

**TRADE AND RELIGION IN INTERGROUP RELATIONS IN NIGERIA: A  
CASE STUDY OF AUCHI BEFORE 1894**

**VIVIAN ONOSHIOLEMA MOMOH  
ART2100604**

**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES  
FACULTY OF ARTS  
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN  
BENIN CITY  
NIGERIA.**

**OCTOBER, 2025**

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND  
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NIGERIA.**

**OCTOBER 2025**

## **CERTIFICATION**

This is to certify that this project was carried out by VIVIAN ONOSHIOLEMA MOMOH with matriculation number ART2100604 in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Benin, under my supervision.

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**Dr. Collins Edigin**  
**Project Supervisor**

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**Prof. J.C. Nwaka**  
**Head of Department**

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**Date**

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**Date**

## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to God Almighty for His infinite grace and mercy upon my life. His loving kindness, protection and favour throughout the course of the study. And my parents, Mr. and Mrs. B. Momoh for their love and care all throughout my academic pursuit in the University of Benin.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

### **Introduction**

The pre-colonial history of Nigeria is replete with narratives of dynamic and well-structured socio-political and economic systems that flourished long before the advent of formal European colonization. Before 1894, Auchi had established itself as a vibrant pre-colonial community with strong socio-economic and cultural structures influenced by trade, religion, and inter-ethnic relations. Trade was a major pillar of Auchi's development. The town's geographical location along ancient trade routes linking the northern and southern regions of present-day Nigeria positioned it as a key point of commercial exchange.<sup>1</sup> Auchi hosted regular markets where agricultural produce, textiles, livestock, pottery, and iron tools were traded. Traders from neighboring ethnic groups including the Hausa, Nupe, Yoruba, and Igbo visited Auchi, creating a multicultural marketplace that encouraged peaceful interaction and economic cooperation. Women in Auchi played vital roles in trade, particularly in local produce and craft items, contributing significantly to household economies and social networks.

Religion also played a crucial role in shaping Auchi's early interactions with external groups. While the town initially practiced traditional African religions centered on ancestral worship and local deities, it increased contact with northern Muslim traders particularly the Hausa, Nupe, and Fulani facilitated the gradual introduction of Islam.

These traders not only brought goods but also religious ideas, which found acceptance among parts of the Auchi population due to their peaceful approach and the prestige associated with Islamic literacy and scholarship. These religious interactions laid the groundwork for deeper international relations, including diplomatic exchanges and intermarriages. Before the British colonial annexation in 1894, Auchi had thus evolved into a cosmopolitan community with active trade networks and growing Islamic influence, fostering a reputation for religious tolerance, cultural openness, and regional diplomacy.<sup>2</sup>

The town's location at the crossroads of major pre-colonial trade routes significantly enhanced its exposure to diverse peoples, goods, and ideas. These routes connected Auchi to both the forest zones of southern Nigeria and the savannah belts of the north. As caravans moved goods such as kola nuts, textiles, salt, and livestock, Auchi emerged as a commercial hub where local agricultural surplus could be exchanged for luxury and utilitarian imports. The economic prosperity generated by this trade encouraged population growth, urbanization, and the diversification of occupational roles beyond subsistence farming.<sup>3</sup>

It was within this context of continued trade and international interaction that Islam began to take root in Auchi. The arrival of Muslim missionaries and northern traders primarily from the Nupe and Hausa regions brought not only goods but also religious doctrines that appealed to local leaders and merchants alike. Islam offered a comprehensive worldview that extended beyond personal faith into ethics, commercial

law, conflict resolution, and community organization. As such, it was not simply adopted as a matter of spiritual conviction but also embraced for its practical utility in enhancing social trust and economic fairness.<sup>4</sup>

The introduction of Islam was further legitimized and institutionalized through the agency of local rulers, most notably Otaru Momoh, whose leadership was pivotal in fostering religious pluralism and formalizing Islamic practices within the town's administrative framework. This period witnessed the construction of mosques, the establishment of Quranic schools, and the adaptation of Islamic legal principles in the arbitration of disputes.<sup>5</sup> Through their alliances with northern Islamic clerics and merchants, Auchi's leaders positioned the town within a broader Islamic commercial and diplomatic sphere. These relationships conferred both prestige and material advantage, allowing Auchi to modernize and flourish even in the absence of colonial infrastructures.<sup>6</sup>

Despite these northern influences, Auchi retained a complex and often pragmatic relationship with the Benin Empire, the dominant political entity in the region during much of the pre-colonial era. Though the town maintained a degree of autonomy, it acknowledged Benin's suzerainty in certain respects, such as the payment of tributes or participation in regional councils. This balancing act between asserting local sovereignty and engaging in broader regional politics reveals Auchi's diplomatic sophistication and its capacity to navigate multiple layers of authority.<sup>7</sup>

Auchi thus stood at the intersection of two powerful cultural and economic spheres: the Islamic north and the traditional Benin polity. It successfully drew on the strengths of both worlds, serving as a bridge for religious, commercial, and political exchanges. This unique positioning made Auchi not only a center of wealth and influence but also a beacon of cross-cultural cooperation in a period often misrepresented as static or isolated. The interweaving of commerce and Islam in Auchi's pre-colonial narrative demonstrates how economic and religious forces worked synergistically to transform a once-agrarian community into a regional power. These developments extended the town's influence beyond Etsakoland and embedded it within larger trans-Saharan and forest-savannah networks, reinforcing its identity as a pivotal player in pre-colonial "international relations."<sup>8</sup>

In essence, Auchi's historical experience before 1894 illustrates the depth and diversity of African agency in crafting systems of governance, commerce, and belief that rivaled those of any contemporary civilization. The town's ability to adapt external ideologies like Islam while preserving indigenous institutions challenges reductionist narratives that depict pre-colonial Africa as lacking complexity or global engagement. This study fills a gap in literature as it focused on Auchi's evolution during this period. This does not only enriches Nigerian historiography but also contributes meaningfully to the broader discourse on African pre-colonial diplomacy, trade, and religion.<sup>9</sup>

## **Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The aim of the study is to examine the role of trade and religion in shaping Auchi's external relations before 1894".

The objectives of this study are:

- 1) To examine the history of Auchi in the pre-colonial period.
- 2) To evaluate the pre-colonial economy and structure of Auchi.
- 3) To examine the emergence of Islam in Auchi during the pre-colonial period.
- 4) To assess the Auchi interactions with the Fulanis of the northern Nigeria in pre-colonial period.
- 5) Examine the socioeconomic and religious transformation of Auchi during pre-colonial period.

## **Scope of the Study**

This study focuses on trade and religion in intergroup relations in Nigeria with specific emphasis on Auchi before 1894. This study is limited to issues around historical relations and integration in Auchi before 1894. The study will also do a critical analysis on socioeconomic and religious transformation of Auchi during pre-colonial period

## **Methodology**

To accomplish the primary objective of this study, the historical methodology used in this study is used to investigate and analyze Trade and Religion in pre-colonial Auchi. The study obtains data from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources,

including oral information from oral interviews and archive resources. Personal interview data will be used, as well as conversations with some particular members of the society.

Secondary sources includes dissertations and seminary papers, internet materials, publications from public and private libraries, including books, journals, essays, periodicals newspapers, and private and public libraries.

### **Literature Review**

S. Yakubu and W. Obomeghei's "*The Auchi Kingdom: A Century of Growth and Innovations 1920–2020*"<sup>10</sup>, offers a comprehensive examination of Auchi's development over a century, focusing on the period from 1920 to 2020. However, their analysis also reaches back to the period before 1894, shedding light on the foundational elements that set the stage for Auchi's growth. This study emphasizes how early trade practices and religious structures, which took root before the town's formal integration into colonial systems, provided a solid base for the town's subsequent innovations and expansion. By highlighting Auchi's evolution from a traditional society to a modern entity, the authors underscore the importance of the socio-economic and religious developments that took place in the pre-colonial era. These earlier systems, particularly the interactions between local communities and external forces, played a critical role in shaping Auchi's political, social, and economic trajectory, which would later enable it to adapt and grow during the colonial and post-colonial periods. Yakubu and Obomeghei's work positions Auchi's

20th-century growth within a larger historical framework, ensuring that the lasting impacts of early trade and religious structures are not overlooked.

A. O. Arunah's *A History of Auchi Kingdom*,<sup>11</sup> offers a succinct yet meaningful narrative that captures the foundational elements of Auchi's development. Arunah outlines the town's early commercial engagements and the simultaneous arrival of Islam through interactions with northern traders. His account links these initial exchanges with broader sociopolitical developments that later defined Auchi's identity. Though brief, Arunah's contribution is valuable for framing the initial conditions that set the stage for deeper religious integration and economic sophistication in Auchi's pre-colonial and early colonial trajectory. By tying together trade and religion, Arunah reinforces the central thesis that Auchi's historical evolution was deeply rooted in its openness to external influences and its capacity to assimilate them into indigenous frameworks.

