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OUTDOOR SCULPTURES AS SYMBOLS OF IDENTITY AND SOURCE FOR HISTORICAL DOCUMENTATION: REFLECTION ON FIVE SELECTED SCULPTURES IN SOME TOWNS IN YORUBALAND, SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The early histories of most ancient Yoruba towns in Southwestern Nigeria are derived primarily from oral traditions that have been transmitted across generations. These histories are deeply embedded in the people's folklore, praise poetry, and oral narratives. However, the reliability of oral tradition as a historical source has long been questioned because the transmission of information across successive generations may introduce distortions and inaccuracies. Consequently, historians often corroborate oral accounts with other forms of historical evidence, including archaeological remains, material culture, and sculptural artefacts. Across many cultures, outdoor sculptures have served as enduring media for documenting and preserving significant historical and cultural events. Likewise, numerous communities in Yorubaland have consciously or unconsciously produced outdoor sculptures that embody important historical narratives and cultural memories associated with their origins and development. This study examines five outdoor sculptures located in selected Yoruba towns to explore their historical significance and assess their value as sources of historical documentation and preservation. Adopting a qualitative research approach, the study utilised both primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through field observations and structured interviews, while secondary data were drawn from relevant scholarly literature. The findings reveal that the selected sculptures encapsulate valuable historical information that complements oral traditions and contributes to a more comprehensive reconstruction of Yoruba history. The study concludes that outdoor sculptures constitute important repositories of indigenous historical knowledge and recommends their conservation, documentation,

and development as cultural tourism assets capable of generating revenue while promoting Nigeria's cultural heritage.

Keywords: *Documentation, Historical Sources, Yorubaland, Outdoor-Sculptures, Southwestern-Nigeria*

1. Introduction

The Yoruba are one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. They occupy the Southwestern part of the country, although there are pockets of them in neighbouring West African countries such as Benin Republic, Togo, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire and the Caribbean. Before the art of writing was invented and histories were documented in written form in Africa and particularly among the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria, the people memorised their mythology, literature, tradition and culture, transmitting the legend orally from one generation to another. Samuel Johnson in his book *History of the Yorubas* quoted by Fabunmi (1985, p.2) opines that, "The origin of the Yoruba Nation is involved in obscurity. Like the early history of most nations, the commonly received accounts are for the most part purely legendary. The people being unlettered, and the language unwritten, all that is known is from oral traditions carefully handed down". That is why an African adage according to Abdul (2025) says, a whole library vanishes when a knowledgeable elderly person or adult passes away".

Brown (1967) observes that one of the difficulties involved in the writing of African history using oral tradition is deciding how much weighting to give to such tradition noting that very many inaccuracies may result when knowledge is passed on between hundreds or thousands of people. Consequently, historians try to check oral tradition against written records or other sources of historical knowledge. Corroborating the above, Birmingham (1970) maintains that historians sought advice from other specialists in attempting to portray the West African past. He notes that archaeologists have studied the material remains of man's activity in order to categorise the major stages of West African historical development. The above observation by Birmingham is also supported by Wilks (1970) when he writes that recent advances in African historiography have taken place against a background of what has been aptly termed a "data exposition". He notes that this has resulted from historians' utilisation of materials from other disciplines; linguistic and social anthropology, from the development of field techniques for the recording of oral "text" of one sort or another, from the increasingly systematic study of the available documentary sources, many of which have lain virtually unused until very recent years. He affirms that for many parts of Africa, the quest for documentary materials is bringing into light an unexpected rich range of sources for the reconstruction of the continent's past. Therefore, this paper is written to showcase the relationship between history and art, particularly sculpture by interrogating the history of five selected towns through sculptural works of art in Yorubaland, Southwestern Nigeria.

The scope of this study covers five selected historical outdoor sculptures that are erected in five Yoruba towns of Southwestern Nigeria to keep their age-long tradition alive which are purposively selected for this study. They are the statue of Oduduwa in Ile-Ife, Agemo statue in Ijebu-Ode, the Oguola statue in Ipara-Remo, Princess Akesan statue in Iperu-Remo and the statue of Oronna and his mystical leopard in Ilaro the socio-cultural and political headquarters of Yewaland. The study highlighted and analysed the features inherent in each of the selected

statues that are associated with the genealogy, praise name or oral tradition of the communities or towns where the statues are erected.

