Résumé

B. Adédirân — Ìdáisà : la formation d'un État frontalier yorùbá.

Le processus de création des États précoloniaux dans l'aire culturelle yorùbá a pris des formes variées. L'article étudie le cas du royaume d'Ìdáisà (dans l'actuelle république populaire du Bénin) où le groupe dynastique des Omo Jagun a agi comme rassembleur de populations d'origines diverses, en dépit, ou à cause de la pression militaire des royaumes d'Oyô et du Danhomè.
On the eve of the imposition of European colonial rule at the close of the 19th century (Ašiwaju 1976), the Yorùbá of West Africa were organized into over sixteen independent kingdoms. The traditions on the formation of these kingdoms are so widespread and consistent that they have, inadvertently, become models for explaining the formation of the various kingdoms. For instance, there is a strong belief that all Yorùbá kingdoms emerged from a single process which began at Ilé-Ífẹ whereOdùduwà, the legendary progenitor of Yorùbá ọba (‘king’), founded the first dynastic kingdom. From Ìfẹ, it is claimed, other kingdoms were established by the imposition of aristocratic groups on pockets of acephalous communities in various parts of Yorùbáland (R. S. Smith 1969). This tradition, in spite of its consistency and popularity, must be understood as referring to the formation of some and not all the kingdoms. As R. C. Law (1973) rightly pointed out, the claim in the traditions that the dissemination of kingship from Ilé-Ífẹ took place ‘at a stroke within a single generation’ is an over-simplification of the issue. On-going researches in different parts of Yorùbáland indicate that the process of State formation was one which spanned many centuries beginning long before the Odùduwà period (Agiri 1975; Òbàyèmi 1976). It is also now known that after the events associated with Odùduwà, States continued to be created.

Evidently for a multi-kingdom people such as the Yorùbá who occupy a wide geographical area and share boundaries with many ethnically distinct peoples (Forde 1951: 1-2; Mercier 1954: 9-21), there are bound to be regional variations in the mechanics of formation of the various kingdoms. In fact since the 1970s, there have been vigorous attempts to take a more critical stand on the issue, and look at the genesis of particular Yorùbá States. This was stimulated by Adbullahi Smith’s work (1970) on the Hausa, the immediate neighbours of the Yorùbá to the north.

*This paper is based on a research project on the Yorùbá-speaking peoples in the Republic of Bénin and in modern Togo. It is financed by the University of Ìfẹ Research Committee.

A. Smith points out the futility of postulating theories of State formation without taking into consideration the historical experiences of the people concerned. As he emphasized, ‘human conditions do not change overnight, nor do allegiances suddenly develop without long and complicated processes of social adjustment’ (ibid.: 329).

This article is a contribution to the on-going discussions. Its primary purpose is to attempt a reconstruction of the origins and development of the kingdom of Ìdáisà. But while it draws largely on materials collected among the Ìdáisà, the article is also intended as a synopsis of the process involved in the formation of other Yorùbá States, especially those in cultural frontier zones where the Yorùbá overlap with other ethnic groups.

The Ìdáisà country is in the central region of modern Republic of Benin and coincides with the administrative district of Dassa. Located in the basin of the Zou and Weme (Ouémé) rivers, Ìdáisà is densely populated in spite of the fact that it is a hilly region with steep outcrops rising in a few places to about 170 metres. The major settlement, called Igbo-Ìdáisà by the local inhabitants, is the administrative headquarter of the district. Officially, it is called Dassa-Zoumé, the name by which it was known to the Fon of Dahomey who live to the south. Although ethnically Yorùbá, Ìdáisà is cut off from neighbouring Yorùbá groups such as the Sàbè to the north and the Kètù to the south-east. It is enveloped by non-Yorùbá, the most predominant of which are the Mahí and the Fon. It is therefore not surprising that the Ìdáisà exhibit a number of social and political peculiarities. For instance, in the local pantheon, important Yorùbá deities such as Obàt and Odùduwà are not prominent, the major deity being Nànam Bùrùkùù (Verger 1957: 244-282) which is little known among other Yorùbá sub-groups. Linguistically, Ìdáisà indigenes are bilingual, having mastery of their local dialect and of the Mahí language. A wide range of borrowed words from Mahí and Fon appear frequently in the Ìdáisà dialect, while Yorùbá words are pronounced with non-Yorùbá accents making them audibly foreign to other Yorùbá.