M. Yesuf's "*Afenmai Peoples in the 19th Century: Change and Continuity*",<sup>12</sup> offers an insightful analysis of the Afenmai people, which includes Auchi, and their adaptability in the face of 19th-century changes. Yesuf examines how the Afenmai, particularly the people of Auchi, responded to significant transformations in trade practices and religious shifts during this period. The essay delves into how the Afenmai people balanced traditional ways of life with the growing influence of external forces, such as the introduction of Islam and the expansion of trade networks. Yesuf's comparative analysis of the Afenmai people's experiences provides a contextual backdrop

for understanding how Auchi navigated these changes, showcasing how the town's early engagement with Islam and trade set it apart in the broader narrative of regional transformation. This work serves as a critical comparative tool for understanding the evolution of Auchi, offering parallels and contrasts with other communities in the region that underwent similar shifts during the 19th century.

D. Sule's *The History and Culture of Auchi*,<sup>13</sup> serves as a pivotal text for understanding the indigenous systems that defined the socio-cultural fabric of Auchi prior to colonial disruption. By focusing on the town's traditional structures, Sule provides a nuanced view of the role of local leadership, communal norms, and values in fostering stability within the community. Although Sule's work does not explicitly emphasize trade or religion, it effectively situates these elements within a broader socio-cultural context, offering insights into how Auchi's societal institutions laid the foundation for later economic and religious developments. The focus on customary leadership hierarchies, particularly the role of the chiefs and elders in maintaining order and resolving disputes, highlights how these systems helped establish a robust framework for governance. Furthermore, the communal approach to economic activities, which was rooted in mutual support and resource-sharing, created a conducive environment for the growth of both local trade and spiritual practices. This foundation set the stage for the eventual integration of Islam and the establishment of more formalized trade relations with

external communities, making Sule's contribution essential for understanding Auchu's socio-cultural evolution in its early history.

W. Obomeighie's *Auchi Kingdom: Twenty Decades of Ikelebe Dynasty, 1845 and Beyond*,<sup>14</sup> delves deeply into the role of the Ikelebe Dynasty in shaping the sociopolitical and economic trajectory of Auchu over the past two centuries. Through a detailed examination of the dynasty's leadership, Obomeighie offers an insightful perspective on how successive monarchs navigated the complex interplay of internal governance and external influence. Central to Obomeighie's thesis is the idea that the Ikelebe rulers strategically engaged with external Muslim traders and Islamic clerics, which facilitated the gradual incorporation of Islam into Auchu's religious and cultural practices. This dynamic allowed for a fluid exchange of ideas, including Islamic scholarship and legal frameworks, which helped solidify Islam's presence in the region. At the same time, these interactions had a profound impact on Auchu's economic activities, particularly by connecting the town to broader trade networks that spanned across northern Nigeria and beyond. The Ikelebe Dynasty's ability to preserve internal unity while expanding Auchu's economic and spiritual relevance underscores the critical role of leadership in navigating external pressures and enhancing the town's integration into regional and transnational exchanges. Obomeighie's work highlights the monarchy's dual function of cultural preservation and facilitation of external engagement, which was instrumental in

positioning Auchi as a key player in the larger dynamics of West African trade and Islamic influence.

E. Erhagbe's *Etsakoland in Transition, c.1860–1948: An Analysis of Change in an Indigenous Nigerian Society*,<sup>15</sup> offers a comprehensive examination of societal transformation in the Etsako region, with a particular focus on shifts in trade and religious life. Through a meticulous blend of archival data and oral traditions, Erhagbe reconstructs the gradual transition from traditional barter economies to structured market systems, paralleled by the growing acceptance of Islam as a cohesive social force. His analysis situates Auchi within a broader regional context, capturing the interplay between internal cultural adaptation and external pressures such as Nupe invasions and missionary movements. The work is essential for understanding Auchi's socio-economic landscape prior to the 1894 British colonial conquest.

N. Omo-Ananigie's *A Brief History of Etsako*,<sup>16</sup> stands as one of the pioneering works on the Etsako people, offering a valuable early account of their history. The work is particularly insightful in its depiction of the socio-economic practices and religious shifts that shaped the region, providing an essential starting point for understanding Auchi's historical roots. Omo-Ananigie examines the town's economic activities, emphasizing traditional trade systems that flourished within the Etsako communities and their surrounding territories. He traces the subtle but significant transformation in religious practices, with Islam beginning to take root in the region, setting the stage for

future cultural and spiritual changes in Auchi. While the work is limited in scope due to its brevity, it remains a cornerstone text for piecing together Auchi's pre-colonial history. Omo-Ananigie's narrative provides the foundational context needed to understand the shifts in Auchi's identity as it navigated early influences, both internal and external, and marks the beginning of a larger story of cultural interaction and integration in Etsako.

J. Egharevba's *A Short History of Benin*,<sup>17</sup> offers a broader imperial framework within which Auchi's development can be situated. Egharevba's analysis of the Benin Empire's control over its vast neighboring regions, including Auchi, reveals much about the intricate balance of political, cultural, and economic forces at play. The Benin Empire, with its strong centralized governance and extensive trade networks, undoubtedly influenced Auchi's growth and direction. Egharevba highlights how Benin's policies of trade, governance, and religion played a significant role in Auchi's exposure to external forces. Auchi, though not directly under Benin's rule, was influenced by its economic and religious systems, particularly in how trade and market practices were shaped. The work underscores the indirect but lasting impact of Benin's imperial structure, revealing how Auchi adapted to and incorporated these external influences before the town was fully exposed to the spread of Islam. This context enriches the understanding of Auchi's socio-political landscape, revealing how the town's early interactions with the wider regional powers laid the groundwork for later transformations, especially those driven by Islamic trade and culture.

F. Ajayi in an article titled “The History and Origin of Auchi”,<sup>18</sup> takes a more contemporary approach, revisiting the historical origins of Auchi through a blend of oral traditions and modern historical analysis. Ajayi’s work provides a deep dive into the town’s foundation myths, kinship systems, and initial economic engagements. One of the central themes in Ajayi’s study is how the town’s early interactions with northern traders and Islamic clerics contributed to its religious conversion and the structuring of its trade systems. Ajayi explores how these northern influences were pivotal in shaping Auchi’s social and economic structures, particularly the introduction of Islam, which transformed local beliefs and practices. The article also examines the evolution of trade routes and systems that saw Auchi develop as a key player in regional commerce. By merging traditional oral histories with contemporary scholarly insights, Ajayi’s work bridges the gap between past and present historiography, offering a richer understanding of how Islam and commerce co-evolved in Auchi’s formative period. The study contributes significantly to understanding how Auchi’s early identity was shaped by external trade and religious influences, setting the stage for its future development in a broader historical context.

R. Momoh in a book titled, *New Perspectives on the History and Politics of Nigeria: The Etsako Experience*,<sup>19</sup> offers a political analysis of the historical and socio-political dynamics of Etsako, with a particular focus on the trade alliances and religious affiliations that influenced Auchi’s development prior to 1894. Momoh examines the

evolution of Etsako's political landscape and how the formation of trade partnerships played a crucial role in shaping Auchi's interactions with neighboring communities. He highlights the significance of these alliances in fostering economic stability and the gradual introduction of external religious influences, particularly Islam, into the region. Momoh's work situates Auchi within a broader regional framework, showing how the town's political relationships were integral in securing its position in transregional trade networks. Furthermore, by exploring the interplay between political and religious developments, Momoh sheds light on the early foundations that would later contribute to Auchi's integration into both Islamic and commercial spheres.

Another book by K. M. Seghosime titled, *Origin and Development of Auchi*<sup>20</sup>, provides a comprehensive exploration of the town's historical trajectory, focusing on the pivotal roles that commerce and Islam played in shaping Auchi's identity before the colonial era. Seghosime examines how trade networks and religious practices, particularly Islam, influenced both the social structure and economic framework of Auchi. His analysis traces the town's evolution from a traditional community to a key center of commerce and cultural exchange, highlighting the interactions between local customs and the external forces that fostered both religious and economic growth. networks, setting the stage for its development and integration into broader historical contexts.

Z. I. Oseni in book titled, *The Islamization of Auchi Kingdom in South Central Nigeria*,<sup>21</sup> provides a thorough exploration of the processes and consequences of religious

conversion in Auchi. Drawing on historical records and oral testimonies, Oseni traces the introduction and eventual establishment of Islam in the region, emphasizing its synergy with socio-economic developments. He outlines how Islamic teachings, clerical networks, and trade caravans from the north played pivotal roles in reorienting Auchi's religious landscape. Furthermore, Oseni illustrates how the adoption of Islam was not merely a spiritual shift but a multifaceted transformation that influenced legal norms, educational practices, and commercial ethics. His analysis underscores the centrality of religion in shaping Auchi's identity and its integration into a wider Islamic and economic world.

O. Kadiri in thesis titled, *“Islamic Movements in Etsako Division of the Mid-West State of Nigeria”*<sup>22</sup>, offers an early academic investigation into the spread and diversification of Islamic thought and practice within the Etsako region, including Auchi. Kadiri examines how the proliferation of various Islamic movements intersected with political authority and economic change. His work sheds light on how these movements were not only religious phenomena but also vehicles for social organization and economic integration, particularly through trade alliances fostered by shared faith. By focusing on the religious transformations within Etsako, Kadiri provides critical insights into the evolving governance structures in Auchi, where Islamic norms increasingly shaped communal leadership and commercial conduct.

