

**ANALYSIS OF AESTHETICS AND USE OF SPACES IN TRADITIONAL  
RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS IN BENIN CITY: A CASE STUDY OF CHIEF  
OGIAMEN'S PALACE**

**BY**

**DIBIA IKENNA AZUBUIKE**

**ENV1805719**

**A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF  
ARCHITECTURE, FACULTY OF ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF  
BENIN, BENIN CITY, EDO STATE.**

**IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF  
BACHELOR OF SCIENCE (B.S.C) IN ARCHITECTURE**

**AUGUST, 2023**



## DECLARATION

By signing this document, I certify that I worked on the project titled "**ANALYSIS OF AESTHETICS AND USE OF SPACES IN TRADITIONAL RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS IN BENIN CITY: A CASE STUDY OF CHIEF OGIAMIEN'S PALACE**" at the University of Benin in Edo State, Nigeria. The text properly acknowledges the material that came from literature and includes a list of sources. This material in its entirety has never before been used for a degree at this university or any other school.

A list of references is supplied with a proper acknowledgement of all sources used throughout this study.

-----

NAME OF STUDENT

-----

SIGNATURE

-----

DATE

## CERTIFICATION

This is to confirm that I, **DIBIA AZUBUIKE IKENNA** completed the research **“ANALYSIS OF AESTHETICS AND USE OF SPACES IN TRADITIONAL RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS IN BENIN CITY: A CASE STUDY OF CHIEF OGIAMIEN’S PALACE”** for the Bachelor of Sciences in Architecture (B.Sc. Architecture), Faculty of Environmental Sciences, University of Benin, Edo State, Nigeria.

-----  
ARC. FELIX I. OMOBUDE

SUPERVISOR

-----  
DATE

-----  
ARC. FELIX I. OMOBUDE

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

-----  
DATE

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this Architectural Dissertation work to God Almighty, my creator, my sustainer, protector and my source of inspiration, wisdom, and insight. He has been my main source of strength.

I also dedicate this work to my mother, Mrs. Nkechinyem Dibia, who has shown me nothing but unconditional love and support.

## **ABSTRACT**

The research **“ANALYSIS OF AESTHETICS AND USE OF SPACES IN TRADITIONAL RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS IN BENIN CITY: A CASE STUDY OF CHIEF OGIAMIEN’S PALACE”** highlights an issue of poorly designed buildings in Benin city which in turn has a negative effect on it’s urban development. The purpose of this research is to thoroughly examine the characteristics of the Benin vernacular architecture and how it can be adopted into contemporary architecture.

In this study, the root of the tree of architecture would be considered when analysing the generic development of Benin vernacular architecture into the modern-day architecture to achieve an environmentally friendly residential building while taking the native or indigenous culture of the Benin people into the design consideration.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

To God be the glory, honour and adoration for his mercies, love and protection all through my stay in school and for giving me the much needed strength and wisdom to finally complete this project.

I wish to appreciate my wonderful parents for their love, care, prayers and support during my years at the university. I also wish to acknowledge my siblings for their financial, moral and spiritual support.

With a grateful heart, I would like to recognize the efforts of my coursemates for being such heartwarming and supportive friends and for their kind words of encouragement.

## TABLE OF CONTENT

TITLE PAGE.....	i
DECLARATION .....	ii
CERTIFICATION .....	iii
DEDICATION .....	iv
ABSTRACT .....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT .....	vi
TABLE OF CONTENT .....	vii
CHAPTER ONE .....	1
1.1 Background to the Study .....	1
1.2 Statement of the problem .....	2
1.3 Aim Of This Research .....	3
1.4 Objective Of This Research .....	3
1.4 Research Questions .....	4
To achieve the stated objectives, the research will address the following questions: .....	4

1.5 Justification of the study .....	4
1.6 Significance of the Study .....	5
1.7 Limitation of the study .....	5
CHAPTER TWO .....	6
2.1: Evolution of Traditional Architecture in Benin from Pre-independence to Contemporary period .....	6
2.3 Spatial Analysis of Residential Buildings in Benin Architecture .....	11
2.4 Fundamental concept of space distribution of palaces in Benin .....	12
2.4 Incorporation Of Benin Architecture Into Modern Buildings .....	20
CHAPTER THREE .....	22
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....	22
3.1 Research Design .....	22
3.2 Sources Of Data .....	22
3.3 Selection Criteria for Case Studies .....	23
3.4 Sample size .....	23
CHAPTER FOUR .....	24

DATA ANALYSIS .....	24
4.1 Overview Of The Ancient Benin Kingdom .....	24
4.2 Case Study: Chief Ogiamien’s Palace .....	25
4.3 History of the Building .....	25
4.4 Description Of The Palace .....	27
4.5 Aesthetic features of The Palace .....	27
4.6 Spaces In Ogiamien Palace .....	30
4.7 Social/Religious Significance of Chief Ogiamien’s Palace .....	39
4.8 Importance Of The Building .....	39
CHAPTER FIVE .....	41
SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION .....	41
5.1 Summary .....	41
5.2 Conclusion .....	41
5.3 Recommendations .....	41
5.4 Contribution To Knowledge .....	42

5.5 Areas For Further Research ..... 42

REFERENCES ..... 43

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background to the Study

The Architecture of a particular place is deeply rooted in the Culture, Religion and Social factors of the people along with the Climatic features of that geographical location. That is why Denyer (1978) describes housing as a symbol of the socio-cultural heritage of a people and culture; culture thus exercises a strong influence on the types and forms of houses. Throughout history, different civilizations have tried to project their culture and religion through their architectural styles and the ancient Benin Kingdom was no different. The ancient Benin kingdom's style of architecture was one of the indigenous styles that drew inspiration from the culture of its people and made use of earth, wood and other locally available materials for construction.