Ìdáisà traditions of origins (Huchet 1941; Mouléro 1931a) acknowledge that the subgroup emerged out of the amalgamation of clusters of hamlets and towns of different ethnic elements. This process is believed to have started at an indeterminable period associated with some four-fingered hominids (Bergè 1928: 725-726), similar to those of the early Stone Age period in other parts of sub-Saharan Africa. However, the earliest human inhabitants were groups of unidentifiable peoples referred to in the local traditions as Màmahùn (lit. ‘I don’t know them’). The accounts associated with the Màmahùn suggest that they developed in situ, their ancestors having simply emerged from the ground in the centre of Dassa-Zoumé. Another legend relates that, contemporaneous with the Màmahùn, a group led by one Òba Ayàbà Okè emerged from the hills
around the present-day village of Ifité. It will require intensive archaeo-
logical investigations to ascertain the antiquity and nature of sites now
identified as belonging to these early inhabitants. At the present state
of our knowledge, it would appear from oral traditions that some of the
eyearly communities developed into viable farming settlements. For
instance, the Mâmahûn are remembered as having large Okro farms from
which their descendants acquired the oríkì (‘praise poem’) ‘Omo onígbó
ilá’.

The Ìdíàsà are probably the only Yorùbá among whom traditions of
autochthonous origins are found. All others subscribe to a legend which
regards Ilé-Ifé as the centre of human creation and the place from where
all fanned out (Biobaku 1960). It must be pointed out, however, that
the Ìdíàsà traditions are in no way parallel to that of Ifé. While the
Ìdíàsà do not regard their sub-group as being formed at Ilé-Ifé, they
acknowledge that different waves of immigrants arrived at an early stage
in the Ìdíàsà region. The first were people known locally as Adja-Popo,
who appear to be part of the migrations which accompanied the demo-
graphic upheaval of the Adja-Ewe migrations (Bertho 1949; Gayibor
1977). The Ìdíàsà would be part of the one in Šábe locally called the
Jàlûmòn or Òjódú (Ašiwaju 1973: 24).

The Adja-Popo were probably well-established by about the late
16th century when the ancestors of the Fon of Dahomey installed them-
selves in Abomey (Akinjogbin 1967: 20-25), for it is remembered that the
ancestors of the Fon left Popo for Allada a few decades after the ancestors
of the Adja-Popo had left.2 Initially, the migrants occupied just about
ten villages, but they later expanded and founded more villages which,
in the end, are said to have numbered about fifty. They quickly absorbed
the autochthons in the Ìfitá area. Adopting the deity called Molú as
a symbol of unity, the villages were organized into a strong city-State
called Ìfitá.

The Adja-Popo were probably still organizing when the first Yorùbá
arrived in different groups and effectively carried out the ‘Yorubanisation’
of the area. The earliest of these groups is now remembered as the
Ìjèùn, who claim an Òyó origin3 and appear to belong to a larger group
settled in the Ègbá forest4 to the east. The Ìjèùn settled among the
Màmahûn and quickly absorbed them socially and politically into their
own cultural system. They subsequently organized into a strong polit-

1. ‘Descendants of those who had Okro farms’. Praise poems collected from
Ìdòyún Jagun, head of Mâmahûn, aged ca. 80, Ìsálú, Dassa-Zoumé, 19 Sept.
1978.
2. Oral traditions: Bara Georgwin, aged ca. 100, et al., Èsèpá, Dassa-Zoumé,
15 Sept. 1978.
3. This is corroborated by their oríkì, part of which refers to them as Òmo ọlèsin ní
Yorùbá, Òmo òyò, i.e. ‘descendants of owners of horses in Yorùbáland, people of
Òyó extraction’.
4. The Ìjèùn in the Ègbá forest moved southwards to Abèòkùta in ca. 1830.
ical unit called Yaka under one Arigbó, allegedly the man who led them out of Òyó-Ilé. Shortly after, a group which had earlier settled in the Sābē country as the Ėhinòkè (Aṣiwaju 1973: 23-24) founded another settlement at Òpò under one Òlófin and took the name Lémon.⁵ Although the Òjèùn and Lémon were both sub-groups of the Yorùbá, each regarded itself as a distinct social and political unit. Indeed, taking refuge on different hills, and cut off from the main bulk to the east, the groups which came to dwell in the Ìdáisà region were for some time unable to develop a spirit of common identity.

