Ọ̀yẹ̀kú Mèji; while Odù Ọ̀kànràn Mèji is the choice of Odù of the àngó (the king of Ọ̀yọ́).

We equally observed that, the physical qualities and attributes of àngó (the deity) were associated with àngó (the king); which results to misplacement of history and mistaken of identity. For example, four important Yorùbá deities are associated with the Yorùbá ancient week: Ọ̀bàtálá, Ọ̀rúnmílà, Ọ̀gún and àngó as explained above.⁵² The historical period of àngó (the deity) preceeds the historical period of àngó (the king). The physical attributes of àngó (the deity) are associated with the àngó (the king) which makes his followers to 'adopt' him as a deity of worship (Ọ̀rì à àkúnlẹ̀bọ̀); but, certainly not the Yorùbá deity (Ọ̀rì à àdáyébá). àngó the king becoming deified was described as being circumstantial, that is, "bí eré, bí eré, àlàbọ̀rùn d'ẹ̀wù, àngó ẹ̀ bẹ̀ di Ọ̀rì à tí gbogbo èniyàn ńsìn ní Ọ̀yọ́...Àwọ̀n olùfẹ̀ àngó sì rò pé àngó ní í fí òkúta rẹ̀ jà. Ídí niyí tí a ẹ̀ tún ń pé àngó ní 'Jàkúta'."⁵³ Meaning that, just like that, àngó became the king that is worshipped in Ọ̀yọ́...his followers thought that it was àngó that fought with stone. This is why we called àngó 'Jàkúta', that is, the one that fought with stone.

The association of the quality of the àngó (the deity) with the Yorùbá fourth day of the week is now a referent of àngó (the king). Furthermore, the attribute of 'thunder stone' and fighting with stone was 'original' to àngó (the deity). This attribute is buttressed by the association of the deity with 'Jàkúta' (the fourth Yorùbá day of the week). àngó the king is an hero, adopted as a deity while the real àngó is a deity. The misplacement of identity of àngó is noticed further in another context. For instance, Ọ̀dẹ̀dẹ̀ as a referent (name) was associated with son of Ọ̀rànmiyàn. àngó (the deity), was first to be associated with this name. This historical misplacement of the two àngó makes Adéoyè reports that:

Èyí mú kí ì ọ̀ro diẹ̀ wà, láti mọ̀ èwo ní orúkọ
irínmọ̀lẹ̀ tí ó kọ̀kọ̀ jẹ̀ orúkọ yìi yàtò sí tí ọmọ
Ọ̀rànmiyàn. Bí ó tilẹ̀ jẹ̀ pé, lílò orúkọ kan náà

*fún ẹni ilá méjì yìí da líúrí pọ̀ mọ̀ à àpà,
sibẹ̀, àwọn oríkọ kan wà tí a mọ̀ mọ̀ irúmmọlẹ̀
yìí dájú àkà (àngó, Ayilẹgbẹ-Ọrun, Àrìrà,
Obilẹjà àti Ewélèrè).⁵⁴*

This makes it somehow difficult to associate the name with the first deity to bear it besides the son of Ọ̀rànmiyàn. Although, the use of the same name for two important deities makes us to mix things up, despite this, there are names that are absolutely associated with this deity (àngó, Ayilẹgbẹ-Ọrun, Àrìrà, Obilẹjà and Ewélèrè).

It is discovered in this work that, none of the above names is a referent of àngó (the king of Ọ̀yọ). The historical misrepresentation of àngó (the deity) for àngó (the king of Ọ̀yọ) has created misconception. The àngó that is annually celebrated in Ọ̀yọ (Kòso) today is not the Yorùbá àngó deity; but a hero deity (Ọ̀rì à àkúnlẹbọ) as earlier clarified. In other words, àngó (the king) is only associated with the present Ọ̀yọ Aláàfin and not with the Yorùbá tradition generally. The popularity of the àngó the king has gained recognition over the àngó (the Yorùbá deity) today to the extent that he is not only being celebrated annually but, an attempt being made to make the place where àngó the king hanged (Kòso) a tourist centre.⁵⁵ It is reported that "the spot where àngó hung has become a tourist attraction and no one goes there anyhow."⁵⁶

