NIGERIA

The mysterious Ogunjokoro of the Old Oyo (Nigeria) and its tourism potential

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Abstract

Archaeological surveys (surface, ethnographic and reconnaissance) of the Old Oyo Archaeological site, an important heritage site pivotal to the history of the Yoruba people of West Africa and an essential site of archaeological and anthropological researches revealed the Ogunjokoro, a mysterious calabash-shaped metallic object weighing about 50 kg. The object measuring about 60 cm in height with a base diameter of about 20 cm was found at about 20 km from Igbeti, Old Oyo, Oyo State, Nigeria. Ethnographic studies as well as oral traditions pointed out that the object migrated from about 25 km southeast of the heart of the Old Oyo. There is the unexplainable story of the constant changing positions of the Ogunjokoro at the site where it is found. Moreover, it was gathered that the object was incriminated in the desolations and misfortunes of the inhabitants of the former place it occupied. It is being recommended that the tourism potential of the Ogunjokoro be exploited by preserving it as much as possible as this would boost the cultural tourism of Nigeria alongside promoting the unity of the Yoruba race.

Introduction

The Old Oyo (Oyo Ile) was the capital of Oyo empire that was abandoned around 1837 as a result of Fulani-Jihad war of the 18th and 19th Century (Okpoko 1998). The Old Oyo empire was the largest and the most powerful of all the polities established by the Yoruba (one of the three main ethnic groups in Nigeria). Its territory covered a substantial part of Yorubaland and extended to Dahomey (the present day Republic of Benin) and parts of Togo and the present day Ghana (Oguntomisin 2002). It is an important historic site pivotal to the history and migrations of the Yorubas (Olukole 2007). The Old Oyo archaeological site has contributed immensely to cultural tourism in Nigeria as its artifacts and ruins have become objects of tourist attraction.

A number of archaeological investigations had been carried out at the Old Oyo by various scholars: Clapperton (1929), Clarke (1938), Keay (1947), Walters (1954), Willet (1960), Sowummi (1979), Soper and Darling (1980), Agbaje-Williams (1983), Aremu (2000) and Folorunso et al. (2006). However there is need to emphasize on the tourism potentials of the cultural materials of archaeological sites because they make for tourist attraction (Olukole and Aremu 2002; Olukole 2007). The empire had a stable economy from agriculture trade with the Sudan, and tax with tributes from conquered provinces (Johnson 1921). There are oral traditions that towns like Ilorin and Igboho emerged from the Old Oyo Empire. This paper discusses an important archaeological find, the Ogunjokoro, a mysterious metal object discovered at the Old Oyo archaeological site, and considers its role as a tourism resource.

Survey

In order to have an idea of the extent of the Old Oyo archaeological site, the site was exploited through a surface survey during which the cultural features of the area were identified and as well classified. The unsystematic kind of surface survey was used, the investigators walked across the area of study using a random sampling technique involving the exploration of paths, collection and examination of artifacts and the recording of their respective locations. This method gave a panoramic view of the cultural features of the Old Oyo and paved way for the subsequent classification of the features. With the aim of updating the cultural history and other viable information of the Old Oyo, ethnographic studies involving the key informant approach were used. The key informant method of ethnographic studies used involved the conduction of oral interviews on one-on-one basis to retrieve important information about the archaeological sites of the Old Oyo. The informants for the study were mainly elderly persons who were not only indigenes but also residents of the area studied. Questions of archaeological interests on the cultural features of the Old Oyo were
asked while using a Samsung camcorder to cover the entire oral interview. Archaeological reconnaissance survey, a systematic attempt to identify archaeological sites, including their precise geographical locations was carried out to take an inventory of cultural remains while noting their spatial distribution and attribute, observing their levels of preservation.

**Results and discussion**

A mysterious metallic object with a rounded base and pointed edge located outside Old Oyo walls. Oral tradition has it that it migrated from Old Oyo to its present location about 45 km south East of Old Oyo. The object measured 60 cm in height with a base diameter of 30 cm (Figure 1), comparable to the Yoruba traditional calabash in shape. The metal has a rough appearance suggestive of the products of indigenous blacksmiths. Personal communication with the residents of Igbeti, about 20 km from the location of the object, revealed that the object is mysterious, having migrated from about 25 km southeast of the Old Oyo. Oral tradition has it that the name Ogunkoro came into being out of a struggle between a blacksmith and a powerful warrior known as Ogun who wanted to elope into the world unknown with the object. Like the story of Jacob and the Angel in the Book of Genesis, after much struggle, the warrior left with the handle of the object while the blacksmith had the other portion of the heavy metal now known as Ogunjokoro. It was gathered that the object possesses some mystical power via which it moves itself from place to place. Another mystery behind the Ogunjokoro is that it is reported to have been incriminated in the desolations of the settlement it once inhabited. An account has it that the object was worshipped by the followers of Ogun, who is generally called the god of iron in the Yoruba Kingdom. Oral tradition has it that several abortive attempts had been made by some visitors/tourists to cart away the
Ogunjokoro. Estimated to be about the average weight of a bag of cement (50 kg), the weight of the object as well as the mystery behind the difficulty of lifting it had prevented its theft. However, no one seems to know how it changes its position within the site where it is located. A further investigation into the origin of the Ogunjokoro revealed that it was named after a renowned traditional warrior who according to oral tradition disappeared at the spot of the object. Nevertheless the Ogunjokoro and the stories surrounding it make it a tourist attraction within Old Oyo.

Cultural resources are currently receiving a fair share in the development efforts of most developing nations. In the tourism industry, this approach has manifested itself in the large number of countries that have sought UNESCO’s aid in the development of cultural tourism (Okpoko and Okpoko 2002). Cultural tourism projects have been embarked upon by UNESCO in Iran, Turkey, Indonesia, Pakistan and Brazil. Africa occupies a relatively small space in the domain since, according to UNESCO (1970), the countries in the region prefer to give priority to the development of education and science in their use of technical aid. The cultural resources investigated in the course of this work could become important objects of tourist attraction if properly managed. The history of the role of the Old Oyo Kingdom in the Yoruba race is of a keynote; hence, the preservation of the ruins of the Old Oyo Empire would go a long way in keeping the history of the Yoruba race. This object, apart from serving as evidence of the existence of settlements in the Old Oyo also reveals the way of life of the early settlers. It also suggests that metallurgy probably was part of Old Oyo’s subsistence. Historical sites like those of the Old Oyo could be archaeologically explored to bring out its tourism potentials.

There is the need for improved preservative measures geared towards cultural resources of the Old Oyo. This would help to preserve the cultural identity of the Yoruba race and also serve as tourist attraction sites. Important objects from the Old Oyo could also be placed in museums with adequate preservative measures. All efforts must be made to harness the wealth of previous archaeological investigations on the Old Oyo in a bid to preserve the tourism information of the historical site. Governments at both the state and federal levels would need to take the lead in improving on the state of cultural tourism in Nigeria. There is the need to effectively plan the development of Nigeria’s cultural tourism so as to benefit on a long term scale from UNESCO’s mission of integrating cultural tourism in the general plans for national development. This will in no doubt improve the current state of social amenities like roads, railway connections, air ways and other public services/infrastructures. Nigeria’s cultural resources are unique among those of other African nations and would reserve a booster if properly managed thereby developing the tourism Industry. In conclusion, there is the need to maximize the tourism potentials of the Ogunjokoro. This becomes necessary as the conservation of such a resource would not only aid further research in the mystery behind it but also attract tourist from within and outside Nigeria.

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