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The Impact of British Colonial Administration on Nigeria: The Auchi Kingdom Experience,
1904-1960

A summary of the Doctoral thesis

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DOCTORAL THESIS

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the impact of British colonial administration on Auchi Kingdom in Nigeria. While the primary objective of British imperialism was economic exploitation, the contact nevertheless spurred certain levels of development within the region. The study explores the origin, traditions of the kingdom, and its situation within the Afemai region of Etsako West Local Government Area (LGA) in Edo State, Nigeria. It delves into the distinctive history of Auchi Kingdom, examining its customs, traditions, and interactions with the British over a fifty-six-year period. The research further assesses the socio-political and economic developments that occurred in the kingdom under British colonial administration from 1904 to 1960. The people of Auchi developed complex and stable social, political, and religious institutions under the leadership of King Oshiogbele Momoh Idaoh and subsequent rulers, influenced by their interactions with the British. This dissertation emphasises the continuity of indigenous customs and traditions alongside the introduction of British policies and infrastructural developments during the period. Additionally, the study examines the introduction of Islam and the implementation of colonial policies and their impact on the community. The research reveals that the innovations such as railways and schools that were introduced by the British were to satisfy their own needs but the local people still benefited from them. Interviews were conducted to gather crucial information, and both primary and secondary sources were extensively utilised to ensure robust findings. An interdisciplinary approach was employed in the analysis of the vast amount of information to maintain historical objectivity. The research concludes that Auchi Kingdom has evolved into a significant socio-economic and political force within Etsako West Local Government Area of Edo State and Nigeria as a whole, largely due to the impact of British Colonialism despite its exploitative tendencies.

KEYWORDS: British; Chiefs; Colonialism; Cultural practices; Kingdom; Policies; Religion; Rule; Nigeria; and Tradition.

1. Delineation of the dissertation (The Impact of British Colonialism Administration on Nigeria: The Auchi Kingdom Experience, 1904-1960)

A. Background of the research

One of the greatest challenges faced by historians concerned with the origin and historical development of Auchi Kingdom, as Dawood noted, is situating the starting point and documenting exactly when, where, and how events emerged.¹ At the time of its earliest unfolding, there were only a few written records which are complemented with oral sources. Before British colonial administration in Nigeria, people went about their daily activities undisturbed and oblivious of the outside world. The people existed without the conventional art of writing. Significant events and activities were stored in the people's memories and were passed down from one generation to another by words of mouth and this is oral tradition. Oral source is the main available source for the reconstruction of the past in Africa.² This dissertation, in essence, attempts to describe the impact of British Colonialism on Nigeria using Auchi Kingdom as a case study.

Attention will be given to the political, and socio-economic consequences of the imperial rule of the British in Auchi Kingdom and their significance before Nigeria was granted independence in 1960. The research unraveled the extent to which British colonial policies impacted on the lives of the people of Auchi Kingdom economically, socially, culturally, politically, religiously, and otherwise. The British Imperialists introduced a new means of administering justice, Western Education and several other colonial policies which impacted on Auchi Kingdom.³ Since Nupe imperialism and British colonial administration did not result in the total abolition of the indigenous practices of Auchi people, according to Tony, the present-day Auchi Kingdom still exhibits many of those innovations as a result of the contact and impact of British Colonialism.⁴ Therefore, this dissertation aims to explain the innovations and policies of the British and how they impacted on Auchi Kingdom.

¹ Egbefo O. DAWOOD, Interviewed by Suleiman Yakubu, July 27, 2020, Iyamho, Professor of History.

² Suleiman YAKUBU, "The Socio-cultural and Political Practices of the People of the Auchi Kingdom Before the Arrival of the Nupe in Nigeria" *Athens Journal of History* Vol. 9, Issue 1, 2023, pp. 69-70.

³ Suleiman YAKUBU - Obomeghie WAJEED, "The Auchi Kingdom: A century of growth and innovations, 1920 - 2020" *Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research* Vol. 6, Issue 6, 2021, p. 4.

⁴ Momoh ROBSON, *New perspectives on the history and politics of Nigeria: The Etsako Experience*, Edo: Afenmai Grafix 2016, p. 59.

