

**AN ASSESSMENT ON THE SPREAD OF ISLAM
IN ORUN-EKITI, EKITI STATE, SOUTH-WESTERN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

This paper unfolds the spread of Islam in Orun Ekiti, Ekiti State. The town is one of the most recent autonomous towns in the State, thus, nothing tangible has been documented as historical fact concerning the spread of Islam in the town. Though, the coming of Islam to Orun-Ekiti is not quite different from what is obtainable in all other towns and villages in Yoruba land. However, what is unique about the religion in the town is its methods of expansion. Through this avenue, many natives embraced the religion and learnt the tenets of the religion through real Islamic education. The preaching within and outside the town helped the expansion of the religion. This made them to be at the enviable position within and outside the town. The descriptive analysis method was used to examine the origin and spread of the religion in Orun Ekiti. Required data were sourced through structured and unstructured interviews with Muslim clerics and other personalities within and outside the town. Archival materials like programmes of events, pamphlets, published and unpublished materials were used in getting the details on the history of Islam in Orun Ekiti. The result revealed that Islam in Orun Ekiti was greatly assisted by the indigenous converts who dedicated themselves to the spread of the religion. The work, therefore, suggested that the method used in the spread of Islam in Orun Ekiti could be studied and adopted by other towns where the religion is still at its nascent stage.

Keywords: *Assessment, Spread of Islam, Orun-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria.*

Introduction

Orun-Ekiti in Irepodun/Ifelodun Local Government of Ekiti State is originally a community made of different people that migrated from various places to form an arm of the three quarters known as Igbemo-Ekiti. The most dominant among the groups that constitute Orun Ekiti was the one led by Arakaawodi, who migrated

from Orun-Ekiti in the present Ise/Orun Local Government Area. Other groups joined later to form important segment in the town. The demand for self-determination as a separate town began in 1986 and by 2013, the State Government granted its autonomy, hence, Orun-Ekiti became the twelfth community in

Irepodun/Ifelodun Local Government of Ekiti State¹.

The Spread of Islam in Orun-Ekiti

It is believed that Islam came to Yoruba land before Christianity. In fact, there is an old saying in Yoruba parlance that “*Ayé la báfá, ayé labá Imôle, osán gan gan ni Ìgbàgbọ wolé*” ‘The Traditional religion and Islam are primordial while Christianity came lately’. This is applicable to Orun Ekiti as history has it that Islam predates Christianity in the town. The coming of Islam to Orun-Ekiti was through the efforts of traders, missionaries and the natives who had contact with the religion in the course of trading to other places in/and outside Yoruba land. This was said to take place after the Yoruba inter-tribal wars popularly known as Kiriji/ Ekiti Parapo wars.²

By the first half of the 19th Century, little was known about Islam as a religion in Orun-Ekiti. Information has it that the time of introduction of Islam to Orun Ekiti was not known. However, it was presumed that Islam was introduced to the town around the middle of the 19th Century. Some records have mentioned 1840 to 1855 C.E as the birth of Islam in the town. It was said not to have been launched on a particular day but covered the years of the Yoruba Intra-tribal wars involving Ekiti, Ibadan and Ilorin popularly known as Ekiti-Parapo war between 1864 and 1886 C. E.³

The religion of Islam was introduced and established in the town by three sets of people. The Muslim traders who brought the articles of trade like cloth to exchange with native kola-

nuts and bitter-kolas. The second group was the itinerant Muslim missionaries who were moving from one town to another. Both the Muslim traders and the itinerant preachers carved a place of prayer for themselves. They also engaged the natives in open air *da'wah*. Their efforts yielded positive results. They produced the set of early scholars in the town⁴.

Islam equally owes a great deal to the natives who embraced the religion in the course of their travelling and trading in other parts of the country such as Ejirin, Ibadan, Ilorin, Benin City and others where they came in contact with Muslims. Also, there were those who embraced the religion during the Ekiti Parapo war. When they returned home, they joined hand with the Muslim traders and the itinerant Muslims to propagate the religion⁵.