This architectural style is characterised by several distinctive features:

- **Material:** Traditional Benin architecture relied heavily on locally sourced materials like clay, laterite, thatch, mud bricks, etc which are sustainable and environmentally friendly.
- **Walled compounds:** Many traditional Benin buildings are situated within walled compounds. These settlements frequently feature a rectangular or square floor plan and laterite or mud brick walls around them. The walls act as a barrier of defence as well as an adornment, frequently displaying elaborate patterns and relief carvings.

- **Rectangular Structures:** The main buildings in traditional Benin architecture are typically rectangular in shape. They may have thatched or corrugated metal roofs, and the walls are usually made of mud bricks or laterite. The buildings are often one or two stories high.
- **Open Courtyards:** Open courtyards are one of the elements of Benin architecture that promote natural ventilation. The courtyards were also used for social gatherings and ceremonies.
- **Decorative Elements:** Traditional Benin architecture is known for its decorative elements, including elaborate relief sculptures and intricate patterns. These decorations often depict historical and cultural motifs, showcasing the rich heritage of the Edo people.
- **Spiritual and Cultural Significance:** Many traditional Benin buildings have spiritual and cultural significance. They are often associated with the Edo people's religious practices, royal ceremonies, and historical events.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

Colonialism and foreign interactions have resulted in the endangerment of the traditional architecture of Benin. The ancient Benin Empire lost a majority of its historical buildings during the colonial era, the kingdom was attacked and raided several times, one of the most notable one is the British Punitive Expedition of 1897 where british soldiers attacked the Oba's palace, looted it and burnt it in the process as a way of punishing the Oba for resisting colonial rule. The soldiers also stole many priceless historical artefacts and art works.



*fig 1.1 A picture of the Oba's palace in 1897 after the Punitive Expedition.*

*Source: Wikipedia*

Following the punitive expedition, the British established colonial control over the Benin Kingdom. This colonial rule had a profound impact on the region's architectural heritage. Traditional structures and building techniques were often replaced by European architectural styles, and British authorities imposed their own urban planning and development strategies.

### **1.3 Aim Of This Research**

The aim of this research is to analyse the Aesthetics and Use Of Space of residential buildings in traditional Benin architecture.

### **1.4 Objective Of This Research**

The primary objectives of this research are as follows:

- To analyse the aesthetic features of a typical Benin Traditional residential building.
- To examine the interior spaces that make up a Traditional benin Residential Building.
- To analyse the role that art and culture plays in Benin Architecture.
- To enumerate the construction materials of Benin Architecture.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

**To achieve the stated objectives, the research will address the following questions:**

- What are the requirements of each individual space in a building?
- What are the aesthetical features of the Benin vernacular architecture?
- What are the effects of culture on a building?
- What are the indigenous building materials of Benin vernacular architecture that

are still applicable to modern day architecture.

#### **1.5 Justification of the study**

History gives us the tools to analyse and explain problems in the past, it positions us to see patterns that might otherwise be invisible in the present – thus providing a crucial perspective for

understanding and solving current and future problems. Studying the traditional architectural style of the Benin People not only preserves the traditional heritage of the Benin people but it provides sustainable architectural solutions that are best suited for the natural conditions of the modern day Edo state and most parts of the South-south geo-polital zone of Nigeria.

### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

This study's findings will provide valuable insights into the Architectural design challenges faced by building designers in Benin city. The research outcomes will be relevant for architects, engineers, urban planners, and policymakers, helping them design and implement more effective strategies to combat inadequate building designs and preserve a city's architectural heritage. Furthermore, the study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on building maintenance, indoor air quality, and public health, particularly in tropical regions with similar climatic conditions.

### **1.7 Limitation of the study**

The number of Benin historical buildings are very limited Due to the destruction of these buildings over the last few centuries which results in very few accessible traditional pieces of architecture, and the existing ones are well guarded for the sake of preservation.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1: Evolution of Traditional Architecture in Benin from Pre-independence to Contemporary period**

The evolution of traditional Architecture in Benin can be summarised into some important points to the following categories:

- **Pre-colonial Period (40 BC – 1890 AD):** During this period, the traditional architecture of Benin was said to be similar to that of Amsterdam, Netherlands. The characteristic features of Benin Architecture during this period were walls made of sun dried mud bricks, houses with large courtyards, thatch roof, bronze artefacts, Intricate patterns and reliefs for aesthetics and a sequence of ceremonial rooms decorated with brass plaques. Benin Architecture utilised locally sourced materials which were both sustainable and well suited to the local climate.