On this thin layer, there came to be imposed two other groups which resulted from the process of sub-ethnic differentiation among the Adja. At Allada there emerged the Fon towards the end of the 16th century (Akinjogbin 1967: 11-13). By the beginning of the 17th century, they occupied Abomey and proceeded to build a strong kingdom, displacing the indigenous inhabitants. Some of those fled northwards under one Gboguidi Arhossou Sorha (Moulé 1931b). After some vicissitudes, Gboguidi and his people colonized the hilly region of present-day Savalou, north of Ìfitá. They were later joined by bands of other exiles as the Fon consolidated and expanded their control on the Abomey plateau. Under Gboguidi or one of his descendants, the refugees eventually assumed an ethnic identity which became known as the Mahi (Bergé 1928: 710-712, quoted in Cornevin 1962: 140) and organized into a State centred around Savalou.

From their base, the Fon infiltrated northwards. They founded their own autonomous villages of which Djezo, Akeyekoun and Takounzoun (Bergé 1928: 727-728) were probably the earliest. This advance guard of the Fon continued to live among their hosts, but they remained culturally distinct from either the Ìfitá, the Mahi or the Yorùbá. By 1708, when the intrepid Agaja ascended the throne of Dahomey, a new and more vigorous wave of migration from the region of the Abomey plateau began. The Fon continued to establish more autonomous villages and to pursue economic and political interests which were often at variance with those of the other groups.

Indeed the prevailing circumstances in the Ìdáisà region favoured the proliferation of settlements without highly centralized political systems, small both in size and population. Thus, at about the beginning of the 18th century, there were already many ethnic groups in the Ìdáisà region. Against this background, it is understandable why the process of State-building did not begin as early as in other parts of Yorùbáland. Indeed the task was an arduous one, a fact which seems to be borne out in the traditions that the efforts of founding Ìdáisà were forty-one times as great.

⁵ The Lémon group claims to have originated from present-day Òbòkúta and to have derived its name from the Olúmo rock, a prominent geographical feature in the town.
as that of founding Ìfitá or any other pre-kingdom settlement in the region (Palau-Marti 1957).

The problem was compounded by other factors. The topography of the Ìdáisà region intensified the dysfunctional consequences of multi-ethnicity. There were (and still are) many hills around each of which different migrant groups settled. This encouraged a spirit of parochialism which for long thwarted any attempt at political integration. Acting as hindrances to easy movement, making communication difficult, and unable to support a large concentration of population because of the relative arduousness of agriculture in a rugged terrain, the Ìdáisà region was not conductive to the formation of a large political unit.

Furthermore, it bordered on the territories of two powerful States, Òyó and Dahomey, both of which by the end of the 17th century were looking towards Ìdáisà as a direction favourable for territorial expansion (Akinjogbin 1967: 68-109; Argyle 1966: 1-3, 34-54; Law 1977: 150-169). The Ìdáisà region was the junction of trading routes north to Borgu and Hausaland and roads leading through Abomey to the east. Local traditions of frequent pilgrimages to the shrines of Nānā Bùrùkúù in central Togo and northern Ghana also suggest that there existed routes traversing the Ìdáisà country in an east-west direction. Ìdáisà was therefore very important in the 18th-century political economy of Òyó and Dahomey. These two States continually ravaged the area and generated series of population upheavals which proved to be a hindrance to political stability. The situation was worsened by the fact that the Mahi at Savalou also wanted to have a strong foothold in the Ìdáisà country apparently to forestall the northern expansion of Dahomey. In effect, the Ìdáisà region became a battle ground from the late 17th century onwards.

But the Ìdáisà State emerged out of the violence and confusion generated by continual Mahi raids and the incessant attempts of Dahomey and Òyó to conquer the western Yorùbá country. The picture from the traditions is that many of the settlements in the region had taken to the hills as a means of refuge. But by the 18th century, population growth and the consequent scarcity of arable land made it difficult to find new and safer areas to move into. As the raids became more frequent and as the Òyó set up garrisons in the region,7 the settlements resorted to forming military alliances which resulted in the merger of many of them into a number of viable nuclear city-States among which Yaka, Òpò and Ìfitá were prominent. The threats initially occasioned a military confederation among these States which, under continual military pressures, developed into a cohesive State.