A. O. Momodu in thesis titled, *“The Role of Otaru Momoh in the Islamization of Auchi and Its Environs”*<sup>23</sup>, provides a focused biographical and historical account of

Otaru Momoh's leadership during a critical phase of Auchi's religious evolution. Momodu highlights how the Otaru utilized his position not only to embrace Islam but to promote its widespread adoption across the community. Through strategic alliances with Islamic clerics and support for Islamic education and practices, Otaru Momoh played a key role in embedding the religion within Auchi's social and political institutions. This transition also influenced economic life, as Islamic principles began to guide trade ethics and legal systems. Momodu's work is invaluable in illustrating the symbiotic relationship between leadership, faith, and commerce in Auchi's transformation.

S. Yakubu in journal titled, "The Role and Impact of the Islamic Religion on the Auchi Kingdom in Nigeria Since 1914" accounts, has roots that reach back into the pre-colonial era. The author, in his detailed examination of the Islamic religion's impact on the Auchi Kingdom since 1914, provides valuable contextual insights that trace the foundation of religious institutionalization to earlier centuries. While the study focuses on the period following British colonial influence, it reveals how pre-1894 Islamic networks, propelled largely through trade and missionary activity, laid a firm groundwork for the later consolidation of Islamic authority. The movement of scholars, clerics, and merchants across West Africa brought not only goods but also religious ideologies that found fertile ground in Auchi. These pre-existing ties between commerce and Islam helped structure community governance, religious education, and moral order, thereby

shaping the town's resistance to colonial domination and its embrace of a faith-centered identity.

Y. Suleiman and O. Wajeed in journal titled , “The Auchi Kingdom: A Century of Growth and Innovations 1920 – 2020’, whose primary focus lies in the modern era, although the authors emphasize how Auchi’s transformation in the twentieth century was inextricably linked to the foundational developments of the pre-1894 period. The legacy of early trans-Saharan and intra-regional trade, combined with the spread of Islam, fostered an administrative and cultural resilience that allowed Auchi to thrive amid changing political dynamics. Their work suggests that the institutional structures, community leadership patterns, and even urban organization seen in the modern era were built upon pre-colonial frameworks. These frameworks were shaped by the integration of Islamic principles with traditional governance, a fusion that was first catalyzed through religious and commercial exchanges long before colonial interventions took hold.

## Endnotes

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## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **PRE-COLONIAL ECONOMIC, RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF AUCHI**

This chapter explores the historical evolution of Auchi, tracing its origins, migratory narratives, and settlement patterns within the broader Etsako region. It delves into the socio-political, economic and social, organization of the community before colonial incursion, emphasizing the intricate industrious systems that underpinned daily life. Key areas of focus include trade routes, agriculture, craft industries, and market networks that connected Auchi to surrounding regions. By examining these pre-colonial, political, social, economic foundations, the chapter provides critical insight into how Auchi's early prosperity and stability were shaped by indigenous practices.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Historical Origin of Auchi**

Auchi, located in present-day Edo State, Nigeria, traces its roots to a migration from the ancient Benin Kingdom, traditionally believed to have occurred in response to sociopolitical unrest or threats of persecution. The founders of Auchi settled on the Kukuruku hills, valuing its defensible terrain and fertile land. Pre-colonial Auchi was organized into a kin-based system with a centralized leadership under the Otaru, who acted as both spiritual and administrative head. The community thrived on subsistence and commercial agriculture, iron smelting, craftwork, and long-distance trade. Its strategic position along major trade routes facilitated interaction with neighboring regions

and distant Muslim traders from the north, setting the foundation for cultural and religious exchange that would later reshape Auchi's sociopolitical identity.<sup>2</sup>

### **Geography of Auchi**

Auchi's geography, defined by its hilly landscape and relatively fertile valleys, significantly influenced settlement patterns and economic activities. The Kukuruku hills not only provided a natural defense against invasions but also facilitated a form of communal identity anchored in collective security. Settlements were arranged in quarters (e.g., Utsogun, Igbhei, Afokpella), often centered around family compounds and farmlands. These quarters later evolved into socio-political units that maintained semi-autonomous administration under the overarching authority of the Otaru.<sup>3</sup>

The geographical location of Auchi, set upon an elevated terrain with access to fertile land and water sources, supported both security and agriculture, which were vital for the sustenance of the growing community. The town's urban pattern arranged around central communal spaces and shrines reflected a planning consciousness that allowed for defense, ritual practice, and governance. Each quarter (such as Igbhei, Utsogun, Igbei, and others) functioned as a micro-unit within the larger polity, led by elders who reported to the Otaru, the central figure of political and spiritual authority. Auchi's pre-colonial social order was thus rooted in a fusion of migration legacy, strategic settlement planning, and communal cooperation elements that laid the foundation for its remarkable stability and adaptation even in the face of external influences and impending colonial intrusion.<sup>4</sup>

## **Settlement**

Before 1894, Auchi had already developed into a well-structured and resilient settlement within the Afenmai region of present-day Edo State, Nigeria. Oral traditions and historical accounts trace the origin of the Auchi people to a southward migration from the northern parts of Nigeria, particularly from regions affected by upheavals such as the Fulani Jihad and inter-ethnic warfare. This migration likely occurred in waves, bringing along not only people but also cultural practices, spiritual beliefs, and early political institutions. By the time Auchi was firmly established as a settlement, it had evolved into a compact, highly organized town composed of various quarters each tied to lineages and kinship groups that cooperated for collective survival.

## **Indigenous Culture of Pre-colonial Auchi**

In pre-colonial Auchi, marriage was not merely a private affair but a deeply social and political institution, representing an alliance between families, lineages, and, at times, entire quarters. The institution of marriage was a rite of passage into adulthood, often orchestrated with the involvement of family elders who ensured the compatibility of the union on moral, economic, and cultural grounds. The process was elaborate and ceremonial bride price negotiations were conducted with formality and symbolism. Items such as kola nuts, palm wine, livestock, and clothing were presented to the bride's family, signifying respect, gratitude, and the establishment of a binding covenant. The dowry

exchange was seen not only as a transactional fulfillment but as a demonstration of goodwill and responsibility by the groom's family.<sup>5</sup>

Polygamy, especially among wealthier and influential men, was not only accepted but encouraged as a means of expanding familial influence and ensuring labor support within households, particularly in agrarian activities. Each wife had a designated role in the social and economic structure of the family, ranging from childcare to domestic management and farm duties. The household thus functioned as a microcosm of the larger communal order, with embedded roles and expectations. Moreover, marriages often served diplomatic purposes sealing peace agreements, fostering inter-clan collaboration, and ensuring resource-sharing among quarters. Through these unions, networks of solidarity and social capital were built, reinforcing the sense of collective identity and mutual dependence that defined Auchi's indigenous society.

In pre-colonial Auchi, traditional attire was not only a marker of identity and status but also reflected the environmental conditions, cultural values, and social roles within the community. Clothing styles were simple yet symbolic, often hand-woven from locally sourced materials such as cotton and dyed fabrics. Both men and women wore attire that balanced functionality with aesthetics, especially during ceremonies, festivals, and rites of passage.<sup>6</sup>

For Men, dressing typically included wrappers tied around the waist, sometimes extending to the knees or ankles, and paired with a loose-fitting upper garment or left

bare-chested in everyday settings. During formal occasions or rituals, men adorned themselves with intricately woven cloth, beads, and symbolic items such as amulets or charms believed to offer protection or reflect spiritual roles. Chiefs and elders often wore more elaborate garments, including turbans or headpieces that signified rank and authority. Accessories like walking sticks, animal skins, or ceremonial swords were also common among the elite.

For Women, dressing was more elaborate, particularly during social or religious gatherings. Women commonly wore two wrappers one tied around the chest and another around the waist along with finely crafted blouses or shawls when available. They adorned themselves with jewelry made from beads, cowries, and brass, which were often indicators of marital status, wealth, or fertility. Hair was styled into various traditional forms, and body adornment such as tribal marks or body painting using natural dyes was not uncommon. During important ceremonies like weddings, dances, or festivals such as Ekuechi, women dressed in vibrant colors and layered accessories that emphasized beauty, status, and cultural pride. Pre-colonial Auchi dressing served not only practical needs but also symbolized deeper social meanings, connecting individuals to their lineage, community values, and spiritual beliefs.<sup>7</sup>

Social interaction in pre-colonial Auchi was governed by a strong sense of communalism and reciprocity, reflecting an intrinsic understanding that individual survival and prosperity were tied to the well-being of the community. Age-grade systems

were integral to the social fabric, organizing individuals into cohorts responsible for various civic and cultural responsibilities ranging from clearing farmlands to maintaining village paths and organizing festivals. These systems also fostered mentorship and socialization, ensuring that cultural values such as respect for elders, hard work, and humility were passed down through generations. Extended family units were not only domestic spaces but training grounds for collective responsibility and moral development.<sup>8</sup>

Inter-clan relationships were characterized by solidarity, mutual aid, and a collective response to crises and celebrations alike. Communal farming, shared labor during harvests, and rotational group support in construction projects were all part of everyday life. Festivals provided opportunities for cultural exchange, peaceful reconciliation, and intermarriage, further intertwining the destinies of different families and clans. Dispute resolution was often carried out informally through trusted elders who relied on consensus and customary laws to mediate. The social fabric was so strong that conflicts were typically resolved without violence. In this deeply relational society, hospitality was a core virtue: guests and strangers were warmly received, fed, and protected, especially during times of communal ceremonies, demonstrating the high value placed on human dignity and social harmony.