- **The colonial architectural period (1897 AD – 1960 AD):** It was during this period that Benin suffered the 1897 British Punitive expedition where the Kingdom was attacked and the Oba's palace was looted and burnt, this greatly affected the cultural and historical heritage of the Benin people and by extension, their Architecture because Architecture is a reflection of the culture, religion, art and geology of a people in a geographical location. After the palace was Burnt down, there was an influx of British soldiers, professionals and government officials who then altered the architectural landscape of the Benin Kingdom by introducing Western architectural styles and Urban planning. The Colonial influence brought about the following

infrastructures; Government Reserved Area (G.R.A), legislative quarters, doctors' quarters and barracks.

- **The independence Architectural period (1960 AD – 1979 AD):** During this period, Benin observed government housing schemes for workers at both state and federal level. There was the emergence of institutional house types, the long central corridor house type (“face me, I face you”), detached and semi-detached bungalow house type in government acquired areas known as quarters, estates and government reserved area (GRA) located around the intermediate and suburban zones.

- **The post-independence period (1980 AD – till date):** The types of domestic architecture observed in Benin during this period are more of contemporary designs which adopt Western style. This is because it is the main architectural style being taught in Nigerian schools of architecture and it is a status symbol for the elites, examples are bungalows, maisonette, duplexes and villas. These designs are found in the city peripheries enclosed in the planned estate zone of Benin. The traditional connection of the essential spaces are still preserved in the detached houses of the 1950s and 1960s, but when it comes to the contemporary houses all the relationships are re-arranged, and courtyards are no longer as common as they used to be.

## **2.2 Aesthetical features of Traditional Benin Architecture**

The Benin traditional architecture is well known for its aesthetic features that is a reflection of the cultural and artistic heritage of the Benin people. These aesthetic features include:

- **Decorative patterns:** Buildings in Benin have elaborate decorative designs on their walls, frequently made of clay. These patterns can include fine features, geometric patterns, and symbols.



*Fig 2.1 A courtyard in a Chief's Palace photographed in 1897 by R. K. Granville*

*Source: A building part and parcel of a Chief's Palace [Benin City] by Paula Girshick Ben-Amos*

- **Intricate carvings:** Benin architecture is well known for its intricate wood carvings. These carvings often adorn the doors, windows, pillars, and other parts of buildings. They depict various motifs, including religious symbols, historical events, and depictions of royal figures. The carvings are not only decorative but also convey important cultural and historical messages.



*Fig 2.2 Carvings on a door*

*Source: Wikipedia*

- **Bronze Artworks:** Bronze artwork is a distinctive feature of Benin Architecture, these artworks were used to showcase the artistic nature of the Benin people. Bronze artworks were used to decorate palaces, shrines and other important buildings. *Fig 2.3 Fig 2.3 Bronze artworks showcasing the skills of Benin Artisans*

- **Thatched Roofs:** Benin traditional Architecture made use of thatched roofs which were not only locally sourced but were also environmentally friendly and provided good insulation against the tropical climate of the region.



*Fig 2.4 Mud houses with thatch roofs*

*Source: Wikipedia*

- **Colourful Decorations:** Building elements were decorated with colourful paintworks to enhance the general aesthetics of the building.



*Fig 2.5 Columns painted and adorned with decorations.*

*Source: Wikipedia*

These aesthetic features collectively define the unique character of Benin architecture, making it a rich and visually engaging expression of the region's cultural heritage and artistic traditions. They continue to be celebrated and preserved as an important part of Benin's cultural identity.

### **2.3 Spatial Analysis of Residential Buildings in Benin Architecture**

Space is the core of architecture. In order to design, it is necessary to think about the architectural space surrounding us. In Architectural design, space is a critical element that can affect a building's function, atmosphere and overall aesthetics. The Traditional Benin residential buildings are designed to meet the needs of the inhabitants while encouraging the cultural and Religious heritage of the Benin people.

## 2.4 Fundamental concept of space distribution of palaces in Benin

The palace of the Oba or a chief in Benin-city (figures 2 and 3) is planned so that the rooms are arranged around a series of internal courtyards, one leading into another much on the pattern of the Classical Roman house with its sequence of atria. In the centre of the roof of each courtyard is a hole which serves to admit light and air, while immediately below it in the floor is a sunken surface with an outlet to carry out the storm water. Indeed, so striking is the resemblance to Roman examples that theories have been advanced linking the plans of Benin-city to Roman sources via Egypt.

Externally, the mud walls are finished in a pattern of horizontal ribs, a pattern of building which has now practically died out, and old houses are usually recognizable by this kind of work. The roofs were originally of thatch – it was through one of these roofs catching alight that the Great Fire began – but it has now been replaced practically everywhere by corrugated iron, although the old method of providing a thatched coping on a light wooden framework to the tops of courtyard walls still persist. In contrast to Yoruba and Igbo houses, the roof construction is of heavy timbers carefully framed together around the opening in the roof, and they are sometimes ornamented with carving. Doors and their jambs and the wooden posts supporting the peristyle around the larger courtyards are often ornamented in the same way.

