
INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY ON YORUBA BURIAL RITES IN OGBOMOSO L.G.A., OYO STATE

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Abstract

Burial is a means of showing respect for the dead. As it is among the Yoruba's age, circumstances of death and social status of the dead determines the type of burial to be accorded. Generally, when an aged and respectable man dies a good death, the corpse is quickly covered with a mat while the relatives spreads the messages concerning the death. The Yoruba *ogbonies* do not burry people in the public cemeteries but in the family compound sometimes in the person's particular room. But the advent of Christianity has changed lot of things, a change that is eased but not amassed by the African Traditional Religion. This study was therefore carried out to examine the influence of Christianity on Burial Rites in Nigeria: Case study of Ogbomoso L.G.A, Oyo state. To assess the influence of Christianity on Burial Rites in Nigeria, the qualitative approach was used. Findings showed that Christianity holds sway on the society and has enormous influence on Yoruba burial rites in Ogbomoso. The study recommends that there is need for the church to train and teach the members on the significance of burial rites and its relations to burial rites among the Jews and that there is also need for the Ogbomoso people to compare their burial rites with the practice of burial rites among many other people in other cultures. This will help with the analysis of the rites and consider aspects of the burial rites which are ideal and those that are not culturally legitimate.

Introduction

Burial or interment is a method of final disposition wherein a dead person is placed into the ground, sometimes with objects. This is usually accomplished by excavating a pit or trench, placing the deceased and object in it, and covering it over. A conceptual view of burial is the ritual act sometimes with objects into the ground (Philip 1). The process involves the digging of a pit or trench, placing the deceased and object in it and covering it over. The act of burial has been a long age event which has lasted with man since after the origin of man. Burial is a means of showing respect for the dead.

As it is among the Yoruba's age, circumstances of death and the social status of the dead determines the type of burial to be accorded. Generally, when an aged and respectable man dies a good death, the corpse is quickly covered in a mat while the relatives spread the messages concerning the death. In response, people troop out to pay their last respect to the deceased. Simultaneously, the corpse is washed, and the hair plaited if a woman. In the case of a man, the hair is either shaved off or well combed. Customarily, the first born son of the man should first pour water on his father's corpse. Here, much importance is attached to the washing ritual as it is believed that one has to be clean in order to be admitted into the abode of the ancestors. Any corpse not so washed will become a wandering ghost-*iwin* or *isekun*. Awolawu noted that after the bath, the corpse is dressed in beautiful and dignifying clothing. It is brought into the sitting room and laid on a well decorated bed to lie in state (19).

Music, dancing and feasting then begin. There is also the firing of guns outside. The boom of a gun is a sign of respect for the deceased and a means of announcing to the general public that some great event has occurred. Laying in that state lasts for two or three days under special treatment to prevent decay. Within those few days, the bedding and clothing worn by the deceased are regularly changed by children and relatives as a mark of honour. Enormous donations in cash and kind are made and those taken by the dead to the great beyond. The Yoruba aborigines do not bury people in the public cemeteries but in the family compound sometimes in the person's particular room. To bury outside the family compound appears like throwing away and losing contact with the person totally.

This is because regular ancestral veneration which involves pouring libation, breaking kola nuts and praying on the grave of the deceased will not be at the best of status in the next world and would be unable to bestow favour on the living descendants. Precisely, interment takes place in the evening but before then, the body is once more laid out in a couch amidst great dancing and performances. A little before sun set, the body is wrapped up in colourful clothes and taken to the grave in a long solemn procession. There, the corpse is carefully laid down in the grave. According to Awolawu, beautiful clothing, pieces of silver, money and all that the departed which are expected to acquire in the next world are provided... an animal is immolated and the blood is poured into the grave. It is believed that the sacrificial animal accompanies the deceased to the next world (20). The immolation of the sacrificial animal replaced the more ancient practice of burying kings with their slaves and wives.

It is inferred from this practice of accompanying the dead with materials and articles used on earth that the dead were expected to enjoy in the afterlife the same socio-economic advantages which they had possessed in this world. As the grave is ready to be covered, there is much wailing by relatives even as they throw mud on the corpse asking him to do one thing or another for them and sending messages to their other ancestors.

Hence, the researcher seeks to determine the influence of Christianity on Yoruba burial rites in Ogbomoso LGA in Oyo State. The work discusses the concept of death and burial rites, Yoruba (Ogbomoso)'s beliefs about death and burial rites, and a review of burials in the nineteenth-century Oyo. It also discusses early Christianity and Church cemeteries and the burial rites in Ogbomoso L.G.A.