The Early Converts

From the available information, it is established that the name of the first convert(s) was/were not known nor the name of the first Muslim preacher to preach and admit the native to the religion. Alfa Abdurahman Dotia was distinguished as one of the early scholars in the town. He was instrumental to Islamic scholarship in the town. The arrival of the following people from their respective wandering as missionary, trader and soldier put the religion on the footing. Some of these set of natives are as follows:

- i. Sanni Sarumi of Oshorun family, Umee, an itinerant cleric from Ilorin

- ii. Yusuf Fatimehin of Aro Compound Ilemo-Orun, a trader from Benin
- iii. Bello Ajilele Ajenibode of Iralepo compound, Oriegunru, a war returnee from Ibadan

These people were impressed on the information that there had been good number of Muslims who could not practice openly. Alfa Sanni Sarumi took the courage to make the first *Adhan* and led the first ever congregational prayer. Each of the above people was of noble families. They used their influence to summon the courage of the converts and the strangers to practice the religion openly. In spite of their nobility, the traditionalists were able to penetrate them resulting to few Muslims reverting to the traditional religion⁶.

Despite the setbacks, the religion continued to spread through the nooks and crannies of the town. Therefore, having achieved meaningful development, conversely, there emerged a serious obstacle in the observance of prayers. But Sarumi spearheaded the coming together of the worshipers to observe the congregational prayers in an open place. The first Mosque was built in Orun-Ekiti at the front of the palace of Olorun of Orun followed by the one built by Egbedi and later of Jimoh Balogun at Ilemo-Orun. Today, there are five *Ratibi* Mosques in the town namely: Oke-Orun, Balogun, Egbedi, Olamiko and Ajagbemokeferi Mosques⁷. Alfa Abdul-Rahman Dotia was the best known Islamic missionary from Ilorin. He, after a series of visits to Orun-Ekiti, was persuaded to stay and teach the people

the rudimentary knowledge of Islam; hence he established a *Qur'anic* school at the house of the Ifa priest called Chief Egbedi. The first sets of pupils were Aliyu Olosan, Saliu Fagbolagun, Jimoh Temidayo Egbedi and Raji Egbedi. The youngest among his pupils, Abdur-Rahman Balogun, travelled back with him to Ilorin. He later became the first Mufasir of Igbemo Ekiti. One of his pupils was Alfa Aliyu Olosan who later produced Alhaji Yusuf Olaleye and Alhaji Jimoh Adesina Balogun. His *Madrassa* (Qur'anic School) was later taken over by Alhaji Yusuf Olaleye and produced many Ulamas like Alhaji Subaru Balogun and Ali Fagbolagun. By 1930, Alhaji Subair Balogun established his own Qur'anic School and subsequently taken over by Alhaji Ibrahim Balogun. Though the Qur'anic education system was slowed down by the introduction of western education in 1950s, many pupils were produced who today cover a large number of various fields combining Western and *Qur'anic* education⁸.

Some Personalities that Assisted the Spread of Islam in Orun Ekiti

The spread of Islam in Orun Ekiti was greatly assisted by some notable personalities. This session would highlight the roles and contributions of some of these personalities to the spread of Islam in Orun Ekiti

Sanni Sarumi

Sanni Sarumi is of Osorun family of Umee. He was one of the first notable Muslims in the old Igbemo-Ekiti. He was a trader who embraced Islam in the course of his journey to Ilorin and was reputable to be the first to make



adhan (call to prayer) as well as led congregational prayer in the town. He led prayers alternatively with Sanusi Bada before the latter was eventually made the first Chief Imam of Igbemo-Ekiti. At Orun Ekiti, Sarumi was the first to organize congregational prayer.⁹

Yusuf Fatimehin

Yusuf Fatimehin alias Abeleje Odun of Aro family, Ilemo-Orun quarters was a trader in Igbo-Ado in Edo kingdom possibly Akoko Edo area where he embraced Islam. He returned home to join other Muslims. Before his conversion, he was one of those championing *Egigun Ede* (a ferocious masquerade in the town). He was very brave and his braveness earned him the chieftaincy title of Balogun of Orun after his conversion to Islam. In his bid to establish Islam in the family, he did not allow his children to attend western schools as a result of the wave of conversion of Muslims to Christianity. He therefore enrolled his first son to Alfa Aliyu Qur'anic School. Later he sent all his sons to Qur'anic schools of different places. It was after completing the Qur'anic education that some of them sort for further studies in Islamic knowledge. He enjoyed the cooperation and followership of some of his cousins, Pa Zubair and Lawal both of Aro family. He was so influential and powerful in the Muslim community of Orun Ekiti. The Chief Imam, Junaid Agigi, sought his support for his wife, Madam Salamat Osaruku, to become the first Iya Sunnah of Igbemo-Ekiti who died in 1966. This was a period generally regarded as the golden age of Islam in the town. Chief Yusuf Fatimehin children later held various

positions within and outside Muslim community in the town¹⁰.