7. Rapport sur la situation de Juda et le commerce de Guinée, 1732, Archives départementales de Nantes (France), C. 739.
The extant traditions tend to associate these changes with one Jagun Olofin who, as the culture-hero of the Idaiša, has acquired a bigger-than-life identity common with founders of new regimes. The traditions differ about the details of the process by which Jagun and his immediate successors welded the large number of relatively autonomous settlements (traditionally put at forty-one) into a single State. They agree however that the process was closely associated with two major developments, the emergence of the Jagun dynasty as the most powerful and influential group in the region, and that of Igbó-Idaiša (Dassa-Zoumé) as a major focus of political attention, both primarily due to the problems of insecurity which led to the influx of groups of individuals into Igbó-Idaiša.

The fact is that, in periods of trouble such as in 18th-century Idaiša, individuals who could command a strong force were apt to get a large following of people who looked up to them for safety and leadership. In such a situation, ethnic or kinship considerations are inadvertently weakened as criteria for the exercise of political authority.

The process started at Êpò where the Lémôn had settled on their flight from Šaɓe. It was here that the dynastic group which was eventually to build the kingdom of Idaiša was constituted. Although Êpò was set up as a temporary camp and is currently non-existent, it has remained the origin and occupied an important place in the psychology of the average Idaiša indigene.

Shortly after the foundation of Êpò, another group arrived in the Idaiša region. It was made up of two elements locally referred to as the Egbá and Oọọ Olá Kétu. The Oọọ Olá Kétu originated from Ilé-Kétu (Morel 1974: 729) while the Egbá claim to be a splinter of the Egbá dynasty now in Abéökúta. Apparently, Olófin saw the new arrivals as useful allies in a new security arrangement. He therefore invited them to Êpò, which became a strong political unit.

This co-habitation of three different elements was a bold experiment and contrasted sharply with the prevalent practice of setting up different settlements. But it soon brought a constitutional problem which the Lémôn had apparently not bargained for. The exercise of leadership had been based on the kinship principle, the whole group being looked upon as an extended family of kinsmen headed by the eldest male individual regarded as the ‘father’ of all members (Akinjogbin 1967: 14-17).

According to the accounts presented by the Lémôn, when Olófin died, he was succeeded by Íwássé, also a Lémôn. This sparked off a series of protests, first within the Lémôn group itself and secondly from the Egbá. A section of the Lémôn claimed that the accession of Íwássé was carried out in a surreptitious manner and did not enjoy the support of his kins-

---

8. Oọọrun, in Yorùbá psychology, signifies the place of origin that must be kept sacrosanct.
men. Some accounts report that Ìwássé was only a brother to Òlófin and therefore not a direct descendant. The truth may never be known, but it is clear that his accession divided the ranks of the Lémon as collateral branches of the group laid claims to its leadership.

The issue was further complicated by the fact that the Ègbá also contested the rights of Ìwássé or that of any other Lémon. They insisted that the host-guest relationship on which the Lémon based their right to monopolize the headship of Èpò should be reviewed and that they too should be given the opportunity to elect a leader for the camp. The details of the negotiations are not now remembered, but the outcome is well known. The Lémon agreed to alternate the leadership with the Ègbá. This was ostensibly to prevent breaking up, but apparently it was because in the prevailing circumstances, the Lémon had no choice. The Ègbá far out numbered them and had the support of the Òmo Òlá Kétu.

Although following the agreement the crisis did subside, the Èpò alliance did not last much longer. The conflicting interests of the Ègbá and Lémon soon rocked the boat. The Ègbá regarded the decision to alternate the leadership as a great victory for their side. Subsequently, they subjected Ìwássé’s policies to critical reviews and continually incited disgruntled elements against him.