Yorùbá Oral History in Relation to Individuals, Families and Towns

In traditional Yorùbá society, the contents, symbols and all other materials that make up the poems belong to the community at large. In other words, these materials are assets of the community

and therefore, the poets cannot claim the ownership or authorship of such materials. Therefore, "in traditional Yorùbá society, the poet seemed to have no personal voice"⁵⁷ This is why "the authorship of Yorùbá Oral Poetry belongs to the community at large"⁵⁸ For example, "the ijálá artists believe that the oríkì orílẹ̀ texts should be prescribed undisturbed as they have been for generation and should be handed down intact by each succeeding generation"⁵⁹ In this way the reliability or the veracity of the historical materials are dependable; as they are undoubtedly sourced from the society's pools of wisdom and knowledge.⁶⁰

It has sometimes been argued that, some contents of *oríkì* could have been manipulated or compromised facts due to some factors. However, without *oríkì*, the historical materials will remain inadequate, incomplete and insufficient for the present historical facts to be related. This is because, "*oríkì* taken as a genre clearly has a history itself."⁶¹ Since the Yorùbá oral genres generally and *oríkì* and *orílẹ̀*, including *ọ̀fọ̀* that this study examines are dated back to immemorial period of existence. Therefore, there are periodicity in the historical accounts contain in the *oríkì*, *orílẹ̀* and *ọ̀fọ̀*. For instance, "some *oríkì* appear to date back many centuries; others came into existence within living memory....We have examples of *oríkì* that may have originated more than five hundred years ago. Other *oríkì* date themselves by references to specific historical personalities, for instance, the Aláàfin Abiódún or Àfọnjá in Ilọrin, both late eighteen century figures"⁶²

The historical events in *oríkì*, *orílẹ̀* and *ọ̀fọ̀* are real. Many evinced some events to an individual as contains in the *oríkì*. It should however be noted that, both *oríkì* and *orílẹ̀* interwove each other. For example, the *oríkì* of Àfọnjá cannot be devoid of *orílẹ̀* Ilọrin. To this effect, what we hear often is *Ilọrin Àfọnjá*; because of the history of Àfọnjá that cannot be complete without his roles in Ilọrin. Therefore,

the authority of the historical narrative is the
authority of reality itself, the historical

account endows this reality with form and thereby makes it desirable by the imposition upon its processes of the formal coherency that only stories possess...The history, then, belongs to the category of what might be called 'the discourse of the real', as against the 'discourse of the imaginary or 'the discourse of the desire.'⁶³

Since the period of events contain in *oriki* and *orile* belong to unspecified date of occurrence, then, efforts should be made in the present days of literacy knowledge to document such events; an attempt that this study is made.

The entire history of poetry and all the potential of specific poem are to be made known and available to each new generation. Poetry and poems are; in this sense, trans-historical, but they acquire this perpetuity by virtue of the particular historical adventures which their texts undergo from their first appearance before their author's eyes through all their subsequent constitutions. The textual history of poems in other words, are paradigm instances of historically specific character of all poetry.⁶⁴

The historical events are related within the ambit of the peoples' culture. Therefore, the historical materials, including the language serve as input with which history is established. This is to say that, history was often encapsulated in the elaborate dynastic poetry of a kingdom, composed and reproduced by specially trained bards and presenting a legitimizing, heroic view of past and present to the peoples at large.⁶⁵ In other words,

culture tells us results and offers us patterns of historical development. Historical phenomenon emphasizes the collective historical experience.