His first son, Alhaji Jimoh Balogun was renowned to be the third registered member of Ansar-Ud-Deen Society of Nigeria in Ekiti land, one of the two delegates that represented Ekiti in the First Biennial Conference of the Society at Alakoro Lagos in 1946. He was a co-founder of the Ansar-Ud-Deen Society in Ekiti land in 1949. He later became the General Secretary of the Society in Igbemo-Ekiti, the manager of Ansar-Ud-Deen Primary School and Ansar-Ud-Deen Secondary Modern School, Igbemo Ekiti from inception till 1976. He was made the Chairman of Ansar-Ud-Deen Society of Igbemo-Ekiti and later held different positions at State and National levels of Ansar-Ud-Deen Society of Nigeria¹¹. His second son, Alhaji Zubair Balogun (d.2010) was one of the renowned Muslim Clerics in the town. He had many students among who were late Chief Imam of Iworoko Ekiti, Imam Haleem Fatayo and Alhaji Ibrahim Balogun who was also a well-known cleric in the town¹². Alhaji Ibrahim has the largest number of students in the town, among were Prof. Imran Olaleye, Eng. Bashir Tope Balogun, and Mallam Badru Balogun among others. Among the children of Pa. Yusuf Balogun was Alhaji AbdurRahman Balogun (d. 2018), he was the *Waz 'ir* of the highly celebrated Ibadan Muslim cleric, Alhaji Najimudeen Al-Quburah. He was with him from 1942-1978 before he came home to become the first *Mufasir* of Igbemo-Ekiti. Also Alhaji MTS Balogun was one of the first sets of educationalist in the town. He is holding many positions as a

community leader, religious leader, and a traditional chieftain title as Aro of Orun-Ekiti. He is acknowledged as one of the Muslim leaders in Ekiti State. The roles played by his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren in the propagation of Islam are unquantifiable. Presently, his grandchild is the Chairman of Orun Ekiti Muslim Community so also two of his great grandchildren are currently the Chief Imams of Ansar-Ud-Deen Central Mosque, Igbemo-Ekiti and Igbemo Muslim Community Central Mosque, Igbemo-Ekiti¹³.

Ibrahim Fagbotemi Egbedi

Ibrahim Fagbotemi Egbedi was an *Ifa* (priest), who after long association with his missionary guest embraced Islam from Alfa Dotia. He and his family embraced Islam in one single day. He became a pillar behind the Muslims of Oke-Ilemo. He built a Mosque at the site of his shrine. The Mosque is now used as the temporary Juma'ah Mosque for Orun Muslim Community under the banner of Ansar-Ud-Deen Society of Nigeria.¹⁴

Alhaji Yusuf Zubair Olaleye

Alhaji Yusuf Zubair Olaleye of Aro family was the eldest son of Pa Zubair Akuro and one of the earliest pupils of Alfa Aliyu Olosan. He later took over the Qur'anic school of his teacher where he produced Alhaji Zubair Balogun and Alfa Aliyu Fagbolagun. He had pupils from outside the town such as Alhaji Yahya Kola Aladejana of Iworoko Ekiti. He became the *Imam Ratibi* of Egbedi Mosque at Ilemo-Orun quarters. He was also turbaned as the *Muqadam* (head of clerics) of Igbemo-Ekiti. He had a remarkable imprint in the area of

Qur'anic education in the town. He handed over his Qur'anic school to Alhaji Zubair Balogun and later passed to Alhaji Ibrahim Akeukanwo Balogun who made some changes in the system by way of combining Islamic and western schools at a time. When Alhaji Yusuf Zubair Olaleye died in 1995, Alfa Salami Opeloyeru succeeded him. His son, Alfa Ibrahim Olaleye, became the Imam of Orun-Ekiti in the year 2015¹⁵