Apparently lacking the self-confidence of his more valiant predecessor, Ìwássé aggravated the situation by alienating a cross-section of his subjects. Shortly after the succession dispute was resolved, there were raids on Èpò by the Mahi. At about the same time, the Òyó, under the intrepid aláàfin Ojígí, launched series of campaigns against the Mahi. In all these, the Ègbá demonstrated their ability as valiant warriors. Ìwássé suggested a break-up of the Èpò camp into its component elements and its evacuation by each for a more hilly and less vulnerable location. This was interpreted by the Ègbá as a sign of cowardice. They wanted an alliance with the Òyó and a direct confrontation with the Mahi. But Ìwássé went on with his own plans. This fuelled the already smouldering embers of crisis. A handful of non-conformists took the initiative and precipitated a coup d’Ètat in which Ìwássé was displaced and Sàgbóná, the leader of the plotters and a member of the Ègbá group, took over the leadership.

Consequently, the Èpò settlement broke up. Ìwássé led his sympathizers to the south-east and founded another settlement which he named Ilemon (present Lemon-Tre) after his group. The remnant of the Èpò group, made up of the Ègbá, the Ômọ Ôla Kétu and a few Lémon who had come to accept as a guiding principle the idea of living together, moved northwards to settle besides the Òjéùn at Yaka. Here, Sàgbóná adopted the title jagun (meaning ‘the valiant warrior’, recalling his exploits during the coup d’Ètat which, it is claimed, Ìwássé resisted vigorously). The
newly formed Jagun group looked at itself as a single element even though it was made up of three. It adopted a social charter which regarded members as belonging to a closed group of kinsmen, Ògbá Omo Jagun. It however recognized the Lémon as a collateral branch which like the Ògbá could aspire to the leadership.

The first major problem which faced the Jagun in Yaka was competition from the Ìjèùn for the scarce resources, especially land, available in the area. But through diplomacy and the assistance of other groups around Yaka, the Jagun displaced the Ìjèùn and proceeded to establish themselves as the focus of attention in the vicinity.

The details of the episode, recorded by Father Mouléro (1931b) and still recollected in bits in various Ìdáisà settlements, indicate that the Jagun quickly sold to the others the idea that cooperation was the only effective means of security. According to Father Mouléro, when they arrived at Yaka, they settled among the Ìjèùn instead of setting up their own camp. Before then, the Ìjèùn had won for themselves a general hatred because of their social policy which discouraged interactions with other ethnic elements in the area. It is specifically remembered that they forbade inter-marriages with any of the pre-existing groups and despised all heads of settlements in the vicinity. On the other hand, the Jagun quickly made friends among the non-Ìjèùn and gradually whipped up sentiments against the Ìjèùn. Many of the former settlements subsequently transferred their allegiance to the Jagun.

One major factor which aided their ascendance was that their installation in Yaka coincided with a series of military campaigns by Dahomey under Agaja. The first of these was in the middle of 1731 and continued till March of the following year (Akinjogbin 1967: 98-99). In spite of its limited success, the offensive led to the destruction of many settlements. The population increased as many of the survivors threatened with obliteration, fled to Yaka. It became obvious that mutual assistance was the only form of insurance and that the only way out was to initiate an alliance in which the scattered settlements would look to one another for protection. Under these circumstances, ethnic ties became inadvertently weakened and personal interests were suppressed. The refugees took a common name, Ìdáisà—interpreted by the Jagun to mean the ‘Chosen people’ and by others to mean ‘the assumption of a new ethnic identity’ (Huchet 1941; Gbaguidi 1952: 65). Indeed out of the motley crowd at Yaka, there emerged a hybrid group, with elements of Yorùbá, Fon and Mahi in its dialect and social customs.

As the raids augmented, the prestige of the jagun as the only effective guarantor of security also increased. Ògbóná exploited the opportunity to lay the spring-board for the take-off of a mighty aristocracy that would extend beyond Yaka. The cumulative effect was the emergence of his group as a strong pillar of political unity. Nevertheless, the political
structure was that of a confederation of autonomous settlements which came together only when faced with problems of external raids. There were many heads of settlements which regarded themselves as equal in status to the jagun. Of these, six were particularly prominent: akran, bara of Ìítá, òba Ògú of Ado, òbàlẹ̀ of Ìjèùn, òba of Ìtágí and òba Lémon (*** [n.d.]). Each had a cluster of settlements under his control. It could in fact be argued that it was an indication that adequate integration of the society had not been achieved. In such a situation, it was difficult to cooperate or reach a consensus on many issues, especially when there were no external raids.