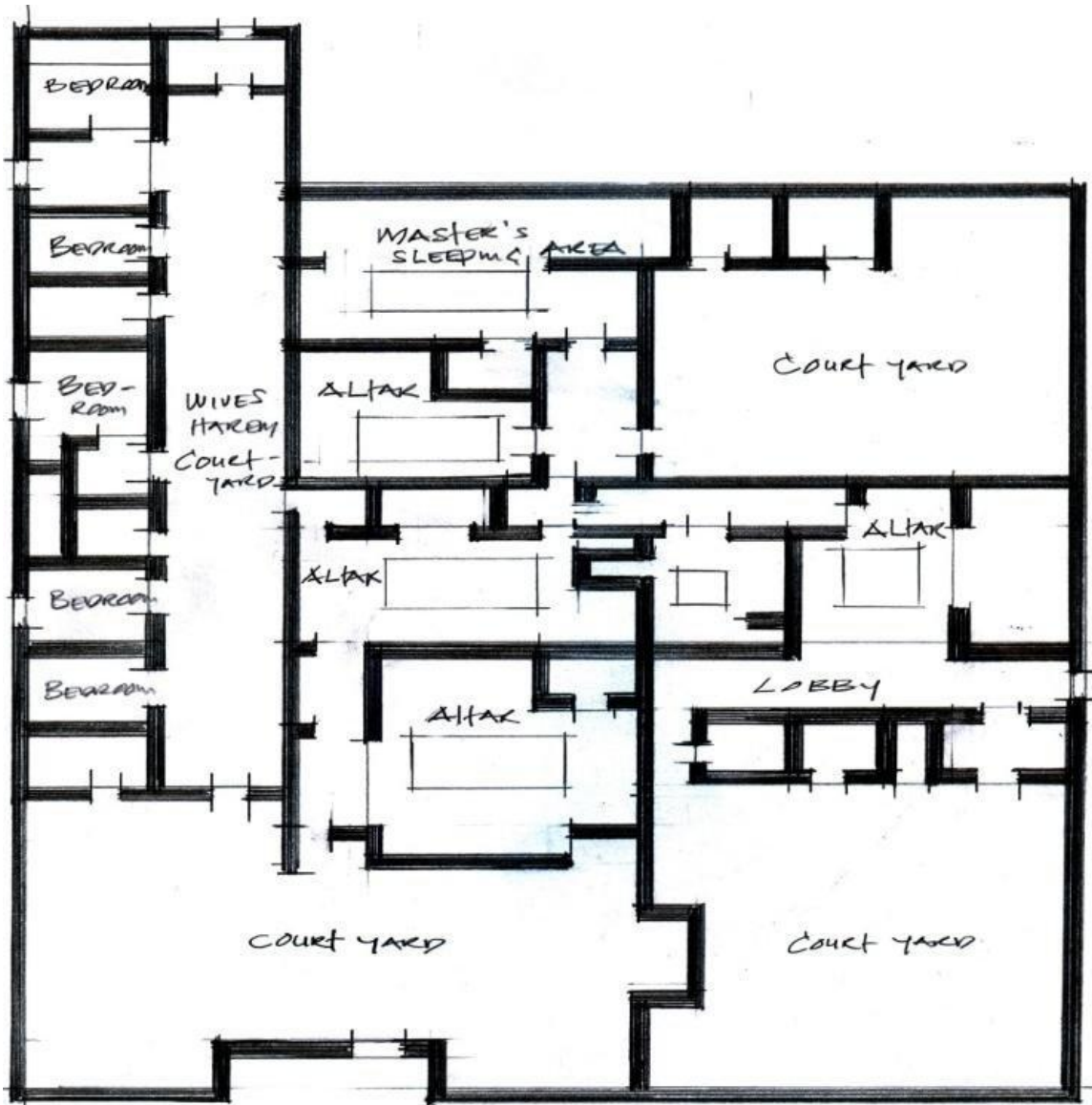


Fig 2.6 FloorPlan of a Typical Palace Compound in Benin

Source: Ekhaese 2011

S/N	Native Name Of Spaces	English Translation	
1	Uhun iba	Entrance Veranda	<p>a. Fixed high-level windows (rectangular or triangular)</p> <p>b. Kitchen built behind main house</p> <p>c. The convenience was built far from the main house to prevent contamination.</p> <p>d. The sizes of houses depend on</p>
2		Fore Courtyard	
3	Ikun n' arusha	Courtyard For Ancestral Altar (Father)	
4	Iba ore	Out-Door Space	
5	Ugha	Living Room	
6	Arruebo	Altar/Shrine	

7	Egun	Section For The Household Head	<p>socio-political status of the household head.</p> <p>e. Physical features of the traditional Benin architecture are: Wall fluted horizontally and column (pillars) fluted vertically, Architectural motifs and organisation, Courtyards looking inwards, Massive carve doors, Sculptural design on the façade of building and Rectangular plans</p>
8	Ikunaruiye	Courtyard For Ancestral Altar (Mother)	
9	Ughugh	Bedroom	
10	Uho amen	Impluvium	
11	Ikun	Atriums	
12	Ikun'odowa	Main Courtyard	
13	Oto eghodo	The Courtyard Areas	
14	Egbe owa nokhua	Convenience	

15	Egbe owa nekhere	Convenience Personal Hygiene Spaces	
16	Aban	Harvested Farm Produce Storage	
17	Ukoni	Kitchen Area	
18	Ikun'oderie	Harem Courtyard	
19	Azar	Vault, Bank And Storage For Valuables	