2. Theoretical Framework

The study hinges on Cultural Memory Theory (CMT) propounded by Jan Assmann. The theory focuses on how artistic expression (Monuments or Sculptures) serve as “Memory devices” conserving the past and defining a group’s sense of unity. It examines how societies use art to bridge past and present to form a collective identity. This theory is most appropriate for the study because each of the five selected monuments or statues for the study documents, conserves or serves as memory device which helps to keep past information about the origin, migration and settlement of the towns where the monuments exist inform of oral sources and are used to authenticate plausible information about the communities in the present day respectively.

3. Review of Related Literature

3.1 Relationship between Art and History

Art and history are interrelated disciplines. Alawode (2023) simply defines art as the interpretation of one’s inner conception through a particular medium or different media. Ezenagu and Olatunji (2014) define art as the product of human creative activity in which materials are shaped or selected to convey an idea, emotion, or visually interesting forms. Chanda (2009) cited in Ezenagu and Olatunji (2014) posits that the word ‘art’ can refer to visual arts which include painting, sculpture, architecture, photography, decorative art, craft and other visual works that combine materials and form. Similarly, Onipede (2022) observes that art has always been a common attribute of humans. He maintains that art is a component part of culture and can be defined as the physical or outward expression of human creative abilities in visual, audio, literary or performance format. Art is as old as man and, through the ages, has found expression based on the beliefs, available materials, level of civilisation, realities and shared experiences in the environment defined by the creative products. From the earliest records of man to the present, art has been used to express human intents, desires and fears.

History on the other hand has also been defined by various scholars. For instance, Fabunmi (1985) defines history as “the story of the past and that which we come to know as the result of an enquiry. It is a story of the past, written or unwritten, for things were happening in the past long before historical records began by about 4,000 B. C. Ogunnaike and Erinoso (2020) opine that history is major bedrock of any human society’s development. They argue that, no individuals, groups, families and nations can progress without having an enduring sense of history. They maintain that historical consciousness propels human beings to project further into the future with the sole aim of creating and enjoying a better life. They apprise that the word “History” has been variously conceptualised by writers and scholars across the universal climes. They maintain that it is apposite to state that Herodotus, who is regarded as the father of history, simply describes it as ‘enquiry’, that is, rigorous probing into the past.

Erinoso (2007) cited in Ogunnaike and Erinoso (2020) avers that history is an organised narrative of the past events which depends on the interpretation of the historian as he translates the selected data into narrative forms. Similarly, Marwick (1984, p.56) cited in Ogunnaike and Erinoso (2020) argues that history refer to what actually happened in the past, the activity of

enquiry into the past, based on the rigorous study of sources; the interpretation(s) produced by the activity, the accumulated body of knowledge about the past; being based on the interpretation of fallible human beings (historians) using fragmentary and imperfect materials. Mittler (2000) avers that art is often considered as a kind of mirror to the past, a way of gaining valuable insights into bygone eras. Many artworks provide valuable information about important people, places and events. In essence, an artist's work (product) is a historical material. What artists produced is what historian's document. Mittler (2000) notes further that painting and sculpture often reveal how people looked and dressed, and they even record their behavior and accomplishments. Picture also illustrates places and significant events and reveal how artists feel about them. For instance, how could anyone fully understand the civilisation of ancient Egypt without studying the pyramids? Similarly, a study of the Renaissance would be, at best incomplete without reference to works of Michelangelo or Leonardo da Vinci. If we agree that an understanding of the present can be enhanced by a study of the past then a close examination of art, particularly sculptures makes good sense. Idubor (1964) also lends credence to the use of artworks, particularly sculpture in documenting history in his quotation:

People must not forget that literary historian alone cannot record history in perfection. Artists, as a matter of fact, contribute in no small measure to the recording of history in relation to the state of civilization of man at any particular time. p.6

What Idubor is saying in essence is that products of art are equally good sources that literary historians can employ in documenting and checking the plausibility or authenticity of oral traditions that they have collected on the field. This opinion is also held by Wilks (1970) who notes further that there are works of African history whose authors have relied almost entirely upon documentary sources. He believes that the historian is in a favourable position when he is able to combine both documentary and oral sources, and many of the more existing development in the discipline in recent years have resulted from just this possibility. He therefore stresses that the continuing development of African historical studies must depend both upon the extensive and scientific recording of oral materials and upon relentless search for documentary materials. Alluding to the foregoing, Segy (1975) cited in Adekoya (2023) observes that although the pre-colonial African could not write, he transmitted his feelings, beliefs, values and other aspect of cultural traditions through his visual arts of which sculpture is one. Sculpture was an additional language through which the African expressed and communicated with the visible and invisible world. These have been in the form of ancestral figures, statuettes and masks whose productions were inspired by religious beliefs. Parrott (1972) argues that buried deep in the earth, small objects in the likeness of human heads and figurines of animals fashioned rather roughly from reddish clay, which were fired or baked to hardness (a material known as *terra cotta*), have been discovered in northern Nigeria. Archaeologists speculate that these were the work of the Nok peoples. The artifacts help to establish Nok as the most ancient of datable African cultures, perhaps existing well over two thousand years ago.