However, the intensity of conflicts was mitigated by the policies adopted by successive jagun. These policies undermined the influence of local rulers while increasing the hold of the jagun on the various settlements. It also culminated in the transformation of the diverse elements into an ethnically homogeneous group.

The first steps taken by Sàgbọ́ná were aimed at making his own group stable by eliminating all possible forms of dynastic disputes. This was a crucial move, when it is remembered that the group was originally made up of three different elements. However, Sàgbọ́ná’s attempts were too hazy and only succeeded in complicating the issues. His intention was to establish the ascendancy of the Ègbá over the Lémon by amending the Èpò constitution. Thus, he decreed that the jagun title was to become the exclusive right of the Ègbá. To assuage the feelings of the Lémon, he created a parallel title, the òba l’òkè (‘king of the mountain’), for them (Palau-Martí 1957: 204). Even then, Sàgbọ́ná made sure that the first òba l’òkè, Òyóró, was a subtle person,11 who would not disrupt the Ègbá’s scheme to monopolize political authority. In spite of all precautions, however, Sàgbọ́ná’s disregard of the agreement reached at Èpò was not taken lightly by the Lémon.

The issue was further complicated for Sàgbọ́ná when the Ìjèùn renewed their claims to political leadership in Yaka. For some time, it appeared as if the attempts at political unification would fail. However, before the Ìjèùn problem assumed a wider and disastrous dimension, the Jagun group decided to put its house in order. Taking advantage of the growing unpopularity of Sàgbọ́ná, the Lémon spear-headed a bloody coup during which he was displaced and exiled from the country. An elderly man from the Lémon section, named Ògùdù, was then installed as the next jagun.

The first few actions of jagun Ògùdù convinced everyone that he was equal to the task. Soon after his ascension on the throne, a dispute arose between the Jagun group and the Ìjèùn over a piece of land which the former

11. Local traditions emphasize that Òyóró had feminine characteristics but remarkable ability to keep secrets.
wanted to acquire. The Ìjèùn claimed the right of ownership on all parcels of land in the Yaka region and demanded the jagun to pay them for the piece he wanted. But Ògùdù refused and insisted that only the Mämâhùn, who were the first inhabitants of the area, could pretend to land ownership. Consequently, it was to the Mämâhùn rather than to the Ìjèùn that Ògùdù paid a token fee which became known as owo Ìgbó. This brought a series of armed revolts from the Ìjèùn but, at the end, the jagun and his allies emerged victorious.

The decision of Ògùdù to recognize the Mämâhùn and not the Ìjèùn as the rightful owners of land was a bold attempt to suppress once and for all the desire of the Ìjèùn for political leadership. However, the idea of purchasing a piece of land when he could easily have acquired it by force, had a more fundamental significance. Examples from other places (Goody 1971: 64) have shown that land had some mystical importance for an agricultural community. It was believed that such mysteries could not be understood by intruders such as the Jagun, no matter the amount of force at their disposal. Thus, usually, rituals connected with land were left in the custody of autochthons such as the Mämâhùn. The purchase of land would therefore appear to be a pact with the Mämâhùn in order to establish a ritual basis for the authority of the jagun.

Ògùdù took other steps of equally significant importance. He reconstituted the Jagun group in an attempt to eliminate all forms of internal disputes of the type which had led to the break-up of Èpò and to the fall of Şàgbônà. Ògùdù succeeded where his predecessor had failed because he was more calculating. He formulated a policy of social integration which forbade inter-marriage within the Jagun (Assongba 1975). At first this may appear normal since the group looked at itself as an exogamous lineage. But, in actual fact, the Jagun ‘lineage’ was made up of at least three different lineage groups, endogamy was therefore not anathema as such. By disallowing inter-marriage, the policy ensured that every prince (ûtólá) had the blood of a commoner (alákemen) flowing in his veins; and many non-royal lineages were in this way socially bound to the dynastic group. The social policy of the jagun could therefore be seen as encouraging interactions and creating an interlocking network of relationships among the various groups.

Thereafter, Ògùdù proceeded to build a palace, ílé ìlà, on the site he had acquired and made it the seat of his administration, giving it the very significant name of Igbó-Idáisà, which meant ‘a settlement belonging to all Èdáisà people’. This was the first conscious attempt to create in the minds of the people a spirit of common ownership or belonging. Igbó-Idáisà was what all those who had a working accord with the jagun looked to as the symbol of their unity; and the jagun himself became the personification of that unity.