Historical study is maximized when the overall cultural experience of people are taken into account. Oral accounts, written records, the culture itself with archeological and linguistic data are document of historical phenomenon.⁶⁶

Since history is closely related with culture it means that, the oral materials such as contains in *Oriki* and *Orile* are as old as the people (as explained earlier); in this way some facts are revealed through these texts. However, some limitations have been associated with oral tradition. However, some bits of the historical elements may be located, traced or found in another text(s). For instance,

Opó ni nwón ñgbé ló s'áàfin Oyó,

L'áiyé oba Abiódún.

Arúkumọda l'ó gbé tiẹ

Awon Arẹsà

Opó ni wón ñgbé ló s'áàfin⁶⁷

Pillars were being carved to Oyó palace,

During the reign of Abiódun the king

Arúkumọda of Arẹsà carved his own pillar
to Aláàfin Oyó's palace

The historical reference to the period of the reign of king Abiódún of Oyó in the above *Oriki* is not accounted for. Therefore, one needs some knowledge of intertextuality for better understanding of the history of both king Abiódun and the entire theme of the *Oriki*. For example, one cannot know the historical events during the reign of king Abiódún in the king Abiódun of Oyó, as reference below:

Ó d'iwájú Abiódún Oba Aláàfin

Abiódún Oba Asọlúderọ.⁶⁸

Straight before Abiódun the king

King Abiódun that makes things better for all
and sundry.

The period of king Abiódún is evinced by the reference to his *Oríkì* in this text which was not made revealed in the earlier text. (Babalólá 2000) serves as historical trace text for further historical documents.

One is able to have some established historical events of the periods of the reign of king Abiódún. The historical period of king Abiódún is further inter-text in *Basòrun Gáà*:

Láiyé Àtándá Adégoólú, Abiódún

Èmi ra kókò mo r'àrán

Mo r'epinrin baba a□□

Àf'òlẹ l'ó le pe 'lẹ yí 'ò dún !⁶⁹

During the reign of Àtándá Adégoólú, Abiódún

I bought yam and cloths

I bought *Epinrin*, the most superior valuable cloth

It is only a lazy person that can say this city is not better for all.

By this text, one is able to be better familiar with the *Oríkì àbísọ*-personal praise name of king Abiódún; which has not been evinced by previous texts. Not only this, the economic history of the period of reign of king Abiódún is referenced. This is revealed as a result of food security- surplus and, people were able to put on good and befitting wears. The basic necessities of life-food, cloth and shelter were being provided. This makes the poem to conclude that, it is only the lazy ones that will not found the period of the reign of king Abiódún as bearable and enjoyable.

From this time commenced that period of peace and prosperity for which king ABÍÓDÚN'S reign was famous. Tributes poured into OYO from the remote states and from Dahomy, agriculture and commerce flourished, and the people to the remotest part of the kingdom were so far happy and contented.⁷⁰

Even though, one can account for some historical events of the period of the king Abiódún in Òyọ, the historical period was unspecified. However, the application of knowledge of reference and intertextuality, one can further account for the historical period. For example,

*lódún 1774 – 1789 ni Oba Adégoólú Abiódún
jọba ní Òyọ Ilẹ nígbà tí ilẹ Yorùbá tàn láti
Odò Òfikì lókè Oya títi dé ìgbèrì Okun.⁷¹*

Aláàfin Adégoólú Abiódún reign in Òyọ-Ilẹ between the years 1774 – 1789 when the Yorùbá kingdom extended to the Òfikì River in the North towards the bank of the sea.

The knowledge of reference and intertextuality has enabled us to be able to account and establish more comprehensively, history of the reign of Abiódún Adégoólú in Òyọ-Ilẹ.

Furthermore, through the knowledge of intertextuality, we are able to know more about the names of king Abiódún Adégoólú that, "Adégoólú" is likely to be what the Yorùbá classify as *oríkọ inagije* (alias name). Abiódún Alias Adégoólú.⁷² The historical account of *Oríkì* (economic, political, social, family, religion and so on) cannot be overemphasized; as

other *oríkì* date themselves by references to specific historical personalities. For instance, the Alaafin Abiódún or Afonja in Ilorin, both late eighteen Century figures...Each Corpus of *oríkì* therefore contains a multiplicity of items from different historical moments, accumulated over long periods. The historical variegation in *oríkì* usually remains invisible and uncommented on.⁷³

The period of reign of king Abiòdún was better for all and sundry to the extent that, his death brought about retrogression to Òyò kingdom in particular and, the entire Yorùbá nations.