3.2 Meaning and Scope of Sculpture

Adekoya (2017) argues that the term "sculpture" has been defined by various scholars, interestingly they all agreed that sculpture is an art form, creative works of arts, particularly a branch of fine arts that is primarily concerned with the creation of expressive forms in two or three-dimensions. Like other aspects of fine arts: painting and drawing, the term sculpture is

also used to describe both the process and the end product of its creation. Adekoya (2002) defines sculpture as the act of making representation or creating images in stone, wood, clay, metal such as bronze, brass, gold and some other assorted, expensive and sophisticated materials such as fibre glass, Plaster of Paris (POP), polystyrene, and through the process of carving, moulding, welding, casting, ornamenting and smiting.

Again, Rogers (1988) while discussing the concept, definition and scope of sculpture, maintains that sculpture is the branch of fine arts that is primarily concerned with the creation of expressive form in three-dimensions. He enumerates the wide range of sculptures to include different kinds of artworks, which extend from free-standing, independent objects, through various forms of high, medium and low relief, to extreme forms of low relief that are little more than raised drawings. Rogers also observes that sculpture is not a fixed term that applies to a permanently circumscribed category of objects or set of activities, but rather, it is the name of an art that grows and changes, and is continually extending the range of its activities and evolving new kinds of objects. He notes that sculpture in the round and in relief was first produced by the paleolithic man and since then, there have been few societies in which sculpture has not played an important role. In a similar vein, Ijisakin and Ogunjimi (2015) cited in Adekoya (2024) maintain that public sculpture is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria. They posit since ancient times, art generally and sculpture in particular had been owned, appraised, and revered by the community where such sculpture was produced and used.

3.3 Methodology

The researchers adopted the qualitative descriptive research method for the study. During the course of the research, the information/data collected were organized and analysed based on their themes. The researchers made use of a self-developed structured in-depth interview guide. Data for this study were derived from two sources; primary and secondary sources. Primary sources included field observation which involved the researchers visiting the locations of the five selected outdoor sculptures to have on the spot examination or assessment and to photographically or pictorially documented and discussed, visited the *Obas'* palaces or the community leader's home to conduct interview on the study vis-à-vis the name of the town, origin, migration and settlement, importance of the sculpture to the community/town. While the secondary source involved the review of all available relevant and related materials to get an in-depth insight into the study. Data collected was analysed using the descriptive method. This entails analyzing and describing the different elements observed in each of the selected sculptures in a very clear and orderly manner that demonstrates their peculiarities, individualism, and differences as well as their importance to the community where they represent.

3.4 Selected Statues and their Features

3.4.1 Oduduwa Statue and Ile-Ife Tradition

Ile-Ife according to Yoruba mythology as recorded by Atanda (1980) and Fabunmi (1985) is regarded as the cradle/genesis of the Yoruba race. Oduduwa is widely accepted as the progenitor of the Yoruba race. Fabunmi maintains that, there are three versions of the traditional history of the reputed patriarch of the Yoruba race, who is called Oodua in Ife dialect for Oduduwa. According to Atanda (1980) and Fabunmi (1985), the first and most popular tradition among the people of Ile-Ife, is the mythical version that Oduduwa descended from heaven, charged by *Olodumare* (God the Supreme Being and the Lord of Heaven) to establish the Kingdom of the earth. The tradition says the surface of the earth was covered with water,

and a five-fingered fowl was sent by Him from the summit of heavens with magical sand under the charge of a priest, whose title was *Ojomu*. The *Ojomu* threw the sand while the fowl spread it all over the earth. By the power and ordinance of *Olodumare*, dry land appeared, and Oodua, with the reputed sixteen elders and their followers descended by means of a chain at Moore quarter.