Furthermore, Igbó-Idáisà became a religious centre with the installation of two important shrines. One of these was that of Nànà Bùrùkùn.
Like any other deity in the region, Nàná Bùrùkúù was expected to protect its clients from misfortune. But its influence was more pervasive and widespread, being widely patronized by people in other settlements.

Under jagun Olúsà who succeeded Ogùdù, the role of Igbó-Ídáisà as a sanctuary town was enhanced with the installation of an Ógun shrine. Ogùn is a deity associated with iron and war. People consulted it before any military expedition. Given the continuous military engagements, visits to Ógun must have been frequent. Thus the location of the major shrine in Igbó-Ídáisà increased its importance as a rallying point for defence.

This was further buttressed by the economic importance it assumed. Some of the settlements which existed on the eve of the establishment of Igbó-Ídáisà were active agricultural and market centres (Huchet 1941; Gbaguidi 1952: 65) and it may safely be presumed that commercial interactions promoted social cohesion and thus influenced the fusion of the different groups. Of particular significance in this regard was the existence of other settlements which specialized in the production of various articles. Yaka was one of these, the Màmàhún having excelled in the use of wood to manufacture a host of implements and necessities. The Jagun group apparently went on to improve on the Màmàhún’s knowledge in producing a number of iron tools and implements. The only settlement where ethnographic evidence of an early ironworking existed is Sokologbo. Under Olúsà this industry was transplanted to Igbó-Ídáisà, perhaps in the attempt to monopolize and keep a strict surveillance over the working of iron. This presumably made dependence on Igbó-Ídáisà very great, and strengthened inter-settlement bonds.

In achieving these remarkable feats, however, jagun Olúsà handled the people with an iron hand, adopting Machiavelian principles which made the reign very burdensome. There was widespread discontent which culminated in the deposition of Olúsà.

Jagun Ajíbóyè, who succeeded to the throne, was a more charismatic character from the Ègbá section. His selection suggests that the Ídáisà wanted to strengthen the ties with Óyoró. Under Sàgbóna, a working accord had been initiated with the Óyoró. This involved the free passage of Óyoró troops and traders in the Ídáisà country. In return, Óyoró undertook to train young Ídáisà princes in the art of government. Ajíbóyè

13. For instance, the Màmàhún are referred to as Òmọ ìyàn ‘descendants of wood workers’.
14. See fn. 12 above.
15. Local traditions remember that Sàgbóna was deposed during a visit to Oyó-Ilé in pursuit of one of these accords.
was one of them and was in fact still undergoing his pupillage when he was hastily recalled to ascend the throne.

One of the immediate steps which Ajibóyé took on his accession was the introduction of Òyó religious institutions, especially the Òṣù Religion, and the adoption of some Òyó official titles such as Òṣùṣẹ. For some time, Ajibóyé continued to play soft towards the Òyó and to treat Òyó authorities with caution and respect. But no sooner had he been enthroned that he revived the issue of the separation of the powers of the Ògbá from the Lémön. It is not now known whether this action met with any opposition from the Lémön or received the support of the generality of the people, but Ajibóyé succeeded in carrying it to the logical end. The Lémön were confined to strictly ritual roles as Òba Òkè and given the right to approve the selection of a jagun, and perform his enthronement ceremonies. Next, Ajibóyé concentrated his attention on solving the various other problems which had been raging for quite some time. He set out to settle the Òjèün question finally. First, he drew them to an open conflict. When this move became a stalemate, the jagun sued for peace and entered into a pact with them. The Òjèün were given some recognition in the new organization. Their leader, the ba-Òjèün, was honoured with a title, Òba Òlè. When literally translated, this means 'king of the house'; adequately understood, however, it meant 'the father at home'. The Òba Òlè was given an advisory role to play and allowed to enjoy privileges which made him, in theory at least, equal to the jagun. These moves healed the old wounds and reconciled the Òjèün and Jagun groups.