Other Notables in the Development of Islam in Orun Ekiti

Alfa Aliyu Olosan of Odunro Family, Ilaaja quarter was one of the earliest pupils of the celebrated Ilorin missionary, Alfa AbdurRahman Dotia. He had among his pupils notably and Jimoh Balogun both from Aro family. He was the first *Muqadam* of the town. He succeeded Alfa Sanni Sarumi as Imam of Oke-Orun Ratibi Mosque and Also the leader of Orun Ulamas till his death in 1950. Pa Bello Ajileye was one of the major pillars of Islam in Orun Ekiti. On his arrival from Ibadan where he embraced Islam, he stayed and lived part of his life in Orun Ekiti. Bello Otun of Balemo family was another notable Muslim of Orun Ekiti. He was installed the Otun Muslim of Orun Ekiti. Among his children was Abdul-Rahman Bello, a *RatibiImam* of Ijabo quarter's Mosque. Another personality among Orun Ekiti Muslim community is Alfa Saliu Fajemilusi Fagbolagun of Odopetu, Ilemo-Orun. He was the second pupil of Alfa Abdurahman Dotia and was installed the *Giwa Alasalatu* (coordinator) of Orun Muslim. He was also a co-teacher of Alhajis Jimoh Balogun.¹⁶



Islamic Revivalism in Orun Ekiti

The trio of Alhaji Jimoh Egbedi, Alfa Aliyu Fagbolagun and Alhaji Ibrahim Balogun were the major Muslim preachers in Orun Ekiti between 1950-1975 throughout the town and suburbs. They were in charge of public ceremonies like *Lailatul-Qadri*, *Maolud-Nabiy*, marriage, funeral and other organized sittings. Alhaji Jimoh, the preacher, would lead the sermon while Alhaji Ibrahim Akeukanwo Balogun was acting as *Ajanasi*, (preacher assistance) and Alfa Aliyu Fagbolagun as the interpreter. After the death of Alhaji Jimoh Egbedi and Alfa Ali Fagbolagun, Alhaji Ibrahim Balogun continued with the assistance of his cousin, Alfa Yaqub Balogun, till he died in 2005.¹⁷

As for Alhaji Ibrahim Akeukanwo Balogun, he combines the occasional sermons with the regular ones he performed with the loudspeaker every morning before *subh* in the mosque. He organizes his pupils to entertain the audience during Islamic ceremonies such as *Maolud-Nabiy*, *Lailatul-Qadr* and *Walimatul Quran*. His aspiration for knowledge made him acquire more knowledge by visiting Ilorin for further study at the Qur'anic school of late Alhaji Kamaldeen where he combined his Qur'anic studies with western education to obtain his Primary School Leaving Certificate. This enabled him to secure appointment as an Islamic teacher at Ansar-Ud-Deen School where he served until his death in year 2005.¹⁸

By 1952, a new crop of *Ulama'u* (Islamic scholars) headed by Alhaji

Abdullah Olaleye as the *Muqadam* sprang up from both orthodox and modern system of acquisition of Islamic education. In almost every notable family are growing numbers of young *Ulama'u* from the modern Arabic centres at Lagos, Ibadan Abeokuta, Ilorin among other towns in Yoruba land to acquire more knowledge. On their arrival, they embarked on Mosque-to-Mosque and Street-to-Street *da'wah* activities for exploration of the knowledge of the *Qur'an*. They brought awareness to the town as they pulled crowds wherever the group staged their preaching¹⁹

An orthodox scholar in person of Shaykh Musa Ibrahim Egbedi, who later became a renowned Islamic cleric in Yoruba land engaged in the establishment of *Qur'anic* schools and regular preaching. He was an itinerant preacher as he moved from one place to the other. History has it that he visited many towns within and outside Yoruba land. In the course of his preaching tour, he made converts who were mainly idol worshipers of various divinities; he got a deeper knowledge of their remote doctrines. He started exposing the secrets in the mode of worship of the traditionalists, making loud portraits of the secret cults and the unholy acts of the adherents of African Traditional Religion thus earned him the nick name "*Ajagbemokeferi*" one that terrifies the unbelievers. He became a threat to them, visiting them in their cult gatherings, carting some of their objects away to be displayed to the public. He would not fear nor hesitate to enter any place or say anything about the secret cults. He visited many

big cities where notable divinities exist such as Ile-Ife, Akure, Ilesa, Iwo, Abeokuta, Ijebu-Ode, Ikere-Ekiti, Ikole-Ekiti, Epe and so on²⁰.