The Concept of Death and Burial Rites

The history of burial rites is as old as human culture itself pre-dating modern *homo sapiens* and dated to at least 300,000 year ago. Burial rites are influenced by the customs and tradition of the society, significant symbols, gathered community, ritual action, cultural heritage and transition of the dead body. Diverse histories and traditions surround funerals and burials in Nigeria. Many ethnic groups have extensive guidelines and prescriptions for what constitutes a befitting burial. These often depended on the cause of death, the age of the deceased and their position in society. For example, the Yoruba believe in elaborate funerals, complete with music and feasting, when an elderly person, considered to have lived in, while suicides and those who passed away young were buried in the forest without burial rites. For centuries, funerals have consumed a lot of resources. In parts of Yoruba land during the 1800s, burial expenses could lead to serious debt, which could lead to pawning one's property or selling oneself or, in some case, one's family members into slavery (Thesis Africa Dec. 14,

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Death and burial rites are issues of great cultural and traditional interest. Death is one of the greatest tragedies that can befall a community. According to Agha, the death of an individual could be attributed to the venting of vengeance or wrath of a dead close relative such as father, mother, brother, sister, or cousin, for wrong done by the living. Such a death could be sudden or after a brief illness (18). To ascertain the actual cause of death, the soothsayer was always consulted to enable him not only say the cause of death but prescribe further remedies to prevent death in the future.

To Yoruba, the advent of Christianity has changed a lot of things, a change that was not envisaged by the African Traditional Religion (Opata 1). Concerning death and burial rites, when an individual dies, be it an infant or adult, as long as the individual is fully registered member of the church, the corpse is considered to belong to the church and not to the clan or village. If it is an infant, the church conducts the burial immediately, but if it is an adult the following procedures are followed. When an adult dies, the church authority is immediately informed. This is followed with a church bell to inform members that one of the faithful had departed. The church will then fix a date with the family members on when the corpse will be burying and the corpse may then be embalmed until the stipulated date.

Thus, on the appointed date, members of the church both diocesan and parish will gather at the church. In Yoruba traditional belief, just like the Greeks, death is not viewed as the end of life; rather, it is regarded as a transition from one form of existence to another or a journey to the ancestral world. The qualification for participation in afterlife is determined by the nature of one's past deeds and the nature of one's death. Therefore, as Gbadegeshin puts it, "conception of the meaning of life and the meaning of death are important for understanding the meaning of life" (1). The meaning of life as an important presupposition of the Ogbomoso people is encoded in their attitudes to others, to the community, to the ancestors and to the deities.

Thus, to the Ogbomosho people, the meaning of life is to deliver the message of Olódùmarè, the supreme creator, according to his wishes. The Yoruba are also of the view that for a deceased to be able to enter into the ancestral world or even become an ancestor, necessary funerary rituals must be performed. These rituals are usually the responsibility of the children of the deceased; hence, the Yoruba attach great importance to getting married and bearing children.

Since death is seen as marking the beginning of a new life, the aged, especially, do not fear death. But as noted by Gbadegeshin, "the issue of death and burial was, and still is, important in Ibadan as in other Yoruba communities (1-2). Previous scholarship on the introduction of Christianity to Yoruba land has emphasized the theme of "clash of cultures," but this work goes beyond clashes and tensions to explore negotiations and compromises, especially those made in mortuary practices. Ibadan history dates from the nineteenth century, when it was founded as a military camp in 1829. From there, it grew to be the most powerful Yoruba state. Its capital, Oyo, was a cosmopolitan centre that attracted fortune seekers from other parts of Yoruba land and even beyond. Oyo had no *oba* (king), and therefore no cult of royalty, but was ruled by a military oligarchy in the nineteenth century. It retained many aspects of Yoruba culture, particularly those concerned with mortuary practice.

Yoruba (Ogbomoso) Beliefs about Death and Burial Rites

Yoruba beliefs about death inform their mortuary practice. Death is seen not as absolute extinction or the end of life, but as a transition to a spiritual realm. *Aye* (the visible world of the living) and *orun* (the spiritual and invisible domain of ancestors, gods, and spirits) are the two realms that make up the Yoruba cosmos. These two realms are closely connected because the inhabitants of *orun* regularly intervene in earthly affairs and are in fact considered important elements in human communities. Death is thus merely a “dematerialization of the vital breath or soul, a transformation from earthly to spiritual existence ... where the dematerialized soul may choose to stay forever or make periodic returns to earth through reincarnation.” This belief in an afterlife and in reincarnation assures the Yoruba of social immortality. Those who live to a ripe old age and die “good deaths” become ancestors, and their intervention as well as that of other ancestral spirits of the lineage and town are solicited regularly by their descendants.