The second tradition according to Fabunmi (1985:22) is the more recent version that Oodua migrated to Ile-Ife, either from Mecca, Egypt, or Upper Nubia. While the last but not the least of the three traditions is that Oduduwa came neither from the East nor from the West, but he was one of the people who lived before the deluge, and that after the deluge, he, together with his followers and their families, descended onto dry land by means of chain-rope from their life-boat, which anchored on Oke Ora (Oramfe's hill) from where they came to Moore quarter in Ile-Ife. When the three traditions are synthesised, one will notice that the first and third traditions are close or almost the same. Fabunmi (1985) maintains that until this day, none of the unsophisticated traditional historians of Ife has given any credence whatsoever to the second version of Oduduwa's history as recounted above. They are still quite firm in their belief that Ife is the cradle of the world, and that Oduduwa only descended at Ile-Ife. The first version was retold by the *Obadio*, the traditional keeper of Oduduwa grove/shrine; *Oba* Ifarotimi Falola Olajide, *Obadio* Oodua Agbaye, Ile Ife to one of the authors of this paper and colleagues during field work of the study (see Figure 3).

To document or preserve this age-long tradition, a free standing mixed-media over-life size sculptural piece of Oduduwa in his royal regalia, wearing the ancient *Are* crown (*Ade Are*) on his head, wrapped a big white fabric round his body and also wearing heavy coral beads round his neck (see Figure 1) was erected inside the grove where it was believed that Oduduwa descended from the sky with an iron chain which he held with his left hand, while he used the right hand to hold his magical staff on which a fowl was standing, and another fowl presumed to be the one that scattered the magical sand on the water that covered the earth is also created on the same pedestal. The dressing of Oduduwa in (Figure 1) has been adopted by the current *Ooni* of Ife, His Imperial Majesty, Oba Enitan Adeyeye Ogunwusi, *Ojaja* II as his mode of dressing for his day-to-day activities as shown in (Figure 2). Interestingly, similar Oduduwa statues are erected in Yoruba towns of Sabe and Ketou in Benin Republic to preserve their provenance of origin.

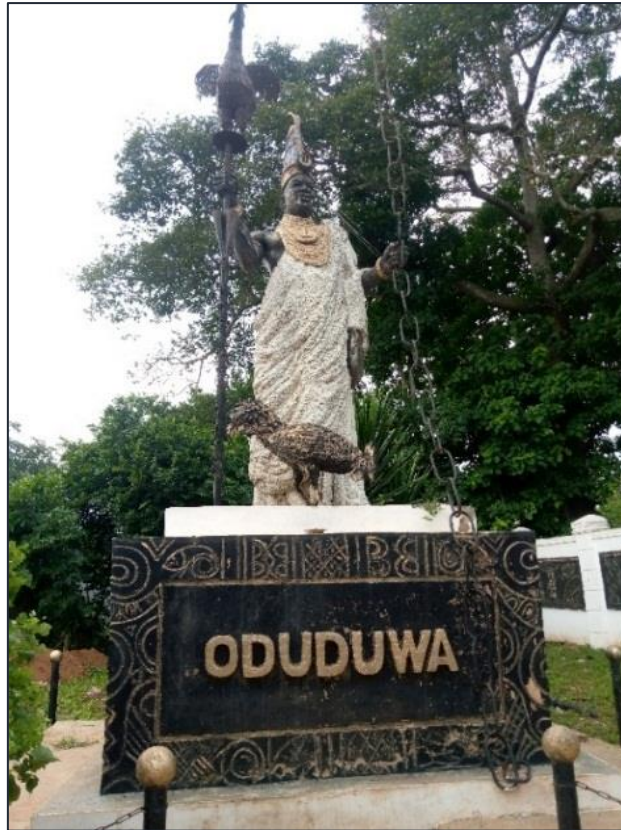


Figure 1: *Oduduwa Statue at the Groove*
Source: Samson Kehinde Adekoya, (2023)



Figure 2: *Ooni of Ife, His Imperial Majesty, Oba Enitan Adeyeye Ogunwusi, Ojaja II, adopting the Oduduwa mode of dressing*
Source: pmnewsnigeria.com, (2020)



Figure 3: Showing the traditional keeper of Oduduwa groove/shrine, Oba Ifamoroti Falola Olajide, Obadio Oodua Agbaye, Ile-Ife, Dr. Samson Olajide Adetunji on his right hand side, Dr. Samson Kehinde Adekoya on his left hand side and the research assistant during the field work for the study.
Source: Dr. Samson Kehinde Adekoya, (2023)

3.4.2 Agemo Statue and Ijebu Praise name

Agemo is one of the prominent deities that are revered and celebrated annually among the Ijebu and Remo people of Ogun State, Southwestern Nigeria. According to *Obanta Newsday* (2004), *Agemo* is said to have been in the entourage of Olu-Iwa the founder of Ijebu-Ode in the first migration of the Ijebu from the ancient kingdom of Owodaiye of Ethiopia which came to an end as a result of the Arab supremacy in the Middle East and the Sudan where Owodaiye was situated.