**Table 2.1** Showing the activity areas of a typical palace in Benin Architecture.

*Source: Researcher's field work*

Activity area	Uzama's Palace	Enigie's Palace	Eghaevb o's Place	Ohen's Palace
Uhun Iba	Entrance is now defined and veranda is introduced	Entrance is now defined and veranda is introduced	Entrance is now defined and veranda is introduced	Entrance is now defined and veranda is introduced
	Introduction of new materials like cement plaster and floor tiles	Introduction of new materials like cement plaster and floor tiles	Introduction of new materials like cement plaster and floor tiles	Introduction of new materials like cement plaster and floor tiles
Ughugh	Some of these spaces are presently incorporated with	Some of these spaces are presently incorporated	Some of these spaces are presently incorporated	Some of these spaces are presently incorporated

	lavatories.	with lavatories.	with lavatories.	with lavatories.
Uho-amen	No change in meaning but the usage changed. Water for household use presently is from a sunk bore hole while water collected through this space is drained off.	No change in meaning but the usage changed. Water for household use presently is from a sunk bore hole while water collected through this space is drained off.	No change in meaning but the usage changed. Water for household use presently is from a sunk bore hole while water collected through this space is drained off.	No change in meaning but the usage changed. Water for household use presently is from a sunk bore hole while water collected through this space is drained off.
Egbe owa nokhua	Both Egbe owa Nokhua and Egbe owa Nekhere are now combined in the same space	Both Egbe owa Nokhua and Egbe owa Nekhere are now combined in the	Both Egbe owa Nokhua and Egbe owa Nekhere are now combined in the	Both Egbe owa Nokhua and Egbe owa Nekhere are now combined in the

	and called Egbo Owa. Used as a toilet and bathroom.	same space and called Egbo Owa. Used as a toilet and bathroom.	same space and called Egbo Owa. Used as a toilet and bathroom.	same space and called Egbo Owa. Used as a toilet and bathroom.
Azar	Only valuables are kept, Money is no longer kept in this space but in the bank.	Only valuables are kept, Money is no longer kept in this space but in the bank.	Only valuables are kept, Money is no longer kept in this space but in the bank.	Only valuables are kept, Money is no longer kept in this space but in the bank.

*Table 2.2 showing the change in use of spaces in Benin Traditional Palaces*

*Source: Researcher’s field work*

The architecture of Benin Palace reflects thoughtful planning and construction and was influenced mainly by the sociopolitical position of the Palace owners, the social structure of the families, the beliefs practised and the level of technical – know how, these formed the element of the culture of the people.

## 2.4 Incorporation Of Benin Architecture Into Modern Buildings

Modern buildings that incorporate Benin architectural elements often aim to blend traditional aesthetics with contemporary design and functionality. These elements add cultural and historical significance to the architecture. While it's essential to preserve and respect traditional styles, modern buildings often adapt these elements to suit modern construction materials and techniques. Here are some examples of modern buildings with Benin architectural elements:

- **Residential Architecture:** Modern residential buildings in Benin, particularly in rural areas, may combine modern construction materials with traditional features such as courtyards and thatched roofs. These homes may also include decorative patterns and carvings on the exterior.
- **National Museum of Benin (Musée de la Fondation Zinsou), Ouidah:** The National Museum of Benin is a modern structure that incorporates elements of traditional Benin architecture. The building features a striking facade with decorative patterns, creating a fusion of contemporary design with traditional motifs. It serves as a cultural institution that showcases the art and heritage of Benin.
- **Hotel Acropole, Cotonou:** The Hotel Acropole in Cotonou is a modern hotel that incorporates elements of Benin's traditional architectural styles. It features decorative patterns and carvings on the building's exterior, creating a sense of cultural identity and aesthetics.

- **Songhai Center, Porto-Novo:** The Songhai Center is a modern complex focused on sustainable agriculture and training. The buildings incorporate traditional design elements, with use of thatched roofing, open courtyards, and decorative patterns.
- **Religious Buildings:** Some modern churches and mosques in Benin blend traditional architectural elements with contemporary design. For example, mosques may feature mud brick exteriors and geometric patterns on walls.
- **Government Buildings:** Government buildings in Benin may incorporate architectural elements reflecting the country's cultural heritage. These elements can include decorative carvings, reliefs, and the use of locally sourced materials.
- **Restaurants and Lodges:** Some restaurants and lodges in Benin may use traditional design elements in their architecture to provide a unique cultural experience for visitors.

Modern buildings with Benin architectural elements demonstrate a commitment to preserving the cultural heritage of the country while adapting to contemporary needs and aesthetics. These structures serve as a bridge between the past and the present, showcasing the enduring appeal of traditional Benin architecture in a modern context.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

The qualitative research method was used to gather data for this study, this involves written works on Benin traditional Architecture by scholars and also physical case studies. This approach helps to gather valuable information about Benin Residential Architecture from different perspectives over a long period of time. In an attempt to preserve these historical buildings and simultaneously maintain the standard of living of its residents, changes have to be made to different aspects of the buildings in the form of renovations, and this often involves the demolition or replacement of outdated building materials and facilities which decreases the purity of the indigenous style of Architecture. The research method earlier stated was crucial to this research because there are documents and published works that have a detailed analysis of these structures before they were renovated and made to carry some features of the Western Styles.