Auchi people adopted and used the innovations of the British colonial masters to their benefit despite their interior motives. It must be noted that the innovations and policies of the British impacted positively on the lives of the people of Auchi Kingdom.

B. Auchi Kingdom in the pre-colonial era

Pre-colonial administration in Auchi Kingdom can be categorised into two epochs. These are the pre-Nupe and Nupe eras. These two epochs in the history of Auchi kingdom are majorly based on oral sources because there are limited written sources available but the available written sources are complemented with oral sources. These two periods, especially the pre-Nupe era, predate the art of conventional writing. Before the colonization of Nigeria by Britain, Auchi Kingdom had a well-organized administrative system.

The first epoch, which is the pre-Nupe era, was characterised by a rich cultural and socio-political landscape that existed before the significant changes brought about by the Nupe invasion in the 19th century. There are two traditions of the origin of Auchi Kingdom. The first tradition claims that the first people of Auchi migrated from Bauchi in northern Nigeria. The second and generally accepted tradition is that Auchi was founded by Uchi, who migrated from Udo in Benin City to its current location. This migration was triggered by a misunderstanding between Uchi and the king of the Benin Kingdom. Through oral tradition, it is revealed that the system of administration of Auchi before the Nupe conquest was a segmentary political institution known as the Odion System.⁵ This points to the fact that there was the absence of monarchies or kingship institutions in the Auchi society before 1860. The administrative system was primarily based on a hierarchical structure and the appointment of elders and heads of extended families was based on age which was a common practice in most communities in Africa. Africans at the time believed that age was synonymous with wisdom. For this reason, Africans had great respect for aged people.⁶

The pre-Nupe administration in Auchi Kingdom, according to Dawood, was based on tradition and customary laws. The laws and regulations of the kingdom were passed down from generation to generation through oral tradition, and disputes were resolved through a system of

⁵ Erhagbe O. ERHAGBE, interviewed by Suleiman Yakubu.

⁶ Abdulrahman Oshioke ARUNAH, *A history of Auchi Kingdom*, Ilorin: Haytee Press and Publishing Co. Nigeria Ltd 2006, p. 23.

traditional dispute-resolution mechanisms. The administration was based on a hierarchical structure with clear lines of authority and accountability, which helped to ensure that the kingdom functioned smoothly and efficiently.⁷ This epoch ended in 1860 after the Nupe Empire invaded and established their administration over Auchi.

The second epoch of pre-British Colonial administration was the Nupe Administration in Auchi. The Nupe imperialist was an imperial power from the north-central part of Nigeria. They were able to exert their imperial power over several communities and kingdoms across the land mass known as Nigeria today. Written records on Nupe-Auchi intergroup relations before 1860 are very scanty. However, historians heavily relied on oral tradition for the reconstruction of aspects of the socio-cultural and economic history of intergroup contacts between the Nupe and Auchi during the period.⁸ Oral tradition has it that the Nupe and Auchi, including other Afenmai communities, enjoyed some flourishing and symbiotic trading activities before 1860. It indicates that traders going to and coming from Nupe land to Auchi and other neighbouring communities passed through Akoko in present-day Ondo State, Nigeria.⁹ The Nupe Imperialists imposed their rule on the Auchi people and introduced several innovations such as a monarchical system of government, a new mode of dressing, a system of tax collection etc. Some of these innovations are still in place till the present day. The British conquered the Nupe empire in Bida in 1897, subsequently ending the imperial rule of the Nupe and the second epoch of the precolonial history of Auchi Kingdom

C. Auchi Kingdom and British Colonial Administration

This was also a period when the British Empire exerted its influence and control over Auchi Kingdom, located in present-day Edo State, Nigeria. This period lasted from 1904, when British colonial officers arrived Auchi Kingdom, till when Nigeria gained independence in 1960.¹⁰ After the arrival of the British, they aimed to expand their influence and control over the region due to its economic potential and strategic location. They sought to exploit the resources, establish trade routes, and impose their political and administrative systems on the indigenous population.¹¹ One

⁷ Dawood O. EGBEFO, Interviewed by Suleiman Yakubu.

⁸ Dawood O. EGBEFO, Interviewed by Suleiman Yakubu.