The spiritual life of pre-colonial Auchi was deeply embedded in its indigenous religious practices, which served both metaphysical and societal functions. At the center

of this spiritual framework was Oghena, the supreme deity believed to be the creator and sustainer of all life. While Oghena was seen as all-powerful and omnipresent, daily spiritual life was mediated through a pantheon of lesser deities and ancestral spirits, each linked to specific aspects of life such as fertility, rain, harvest, protection, and justice. These spirits and deities were honored through ritual offerings, libations, and songs, usually conducted at shrines, sacred groves, or ancestral compounds. Ritual leaders and diviners, known as *abo ohon* or priests, held immense spiritual authority and were often consulted in times of illness, misfortune, or conflict.<sup>9</sup>

Religious festivals and rites were communal affairs, marked by drumming, dancing, chanting, and feasting, all of which served not just as worship but as a means of reinforcing communal identity and transmitting oral traditions. Every quarter or lineage within Auchi had its own patron deity or spirit, whose veneration was a source of pride and spiritual assurance.

Despite these local variations, the collective worship of Oghena provided a sense of spiritual unity across the town. Seasonal rituals linked to agricultural cycles, coming-of-age ceremonies, or crisis interventions ensured that the people remained in harmony with both the physical and spiritual worlds. The spiritual realm was not seen as distant but intimately woven into daily life, shaping moral choices, guiding leadership, and sustaining communal ethics. This traditional worship system provided not only a

religious compass but a cultural anchor for the people of Auchi prior to the advent of Islam and colonial influence.

The linguistic identity of the Auchi people is rooted in the Etsako language, which belongs to the larger Edoid language family a group of languages spoken predominantly in the southern region of Nigeria. Etsako serves as both a communication tool and a cultural archive, preserving the collective memory and identity of the people. Within the broader Etsako linguistic group, the Auchi dialect carries distinct phonological patterns, tonal variations, and syntactic structures that differentiate it from neighboring communities, even within the Afenmai region.<sup>10</sup>

Language in pre-colonial Auchi extended far beyond daily conversation; it was an essential medium for transmitting oral traditions, ritual chants, folktales, proverbs, and historical narratives. Elders, griots, and spiritual leaders used language to educate the youth, resolve disputes, and perform religious rites. Proverbs and idioms were particularly valued as tools for moral instruction and social cohesion, reinforcing communal norms and ethical behavior. Through storytelling and ceremonial recitations, the Etsako language helped to embed a sense of identity, pride, and continuity within the Auchi community, making it a cornerstone of cultural life before colonial influences.

### **Political Institutions in Pre-colonial Auchi**

Pre-colonial Auchi possessed a well-structured and indigenous political system that balanced centralized leadership with community-based governance. At the apex of

this structure stood the Otaru, the paramount ruler who held both spiritual and political authority. The Otaru was not merely a figurehead; he was the custodian of customs, the chief priest of the land, and the ultimate adjudicator in critical matters affecting the community. His leadership was legitimized by ancestral traditions, spiritual validation, and the collective endorsement of the various quarters. The office of the Otaru was hereditary, usually selected from specific royal lineages, and his installation was marked by elaborate rituals, symbolizing his divine mandate and commitment to uphold justice, peace, and tradition.<sup>11</sup>

Beneath the Otaru operated a council of chiefs and elders drawn from the different quarters and lineages of Auchi. This council played a crucial role in local administration, deliberating on issues such as land distribution, conflict resolution, inter-community diplomacy, religious ceremonies, and communal projects. Governance was highly participatory decisions were reached through dialogue and consensus rather than imposition. The elders also acted as the moral and judicial backbone of society, interpreting customary laws and ensuring that societal norms were upheld. These political institutions reflected a deep respect for age, wisdom, and experience, ensuring that leadership was grounded in cultural knowledge and communal accountability. The fusion of spiritual, administrative, and judicial functions within this political system fostered a stable and cohesive society in Auchi before colonial disruption.<sup>12</sup>

### **Settlement of Disputes in Pre-colonial Auchi**

In pre-colonial Auchi, the settlement of disputes was an integral part of the community's social and political fabric, deeply rooted in indigenous jurisprudence and customary law. Disputes ranging from family disagreements and land conflicts to marriage breakdowns and inheritance issues were not viewed solely as private matters but as concerns affecting the broader community. The resolution process was largely communal and consensus-driven, led by the council of elders and presided over by the Otaru, who held both spiritual and administrative authority. These elders, respected for their wisdom and experience, functioned as mediators and moral guides rather than punitive enforcers.

A hallmark of Auchi's traditional dispute resolution system was its emphasis on reconciliation and restoration over punishment. Hearings were typically held in public spaces, fostering transparency and communal learning. Disputants were given the opportunity to voice their grievances, and solutions were often crafted to preserve harmony and prevent future conflict. Symbolic acts such as sharing kola nuts or drinks after a verdict further signified the restoration of peace. British colonial observers, even before 1894, remarked on the efficacy and sophistication of these indigenous mechanisms, noting that the Auchi system promoted accountability, unity, and stability in ways that aligned closely with the community's deeply held values and traditions.<sup>13</sup>

### **Pre-Colonial Economic Structure of Auchi**

The pre-colonial economic structure of Auchi was predominantly agrarian, marked by subsistence and surplus farming, complemented by hunting, fishing, and local crafts. The fertile lands and favorable climate supported the cultivation of staple crops such as yam, cassava, millet, maize, and plantain. Farming was both a communal and individual enterprise, with land held collectively under family and lineage heads and distributed according to need and capacity. Agricultural cycles were closely tied to seasonal festivals and religious rites, which celebrated harvests and ensured spiritual harmony with the land. In addition to crop production, men engaged in hunting and fishing to supplement food supply, while women often specialized in processing and preserving agricultural produce, weaving, and pottery.

Trade was another significant pillar of the Auchi economy in the pre-colonial period. The town's strategic location along inland trade routes enabled it to serve as a hub for the exchange of goods between northern and southern communities. Local markets were vibrant centers where agricultural products, livestock, handcrafted goods, and imported items such as salt, beads, and textiles were traded. Barter was the primary mode of exchange, although cowries were also used as a medium of value. These market interactions not only stimulated economic activity but also fostered interethnic relations and cultural exchange. Moreover, Auchi's engagement with Islamic traders from the north introduced new economic practices and opened up trans-Saharan trade connections

that further enhanced its prosperity and regional significance before the onset of colonial rule.<sup>14</sup>

### **Trade Routes (Pre-1500s to 1894)**

Auchi's economic development before colonial rule was significantly influenced by its strategic positioning along ancient trans-regional trade routes that connected the northern savannah zones of West Africa such as Kano, Katsina, and Sokoto with the dense forested regions of the south. These routes, which were already functional by the 15th century, gained momentum in the 17th and 18th centuries, especially with the flourishing of the trans-Saharan and regional trade networks. Through these commercial corridors, Hausa traders traveled southward with commodities like leather goods, salt, cowrie shells, beads, textiles, and Islamic literature. In return, Auchi and its surrounding communities supplied agricultural products such as yam, kolanuts, palm oil, and other forest-derived resources, alongside locally crafted tools and household wares. These trade exchanges fostered economic interdependence between regions, increased prosperity in Auchi, and enhanced its local production systems.<sup>15</sup>

Beyond material exchange, the trade routes facilitated cross-cultural interactions that significantly shaped Auchi's socio-religious landscape. The influx of Hausa and other northern traders led to the gradual introduction and adoption of Islam in Auchi centuries before colonialism. The presence of Islamic scholars, mallams, and traveling merchants not only influenced religious practices but also introduced literacy in Arabic,

changes in dress patterns, and new governance ideals that blended with local traditions. This integration of economic and cultural exchange helped transform Auchí from a relatively isolated agrarian community into a vibrant regional hub of commerce and religious learning. The stability of these trade routes ensured by local political structures, age-grade systems, and customary security practices allowed for the continuous flow of goods and ideas that sustained Auchí's growth well into the 19th century.