Alhaji Ajagbemokeferi appeared brave and his braveness earned him favourable acceptance by the elderly Muslims who supported and cheered him up when he got to their towns. He pulled crowds in his public preaching because of the exposition he made of the divinities. The adherents of such beliefs felt proud of coming near him and sharing views on their positive benefits. He never denied the existence of these divinities but refuted the idea of worshipping them instead of one true Allah. They were created for use and not for being worshipped. He was turbaned as Aare Musulumi of Igbemo-Ekiti in 1986. Among his students were Alhaji Yakin Zubair (Oko-Oso), Alhaji AbduRaazak Musa, the present Khalifa Ajagbemokeferi, Imam Ibrahim Olaleye, the Chief Imam of Orun-Ekiti, Imam Idris Adedeji, Imam Ansar-u-Deen Central Mosque Ise-Ekiti, Imam Uthman Ayolo, The Chief Imam of Ise-Ekiti and host of other scholars of Arabic and Islamic Studies. He died in year 2000.²¹

Achievements

When Orun Ekiti broke out of Igbemo Ekiti in December 2013, Orun Muslim community made under leadership of Alhaji Abdullah Olaleye as the Acting Chief Imam and Mallam Badru Balogun as the Chairman of the Muslim community. By March 2014, the Chief Imam was appointed in person of Alfa Ibrahim Olaleye. The Muslim community named their *Jama'ah* after Ansar-Ud-Deen. This

help a lot in the development and the growth of the Orun and indeed Ekiti State. In fact, the roles played by people like Alhaji Jimoh Balogun, Alfa Lamidi Ogunsina and Alhaji Chief Nuh Obayemi Saliu in the establishment of the Society help them greatly in the development of Muslim community in the town.

Within five years of establishment of Orun Muslim Community, they had succeeded in the following:

- i. Joining the league of Muslim towns in the Local Government and occupying rightful positions;
- ii. Participating in all activities and programmes of Ansar-Ud-Deen Society of Nigeria within and outside the State;
- iii. Peacefully appointed their Chief Imam without rancor in the town villages in Orun-Ekiti
- iv. Established public primary school named Ansar-Ud-Deen Primary School Orun-Ekiti.
- v. Installed both male and female chiefs for the Muslim community such as Mufasir, Iya-Sunnah, Balogun, iya Alasalatu etc.
- vi. Built a solid and viable Muslim community under the chairmanship of Mallam Badru Balogun;
- vii. Secure land for the construction of ultra-modern Central Mosque named Ansar-Ud-Deen Central Mosque, Orun-Ekiti;
- viii. Held many positions of trust in the State political administration starting from 1952 till date, Alhaji Jimoh Balogun and Alhaji Sheedu Bakare became first and second Councilors representing Orun at Ado-Ekiti District Council and presently Hon. Abdullah Goke

Balogun is the Councilor representing Orun/Igbemo in Irepodun/Ifelodun Local Government Area of Ekiti State;

- ix. Educationally, Orun Muslim have been doing well, they produced the first generation of scholars in the town such as Alhaji Sakariyau Bayo Balogun, a retired School Principal, Alhaji Chief Muhammad Tiamiyu Sola Balogun, the Aro of Orun-Ekiti, also a retired School Principal and Jimoh Karim Balogun a retired lecturer from Federal College of Education, Abeokuta. Lately a Muslim in the town bagged Professorship in Petroleum Engineering in person of Professor Imran Olaleye. The Muslims in the town has also produced many Ph.D. holders and captains of industry.
- x. It is on a sound note that most of the personalities and achievements recorded by Muslim in Igbemo-Ekiti were worthy of studying so that people would appreciate their roles in the development of Islam in the area

Conclusion

The paper has brought out the historical origin and the development of Islam in Orun Ekiti. Though the town was carved out of the old Igbemo Ekiti, its records showed that the its Islamic achievements are worthwhile. It revealed that Islam in Orun Ekiti was greatly assisted by the indigenous converts who dedicated themselves to the spread of the religion. It is therefore suggested that the strategies adopted in the growth of Islam could be studied by scholars to see the extent it could be adopted for

the propagation of Islam in other parts of the country.

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