⁹ Dauda Saliu GARUBA, Interviewed by Suleiman Yakubu.

¹⁰ Edward O. ERHAGBE interviewed by Yakubu Suleiman, April 21, 2021, (63), Abuja, Professor of African History.

¹¹ Dawood O. EGBEFO, interviewed by Yakubu Suleiman, 21 July, 2020, (55), Professor of African history.

of the key aspects of British colonialism in Auchi Kingdom was the introduction of several colonial policies and the imposition of indirect rule. Indirect rule involved using local traditional rulers as intermediaries between the British colonial administration and the local population.¹² In Auchi Kingdom, this meant that the Otaru (traditional ruler) became a key figure in implementing British policies and maintaining control over the kingdom. Under indirect rule, the British introduced new administrative structures and institutions. They established Native Courts to administer justice based on a combination of British law and indigenous customs.¹³

The British also introduced taxation systems to generate revenue for their administration and expenses. These changes had a profound impact on the social and economic fabric of the Auchi Kingdom. British colonialism brought about significant changes in education and religion in Auchi. Christian Missionary activities were encouraged by the colonial administration, leading to the establishment of Christian missions in the area but did not tamper the Islamic religion which was the official religion of the kingdom. The British also introduced Western education, which had a transformative effect on the kingdom and led to the emergence of a new educated elite.¹⁴ The economic impact of British colonialism in Auchi was substantial. The British exploited the resources of the region, particularly palm oil, rubber, and timber. They established plantations and encouraged cash crop production for export. This led to changes in land ownership patterns and disrupted traditional agricultural practices. British Colonial Administration came to an end in 1960 when Nigeria was granted independence.

2. Overview of the chapters in the dissertation

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter is the introductory chapter. It focuses on the background to the study, the statement of the problem, aim and objectives, significance of the study, limitation of the study, literature review, sources and methodology etc. It guides through the research methodology, sources of information and information-gathering techniques and analysis. This chapter is divided into nine sub-topics of which some have already been mentioned above. Attention was focused on the

¹² Momoh ROBSON, *New perspectives on the history and politics of Nigeria: The Etsako Experience*, Afenmai Grafix, Edo 2016, p. 63

¹³ Tony MOMOH, *Each man, his time: The biography of an era*, Pumark Nigeria ltd, Lagos 1995, p. 41.

¹⁴ Suleiman YAKUBU, "Colonial Rule in Nigeria: The Auchi Kingdom Encounter with the British Colonialists and the Impacts" *Brazilian Journal of African Studies* Vol. 6, No. 12, 2021, p. 63.

background of the studies because every dissertation should have an intriguing introduction to arouse the interest of the reader. The aim and objectives of the chapter are clearly outlined and captured in the dissertation in a way that would be easily understood by the readers. There are also six research questions that were put forward and are adequately addressed in the dissertation.

The scope of the dissertation covers a time frame of fifty-six years. This period is from the time the British Colonial Officers arrived Auchi Kingdom in 1904 to the time Nigeria was granted independence in 1960. Much attention was also focused on the methodology. Oral sources were greatly relied on to arrive at historical objectivity. This is so because before the coming of Western education to Africa, Auchi Kingdom like any other kingdom lacked conventional literacy and means of communication but adopted other means of communication and the transmission of information. The history, tradition, cultural practices, and religion of the people were not documented but were represented in tales, sayings, songs and proverbs and were transmitted orally and also handed down from generation to generation over the centuries. It must be noted, however, that oral sources remain one of the most important sources of African history. This, to a large extent, has resulted to the heavy reliance of African historians on oral sources as their major source of reference.¹⁵

A literature review, as a sub-topic, is also in this chapter. As already explained above, existing works on Auchi Kingdom and its people are very limited and are characterised by fragmentary information for the research under study. However, some inferences and information were still obtained from the few available ones. In order to achieve objectivity, efforts were made to review some of the available works and literature on the history of Auchi Kingdom and some other sources which proved useful to the completion of this research work. This chapter concludes after the research's sources, techniques and methods were discussed.