About this period [of the death of Abiòdun], supposed to be near the year eighteen hundred was inaugurated a state of things the influence and effect of which are felt to this day and which present materials, could they be collected, of one of the most thrilling and eventful periods within the history of any people.⁷⁴

This report corroborates the earlier intertextual history in regards to the period of the reign of king Abiòdun. It is clear from this analysis that, the historical account of one text is inadequate to establish a complete or comprehensive history without further trace through the knowledge of reference and intertextuality.

Recommendation and Conclusion

This study recommends that, in an oral community such as in Africa generally and in Yorùbá in particular, incomplete historical documents can be traced and monitored by the related texts such as demonstrated in the study. This is necessary because, some of the historical events and accounts were located to the time immemorial. For example, the period of the living or existence in the human form of the divinities on the surface of the earth and some ancients' social, religious, economic and political events in the illiterate society. This study encourages the documentation of the oral histories that have not been documented from individual, the heroes, family chieftaincy to the king (the political head of Yorùbá administration). This will remove some bottle-necks that are presently associated with oral history.

This study concludes that, the roles of oral form of history cannot be overemphasized in Africa generally and among the Yorùbá

in particular. The need for the performances of oral genres makes the forms of histories to be unique as Yorùbá oral genre such as *òfò* (incantation), *oríkì* and *orilẹ̀* (panegyrics and totem, *òwe* (Proverbs) are complete by oral performances.

Endnotes

¹The ability of the contestants to relate orally the history that surrounds the Obaship throne is one of the determinant factors for chosen the rightful candidate.

²See Johnson, S. (1921). *The history of the Yorubas*. Lagos: CSS Bookshop, p. 70.

³*Ifá* is regarded as a religion and science of the Yorùbá people. It is the spokesperson for all Yorùbá divinities. *Ifá* is the basis of all the Yorùbá histories including myths and legend.

⁴To some authors, *oríkì* is called panegyrics and to some praise poetry. However, the contents of *oríkì* are beyond to praise but, evincing the history of individual, family, city/town among others as it is.

⁵This is poetic history relating to origin of individual, family or a city. It is mostly associated with symbol with which the ancestors of individual, family and/or city are associated.

⁶Ilésanmí, T. M. (1992). "Ipò àti ipa litirésọ nínú àṣà ibilẹ̀ Yorùbá." In A. Ìṣàlẹ̀ (Ed.). J. F. Odúnjọ memorial lecture 3; *New findings in Yorùbá*. Department of Linguistics & African, p. 101.

⁷See Awoniyi T. A. (1978). *Yorùbá Language in Education (1846 – 1974): A Historical Survey*. Ibadan: Oxford University Press, p. 73.

⁸Badà, S.O. (1950). *Ìwé Ìtàn Ìlákí*. Ìlákí: Ládépò Printing Press.

⁹See Pogosone, I. O. and Akande, A. O. (2011). Ifá Divination Trays from Ìsàlẹ̀-Òyọ̀, pp. 15-41. From cea.reVues.org/196.

¹⁰See Agíri, B. (1975). "Yorùbá Oral Tradition with special reference to the early History of Òyọ̀." In W. Abimbolá (Ed.) *Yorùbá Oral Tradition*, pp. 157-195.

¹¹Ibid. pp. 158 & 9.

¹²Awẹ, B. (1975). "Notes on Oríkì and Warfare in Yorùbáland." In W. Abimbolá (ed.) *Yorùbá Oral Tradition*, pp. 267-282.

¹³Ibid. p. 274.