### **Agriculture (15th Century – 1894)**

Agriculture served as the backbone of Auchí's pre-colonial economy, tracing its structured practices to the aftermath of the Bini migration in the 15th century. Upon settling in their new environment, the early inhabitants of Auchí utilized the fertile soils and favorable climate to establish a robust agrarian lifestyle. Farming was primarily subsistence-oriented, with families cultivating a variety of staple crops such as yam, cassava, millet, maize, plantain, and assorted vegetables. These crops not only sustained local diets but also generated modest surpluses for trade within neighboring communities. Using indigenous tools like hoes, digging sticks, and machetes, agricultural labor was intensive and often organized through communal or family-based cooperation. Farmland was communally owned and distributed by lineage or clan heads, ensuring equitable access and reinforcing social bonds through land tenure customs rooted in kinship and tradition.<sup>16</sup>

The agricultural cycle played a central role in Auchí's social and spiritual life. Seasonal rhythms dictated communal activities, with planting beginning in the early rains of March and harvesting occurring between August and November. These periods were marked by vibrant cultural expressions such as the Inema Festival a post-harvest celebration that combined thanksgiving, music, dance, and spiritual rituals, fostering a strong sense of unity among community members. Age-grade groups, women's cooperatives, and family networks all contributed to maintaining agricultural productivity through shared labor systems like *ozheozhi* (mutual assistance farming). Moreover, the agricultural sector not only fed the population but also supported other sectors such as trade and craft production, laying the foundation for Auchí's pre-colonial prosperity and sociopolitical stability.

### **Craft Industries (16th – 19th Centuries)**

During the pre-colonial period, particularly from the 16th to the 19th centuries, craft industries emerged as a vital component of Auchí's economy and cultural identity. The community capitalized on locally sourced raw materials such as clay, iron ore, wood, and natural dyes to produce a wide array of handcrafted items. Blacksmithing was a highly respected occupation, with skilled artisans forging essential tools for farming, hunting, and warfare, as well as symbolic objects for rituals and leadership regalia. Pottery, predominantly undertaken by women, produced utilitarian and ceremonial vessels used in cooking, water storage, and religious rites. Similarly, wood carving served

both functional and artistic purposes, with figures, masks, and household items bearing spiritual symbolism. These crafts reflected a deep interweaving of economic necessity and cultural expression.<sup>17</sup>

Auchi's craft industries were sustained by family-based apprenticeship systems and informal guild-like structures that ensured the transmission of knowledge and skills across generations. Craftsmanship was not merely a livelihood but also a sacred duty tied to lineage and spiritual obligations. For instance, certain carving or forging practices were associated with specific clans or deities, and artisans often performed rites before embarking on significant projects. Beyond fulfilling domestic needs, these crafts were important trade commodities, facilitating exchange with neighboring Etsako communities and the wider Afenmai region. The durability and aesthetic quality of Auchi-made goods helped reinforce its economic relevance and cultural reputation prior to colonial incursion. By the 19th century, these industries had become an integral part of Auchi's economic diversity, contributing to its resilience and prosperity in a rapidly changing regional context.<sup>18</sup>

### **Market Networks (17th – 19th Centuries)**

Between the 17th and 19th centuries, Auchi developed a vibrant market network that was instrumental to its pre-colonial economy. These markets were held at regular intervals, typically on a four- or eight-day cycle, allowing for consistent economic activity and the circulation of goods and services. The central market in Auchi served as a

focal point where traders from neighboring communities such as Aviele, Ibie, Jattu, and Uzairue converged. These gatherings fostered not only commerce but also social exchange and cultural interaction among the Afenmai people. The market environment was dynamic, accommodating a variety of goods including foodstuffs, handcrafted tools, textiles, herbs, and livestock. Women were particularly active in these markets, dominating the trade in farm produce, cooked foods, and household items, while men more often participated in long-distance trade and bulk transactions.

The market networks of Auchi were also closely tied to seasonal and ceremonial rhythms. Fairs held during harvest festivals, such as after the Inema celebrations, attracted traders from farther regions, including Nupe and Oyo, creating opportunities for the exchange of luxury items and exotic goods. Barter was the traditional form of trade, but over time, cowrie shells and iron rods emerged as widely accepted mediums of exchange, signaling the early monetization of the local economy. These markets contributed significantly to Auchi's prosperity and cultural integration, acting as bridges between the economic, spiritual, and social spheres. They helped reinforce Auchi's role as a regional hub of commerce and laid the foundation for continued economic relevance into the colonial era.<sup>19</sup>

### **Auchi's Early Prosperity (1700s – 1894)**

During the 18th and 19th centuries, Auchi emerged as a thriving and strategically important settlement within the Afenmai region. Its prosperity was rooted in a combination of agricultural abundance, active trade networks, and sociopolitical stability. With fertile land and a communal land-tenure system that ensured equitable access, the people of Auchi were able to sustain productive farming activities and generate surpluses for trade. This agricultural strength supported the rise of local markets and long-distance trade, enabling the community to integrate into broader economic systems reaching the Hausa states and parts of Yorubaland. Trade in commodities such as palm oil, kolanuts, local crafts, and livestock further fueled economic growth, while craft industries provided tools and goods essential for daily life and commerce.

The early 1800s marked a period of notable demographic and spatial expansion for Auchi. Oral traditions recount how people from neighboring villages, particularly those affected by intercommunal conflicts, famines, or displacements, migrated to Auchi in search of peace and security. This influx of people contributed to the diversification of the local economy and the strengthening of communal institutions. Religious leadership, particularly under Islamic influence introduced through trade, coexisted with indigenous governance structures led by the Otaru and council of elders. These institutions preserved internal order and managed resources effectively. Auchi's early prosperity thus reflected

a balanced integration of economic activity, social harmony, and political governance, establishing it as a beacon of stability in pre-colonial northern Edo.<sup>20</sup>

### **Sociopolitical Stability (Throughout the 1800s)**

Throughout the 19th century, Auchi maintained a remarkable degree of sociopolitical stability, which played a crucial role in sustaining its economic and communal prosperity. Central to this stability was the leadership of the Otaru who was Auchi's traditional ruler and his council of elders, who oversaw governance through customary laws and consensus-based decision-making. These traditional authorities were instrumental in managing communal resources, particularly land, which was allocated based on family lineage and need. They also served as mediators in conflicts, upheld justice, and maintained order within the society. Their ability to provide consistent leadership helped foster a secure environment conducive to farming, trade, and social development.<sup>21</sup>

Another pillar of sociopolitical order was the age-grade system, which assigned specific responsibilities to various cohorts based on age and experience. These age groups were responsible for essential communal tasks such as organizing communal labor during planting and harvest seasons, maintaining roads and public spaces, and defending the community when needed. Such structures cultivated discipline, a sense of duty, and social cohesion among the people. Importantly, Auchi was spared the widespread violence, slave raids, and inter-village warfare that afflicted many other

Edoid communities during the 1800s, thanks to its robust internal organization and diplomatic relations with neighbors. This enduring peace enabled uninterrupted economic activities and reinforced Auchí's reputation as a stable and secure settlement in pre-colonial northern Edo.

However, Auchí's indigenous economic structure prior to colonial intervention was deeply rooted in communal values and traditional practices that emphasized collective well-being over individual accumulation. Land, the most vital resource, was owned communally and managed by lineage heads who allocated portions to families based on need and capacity. This system ensured equitable access to arable land and prevented land monopolization. The economy thrived on shared labor practices like *ozheozhi* a system of communal labor mobilization where families assisted one another during intensive agricultural periods such as planting and harvest. These practices strengthened social bonds and reinforced a spirit of cooperation that underpinned local productivity.<sup>22</sup>

Economic success in Auchí was traditionally measured not merely by material wealth but by generosity, support for extended family, and participation in communal life. Elders and influential families were often respected not for how much they owned, but for how much they gave and the extent of their involvement in community affairs. Spiritual beliefs also governed economic life, with taboos and rituals guiding trade ethics, land use, and craftsmanship. There were no formal systems of taxation or monetary

policy; rather, economic activities were regulated through oral customary laws enforced by elders, and spiritual sanctions that discouraged greed or exploitation. This sustainable, interdependent system laid a solid foundation for Auchi's resilience and prosperity well into the 19th century.

### **Production and Exchange (15th century – 1894)**

Auchi's pre-colonial economy was characterized by a diversified production system rooted in agriculture, craftwork, and animal husbandry. Households cultivated staple crops like yam, maize, and cassava, while also rearing goats and chickens to supplement their diets and provide additional goods for trade. Skilled craftspeople contributed tools, pottery, woven items, and dyed cloths, enriching the local economy with both utilitarian and culturally significant products. These goods were exchanged primarily through barter, though mediums such as cowrie shells, iron bars, and later glass beads served as proto-currencies, facilitating trade beyond immediate communities.<sup>23</sup>

The exchange of goods extended beyond economic transactions, reinforcing social relationships and cultural ties among neighboring communities such as Jattu, Uzairue, and Ibie. Local markets became key points for both economic and social interaction, operating under shared norms of trust and fairness, often regulated by elders or market guilds. Trade with northern Muslim merchants introduced goods like salt, leather, and Islamic texts in return for southern products such as kolanuts and palm oil. These exchanges not only expanded Auchi's economic reach but also embedded trade

practices within the community's religious and moral values, creating a resilient, self-sustaining economic system that thrived up to the eve of colonial disruption in 1894.<sup>24</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Auchi's pre-colonial economy was both dynamic and deeply embedded in its cultural and sociopolitical framework. From the 15th century to 1894, the community thrived on a foundation of agriculture, craft industries, and vibrant market networks, all supported by communal values and indigenous governance structures. Its strategic position along major trade routes facilitated interaction with northern and southern regions, fostering economic growth and cultural exchange. The economic system was marked by reciprocity, collective labor, and sustainable practices, with wealth measured not only in material terms but also in social cohesion and prestige. Through effective leadership, age-grade cooperation, and spiritual guidance, Auchi maintained peace, economic balance, and inter-community relations. This resilient economic tradition not only ensured prosperity during the pre-colonial period but also provided a strong base that shaped the community's response to colonial changes that followed.