However, the utmost desire is to be commemorated as an individual through an *egungun* (masked ancestral spirit). An *egungun* is regarded as the “spirit of a deceased person who has returned from *orun* ... to visit his people.” Hence, he is called *ara orun* (visitor from *orun*). Shortly after the burial of the aged deceased, an *egungun* dressed like him visits his household, admonishes them, and blesses them. The important function of this ceremony, according to Peter Morton-Williams, is the “restructuring of the set of social relationships that had centred on him during his life, and the general social recognition of his replacement by his heirs.” Some families go beyond this last simulation of bodily appearance to actually institute an annual *egungun* in memory of their fathers. Such *egungun* will regularly appear at community festivals and “in certain emergencies, when a diviner may advise its summoning.” However, regardless of whether an official *egungun* is instituted, the children of the deceased would continue to offer periodic sacrifices at his grave and invoke his blessings on the household. Thus, even after death, an aged parent continues to be a part of the family.

These are just broad principles. There are variations among different Yoruba groups in terms of specific rituals associated with different types of burials, details of *egungun* outing, and gender roles. However, there are other areas of general consensus in terms of dealing with the dead. First, the Yoruba distinguish between a “good death” and premature or “bad deaths.” A “good death” is that of a person who has lived to a mature age before departing peacefully without violence or trauma. “Mature age” is not only a function of chronological advancement in years, but also depends on other factors. In the words of J. A. Atanda, “anyone whose parents have died and who is survived by children old enough to celebrate his funeral” (2) is considered mature, and his death would be celebrated, after a brief period of mourning, with a lot of merriment.

There are different categories of “bad death” called *oku ofo*. First is the death of the young.

These are youths who die before having children or before their children have grown up. Most times, their parents survive such premature death. There is also the death of infants. A series of dying infants is called an *abiku* (born-to-die), and these are not given decent burials to discourage them

from dying prematurely if they ever come back again. They are often mutilated at death and thrown into the bush. Nobody mourns them. There is also *iku ojiji* (sudden death) resulting from calamities, such as death by thunder, by drowning, and from accidents.

All these require special rituals before they are interred, mostly outside the home to

prevent a recurrence. The same applies to those killed by *sonponna* (smallpox) and also by suicide. Lepers and lunatics are never buried in the house, while corpses of criminals are thrown into the bush. While the bodies of the premature dead (excluding *abiku*) are buried within the compound, others are interred outside. Those whose deaths are considered “good deaths” are buried in the house, sometimes in their rooms, in the veranda, or in the parlour. The type of rituals performed depends on the gender of the dead, his or her lineage group, religion, status in life (whether highly placed, e.g., chief, or a common man),

membership in secret societies, age group, other associations, occupation (whether hunter, warrior, diviner), and several other variables.

One issue which various anthropological studies of Yoruba society agree is the expense incurred by funerals. A lot of resources are expended on sacrifices and feasting, which last several days. A second burial is even carried out among some Yoruba groups where additional feasting and celebration is organized. Those who could not afford this ceremony borrowed money for which they had to pawn their children. The repayment of such loans could take several years.

Burials in the Nineteenth-Century Oyo

There is a dearth of studies on Oyo mortuary practice in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The only work that sheds some light on the nineteenth-century practice is J. D. Y. Peel's magisterial study of religious encounter. Though its focus is on the entire Oyo region, it has a few scattered references to nineteenth-century Ibadan burials, especially in Peel's discussion of “burial palavahs” between missionaries and different Yoruba groups. The bulk of the data used in the following reconstruction is from original Church Missionary Society (CMS) documents. The CMS native agents (pastors and catechists) in Oyo whose journals and annual reports have yielded valuable information in this respect are Daniel Olubi, James Okuseinde, W. S. Allen, and Samuel Johnson.

It is clear from these journal entries that Ogbomoso people, like other Yoruba groups, buried their dead indoors. The graves, dug by the in-laws of the deceased, were mostly three feet deep and placed close to a wall. Before burial, the corpse was washed and wrapped in fine cloths. Drummers beat out rhythms suitable to the occasion while guns were fired at intervals. Relatives, neighbors, and friends came in to express their sympathy and later partook of the feast prepared by the children of the deceased. This feasting went on for several days.