Chapter 2: The Land, People and Socio-Cultural Institutions of Auchi Kingdom

This chapter is divided into eleven sub-topics. It gives a vivid description of the land, geography, location and people of Auchi Kingdom. A vivid description of the immediate neighbours of Auchi Kingdom was also explained. It further explained the two traditions of origin of Auchi

¹⁵ Jan VANSINA, *Oral tradition as history*, The University of Wisconsin Press, London 1985, p. 2

people. It also describes the cultural, socio-political and traditional practices of the people of Auchi Kingdom. These include Kinship and Kingship, Age grade system, Religion, Marriage and Birth Ceremonies, Funeral ceremonies, and many others. This chapter concludes with a summary of all the items discussed in the chapter.

Chapter 3: Indigenous Rule and Administration in Auchi Kingdom up to the eve of Colonial Invasion

This chapter is divided into six sub-topics which dwell on the kind of activities that were prevalent in Auchi kingdom up to the time British Colonialism started. This chapter also describes the two epochs, the pre-Nupe and Nupe eras before the advent of British colonialism. During the pre-Nupe era, a segmentary system of government was operational. In essence, governance was the business of the elders as the ruling elite before the Nupe invasion of 1860.¹⁶ The oldest person in the most senior age grade association was appointed the Odion or Odafe and he performed the functions of central administrator. The Auchi system was structured in a way and manner that the source of authority and administration of the entire Auchi society was from the family unit, quarter council, village council, and council of state with each unit having its function and roles to play. The architects behind kingship in the Kingdom were the Nupe imperialists.

The second epoch started with the Nupe invasion of 1860. The Nupe raiders imposed their hegemony over Auchi and imposed tributes and taxes payable in the form of slaves, goats, and even fowls on Auchi people. Other innovations were a new mode of dressing, a monarchical system of administration, changes in marriage customs, the introduction of new titles and administrative roles and several others. However, the Nupe hegemony ended in 1897 after the collapse of the Nupe Empire. British colonial officers arrived in Auchi Kingdom in 1904 seven years after the Nupe Empire fell. A treaty was signed with the Otaru of Auchi after which full control was established over Auchi Kingdom by the British. The British completely ended the slave trade because it had already been abolished almost a century ago. This chapter concludes with a summary of all the items discussed in the chapter.

¹⁶ Amedu O. AKEEM, interviewed by Yakubu Suleiman, April 22, 2021, (65), Abuja, Civil servant.

Chapter 4: Britain and the Impact of her Colonial Policies

This chapter is divided into thirteen sub-topics which dwell on British Colonial Policies on Auchi Kingdom and Nigeria as a whole. Between 1904 and 1960 several British Colonial policies were implemented in Auchi Kingdom and Nigeria as a whole. Some of these policies include the Indirect Rule System, Economic Policies, Judicial Reforms, Native Authority, Judicial reforms and many more. These reforms were implemented to enhance the exploitative desires of Britain but there were still some benefits for Auchi Kingdom and Nigeria as a whole. Some of the benefits were that several crops such as cassava, cocoa, cotton and palm products were redesignated as cash crops. Policies were formulated to enhance and encourage local farmers to grow these crops for export to Europe. Even though there the neglect of the growing of staple food crops which caused scarcity of food crops, many local farmers benefited from form this activity. This was a time when cassava became a crop majorly grown and processed by women because many of the men were at the war front during World War II.

There was also the construction of railway tracks across which was primarily to satisfy the needs of Britain but the local people still benefited from it because they needed it to transport their agricultural products to locations where they would be bought. Britain did not dismantle the rail the tracks after the Colonial administration. In the long run, the trains were to the benefit of the local people. This chapter also describes the role of the Royal Niger Company in Nigeria and how they dismantled the Nupe Empire in 1897. This chapter concludes with a summary of all the items discussed in the chapter.