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## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **EMERGENCE OF ISLAM IN AUCHI AND INTERACTIONS WITH THE NORTHERN FULANIS**

#### **The Auchi Kingdom in the Pre-Islamic Era**

Prior to the advent of Islam in the Auchi Kingdom, the people adhered to a rich traditional religious system centered around various deities whom they revered and petitioned sincerely for guidance and protection. Notable among these deities were Uchi, believed to be the spirit of Auchi's founder; Orle, the River goddess; Amanue; and Ogholodio, among others. These deities had specific shrines dedicated to them, where worship and rituals were conducted. At that time, the traditional religion was the

dominant faith among the Auchi populace, and each community or village maintained its shrine for collective worship.<sup>1</sup>

The Auchi people also had a deep-rooted belief in a Supreme Being. In their local language, this deity was referred to as “Oghena” or “Ogie Okuli.” They consistently acknowledged the supremacy of this divine entity in their prayers, recognizing Him as the ultimate force governing the universe. Although they approached Him through lesser gods, they strongly believed that this Supreme God was the singular source of all spiritual and earthly power. Alongside the Supreme Being, the people venerated local divinities. Some were widely worshipped across the kingdom, while others were specific to extended families. Many of these local deities represented prominent ancestors who had been deified due to their significant roles in the establishment and defense of the Auchi Kingdom. Orle, the River goddess associated with fertility, and Uchi, the progenitor who migrated from the Benin Kingdom over five centuries ago, were among the most revered. Ritual offerings to these deities did not involve human sacrifices but typically included animals such as goats, sheep, cocks, and ducks, as well as foods like pounded yam and egusi soup. These offerings were believed to promote general wellbeing and cure ailments such as infertility. Additionally, these deities played vital roles in settling disputes, including accusations of theft, witchcraft, and infidelity, often through oath-taking at the shrines, with outcomes believed to manifest promptly.<sup>2</sup>

Despite these unique local traditions, the overall religious worldview of the Auchi people aligned with the broader African spiritual systems. They believed in the active influence of spirits and ancestors on everyday life. Spirits were thought to inhabit physical objects and influence natural events, such as the destruction of farms. When such incidents occurred, spiritual intermediaries native doctors and medicine men were often called upon to mediate.

Ancestors were also highly revered. Not every deceased person was venerated as an ancestor; typically, it was those who had played foundational roles in the kingdom's formation. Once deified, these figures became central to the people's religious practices. Shrines and worship sites were established in their honor, and they were invoked in prayers, songs, and praises. Ancestors were believed to mediate between the living and the Supreme God, ensuring peace, prosperity, fertility, and harmony within the kingdom, especially before the 1860 Nupe invasion.

In line with their spiritual worldview, the people celebrated religious festivals to honor deities and ancestral spirits. These events were scheduled annually to express gratitude, request divine favors, commemorate historical events, and reinforce cultural values. One key example was the Uchi Festival, dedicated to Uchi, the kingdom's founding father. During the festival, the community, especially women and children, gathered at the historical site on Ekhei Hill, Uchi's original settlement. They sang, danced,

and clapped as the local priest conducted rituals and conveyed messages of gratitude and assurance from Uchi in response to the people's devotion.<sup>3</sup>

Another prominent celebration was the Orle Festival, which also saw large participation, particularly from women and children. In Etsako culture, women were seen as natural seekers of spiritual protection due to their perceived emotional depth and nurturing roles. Their active involvement was believed to enhance the community's spiritual appeal and ensure divine intervention in challenging situations. Furthermore, these festivals were believed to boost women's fertility. However, with the spread of Islam, many of these celebrations ceased, and those that remained were stripped of their original rituals and became more symbolic than spiritual.<sup>4</sup>

In the pre-Islamic Auchi society, religion, traditional medicine, and mystical practices were inseparable. Spiritual explanations were sought for every natural or supernatural occurrence. As such, individuals with problems often consulted native doctors and marabouts. These spiritual specialists employed various divination tools such as kolanuts, cowries, and palm kernel shells. Through chants and rituals, they identified the source of issues, revealed the perpetrators, and prescribed remedies involving specific items or sacrifices. These practitioners also crafted protective charms for individuals, including warriors, enhancing their courage, resilience, and effectiveness during conflicts.

The Auchi people also embraced beliefs in life after death and reincarnation. Their worldview encompassed both the physical and spiritual realms, which were seen as

interconnected and continuous. Life was understood as a cycle birth, maturity, death, and rebirth. The visible realm included humans and natural phenomena, while the invisible world comprised spiritual beings, both benevolent and malevolent, as well as the spirits of the dead. These two realms constantly interacted. The community relied on diviners, priests, and priestesses individuals believed to possess special spiritual gifts to interpret this unseen world. They acted as mediators between the living and the dead, explaining mysteries and guiding the people spiritually. It is important to note, however, that many of these beliefs and practices stood in contrast to the tenets of Islam, which began to gain prominence in the Auchi Kingdom in the early 20th century.<sup>5</sup>

### **Emergence of Islam in Auchi**

The arrival of Islam in the Auchi Kingdom marked a significant transformation in the lives of its people. Prior to 1860, Islam was practiced mainly by visitors, travelers, and settlers primarily of Nupe, Hausa, Fulani, and Yoruba descent. These groups, especially the Nupe and Hausa, resided mainly in Aibotse, a village within Auchi, which explains why the central prayer ground has remained there since Islam's introduction to the area. Although the Nupe did not directly impose Islam on the Auchi people, their conquest and socio-political relations with Auchi and its surrounding communities played a major role in stimulating interest in Islam. Nupe Islamic scholars, or mallams, further

influenced the process, especially when the community began to embrace Islam as its official religion. Despite their initial focus on trade, the Nupe's influence on Auchí's Islamization is undeniable.<sup>6</sup>

A pivotal moment occurred in 1914 when the Auchí people officially adopted Islam, discarding their traditional belief systems. This marked a revolutionary shift in their cultural and spiritual identity. The catalyst for this change was Oba Momodu of Agbede a nearby town who first embraced Islam. Auchí soon followed his lead, driven by the visionary leadership of Prince Momoh I, who was already playing an influential role before he ascended the throne.

Momoh I was known for his progressive mindset, generosity, and openness to new ideas. Deeply admired by both the British and his people, he was instrumental in the spread of Islam in Auchí. To encourage conversions, he promised full Islamic attire to the first 250 individuals who learned how to pray and sacrificed a ram as part of their conversion, which included adopting Muslim names. This initiative significantly changed the town's appearance, making it resemble a typical northern Muslim community. He later extended the offer to an additional 350 people.

As a young prince, Momoh had embraced Islam early and maintained close ties with the Hausa.<sup>7</sup> Industrious and enlightened, he worked as a tailor, owned a cotton farm, and traded extensively with major Nigerian cities like Lagos, Calabar, and Warri. He even hired a private tutor to teach him English and studied the Qur'an under Hausa and

Nupe tutors. Around 1910, he began inviting Islamic scholars to Auchi, many of whom were already active in Agbede. With their help, he led efforts to eliminate the old traditional religious symbols, and by 1914, the people had fully converted to Islam.

When Momoh became the Otaru (king) in 1919, he dispatched Mallams to neighboring areas to propagate Islam, which further strengthened the religion's presence in and around Auchi. He also strategically married women from various communities, fostering unity and alliances through these marriages. Some Mallams were sent to study in places like Lokoja, Keffi, and Kano. By 1960, Auchi had many well-respected Islamic scholars. King Momoh had 48 wives and 257 children, yet his household was known for its harmony. The British colonial officers were reportedly amazed by the peacefulness and organization within his large family. His wives lived in structured groups, with senior wives caring for the juniors like their own siblings. The people of Auchi regard the adoption of Islam as one of the greatest milestones in the kingdom's history.<sup>8</sup>

### **Fulani Merchants, Clerics, and Migrants**

The spread of Islam to Auchi in the 19th century was significantly influenced by the movements of Fulani and Hausa Muslim merchants, clerics, and migrants, many of whom were indirectly connected to the larger Islamic reformist wave initiated by the Sokoto Jihad (1804–1810) led by Usman dan Fodio. Although Auchi was not directly involved in the military campaigns of the Jihad, the religious and intellectual currents it stirred had far-reaching consequences for the Middle Belt and Southern Nigeria.