#### **3.2 Sources Of Data**

The major Source of data used in this research is from the published works and Field Reports written by scholars and historians along with a physical case study on Chief Ogiamien Palace. A survey could not be used to gather data for this research because the general public have little to no knowledge on the spatial and aesthetical features of buildings constructed with the Benin style of Architecture.

### **3.3 Selection Criteria for Case Studies**

The buildings analysed in this research are Traditional residential buildings in Benin City that have historical value. This thereby limits the selection for this case study to palaces and a few other existing residential buildings.

### **3.4 Sample size**

The buildings that will be analysed during this research are the Residential buildings with the Benin style of Architecture that are within Benin city, Edo State, Nigeria.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA ANALYSIS

#### 4.1 Overview Of The Ancient Benin Kingdom

The **Kingdom of Benin**, also known as the **Edo Kingdom**, or the **Benin Empire** (Bini: *Arriṣba ẹdo*) was a kingdom within what is now southern Nigeria. The Kingdom of Benin's capital was Edo, now known as Benin city in Edo State, Nigeria. The Benin Kingdom was "one of the oldest and most developed states in the coastal hinterland of West Africa. It grew out of the previous Edo Kingdom of Igodomigodo around the 11th century AD, and lasted until it was annexed by the British Empire in 1897.

The original people and founders of the Benin Kingdom, the Edo people, were initially ruled by the Ogiso (Kings of the Sky) who called their land Igodomigodo. The first Ogiso (Ogiso Igodo), wielded much influence and gained popularity as a good ruler. He died after a long reign and was succeeded by Ere, his eldest son. In the 12th century, a great palace intrigue erupted and crown prince Ekaladerhan, the only son of the last Ogiso, was sentenced to death as a result of the first queen (who was barren) changing an oracle's message to the Ogiso. In carrying out the royal order that he be killed, the palace messengers had mercy and set the prince free at Ughoton near Benin. When his father, the Ogiso died, the Ogiso dynasty ended. The people and royal kingmakers preferred their late king's son as the next to rule.

Chief Ogiamien's Palace was the palace of the Ogisos, founders of the Benin Kingdom. When the Ogisos ceased to reign, that was when the Obas came in. They were still existing side by side with the Obas. The father of Ogiamien was Ogiso.

## 4.2 Case Study: Chief Ogiamien's Palace

- **Name of Building:** Chief Ogiamien Royal Palace.
- **Location :** The Palace building is located at No. 97 Sakponba Road in Benin City.
- **Architect:** The Architect who designed the Palace and the Palace Architectural plan is unknown and was not documented.
- **Style of Architecture:** Benin Architecture
- **Type of Building:** Royal Palace

## 4.3 History of the Building

In the beginning, it was the Ogiso (king of the sky in Benin) who held the reins of power in Igodomigodo as Benin was then referred to. They needed a seat of government from where they could administer the vast land. Built in the 12th century AD, several Ogisos ruled the land from Ogiamien's palace until the end of the Ogiso dynasty and the ascension of Oba Eweka 1 in 1170. In the pantheon of the legendary kings of the sky, 32 Ogisos ruled Benin starting with Ogiso Igodo who ruled from 900-925 and ended with Ogiso Erhebor in 1170. One of the few surviving structures of the British invasion of Benin in 1897, the historical Ogiamien palace, dates back over 1,000 years. While almost all the houses including the majestic Oba Palace were razed down and Oba Ovonramwen was deposed, against all odds, the centuries-old Ogiamien palace was spared the wrath of the invaders.

The chief Ogiamien Ancient Royal Palace building is located at No. 97 Sokponba Road in Benin City. It is believed to be the first house in West Africa. It was built at about 1130 AD with a great significance as the only building that predates the emergence of OBASHIP in Benin political organisation and it is believed to be the only building that survived the 1897 British expedition and siege.

It was declared a National Monument on May 26th, 1959 and by Decree 77 of the 1979 constitution that establish the National Commission for Museum and monuments; and gazetted under the Federation of Nigeria official gazette No. 31 Vol. 46 of 1959, the protective cover of part II section 3 of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria under the concurrent legislative list.

The Chief Ogiamien historical building has survived the harsh natural weather and human factors of deterioration and is still standing till date.

#### 4.4 Description Of The Palace

At the entrance of the palace is the newly constructed gate and fence which is exquisite and well celebrated with beautiful designs on fence walls and classical gothic pillars truly befitting of a royal palace.

At the entrance gate is a huge/massive arch or an open dome standing above the gate of about 1.5 metres width, painted white with steps at end with different thickness with a gold coloured design done at various intervals on them. This huge arch is supported by three (3) gothic columns at each end of the arch.

The high entrance fence (about 3 metres) is painted dark brown and white with horizontal grooves running across the fence wall . The entrance gate is painted brown with several designs on it. A part of the gate is used for pedestrians, while the other part is a sliding gate used for vehicular passage. On the top of the gate is the name of the Palace boldly written on it.

The Palace walls were constructed with sun dried mud bricks. Clay was used to finish the outer surface of the walls, the clay was used to create grooves on the walls to add aesthetical value to the walls.