According to Daniel Olubi, the Oyo CMS native pastor, if the dead person was a man, the initial festivities would be held for nine days, seven days for a woman, and “after certain days again, the ceremony is recapitulated.” The graves, in the missionary narrative, were transformed into domestic shrines because the people made regular sacrifices on them, especially in times of hardship. W. S. Allen describes a sacrifice performed on the grave of a woman who had been buried three days earlier (23). A goat was killed and its blood sprinkled around the grave, while a male relative said a long prayer for the children of the deceased who knelt by the grave.

Due to the military nature of Ibadan as noted earlier, the burials of war chiefs were much more expensive and elaborate in terms of rituals and the scale of feasting than those of ordinary people. For instance, on March 29, 1869, the death of Bashorun Ogunmola, Ibadan's head chief, was announced by several gunshots. Seven women, one boy, and a horse were killed to accompany him to the other world. It is not clear if all of those were interred with him

in the same grave. They were meant to wait on him in the afterlife. Meanwhile, during his illness (he had died of smallpox), a boy and a girl had been offered in sacrifice. On the eve of his death, sixty sheep and goats were killed in sacrifice, “each tied in a bundle and thrown about in front of his house supposing that, when death comes and sees these victims, he will feed upon them and return and so the diseased life would be spared.”

Unfortunately, he was not spared. It is important to note that *Sonponna* (cult of smallpox) priests could not carry off the corpse of the head chief, as they would have done to an ordinary person killed by the same disease. No doubt, they “officiated” during the cleansing rituals, but Ogunmola was given a state burial as evident in the number of people sacrificed upon his death and the scale of the accompanying festivities. He was laid to rest in his home. Sometimes military chiefs died on the battleground, and if their corpses could not be sent home immediately for burial depending on the distance of the warfront, they were interred somewhere close to the scene of war. This was because military engagements sometimes lasted several months. However, immediately after the war came to an end, their bones were exhumed and brought back home for a proper burial. On August 29, 1873, Allen records that the bones of “an influential chief in this quarter who was killed in the last Ijesa wars were brought ... for burial at home.” He was given a full military burial with guns fired in every direction and all the necessary rituals and ceremonies observed.

Perhaps at this point, we should consider the significance of these home burials and their associated rituals. Generally, burial rituals were meant to assist in the transition of the dead into the realm of the ancestors by ensuring his/her ritual purity. Moreover, the rupture created in the social fabric by the departure of a member was also repaired through such rituals. Social relationships were symbolically restructured and the heirs of the dead empowered to replace them. Seen from another perspective, funeral rites were celebrations of the “patriarchal and ontological principles of Yoruba life. In this sense, funerals “redefined kin groups through assertive acts of power over those of lower status.” For example, a dead man's wives were reallocated to new husbands (mostly without the consent of the affected women); children were pawned as interest on loans taken to finance an elder's burial; and most significantly, slaves, who represented the helpless class, were sacrificed to ease the passage of the deceased or to wait on him in the afterlife. All these show that even during these end-of-life rites, the survival and stability of the social order were paramount, and no price was considered too high to be paid for it.

Home burial was central to all these aspirations. It ensured that the dead had a smooth transition to the afterlife aided by potent rituals supervised by their survivors at home. It also guaranteed that the graves of the deceased were within easy reach for regular contact and offerings. Sacrifices were made on the graves, and serious conflicts within the kin group were resolved at the graves of their ancestors.

The mutual contact between the living and the dead was thus mediated, to some extent, by the physical grave located in the house. A burial where all the necessary rituals had been observed, ceremonies and feasting carried out to match the status of the dead, and the dead set up for this long-term relationship with his or her kin was thus seen as a “befitting” or “proper” burial. Such a well-executed burial would not only attract the approval of the community, but also the benevolence of the departed spirits. However, it appears all this symbolism and concern for social equilibrium were lost on the CMS agents whose descriptions and narratives of these burials reek, not surprisingly, of prejudice and disapproval.

The people are presented as “heathens” who worship the dead. On an occasion when Daniel Olubi interviewed a neighbour on the purpose of the elaborate feasts put up to celebrate the dead, the man was alleged to have responded, “Yes, to be applauded of men, if even we have to put our children into pawn for it, and this is praiseworthy.” Again, when Allen attended the burial of the war chief whose bones were brought home, he was not impressed by the fact that the chief’s remains had been brought home for a proper burial, but appeared rather piqued by the fact that a stump of banana (plantain stem) had been carefully wrapped with clothes and laid in state for visitors to pay their last respects. This to him was deceitful conduct. Perhaps the bare bones should have been displayed!