¹⁴See Babalola, A. (1981). *Àwọn Oríkì Bọ̀rọ̀kinní*. Ibadan: Nigeria Publishers Services Limited.

¹⁵Ibid. (1981) *Àwọn Oríkì Orilẹ̀ Mètàdínlógún*. Lagos: Longman.

¹⁶Barber, K. (1991). *I could Speak Until Tomorrow: Oríkì Women and the Past in a Yorùbá Town*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, p. 25.

¹⁷See Oláníyí R. O. (2011). "Ìdẹ̀wùrẹ̀ Migration and Settlement Patterns in Yorùbáland." In A. Adejumo (Ed) *Yorùbá: Journal of the Yorùbá Studies Association of Nigeria*, Vol. 6 (5): 139-169.

¹⁸See Olajubu, O. (1981). "Yorùbá Oral Poetry: Composition and Performance." In U. Abalogu, G. Ashiwaju and Amadi-Tshiwalá R. (Eds) *Oral Poetry in Nigeria*, pp. 71-85.

¹⁹Ibid, p. 74.

²⁰See Falólá, T. (1984). *The Political Economy of a Pre- Colonial African State*. Ibadan, 1830-1900. Ibadan: African Press, p. 3.

²¹Gunner, L. (2007). "Africa and Orality" In *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*. O. Tejumola & Quasyson A. (Eds), Blackwell: Publishing USA, p. 67.

²²Àjàyí, S. (2005). "Sources for the study of early African culture and civilization." In A. Àjàyí (Ed.) *African culture and civilization*. Ìbàdàn: Atlantis Books, p. 25.

²³See Adeẹkọ, A. (2010). "writing" and Reference" in Ifá Divination Chants. *Journal of Oral Tradition*. From journal oraltradition.org/files/2511/03_25.2.pdf., p. 288.

²⁴Okonda, B. O. (2017). "From the hermeneutics of traditions to the history of ideas in the context of orality." In *Nokoko: African Philosophy: Its Paradigms and Historiography*. B. Ruthertford (Ed). From <https://carleton.ca/africanstudies/research/nokoko/volume-6/> Okonda , p. 57.

²⁵Matterson, S. and Jones D. (2000). *Studying Poetry*. London: Hodder Arnold, p. 76.

²⁶See Odeyemi, J. "Ifá and Ori à Temple." 2013. Web. 13 July 2012.<oyekuofun.com/what-is- ifa/>.

²⁷Ládélé, T., Mustapha, Oyebamiji., Awórindé, I., Oyèrindé, Oyedemi. and Oládàpọ̀, Ìlatunbọsun. (1986). *Àkójọpọ̀ Ìwádìí Ìjìnlẹ̀ Àlákọ́rọ̀ Yorùbá*. Ìbàdàn; Macmillan Nig. Limited, pp. 62-3.

²⁸Matterson, S and Jones D. (2000), p. 76.

²⁹The custodian of *Ifá*.

³⁰*Ibid.* p. 90.

³¹Abimbola, W. (1976). *Ifá: An Exposition of Ifá Literary Corpus*. Ibadan: Oxford University Press, p. 31.

³²Finnegan, R. (1970). *Oral Literature in Africa*. Kenya: Oxford University Press.

³³Abimbola, W. (1976), p. 20.

³⁴Ládélé, T., *et al* (1986), p. 178.

³⁵Gunner, L. (2007), pp. 67 & 8.

³⁶Barber, K. (1991), pp. 15-16.

³⁷See Oláníyí, R. O. (2011). p. 142.

³⁸Simpson, G. (1980). *Yorùbá religion & medicine in Ibadan*. Ibadan: University Press, pp. 43-44.

³⁹The Yorùbá divinity of herbs and medicine.

⁴⁰Àjàyí, S. (2005). "Sources for the study of early African culture and civilization." In A. Àjàyí (Ed.) *African Culture and Civilization*. Ibadan: Atlantis Books, p. 25.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

⁴²This code is Yorùbá indigenous means of orality, dated back to the time immemorial.