#### 4.5 Aesthetic features of The Palace

- **Decorative patterns:** The Ogiamien Palace has horizontal grooves on the exterior walls of the building that was constructed with Clay, it is one of the characteristic features of Benin Traditional Architecture. The Palace fence was constructed in 2022 by the National

Commission for Museum and Monuments. The fence was made to take this specific aesthetic feature but the grooves were constructed with plaster rather than clay.



*Plate 4.01 Showing the olokun with horizontal grooves made of sun dried clay*

*Source: Researchers field work (2023)*



*Plate 4.02 Showing the Horizontal grooves on the fence*

*Source: Researchers field work (2023)*

- **Roofing Material and Style:** The palace made use of pitched roof constructed with thatch but was later changed to Corrugated roofing sheet.



*Plate 4.03– Showing the roof used in the Palace*

*Source: Google Reviews (2023)*

- **Decorations:** A wooden door leads inside the Palace chambers with some traditional materials hung above the door.



*Plate 4.04– Showing the entrance into the palace chambers*

*Source: Researchers field work (2023)*

#### **4.6 Spaces In Ogiamien Palace**

The layout of The Ogiamien Palace incorporates the courtyard system which is a common feature of Benin Traditional Architecture, The Palace compound houses the following spaces and facilities:



*Plate 4.05–Aerial view of the Palace*

*Source: Google Earth (2023)*

- **Uhun Iba:** Inside the palace, there is an open courtyard that welcomes you. In this courtyard there is the *Edion Shrine*. This shrine is where the Ogamien family performs their rituals when they lose an elderly member of the family. Also when an Ogamien family is being given a chieftaincy title, the ritual is performed at the Edion Shrine.



*Plate 4.06 – Showing the Edion Shrine*

*Source: Researcher's field work (2023)*

- **kun n' aruerha:** There is also an altar where the Ogiamien worship. This altar is where every family head worships every morning. Also, during the *Ague festival* which Christians call Lent, every Ogiamien is encouraged to fast and pray at the family altar three times a day just as their great ancestor, Ogiamien.



*Plate 4.07 – Showing the altar where the Ogamien worships.*

*Source: Researchers field work (2023)*

- **Olokun:** The Olokun is where the Ogamien children worship.



*Plate 4.08– Showing the Olokun*

*Source: Researchers field work (2023)*

- **Elders Chambers:** This chamber is a place where all the past Ogisos who had ruled were immortalised.



*Plate 4.09– Showing all the past Ogisos who had ruled.*

*Source: Researchers field work (2023)*

- **Igbele:** This is a room for the treatment of sick people, a traditional hospital. If anybody was sick, they set fire and laid that person down on a mat, no matter the ailment, the person will get better (according to legend).



*Plate 4.10– Showing the traditional hospital.*

*Source: Researchers field work (2023)*

- **Azar:** There is a native bank where Ogamien kept his money. He covered it with a mat so that nobody would know that there is treasure buried down there.



*Plate 4.11– Showing the native bank.*

*Source: Researchers field work (2023)*

**Ughuha:** There is also Chief Ogiamien’s main chamber. This is the room where he sleeps and rests at the end of the day.



*Fig 4.12– Showing Chief Ogiamien’s resting chamber.*

*Source: Researchers field work (2023)*

- **Aruebo:** Within the palace is the Ogiamien’s mother Shrine.



*Fig 4.13– Showing Chief Ogiamien’s mother’s shrine.*

*Source: Researchers field work (2023)*

- **Ikun’oderie:** At the side of the palace is the chambers/quarters for his wives and their children. This chamber is made of about five rooms and a large kitchen ( Ukoni). This chamber is also made of mud wall. The roofing of this chamber is also pitched and the material used is also the corrugated roofing sheet. There is also an open walkway separating the main palace chambers and the wives chambers.



*Fig – Showing the chambers of the wives.*

*Source: Researchers field work (2023)*

#### **4.7 Social/Religious Significance of Chief Ogiamien's Palace**

The Ogiamien Ancient palace building has several cultural/Religious significance;

- One of which is the role it plays in the event of the coronation of the Oba of Benin. It is said that as it is customary for every Benin monarch (Oba) during his initiation rites, would present a stool to the Ogiamien. It is a part of the installation ceremony of the new Oba. I was told that this stool was presented by the immediate past Oba of Benin, Omo N'Oba Erediauwa. It was said that if Ogiamien wants to do anything, he sits on that stool.
- It is also a centre for entertainment, even till date various forms movies, cultural dances, songs, folktales and stories take place in the building.
- Chief Ogiamien celebrates Igue festival a day before the Benin general Igue festival, thereby making the palace a centre of ceremony.

#### **4.8 Importance Of The Building**

- The Palace is a historical landmark that shows the Architectural and cultural heritage of the Benin Kingdom
- Specifically, Chief Ogiamien ancient edifice, provides an avenue for cultural display, film production, family meeting place and a point where poems, idioms are recited. Folk songs such as lullaby and story-telling (folktales) take place. These act as synthesis that condition social life.

- The monument has enormous cultural tourist potentials which can fetch revenue for both the local community, family and government in general, if properly harnessed, preserved and marketed.

- It serves as an educational and research centre for cultural bodies and students all over the world.