Auchi, being strategically located in the northern part of present-day Edo State, sat at a crossroads of commercial and cultural exchanges that connected the Islamic north to the forest belt of the south. As a result, by the 1820s, Fulani and Hausa merchants began frequenting the area. These traders brought more than goods; they carried with them Islamic teachings, manuscripts, Arabic scripts, and ethical norms grounded in Islamic jurisprudence. Among these figures were clerics and mallams (Islamic teachers), who gradually settled in Auchi. Their presence marked the beginning of sustained missionary efforts in the region. Mallam Garba, a pivotal figure in Auchi's Islamic history, is said to have arrived around 1860. He was not only a scholar but also a teacher and mediator. With his deep knowledge of the Qur'an and Hadith, he established one of the earliest Quranic schools (madrasa) in the town, which became a beacon of Islamic education in the Afenmai area.<sup>9</sup>

Mallam Garba's influence extended beyond religious instruction. He was instrumental in advising local leaders, mediating disputes using Islamic principles, and helping create a moral and social structure that complemented existing traditional systems. His legacy laid the foundation for the emergence of a local Muslim intelligentsia and the broader institutionalization of Islamic practices in Auchi. Fulani and Hausa migrants contributed to agricultural and commercial life, trading in goods like kolanuts, leather, cloth, and livestock, while introducing northern farming techniques and caravan-

based commerce. Their long-term presence facilitated intermarriage, language exchange, and social integration, thus embedding Islamic culture within the everyday life of Auchi.

### **Religious Pluralism**

The introduction and expansion of Islam in Auchi did not occur in a vacuum; it unfolded within a society deeply rooted in traditional religious systems. Throughout the 19th century, Auchi exemplified a model of religious pluralism, where Islam and indigenous spiritual practices coexisted sometimes blending, sometimes operating in parallel. At the core of Auchi's traditional religion were beliefs in ancestral spirits, nature deities, oracles, and ritual ceremonies that emphasized balance between the spiritual and physical worlds. These belief systems were centered around the family and community, with practices such as libations, sacrificial offerings, and consultations with diviners (azebho) serving both personal and communal needs.<sup>10</sup>

As Islam gained followers, it did not attempt to obliterate these traditions. Instead, early converts often influenced by trade relationships, prestige, or education adopted Islamic beliefs while maintaining elements of their cultural heritage. For instance, festivals like Inema, which marked the harvest season and communal thanksgiving, continued to be celebrated even by Muslims, albeit with certain Islamic modifications such as prayer-led ceremonies or avoidance of traditional libations. Islamic dietary laws, prayer routines, and dress codes began to shape everyday norms, especially among those engaged with northern scholars or who had studied under local mallams. However, these

changes were introduced with diplomatic sensitivity, allowing families and communities to adjust gradually. Elders and traditional leaders, including the Otaru ensured that no group Muslim or non-Muslim felt marginalized, maintaining unity and continuity within the community. This coexistence fostered a unique spiritual landscape in Auchu, where interfaith dialogue, tolerance, and mutual respect became part of the social fabric. It also ensured that Islam's growth did not spark social unrest but was instead seen as a complementary force that brought literacy, law, and broader connections to the Islamic world.<sup>11</sup>

## **Altered Cultural Norms**

The gradual entrenchment of Islam in Auchi during the 19th century introduced a wave of cultural transformation that, while significant, was diplomatically harmonized with indigenous customs. Islam did not seek abrupt replacement of local traditions but instead embedded itself thoughtfully within the social framework of the community. This approach facilitated smoother acceptance and integration of Islamic values. One of the most visible changes was in the realm of education. With the arrival of Islamic clerics and scholars most notably Mallam Garba Arabic literacy and Quranic instruction became central to child upbringing among Muslim families. Memorization of the Qur'an, ethical teachings from Hadith, and basic Islamic jurisprudence were introduced, not just as religious obligations, but also as markers of prestige and enlightenment.

In terms of social behaviour, Islamic moral teachings began to influence norms related to modesty, hygiene, and interpersonal conduct. For example, women's attire gradually shifted toward more modest clothing, reflecting Islamic injunctions while still accommodating local fabrics and styles.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, life-cycle rituals such as naming ceremonies (Aqīqah), marriages (Nikkah), and conflict mediation increasingly followed Islamic rites, although traditional elements were often retained to maintain cultural continuity. Crucially, these changes were not imposed in opposition to traditional authority. The Otaru (traditional ruler) and his council of elders played a mediating role, ensuring that Islamic practices did not conflict with the communal values or spiritual

unity of Auchí. This diplomatic balance allowed Islam to flourish without alienating adherents of ancestral religion or threatening communal harmony.

### **Initiated Long-term Social Changes**

Over time, the influence of Islam in Auchí extended far beyond religious practice triggering far-reaching social transformations that continued into the colonial and post-colonial periods. The most enduring impact was the institutionalization of Islamic education, with Quranic schools emerging as early as the late 19th century. These institutions cultivated a literate Muslim elite who became instrumental in shaping Auchí's reputation as a center of learning. Many of these early scholars would later engage with colonial administrative structures and contribute to local governance, education, and legal affairs.<sup>13</sup>

Islam also carried egalitarian ideals that subtly challenged traditional hierarchies. Unlike the rigid lineage-based power systems, Islamic teachings emphasized spiritual equality and merit. This encouraged conversions across social strata including slaves, women, and commoners thus broadening access to religious leadership and education. Social welfare practices, such as zakat (almsgiving) and community-based mutual aid, helped strengthen communal cohesion. Ethical norms surrounding justice, accountability, and cleanliness also reshaped local civic life. As Islam spread, Auchí gained regional recognition for its scholars and religious institutions, drawing students, traders, and clerics from nearby Etsako and Afenmai territories, and further integrating Auchí into the

wider Islamic intellectual and economic networks of Northern Nigeria. Islam's arrival was not just a religious event it marked the beginning of Auchi's transformation into a hub of education, justice, and social reform grounded in both spiritual values and cultural diplomacy.<sup>14</sup>

### **Strategic Alliances and Integration into Wider Islamic Networks**

The growth and consolidation of Islam in Auchi during the 19th century were significantly propelled by strategic alliances between local traditional authorities and influential Islamic scholars and merchants from the north. These partnerships went beyond religious propagation they served as diplomatic, economic, and intellectual bridges, positioning Auchi within the larger Islamic world of West Africa. Local leaders, including successive Otaru rulers, recognized the value of affiliating with Hausa and Fulani clerics who were already part of well-established Islamic networks stretching from Sokoto to Ilorin and beyond. By hosting and supporting these clerics such as Mallam Garba, who arrived around 1860 Auchi created an environment conducive to both spiritual growth and regional prestige. These scholars not only brought religious knowledge but also facilitated access to long-distance trade routes, legal ideas rooted in Sharia, and Islamic educational frameworks. As Auchi deepened its ties with the Hausa-Fulani Muslim sphere, it gradually became integrated into the broader intellectual and commercial circuits that linked northern Nigeria with trans-Saharan Islamic centers. The

recognition of Auchi as a spiritual and political hub by the late 19th century (circa 1894) was the result of these sustained interactions and mutual alliances.<sup>15</sup>

## **Conclusion**

These alliances also had significant diplomatic value during the onset of British colonial penetration. Islamic institutions in Auchi had already established systems of governance, moral order, and education, which colonial officials often found easier to engage with and co-opt. The respected leadership structure underpinned by both traditional and Islamic legitimacy, enabled Auchi to negotiate peacefully with early colonial agents, avoiding the violent confrontations that plagued other communities during this period. In essence, Auchi's integration into wider Islamic networks was not just a religious development but a multifaceted strategy that enhanced its political stability, regional influence, and socio-economic resilience. These strategic relationships ensured that Islam in Auchi was not an isolated phenomenon but part of a continental Islamic movement rooted in diplomacy, learning, and commerce.<sup>16</sup>

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE FULANIS AND THE SOCIOECONOMIC AND RELIGIOUS TRANSFORMATION OF AUCHI

This chapter delves into the transformative impact of Fulani influence on Auchi's socioeconomic and religious landscape. It analyzes how the Fulani presence marked by Islamic scholarship, political ideas, and commercial networks reshaped indigenous institutions and introduced new systems of education, governance, and religious leadership. The chapter highlights the role of key Fulani figures and their relationships with local elites in advancing the spread of Islam and redefining socioeconomic roles within the community. Through this analysis, the chapter uncovers the layered ways in which Fulani engagement with Auchi contributed to a profound reordering of its societal framework during a critical historical juncture.<sup>1</sup>

#### **The Fulanis**

The Fulani, along with other northern groups such as the Hausa and Nupe, played a pivotal role in the religious and socioeconomic transformation of the Auchi Kingdom. Prior to the mid-19th century, Islam was primarily practiced by transient individuals and settlers of northern origin. Although the Fulani did not forcefully impose Islam, their interactions through trade, settlement, and religious influence significantly shaped Auchi's gradual embrace of Islam. The settlement of these northern Muslim groups in Aibotse, a village within Auchi, laid the foundation for Islam's establishment in the

region. Their presence contributed to the construction of the central prayer ground, which remains in Aibotse to this day. Over time, religious scholars (mallams) from the Fulani and allied groups began to influence local culture and governance, contributing to the eventual Islamization of the entire kingdom.<sup>2</sup>

This transformation culminated in 1914 when Auchi officially adopted Islam as its state religion under the leadership of Prince Momoh I, a visionary leader with close ties to Hausa and Fulani communities. His efforts, including inviting mallams to preach and offering incentives for conversion, revolutionized Auchi's religious and social structure. He also promoted education, trade, and inter-community marriages, which helped to solidify the new religious identity and strengthen regional alliances. The Fulani, through their religious leadership and economic integration, played a central role in shaping the cultural and spiritual landscape of Auchi. Their influence endures, as seen in the sustained Islamic practices and the northern-style dress and customs that remain prominent in Auchi today.