Agemo among the Ijebu is regarded as their identity and symbol of their unity. This is why the Ijebu are praised as ‘*Omo Alagemo merindinlogun*’, meaning the offspring of sixteen *Agemo*. The sixteen *Agemo* includes: *Agemo Onire* – Tami from Odogbolu which is regarded as the over-all head of all the *Agemo*. It is necessary to state here that the other *Agemo* which are mentioned below are not listed in any particular order, hierarchy or seniority. They are listed as their names came to mind. They include, Ede Olumoro (Imoro), Serefusi (Igbile), Posa (Imosan), Moko (Okun-Owa), Alofe (Ijesa-Ijebu), Onugbo (Okenugbo), Ija Oloko (Imosan), Lapen (Oru), Magodo (Aiyeye), Bajelu (Imuku), Lubamisan (Ago-Iwoye), Petu (Isiwo), Ogegbo (Ibonwon), Idobi (Ago-Iwoye) and Nopa (Imushin).

Agemo statue can be found in Ijebu-Ode and Odogbolu, both in the Ijebu Division of Ogun State, but the one selected for this study (Figure 4) is located at Itoro roundabout in Ijebu-Ode. *Agemo* according to Ijebu mythology, is a historical figure. It is a sacred deity that is dreaded by all, particularly female gender. It is necessary to make some clarification here that *Agemo* imagery is not forbidden for women to see as people speculate. Women usually attend *Agemo* festival at their groove at Agbala in Imosan, a suburb community of Ijebu-Ode. Women are only forbidden to see their luggage which contain their charms and magical powers whenever the *Agemo* priests and their entourages are leaving their respective homes for their annual dance/festival and they usually converge on Agbala. They believe that the presence or appearance of women who are on their monthly menstruation period can neutralise the potency of their charms and magical powers. That is why the appearance or presence of women is forbidden. However, after they may have all arrived and dressed in their costumes for their performances, women do watch them live. Ayandele (1992) remarks that *Agemo* festival is by

far the most colourful ceremony which took place in June when the sixteen *Agemo* priests from their respective towns came with their bands of followers and their “sacred loads” which no woman was allowed to see, to Ijebu Ode to honour and bless the Awujale. The *Agemo* statue (Figure 4) erected at Itooro roundabout, preserves this praise name as it has round the circular lower part of its pedestal, sixteen relief sculptures representing the different *Agemo* forms with their names written under them. Though the statue is produced in fibre glass, the original costume of *Agemo* which it portrays is made from lots of raffia thread of different colours (see Figure 5).



Figure 4: *Dancing Agemo Statue at Itooro Roundabout, Oyingbo, Ijebu-Ode*
Source: Samson Kehinde Adekoya, (2012)



Figure 5: *One of the Agemo in his real costume. Ajagalaru from Oru Ijebu*
Source: Facebook (2025)

3.4.3 *Oguola* Statue and Ipara-Remo History

Ipara-Remo, according to Okubote (2013), is one of the five major and earliest ancient settlements in Remoland. Others are Ilara, Epe, Oko Abirangun and Imo Elese. Ipara is in the northern part of Remo division of Ogun State. Ayodele (2008) informs us that Ipara-Remo served as a boundary town in Remo North or a gateway to Remo Division from the northern part of Nigeria particularly Ibadan. Ayodele further claims that the founder of Ipara-Remo in the early part of the history of the Yoruba people was called *Oguola* and his wife *Oroye*. For this reason, the Ipara-Remo people are referred to in greeting as *Omo Oguola, omo Oroye*. Attesting to the foregoing, Adekoya and Adekoya (2025) assert that Ipara-Remo has a unique tradition of origin. Though like some other ancient cities/towns, the sources for the early history of the town are also limited to oral traditions which were carefully handed down through generation. It is a history that is deeply rooted in the people's folklore and praise names. Adekoya and Adekoya (2025) citing Ipara-Remo mythology, maintain that the town was founded by *Oguola* and his wife *Oroye* over 900 years ago. During an investigation or a study on the history of the town, two traditions of origin and migration were revealed. Interestingly, both traditions agreed that the town was founded by *Oguola* - a hunter/warrior and a crowned prince of Iremo Quarters in Ile-Ife and his wife *Oroye*. The first tradition says that *Oguola*, being a hunter/warrior (after consulting the *Ifa* oracle), left Ile-Ife with his wife *Oroye* on a hunting expedition southward until they got to the area that is known today as Ipara-Remo where the oracle had instructed them to settle.