The Burial Rites in Ogbomoso

Idowu opines that one of the first rites performed is to slay a fowl which is called *Adiẹ-ìrànà* the fare-fowl. This is done in order to make the road easy for the deceased. During the lying-in-state, a yam is prepared and a portion of it is placed at the foot of the bier; this food is regarded as food for the deceased. While the corpse is lying-in-state, the chief mourners, the widows and daughters, are not expected to participate in the death-feast that follows (205).

In fact, according to Ellis, “they are shut up in an adjacent apartment, where they are compelled by custom to remain during the three days that a corpse invariably lies in state” (9). During the period of being secluded, they are forbidden to take bath, and, for at least a day, custom requires them to refuse all food, after which they usually allow themselves to be persuaded to take some nourishment. The actual burial of the corpse is seen as a kind of preliminary event to the funeral process during the interment, the children, relatives, friends and neighbours of the deceased gather round with gifts, such as clothes, money and other material things meant for the use of the deceased in the next life. As noted by Idowu, when the corpse is lowered into the grave, the children and relatives of the deceased draw near it, according to the family status, with a sacrificial victim, a goat, and offer their gift through the “officiant” or *babá ìsínkú* (205). As the gift is offered, the deceased is implored to accept the offer and not to sleep wherever he may be but rather to open his eyes wide and watch over his children and belongings and also to be ready to fight for them whenever there is need. Relatives, friends and neighbours of the deceased who wish to send message to their own people who are already in the ancestral land are also allowed to do so either verbally or materially.

The next rite to be performed is known as *Bí bá òkú ya’hùn*, Idowu refers to this rite as “entering into a covenant with the deceased (205), while Olajubu and Olupona call it “separation of the dead from the living” (100). This rite is performed in order to break off any physical connection or relationship between the dead and the living and for the living to say farewell to the deceased as well as impresses “it upon him that now he is no longer in his former earthly state” but belongs to another realm. And that he now has the responsibility of watching and protecting those he left behind. This rite is performed, according to Idowu, by the “officiant” who descend into the grave and slays the sacrificial victim. He splits kola nuts and puts certain items, such as food, beside the body (205). As noted by Olajubu and Olupona, this ritual can also be carried out by destroying the religious or professional paraphernalia of the deceased and retaining only a fraction of it for the children in case they want to consult with him as an ancestor at a later date (100).

During the interment, after the body has been lowered into the grave, items such as food rum, and cowries are placed in the grave and the body is sprinkled with the blood of a he-

goat, sacrificed to propitiate *Èlẹ́gbà* (the Devil). A few cowries are thrown in, and then the grave is filled up. There are other various articles placed in the grave depending on the guild of the deceased. For instance, during the burial of an *àyàn*- a drummer, after all the necessary rituals have been done, *Pàlà* and *Opáílù*, instruments used for beating drums, are put at the left hand of the corpse in the grave. After this, the grave is covered up while other necessary rituals follow (Ellis 199). The funeral, according to Drewal, involves seven days of ritual called *ètùtù*, which are performed “to convey the spirit of the deceased to its other-worldly realm where it remains along with other ancestral spirits” (38-39). The first day of the ritual is known as *ojo-ìsínkú*; it is the day of interment.

The third day is for feasting and is called *Ìtaòkú*. the seventh day, *Ìje-Òkú* or *Ojo Ìje* is meant for public celebration. On this occasion, according to Ayantayo, if the deceased is a drummer, one of the drummers will climb the roof of the house of the deceased. The man on the roof will be dancing to the drumming going on. After sometimes a fowl will be thrown and he must catch it; if he does not catch the fowl, certain rituals must be performed. The fowl is then slaughtered, with the blood poured on the ground, while the man on the roof steps on it as he descends from the roof (119-222). After this ritual, dancing will continue, as relatives, friends and well-wishers follow the children of the deceased and the drummers to the marketplace. At the market place, all the drummers will be beating their talking drums while the participants will be dancing in turn.