As soon as his position as jagun was secured, Ajibóyé adopted the policy of independence from Òyó overlordship. This brought series of raids by Òyó soldiers in the attempt to enforce metropolitan authority. The greatest clash, locally referred to as the jọkojọdọ war, probably took place in ca. 1780 (Igué 1970: 113). According to local accounts, the Òyó attacked the little kingdom thinking that they would make an easy prey of it. But the battle was a long-drawn one. The Òyó initially had the upper hand, but just when all hopes were about to be lost among the Òdáisà, the Òyó were forced to withdraw as a result of an outbreak of smallpox which decimated their soldiers.

The Òdáisà now claim that the 1780 war led to the independence of their kingdom from Òyó domination and that the Òyó never had the opportunity of a reconquest. But contemporary sources suggest that the Òdáisà region continued to be subjected to series of military pressures from Òyó till the early 1820s when Dahomey revolted against the Òyó, and thenceforth from Dahomey itself (Akinjogbin 1967: 68 sq.; Cornevin 1962: 157 sq.; Law 1977: 270 sq.). However, as a series of internal

---

Crisis at Oyo-Ile started the Oyo empire on a slow path towards disintegration (Law 1971: 39-43), it is not unlikely that the military pressures on the Ìdáisà after 1780 were those of individual Oyo generals and not a concerted imperial policy backed up from metropolitan Oyo. It would also appear that until the mid-1840s Dahomean military pressures on Ìdáisà were not vigorous, for it is only during the reign of Glélé, king of Dahomey (1858-1889), that the traditions recall any serious confrontation with Dahomey.

Indeed the Ìdáisà, having turned the reality of ethnic diversity into an instrument for fostering political equilibrium and social unity, were able to distinguish themselves in a host of economic activities. John Duncan could not hide his astonishment that, in spite of the prevalent atmosphere of insecurity, Ìdáisà settlements were fairly large and well-peopled. He noted with equal surprise that they were good farmers and hunters; held regular markets and had a 'superior method of manufacturing iron' (Duncan 1968: 196).

Thus, although located in a cultural frontier zone, the rulers of Ìdáisà were able to create among the citizens the consciousness of belonging to a common political unit. This was made possible by the destruction of the basis of corporate existence of each pre-kingdom group. The menacing raids of Oyo and Dahomey, Ìdáisà's two powerful and implacably hostile neighbours, only succeeded in strengthening the ties and cohesion which had been previously weakened by internal crises in the State. The Ìdáisà example further suggests that the promotion of adequate dialogue among different groups (Adediran 1984: 55-63), by whatever means, and the active participation of all sectional groups in the political life of a State are necessary ingredients for national integration and political stability. It was through the process of accommodation, rather than through the process of implantation of Ifè princes enunciated in the popular traditions, that the Ìdáisà kingdom was formed.

University of Ifè, Ilé-Ife.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Adediran, A.
Aghiri, B. A.
1975 'Early Oyo History Reconsidered'. History in Africa II: 1-16.

Akinjobin, I. A.

Argyle, W. J.

Asiawu, A. I.

Assongba, R.

Bergé, J. A.

Bertho, J.

Biobaku, S. O.

Cornevin, R.

Duncan, J.

Forde, D.

Gayibor, N. L.
1977 *Recueil des sources orales du pays Aja-Ewe* (Lomé: Université du Bénin), ii-104 p. mimeo.

Gbogidi, B.
Goody, J.

Huchet, R. P.
1941 ‘Origines des noms de villages, Canton Dassas’ (Dassa-Zoumé: Archives départementales), 8 p. mimeo.

Igué, J.-P.

Law, R. C. C.

Mercier, P.
1954 *Cartes ethno-dénographiques de l’Ouest africain* [feuille no 5] (Dakar: Institut français d’Afrique noire), 27 p.

Mokel, A.

Mouléro, T.

Obayemi, A.

Palau-Martí, M.
1957 ‘Notes sur les rois de Daşa (Dahomey, AOF)’, *Journal de la Société des Africanistes* XXVII (2): 197-209.

Smith, A.

Smith, R. S.

Verger, P.
1957 *Notes sur le culte des Oriṣa et Vodun à Bahia, la Baie de tous les Saints, au Brésil et à l’ancienne Côte des Esclaves en Afrique* (Dakar: IFAN), 609 p. + 159 photos ("Mémoires de l’IFAN" 51).