The second tradition though mythical but sounds more plausible after correlating it with their praise name (*Oriki*) reveals that, Ipara-Remo was founded by *Oguola* a hunter/warrior and a crowned prince of Iremo Quarters in Ile-Ife and his wife *Oroye*. This tradition reveals further that before they left Ile-Ife, customarily they consulted *Ifa* oracle and being a crown prince who was going to establish his own domain, he was given *Opa Ase* (Staff of Office) and other kingship paraphernalia and the *Ifa* priest also gave them an iron chain and instructed them that at their departure they should drop it on the ground. The priest also informed them that the chain would travel through the ground and they should follow this chain underground and settle at the location where the other end of the chain re-surfaced on the ground. According to Ipara-Remo tradition, the chain appeared at a place called Ejina in Ipara-Remo (Figure 7). This is why the people of town are referred to as "*Omo atile run bi atorin*", meaning the people that grew up from the ground like cane. And because the other end of the chain remained at Iremo quarters in Ile-Ife, the people of Ipara are also referred to as "*Omo ojumo tomo loni iyen ti Olufe, ile to mo loni iyen ti Onipara*", meaning today's dawn belongs to the *Olufe*, today's day break is for the *Onipara*.

Adekoya (2025) claims that Ipara-Remo occupied a unique position in the old Oyo Empire in the 19th century during the various internecine wars that rocked Yorubaland. Many history scholars among who are; Johnson (2017) as well as Mabogunje and Omer-Cooper (1971) attested to this historical and superlative feat, when they revealed in their various research works conducted on Yorubaland that Ipara was a permanent military base for the Ijebu and Remo warriors during the various internecine wars. Mabogunje and Omer-Cooper (1971) regarded Ipara as being so great that the then *Awujale* of Ijebuland, *Oba Figbajoye* – Anikilaya who reigned between 1820 and 1851 suggested that Ipara be made the war camp of both the Ijebu and Remo armies. This was agreed on and Ipara became the abode (fortress) for the Yoruba. It was also revealed that *Oguola* loved his children so much that he built an underground bunker to hide them during warfare in order to save them from the aggression of

enemy forces who might want to take them as slaves. This is why Ipara people are referred to as “*Omo a bi’le soro kile lanu*” meaning “the descendants of he whose command opens up the ground”. A close look at the statue of Oguola (Figure 6) shows all the paraphernalia of a warrior hanging on his body, which attested to this version of their tradition of migration and history. He used his two hands to hold the chain that was mentioned in this version of their tradition of origin, a small bag presumably containing his charms hanging on his shoulder and his Dane gun which reaffirm the fact that he was a hunter/warrior, is hanging on his back. Also, behind the statue are two poles, one could be likened to the *Opa Ase* that was given to him as a royal prince as mentioned in this tradition while the second pole resembles an arrow which he used during his hunting expeditions. In front of the pedestal immediately under the marble inscription, is a relief work which symbolises the undulating structure of the ground on which the underground bunker was erected. Thus, to keep or preserve this tradition and as a symbol of Ipara people’s identity, the Leo Club of Ipara Remo commissioned the erection of the statue in 1999.

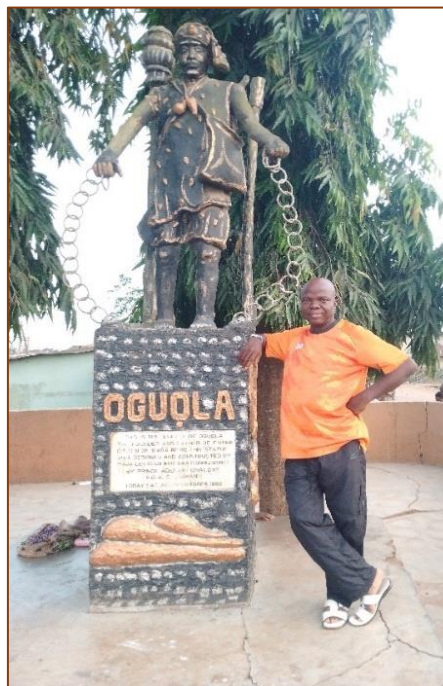


Figure 6: *Oguola Statue in front of the Nigeria Police Station, Ipara-Remo*
Source: Samson Kehinde Adekoya (2026)



Figure 7: The spot where Oguola and Oroye his wife were said to have come out of the ground at Ejina in Ipara-Remo.
Source: Samson Kehinde Adekoya, (2026)