It is noteworthy that both the Greek and Yoruba perform a funeral rite of animal and human sacrifices at the grave side. For instance, Homer (*Iliad* 18; 336-337) describes how some Trojan youths were sacrificed at the burial of Patroclus. Not to be left out is the funerary ritual of war heroes whose wives and horses were also buried with them. According to Kurtz and Boardman (144-147) and Garland (34-36), there is evidence that this kind of funeral rites even occurred in the Classical era, even though, Solon had forbidden such sacrifices. From Yoruba traditional set up, the king is regarded as sacred and as Mustapha et al explain, the burial of a king is sacred and secretive. After all the necessary sacrifices have been performed with various rites and rituals, human beings were known to have been buried with kings (41-42). This is known as “*Abóbakú*”. This was done because it was believed that a king could not go on a journey alone; he must be accompanied. It was also done so that the king would have people to send on errand in the hereafter, just like in the normal life on earth.

According to Idowu, several days after the burial, another rite is performed; it is known as *Fífa eégún òkú wólé* – 'Bringing the spirit of the deceased into the house' (206). With this rite, it is believed that the *egúngún*- (masquerade) provides the link between the living and the ancestors and, at times, are seen as representing the ancestors. Thus the *egúngún* are represented as playing a role that cuts across descent-group (Morton-Williams 340-347; Bascom 93-94,). When this rite is being performed, in some areas, it is customary for an *egúngún* to come out from the room of the dead man seven days after the burial. The masquerade must have the same physical appearance with the deceased and should be able to imitate the dead man as he brings greetings from the dead man to the other members of the family and people in the compound. This is why they refer to the *egúngún* as *Ará Òrun Kínkín*- visitor from heaven (Mustapha 73-74).

The Ogbomoso people perform other rites at the grave side of the deceased at a later time either to appease the deceased or the gods, depending on the circumstance. In most cases, children pray and make annual offerings to a dead parent for spiritual protection. According to

Abimbola, each adult who dies becomes an *òrìṣà* to his own family since all ancestors are viewed as such (75). These beliefs are related to the concept of *orí*. As noted by Bascom, these annual sacrifices are made on the day on which the founder used to make offerings to his own *orí*; this is like the *Genesia* of the Greeks. There are other ceremonies performed in remembrance of the deceased, one of such is known as *Ìyẹyìn òkú padà*. This ceremony can be performed at any time, even 'several years' after the burial (72). This is why the Yoruba, during such funeral ceremony, sing as follows:

Òkúolówó, ọdún mèta. Òkú olòṣì, oṣù mèfà.

Òkú ọlómọ, àṣẹṣẹtúnṣe.

The burial of a rich man is celebrated for three years.

The burial of a wretched man is celebrated for six months. The burial of a man with children is celebrated year after year.

The funeral rites practised in ancient Greece and in Yoruba traditional setting, including the ritual lamentation, the grave gifts, the animal and human sacrifices as well as the periodical rituals performed days and years after the burial and more importantly the coin put in the mouth of the deceased during burial, did not just represent a sentimental show of respect for tradition or for the deceased. Rather, they were performed out of religious conviction of ensuring that the deceased gain an entrance to the underworld, and there remain as ancestors. To the Greeks, the realm is Hades, Elysium or Tartarus, depending on the deeds of the deceased while alive. The question that readily comes to mind now is 'where is the location of the afterlife or hereafter of the Yoruba?' To answer this question, Dopamu suggests that the Yoruba will probably point to the sky, indicating the heaven (12). To them, the heaven is just above and covered by the clouds. The Yoruba speak of heaven as a place that exists in literal terms. Heaven is viewed by the Yoruba as a very pleasant place to go, and a place that the aged look forward to with eagerness. When an old person is being buried, he is warned to live in heaven according to the established pattern of the place:

To the Yoruba, Ogbomoso people, the judgment of Olódùmarè determines the reward for an individual soul after death. Hence, with reference to afterlife- *Èhìn-Ìwà*—the Yoruba talk of two heavens, *ọrun rere*—'good heaven' and *ọrun àpáàdì*—'potsherd heaven'. The dead go to one of the namely two heavens, depending on how they are judged by Olódùmarè: *ọrun rere* or 'good heaven' is meant for those who lived a virtuous life. *Ọrun apadi*, 'potsherd heaven', on the other hand, is prepared for the wicked where they are tormented. According to Idowu, as good people enter *ọrun rere*, through the gates, it is believed that all their relatives and associates who have gone before them come to meet them in rejoicing/welcome (217).