⁴³Sàlámì, A. (2002). *Ifá: A complete divination*. Lagos: NIDD Publishers, p. 61 and Oḍégbolá I. O. (2014). *Ìwé Mímọ́ Ifá: Èsìn Àkòdá Olódùmarè*. Ibadan: Oḍégbolá Traditional Global Services, p. 8.

⁴⁴Adéoyè, C. L. (1985). *Ìgbàgbọ́ àti èsìn Yorùbá*. Ibadan: Evans Brothers (Nigeria Publishers) Ltd, p. 2.

⁴⁵Fátókun, S. (2005). "African Traditional religion and belief system." In A. Àjàyí (ed.) *African culture and civilization*, Ibadan: Atlantis Books, p. 341.

⁴⁶Adéoyè, C. L. (1985). p. 29.

⁴⁷*Ibid.* p. 285.

⁴⁸*Ibid.* p. 285.

⁴⁹*Ibid.* p. 287 & 8.

⁵⁰*Ibid.* p. 278.

⁵¹Káyòdé, J. O. (1984). *Understanding African Traditional Religion*. Ilé-Ifè: University Press, p. 5.

⁵²See Adeoye (1985).

⁵³Dáramólá, O. and Jéjé, A. (1967). *Àwọn àṣà àti òrìṣà ilẹ̀ Yorùbá*. Ibadan: Oníḃon-òjé Press, 286.

⁵⁴*Ibid.* p. 287.

⁵⁵See *The Nation*, 8 September 2013, under the headline 'the world hails òṣàngó festival.' p. 42.

⁵⁶*The Nation Newspaper* 21 August 2013. Devotees Celebrate Yorùbá religion, pp. 26 & 27.

⁵⁷Qlábímtán, A. (Ed.) (1988). *Àkójopò ewi àbáláyé àti ewi àpilẹkọ*. Ibadàn: Paperback Publishers, p. 1.

⁵⁸See Qlájubù, O. (1981), p. 74.

⁵⁹Ibid, p. 74.

⁶⁰Qlábímtán, A. (Ed.) (1988), p. 13.

⁶¹Barber, K. (1991). *I could Speak Until Tomorrow: Oríkì Women and the Past in a Yorùbá Town*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, p. 27.

⁶²Ibid, p. 26.

⁶³White H. (1989) From "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality." In *Modern Literary Theory*, P. Rice and P. Waugh (eds). New York; Hodder Arnold, p. 260.

⁶⁴McGann, J. (1989). "The Text the Poem, and the Problem of Historical Method." In *Modern Literary Theory*, P. Rice and P. Waugh (eds) . New York; Hodder Arnold, p. 302.

⁶⁵Gunner, L. (2007), pp. 67&8.

⁶⁶Qbayomi, A.(1983). "Histoty Culture, Yorùbá and Northern Factors". In *Studies in Yorùbá History and Culture*, edited by G. Olusanya. Ibadan: University Press Limited, p. 76.

⁶⁸See Babalola, A. (2000). *Àwọn Oríkì Orilẹ̀ Mètàdínlògbòn*. Lagos: Longman Nigeria Plc, p. 74.

⁶⁹Fálétí, A. (1972). *Ba ọ̀rùn Gáà*. Ibadàn: Onibonòjé Press, 142.

⁷⁰Johnson, S. (1921). *The history of the Yorùbás*. Lagos: CSS Bookshops.

⁷¹See Qlatunji, Q. (1982). *Adebayo Fálétí: A Study of His Poems*. Ibadan; Heinemann Educational Books (NIG.) LTD., p. 80.

⁷²Johnson, S. (1921). *The history of the Yorùbás*. Lagos: CSS Bookshops, p. 219.

⁷³Barber, K. (1991), p. 26.

⁷⁴Clarke, W. 1972. *Travels & Explorations in Yorùbáland* (1854 – 1858), J. A. Àtandá (ed.), Ibadàn: University Press, p. xxv.