3.4.4 Akesan Statue and Iperu-Remo tradition

Iperu-Remo is a town in the present day Ikenne Local Government Area of Ogun State. It is the most centrally located town in Remo Division. According to Iperu tradition, the town was founded in the mid-19th century by one Princess Akesan and her husband, Ajagbe. For this reason, Iperu-Remo indigenes are praised as “*Omo Akesan Baale Oja*”. There are several conflicting traditions as regards the founding of Iperu-Remo. Interestingly, all the traditions point to Princess Akesan as the founder of the town. Ayodele (2008) avers that there are several claims to the founding of Iperu. He notes that all of them have their merits and demerits. From the claims, one can determine the one which seems to be accurate.

According to Ayodele (2008), the first tradition asserts that Iperu is an off-shoot of Ijebu-Ode. He posits that the opinion of some historians that Remo traditional towns was that Makun, Ogere, Iperu, Isara and Ode-Remo have their genealogical attachment to Ijebu-Ode. Supporting the foregoing, Alao and Oguntomisin (2002) posit that the founder of Iperu and some other Remo towns migrated under the leadership of Obanta first to Ijebu-Ode. It was gathered in another account, that Princess Akesan migrated out of Ile-Ife with her husband, Ajagbe. They came to Oyo and settled down briefly. They left Oyo until they reached the present site of Iperu and settled down. Corroborating the above, Awotesu (2003), maintains that the town, Iperu-Remo was reputed to have been founded several centuries ago by Akesan who was a sister of one of the *Alaafin* of Oyo whose origin is traceable to Ile-Ife, the cradle of all the Yoruba and her farmer/hunter husband, Ajagbe who was from Irewo Quarters in Ile-Ife.

The third tradition is that the founder of Iperu was a woman whose name was Akesan who migrated from Oyo Alaafin. The assertion further indicated that Akesan, a daughter of one of the *Alaafin* of Oyo, was married to Ajagbe and that they left Oyo and wandered onto the unknown until they reached and settled at the present site of Iperu. Yet, another account claims that Iperu was said to have been an off-shoot of another town in Remo – Epe in Sagamu now. Although the focus of this paper is not to investigate the root or place of origin of Princess Akesan, it can be contested considering the various Iperu traditions that it is plausible to link

Princess Akesan to Oyo-Alaafin than relating her with Ile-Ife, Ijebu-Ode or Epe in Sagamu. This is because; the name Akesan is popular in Oyo. There is a big and popular market of ancient record in the history of Oyo called Akesan Royal market and interestingly the only market in Iperu is also called Akesan located at the site where is said to have Akesan settled. Another factor is that the corn meal that Akesan sold is peculiar to Oyo Alaafin and neighbouring towns till today.

Awotesu (2003) contends that Akesan sold boiled maize at the site on which Akesan Hall is now located at a road junction, which eventually grew into Akesan Market. Remoland, then including Ikorodu, was a great route through which people from hinterland passed to the coastal towns of Lagos and Badagry for trade and other purposes. The propinquity of the site to the road interjection on the old caravan route that led from the coastal areas to the far north, even up to the Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean Sea, northward, and from the great Benin Empire in the East through Ijebu-Ode and westwards through Igbore and some of the then villages now constituting present day Abeokuta to Dahomey (now Benin Republic) made the site a convenient and popular place for travellers who stopped over to rest in their long journeys and buy boiled corn from Akesan and for other replenishments.

To preserve the story of their provenance and the founder, the statue of Princess Akesan, (Figure 8) was sponsored by the Akesan Club 54 and mounted in front of their Club Hall (Akesan Hall), facing Akesan market in Iperu-Remo. Quite expectedly, the artist must have relied solely on oral tradition or oral description before producing the statue because she (Akesan) lived in the pre-photographic technology era. Perhaps that is why the artist depicted her seated on a stool preparing and packing her corn meal in an open earthenware, *agbada*, placed in front of her. Beside her is a big earthen pot that is placed on a local earthen stove, suggesting the cooking of the corn meal.



Figure 8: *Akesan Statue Founder of Iperu-Remo in front of Akesan Hall, in front of Iperu-Remo market*
Source: Samson Kehinde Adekoya, (2025)

The composition is executed in red cement. Akesan is depicted with her hair plaited in the traditional Yoruba style called *Suku*, and adorned with bead. She has two neck beads on her neck and two each in her arms. She ties a wrapper that covers her chest to her feet. All these affirm or attest to the fact that she was from a royal parentage. The draperies on her wrapper are also perfectly rendered. The work is both naturalistic and realistic. However, it is pathetic to note that the statue is not taken care of by the club that produced it, even when it is mounted in front of the club house. Obviously, the work is covered by overgrown weeds and its colour is already fading. This abandonment typifies the attitude of some governments and the people to their one time heroes and heroines.