The Influence of Early Missionaries and Church Cemeteries on Yoruba Burial Rites

The German CMS missionary, Reverend David Hinderer, introduced Christianity to Ibadan in 1853. He had earlier been to Ibadan in 1851 on a reconnaissance visit. His arrival on May 16, 1853 is commemorated in local traditions as *Esin si 'keje lo mu 'gbagbo wo 'Badan*. (The horse was the seventh in the party that brought Christianity to Ibadan.) This was because Hinderer entered Ibadan on horseback followed by five other men, namely, Messrs, Phillips, Dalley, Marsh, Olubi, and Okuseinde. For about forty years, the CMS were the only missionaries in Ibadan. Other denominations joined them only in the last decade of the nineteenth century. The CMS pioneers laboured hard but got little return.

Traditional religion and Islam proved to be very formidable rivals; the latter had been

introduced some two decades earlier. The first Christian converts were slaves, poor widows, and other individuals on the margins of society. It was considered a thing of shame for a titled man or anyone of social significance to associate with the Christians. By 1875, the CMS had three congregations at Kudeti, Ogunpa, and Aremo, all Ibadan suburbs. The total membership was 398, of which 169 were communicants with one native clergy and four lay teachers. There were two schools with a total population of 69 pupils and 5 teachers. This was in a city of over 100,000 inhabitants. Again, early converts suffered a lot of persecution. The slaves were beaten up mercilessly, maltreated, and left to die without care when they took ill. The freeborn were also ostracized.

Betrothals were broken when either party converted. Christian women were beaten up and locked indoors by “heathen” husbands. “Heathen” wives abandoned Christian husbands. Young people who converted were tied up and beaten by their parents. The journals of the missionaries and native agents are replete with records of these “persecutions.” But the Christians persevered, a few paid the supreme price, and the church grew, albeit slowly, until the establishment of colonial rule in 1893, after which it gradually became much easier to practice Christianity.

Death featured significantly in the experience of Oyo Christians. First, it was articulated in the preaching and discussions of mission agents with the people. A common way of starting off conversations aimed at conversion was to ask individuals what would become of them after death. The people always had a ready answer that indicated they expected to become ancestors and probably reincarnate. This was very different from what missionaries had in mind. The Christian message was then preached with its emphasis on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and His victory over death. Believers were therefore not to entertain any fear of death, as this is what would usher them into eternal life. Almost immediately after the first church was established at Kudeti, a graveyard was created. The first of the dead to be buried there was one of the White missionaries who had come to assist with the work—Reverend J. T. Kefer, who died in May 1855. The church cemetery thus developed as a part of the landscape instituted to facilitate a Christian burial. What did this entail?

A Christian burial was devoid of all the sacrifices and rituals associated with “pagan” burials. It was also shorn of all the celebrations and festivities that characterized the latter. It was a solemn affair marked by Christian prayers and hymns. Finally, the dead person was interred in the church cemetery. This had a dual significance. First, it was to separate the Christian dead from “pagan” relations at home. Second, it was to unite the Christian dead with the community of other Christians, dead and alive, within the spiritual ambience of the church. The Christian dead, together

with his new religion skin, thus awaited his resurrection from the dead. An important artifact of this new burial culture was the wooden coffin. Hitherto, the dead had been wrapped in cloths and sometimes in expensive mats before interment. The church then introduced the coffin made by its members. The leading carpenters in the Ibadan Christian community were James Okuseinde, Jacob Oja, and F. L. Akiele (who later moved to Ogbomoso).

This idea of burial in a church cemetery kicked against everything that traditional burial represented. It was seen as a heartless and insensitive separation of the living from their dead kin, who could never become ancestors because the necessary rituals had not been allowed. Initial reaction to this practice was therefore very hostile. In Abeokuta, where Christianity had been established before it got to Ibadan, disputes over where and how

Christians should be buried were quite rampant. James Barber, a CMS agent at Abeokuta, records an incident concerning an old woman. Her “pagan” relatives “would not suffer the body of the old woman to be taken away by the *oibo*es [Christians] and to be interred in the cemetery which they called thrown into the bush.” They invited the *Ogboni* (an esoteric cult devoted to worship of the earth but which also exercised judicial powers) to perform the burial. In fact, the idea of burying one’s parent “in a box in the bush,” as the non-Christians saw it, was deeply disturbing if not outright offensive. No doubt, the missions wanted their converts buried on “holy ground,” but this new practice of separating the dead from their family “challenged the very process of social reproduction in its moral as in its physical aspect.”