Chapter 5: The Impact of British Colonial Administration on Auchi Kingdom during the Otaru System of Administration

This chapter is divided into eight sub-topics which dwell on the impact of British colonial activities on the Otaru System of Administration in Auchi Kingdom from 1904 to 1960. Between 1904 and 1960, a total of six kings (Otaru) witnessed British Colonial Administration. These were Idaoh Ikelebe (1875-1905), Odifili Okeregie-Nokhua (1905-1905), Ikharo Ikelebe (1905-1919), Idaoh Oshiogbele Momoh (1919-1944), Momoh Jimah Momoh (1945-1955), Abubakar Keremi Momoh (1955-1960). Idaoh Oshiogbele Momoh was the Otaru that had the longest regime of twenty-five years. He was also more influential than any other Otaru and several significant innovations were experienced under his regime. Under the regimes of these kings,

Auchi Kingdom experienced monumental innovations and growth that included the indirect rule system which allowed local rulers like the Otaru to maintain some degree of authority while ultimately being subordinate to colonial administrators unlike during the Nupe era, the establishment of Auchi as the administrative headquarters, introduction of western education, introduction of the Islamic religion and several others.

The legacy of the Otaru system from 1904 to 1960 laid a complex foundation for post-independence governance in Auchi Kingdom. The experiences under indirect rule shaped local expectations regarding leadership and governance structures after Nigeria gained independence in 1960. Traditional authorities like the Otaru retained significance in local politics but had to navigate a new political landscape characterised by modern democratic principles. This chapter concludes with a summary of all the items discussed in the chapter.

Chapter 6: Summary and Conclusion

This chapter is divided into two sub-topics which are a general summary and conclusion. This chapter gives a general overview of the entire dissertation touching on key areas. The dissertation concludes with comments that the innovations of the British Colonial Masters was beneficial to the people of Auchi Kingdom. The innovations are reflected in their cultural practices, tradition, religion, mode of dressing and infrastructures that were put on ground by the British despite their interior motives and exploitation that was purely economic based. Auchi Kingdom was able to achieve development and progress during the era of British rule because of the role and activities of the various kings but mostly due to the role of Oshioyegbe Momoh Idaoh during his reign of twenty-five years (1919-1944) as Otaru of Auchi Kingdom. It must be noted that despite the interior motives of the British Auchi people still benefited from British Colonialism from 1904 to 1960.

3. Results

This dissertation has demonstrated that:

A. the British colonial masters overran the Nupe Empire at Bida ending Nupe imperialism in Auchi kingdom and other locations across Nigeria. This made the Nupe imperialist commanders stationed at Auchi Kingdom lose grip of the kingdom and this paved way for British Colonialism.

B. the British colonial masters introduced and implemented several colonial policies that resulted in several innovations which included the establishment of a new administrative system, the creation of Auchi Kingdom as the administrative headquarters, the construction of a modern official building complex, official staff quarters and a modern prison, Western education, creation of a network of roads, abolition of some very obnoxious cultural practices, the total abolition of slavery and slave trade, setting up of native courts and a host of others. Despite their interior motives Auchi kingdom benefited very significantly.¹⁷

C. even though Auchi people benefited from British Colonialism, all the policies and infrastructure that were introduced and created were primarily to satisfy the needs of the British Colonial Masters and to cut the cost of running the British Colonial Government.¹⁸

D. several crops like cocoa, cotton, palm produce etc. became redesignated as cash crops for exportation. Cassava became a crop exclusively grown and processed by women in Auchi Kingdom and Nigeria as a whole.

E. there were no outright losers because both the British and local people of /Auchi Kingdom and Nigeria as a whole benefited from the contact.

4. Implication for further research

Further research is crucial for expanding knowledge and understanding the history of Auchi Kingdom and Nigeria as a whole. Research often uncovers new questions that have not been fully addressed or answered. These unanswered questions can serve as potential avenues for further research. By identifying these gaps in knowledge, researchers can design studies to investigate and provide insights into unresearched areas. The dissertation paves the way for further research in specific areas such as in-depth research on the economy, politics, religion, cultural practices, age grade system, cultural practices, kingships etc. of Auchi Kingdom and its surrounding communities. Research topics could be developed from these areas mentioned above and exhaustively researched into. Students and researchers could also use this dissertation as a reference point because it touched on key areas of the history of Auchi Kingdom.

¹⁷ Edward O. ERHAGBE interviewed by Yakubu Suleiman.

¹⁸ Tony MOMOH, *Each man, his time: The biography of an era*, Lagos: Pumark Nigeria ltd Lagos 1995, p. 58.

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