3.4.5 Oronna Statue and his mystical Leopard and Ilaro tradition

According to *Oba* (Dr.) (ESV) Kehinde Gbadewole Olugbenle, *Asade Agunloye IV*, the *Olu* of Ilaro and Paramount Ruler of Yewaland, in his book titled, *Double Grace: Kingship and Service: the Autobiography of His Royal Majesty*, from oral tradition, folktales and publications available, the history of Ilaro is not different from that of many Yoruba towns and cities. They are similar history of migrations and settlements, of wars and of human economic activities. He notes further that usually in many of those instances, the ancient personalities found the indispensable roles of spiritual guidance through *Ifa* oracle which gave directions and solutions as to what should be done.

Oba Olugbenle maintains that Ilaro was said to have been founded by a brave hunter and warrior, Aro who migrated from Oyo in about 1600, after consulting *Ifa* oracle and he was assured of great prospects of migrating from Oyo to a new location. On arrival at the location now known as Ilaro, he settled at a place called Igbo-Aje, the present location of the old Motor Park and Central Market. The name Ilaro is a contraction from the word *Ilu Aro*, meaning the town founded by Aro. He claims that Ilaro people are descendant of Oranmiyan and Oduduwa, with their origin traced to Oyo. As time went on, Aro soon realised the need to fortify his rich settlement with strong men and associates with whom he could build a strong and prosperous community. He naturally turned to his kinsmen, the *Omoobas* (Princes) in Oyo to join him in his fertile settlement so as to assist him in confronting the many external aggressions against the town, especially from the notorious and fearful Dahomean army. This was how the legendary hunter and warlord, *Oronna*, amongst others joined Aro in his town.

Oba Olugbenle claims that *Oronna* was a super human generalissimo, very mighty in battle with the aid of his mystical leopard that distinguished him from other warriors of the time. It was remarkable that during his time, the people of Ilaro were never confronted with any serious aggression since *Oronna* enjoyed maximum supports from Odua and other deities from Itolu, a sub-Ilaro community, to successfully ward off any war or aggression against the town. *Oronna* eventually became old and was said to have mysteriously vanished into the ground with his leopard at the present site called *Oju Oronna* (Oronna shrine), thus, assuming a deity figure in the history of the ancient town.



Figure 9: *Oronna Statue and his mystical Leopard.*
Source: Samson Kehinde Adekoya (2021)

Before he vanished, he was said to have tied a long chain around his waist with the leopard as shown in (Figure 9) and promised that he would always rise to defend the town in the event of any attack, in times of war. He therefore instructed the people to always pull the chain to attract him and the leopard whenever such situations and time arose. To preserve this tradition, the statue of Oronna and his Mystical leopard was erected at the spot called Oju Oronna where Oronna was said to have vanished into the ground.

Conclusion

This study has examined some outdoor sculptures that are used to document, preserve or keep alive the traditions of origin, culture and heritages of five ancient Yoruba towns in Southwestern Nigeria, namely: Ile-Ife which is regarded as the cradle, the capital and the most ancient city in Yorubaland, Ijebu-Ode which is also regarded as the political headquarters of Ijebuland, Ipara-Remo which once served as a permanent military base for the Ijebu and Remo warriors during the various internecine wars, Iperu-Remo and Ilaro the headquarters of Yewaland. The study highlighted those features in five sculptural pieces that documented elements of their history of origin and heritage, particularly, the statue of Oduduwa in Ile-Ife, Agemo at Itooro Roundabout in Ijebu-Ode, Oguola Statue at Ipara-Remo, and Princess Akesan at Iperu as well as the statue of Oronna and his mystical leopard in Ilaro.

The study shows that art and history are interrelated disciplines. It also showed that artworks, particularly sculptures have helped a great deal in documenting and concretising the traditions that were bequeathed orally from one generation to another, which are prone to distortion or alteration. However, the authors observed from the artistic point of view that some of these sculptures are realistically and proportionally produced in terms of their anatomical rendition except the statue of Oguola in Ipara-Remo which lacks good anatomical structure and good proportion, while the statue of Princess Akesan is not well maintained. It is therefore, suggested that these outdoor sculptures should be well maintained and turn to tourist attractions from where the various tiers of government in Nigeria can generate huge revenue as it is done in developed countries of the world.

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