Burial conflicts in Ibadan were not as serious as the Abeokuta, Ondo, or Ogbomoso cases reported by CMS missionaries in those areas. However, sometimes relatives protested the burial of their dead in the Ibadan churches. Allen records on August 4, 1874 that the relatives of a man he had buried in the church were not pleased with the action. He promptly explained to them the significance of a Christian burial and ends his narrative with the submission that he believes he has convinced them of their errors and that they were satisfied. However, since this is a one-sided account, there is no way of verifying if the aggrieved family was actually pacified. Perhaps, because of the general hostility to Christians in Ibadan society, the mission was very careful not to aggravate matters. Civil issues in nineteenth-century Oyo were as volatile as its external affairs. It was as if the entire community sat on one big keg of gunpowder. Any slight pressure could spark a spate of civil disorder. The missions certainly were not prepared to be the ones to provoke any crisis. Even when they needed to bury converted slaves, they sought the permission of their masters before doing so. Where permission was withheld, the mission allowed the matter to rest. The majority of the burials in the churchyard were, therefore, not controversial. A few more white mission agents who died in Oyo were interred in the church.

Individuals identified as the pillars of the Oyo Ibadan Christian community and their spouses were also given church burials. The case of Comfort Phebe Oyeboode is recorded in the journals of both Allen and Daniel Olubi. She died of post-delivery complications and was buried in the churchyard beside her father, who was the late scripture reader at the Aremo CMS church. Her husband later became the first indigene of Ibadan to be ordained a priest in the Anglican Church. Perhaps more touching were the cases of children. There were probably as many children’s deaths recorded in the missionary narratives as adults. Infant mortality was particularly high in nineteenth-century Ibadan. The families of the native agents too had their share of the scourge. Allen, for example, lost two children to smallpox (one ten months old and the other eighteen months) between 1868 and 1869. He also recorded burying several children from the Christian community who had died of diarrhoea in 1874. All these children were buried in the church cemetery. A touching story was told by Daniel Olubi in 1876 of a female slave belonging to an Ijebu master who died while the man was away on a journey. None of the neighbours were willing to bury the woman because her owner was a particularly cantankerous character. Instead, they deposited the body outside the city by a brook and placed her three-month-old infant in a calabash beside her. The infant was exposed to heavy downpours before Christians discovered her and took her in. She died after eight days, probably of pneumonia. But because she had been baptized after her initial rescue, she was given a befitting Christian burial in the church yard.

This incident shows that baptism in the church was a major qualification for a

Christian burial. But it did not always guarantee it. Any baptized member that fell into apostasy was denied a space in the cemetery and ultimately a church burial. This was the sad case of Abel Oderinde. His father, James Oderinde, had been the “headman” of Ibadan Christians from the mid-1850s until he died in 1877 and had contributed significantly, as a lay leader, to the survival and expansion of Christianity in that early phase. After his death, his two sons turned away from Christianity. John Oderinde became a Muslim and took the name Bakare while Abel, his brother, became very wayward and immoral. The latter eventually died of what missionaries called a “female disease.” His mother wanted him buried in the church cemetery so that he might “sleep near his father and that he might be where his father is in the next world.” The clergy declined because Abel had clearly denied the faith before his death. His brother then sent for Muslims, who buried him.

Conclusion

This work examined the influence of Christianity on burial rites in Nigeria, particularly the history of Christianity in Nigeria in general and Ogbomoso to determine the importance of Christianity on the society, to assess the level of influence Christianity has had on burials in Ogbomoso land in Oyo State, to recommend ways of improving the influence of Christianity on burial rites in Nigeria and to determine the economic status of the family of the deceased immediately after burial rites.

The work also revealed that Christianity is very important to the society. It further revealed that Christianity influences burial rites in Ogbomoso. Furthermore, it showed that the death of a family member affects the economic status of a family. It is obvious that Christianity has exerted enumerable influence on the Yoruba burial rites and practices and made the Yoruba people have a number of changes in the entire practice. Such a change should make Christians understand the place of the Bible on their culture and align with the Bible and Christian teachings for sound teachings and practices in our various culture.

There is need for further improvement of burial rite in Ogbomoso, which will give room for further research. There is need for the church to train and teach the members on the significance of burial rites and its relations to burial rites among the Jews. There is need for the Ogbomoso people to compare their burial rites with the practice of burial rites among many other people in other cultures. This will help with the analysis of the rites and considering aspects of the burial rites which are ideal and those that are not culturally legitimate.

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