- In general, the importance of our Heritage cannot be overemphasised. The greatness or pride of a Nation is tied to the wealth of their heritage. Thus conveys a testimony of the people's daily life, to express their creative capacity and present the traces of their History. As a receptive or package of memory, it embodies the symbolic of cultural identities and constitute fundamental references for structuring society.

- It is useful in binding social groups together and bringing cultural communities closer to one another.

- Finally, heritage is an instrument of third way process between past, present and future.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

#### **5.1 Summary**

The Traditional Architecture of Benin was one of the best in Africa, and it displayed the culture, religion and artistic nature of the Benin People while offering structurally sound and aesthetically pleasing buildings.

Traditional Benin Architecture did not only showcase the culture, religion and art of the Benin people, it also showed significant historical events. The buildings could tell stories and teach lessons through clever artworks that were centuries ahead of their time.

#### **5.2 Conclusion**

Benin Traditional Architecture is a very realistic and sustainable style of Architecture that should be incorporated into modern day designs to archive good and affordable houses constructed with durable materials that are locally sourced and are environmentally friendly.

#### **5.3 Recommendations**

Departments and schools of Architecture should teach about Benin Traditional Architecture in order to educate the future architects about the historical Architectural heritage of Benin and the innovative and sustainable techniques that were employed to solve some issues of residential building designs in Southern Nigeria.

#### **5.4 Contribution To Knowledge**

The aesthetics and use of spaces in The Benin Traditional Architecture was analysed in this study along with the locally sourced and environmentally friendly building materials used to achieve the construction of these buildings. This study also provides a brief account of the origin of Benin and it's Government. The findings of this study can be used as a basis for future research.

#### **5.5 Areas For Further Research**

The material properties of clay, thatch, wood and other locally sourced building materials should be studied along with their viability as possible construction materials in the modern day climate.

## REFERENCES

Adeokun, Cynthia O. (2012). "Analysis of spatial types and social space in Ile-Ife domestic architecture." Paper presented at the WABER 2012 conference, Abuja, Nigeria, July 24-26.

EKHAESE Eghosa Noel (2011): Domestic Architecture in Benin City: A Study of Continuity and Change

Osahon James Ediae; Enobakhare Paul Enoma; Isidore Chukwunweike Ezema& Albert B. Adeboye (2018): Changes in the meaning and uses of space in Benin Traditional Palace Architecture in Nigeria.

Ogun Oliver Ewere (2023): An Architectural Appreciation On Chief Ogiamien Palace, Benin City.

Ekhaese Eghosa Noel (2014): Benin Domestic Architecture "A TABULA RASA" For Transition: From Pre-Independence to Contemporary Architecture.

EKHAESE O. N. E.1 , TAIWO A. A.2 ,IZOBO-MARTINS O. O.3& ADEWALE, B. A. (2011): The Domestic Architecture In Benin, A Good Place For Building Resilience.

Paula Girshick Ben-Amos (2015): A building part and parcel of a Chief's Palace [Benin City]

Obinyan, T. U. (1988): "The Annexation of Benin". *Journal of Black Studies*.

P. Amaury Talbot, c. (1920): A house at Benin.

Barbara Plankensteiner, ed. (2007). *Benin- Kings and Rituals: Court Art from Nigeria*.  
Exhibition catalogue Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna mit MVK und OTM/Snoeck.

Osasona, C., O. (2007), From Traditional Residential Architecture to the Changes in Use and Meaning of Spaces in Benin Traditional Palace Architecture..... 49 Journal of Civil and Environmental Systems Engineering - UNIBEN Vernacular: The Nigerian Experience. Received (25/7/13) from: <http://www.mudonline.org/aat/2007-documents/AAT-Osasona>.

Eco, U. (1986), Function and Sign: Semiotics of Architecture, in Gottediener, M. and A.Cagopoulos (eds). *The City and the Sign: An Introduction to Urban Semiotics*. 2(9): 13-17, New York, Columbia University Press Evans, M. & S.

Kahn, L. (1973), *Shelter 1*, Bolinas, C.A; Shelter Publications Kazimee, UK.

Kent, Susan. 1990. "Activity areas and Architecture: An interdisciplinary view of the relationship between use of space and domestic built environments". In *Domestic Architecture and the Use of Space: An Interdisciplinary cross-cultural Study*. Edited by Susan Kent, 1-8. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kürtüncü, B., Köknar, S. A., & Dursun, P. (2008). *Decoding spatial knowledge and spatial experience*.

Norberg-Schulz, C. (1971), *Existence, Space and Architecture*, New York, Preeger Publishers.

Osasona, C., O. (2007), From Traditional Residential Architecture to the Vernacular: The Nigerian Experience. Received (25/7/13) from: <http://www.mudonline.org/aat/> 2007-documents/AAT-Osasona

Osemwenowa, U. I. (2000), the Customary Law of the Binis, Benin City, Nigeria: Myke commercial Press.

Rapoport, A. 1990. "Systems of Activities and Systems of Settings." In Domestic Architecture and the Use of Space: An Interdisciplinary cross-cultural Study. Edited by Susan Kent, 9-20. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Relph, E. (1976), Place and Placelessness, London, Pion Limited. Space and Place Humanistic Perspective, Progress in Geography, International Review of Current Research, 2(11) London University Press.

Tuan, Y. (1975), Place: an Experience Perspective, The Geographical Review 6(5): 151-169.