### **The Role and Impact of Islam on the Auchi Kingdom**

The advent of Islam in the Auchi Kingdom marked a significant milestone in the region's historical and cultural development. As earlier noted, its introduction was among the most transformative events in the kingdom's history. Islam profoundly influenced not only the religious orientation of the people but also their social, administrative, and cultural structures.

Its arrival led to a series of innovations, and its eventual adoption as the state religion significantly redefined the cultural practices of the Auchi people. At its core, Islam signifies complete submission to the will of God and promotes peace, which contributed to reshaping the religious and cultural landscape of the kingdom. This transformation fostered a climate of peaceful coexistence within Auchi and among surrounding communities.<sup>3</sup>

### **Socioeconomic Impact of Islam**

The introduction of Islam into the Auchi Kingdom, particularly beginning in 1914, significantly transformed the social, cultural, and economic fabric of the community. The arrival of Islam was considered one of the most pivotal developments in the kingdom's history, influencing both Auchi and surrounding regions.

### **Transformation of Lifestyle and Religious Identity:**

The arrival of Islam in Auchi marked a significant transformation in both lifestyle and religious identity. Unlike Christianity, which was introduced later and often perceived as a formalized set of beliefs and rituals centered around church worship, Islam was embraced as a holistic system that influenced all aspects of life. It extended beyond mere religious observance to shape social behavior, economic transactions, legal frameworks, and even dietary habits. Islam encouraged believers to live in total submission to the will of Allah, making faith an integral part of everyday actions and decisions.<sup>4</sup>

This comprehensive approach to religion fostered a deeper sense of community and identity among the people of Auchi. The Islamic lifestyle promoted values such as honesty, charity, humility, and justice, which reinforced moral conduct in both public and private life. Through regular prayers, fasting, almsgiving, and other religious obligations, individuals became more spiritually disciplined and socially responsible. The emphasis on modesty in dress, respect for elders, and peaceful coexistence with others contributed to enhanced communal harmony and solidified Auchi's reputation as a center of Islamic culture and learning. This transformation distinguished the community from its pre-Islamic past and from neighboring regions with differing religious orientations.

### **Islamic Governance in the Auchi Kingdom**

The Auchi Kingdom, located in Etsako West Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria, represents a unique blend of traditional monarchy and Islamic governance. Although it operates within the larger secular Nigerian state, the internal socio-religious organization of Auchi is deeply influenced by Islamic principles, reflecting both the heritage and lived experiences of its predominantly Muslim population.

The official adoption of Islam in Auchi traces back to the early 20th century, following a period of active Islamic proselytization by scholars and traders from the northern regions of Nigeria. The Otaru, the traditional ruler of Auchi, formally declared Islam the main religion of the kingdom a declaration that symbolically aligned the royal institution with Islamic teachings and values. Despite this religious declaration, the community maintains

an inclusive and tolerant outlook, allowing other religions such as Christianity and the Grail Message to flourish. The recognition of Islam as the principal religion thus serves more as a cultural identity marker than a legal imposition.<sup>5</sup>

The Otaru of Auchi is both a traditional monarch and a symbolic Islamic leader, playing a vital role in harmonizing traditional customs with Islamic values. While the Otaru does not wield sharia-based judicial authority in the strictest sense (as found in states with official Islamic legal systems), his rulings and community engagements are informed by Islamic ethics of justice, fairness, and compassion. He acts as a custodian of both Islamic morality and indigenous tradition, balancing religious leadership with political diplomacy. His palace functions as a center for dispute resolution, mediation, and community guidance, often involving religious scholars in decision-making processes.

Islamic governance in Auchi was complemented by a structured religious hierarchy that includes: The Chief Imam of Auchi, Assistant Imams, Islamic scholars (Malams), and Leaders of Qur'anic schools and mosques. These figures are entrusted with the spiritual and moral education of the populace. They interpret Islamic law (Shari'ah) in a non-legislative but community-guiding capacity mainly offering fatwas (legal opinions), delivering sermons, and settling family or civil disputes through mediation. The collaboration between the religious clerics and the Otaru ensures a system

of governance that promotes Islamic values without marginalizing non-Muslims, upholding religious harmony within the kingdom.<sup>6</sup>

Islamic governance in Auchu is practiced alongside indigenous customs, creating a hybrid system where Islamic norms influence daily life marriage, inheritance, family structure, and dispute resolution but without overriding traditional laws or the Nigerian constitution. For example: Islamic rites are observed in weddings and burials. Islamic inheritance principles are often preferred in Muslim households. Family and marital disputes are often taken to the mosque or Islamic council before any civil intervention. This dual system enhances both religious piety and social cohesion, ensuring that Islamic laws are respected but not coercively imposed. Auchu's Islamic governance places strong emphasis on ethical leadership and community service. Religious and traditional leaders are expected to embody the values of: Justice ('Adl), Compassion (Rahma), Accountability (Mas'uliyah) and Community welfare (Maslahah). These principles guide the governance style of the Otaru and the moral teachings of Islamic scholars. The leadership structure discourages corruption, favoritism, and injustice, encouraging public servants and community heads to act in the interest of all citizens, regardless of religion.<sup>7</sup>

One of the most notable successes of Islamic governance in Auchu is its role in maintaining peace and interfaith harmony. The religious leadership encourages interfaith dialogue and mutual respect. Prominent figures like Sheikh Suleman Momoh have

emphasized that Islam forbids religious coercion, and this message is echoed in public sermons and teachings.

Instances such as the peaceful resolution of land disputes between Muslims and Christians, or the joint celebration of festivals, highlight the effectiveness of a governance system that prioritizes peaceful coexistence over religious domination. Islamic governance in the Auchi Kingdom is not a rigid legal framework but a moral and cultural compass that guides the community's spiritual and civic life. Anchored by the leadership of the Otaru, supported by a network of Islamic scholars, and reinforced through educational and welfare institutions, it creates a system where faith and tradition coexist with democracy and diversity.<sup>8</sup>

### **Shift from Polytheism to Monotheism:**

Prior to the advent of Islam, the Auchi people were adherents of polytheism, revering a variety of traditional deities, spirits, and ancestors. These spiritual entities were believed to influence different aspects of life such as fertility, harvest, protection, and health. Religious practices involved rituals, sacrifices, and festivals to appease these gods, and a strong connection to ancestral worship was part of the spiritual fabric of the community. The worldview of the people was shaped by the belief in multiple supernatural forces, with each deity playing a specialized role in human affairs.

However, the introduction of Islam ushered in a significant spiritual transformation. By 1914, Islamic monotheism, centered on the belief in one indivisible

God (Allah), had been widely accepted in Auchi. This shift brought about not just a change in worship practices, but also a restructuring of religious thought and identity. Islam unified the people's spiritual direction under a single divine authority, which in turn influenced their ethics, morality, and societal values. The adoption of monotheism led to the decline of traditional religious systems and created a cohesive spiritual ideology that integrated faith with daily life and governance.<sup>9</sup>

### **Legal and Administrative Reforms:**

The embrace of Islam in Auchi was not only spiritual but also institutional, as it introduced structured legal and administrative systems based on Islamic principles. Islamic law, or Sharia, began to inform how justice was administered, with the Qur'an serving as the ultimate reference for resolving disputes and maintaining social order. This marked a departure from the informal and often oral traditional justice systems. The new framework emphasized fairness, accountability, and religious observance, making it a central pillar in community governance.

Additionally, the spread of Islamic education produced a literate class of individuals who were qualified to serve in various bureaucratic and judicial capacities. Educated Muslims took up roles such as scribes, court clerks, judges (Qadis), and personal secretaries to traditional rulers, such as the Otaru of Auchi. Their training not only enhanced administrative efficiency but also reinforced the role of literacy and religious knowledge in leadership. The reliance on educated personnel and the Qur'an in

governance signified a merging of religious ethics with public service, resulting in a more organized and accountable political structure.<sup>10</sup>

### **Naming and Identity Systems**

Before the 1860 Nupe invasion, the naming system in Auchi was deeply connected to the community's spiritual and cultural beliefs. Children were given names that carried significant meaning, often reflecting hopes, prayers, or cultural values. For instance, names like *Oshiobugie* ("God shows the way"), *Oshionebo* ("God is the granter of greater protection"), and *Ikelegbe* ("I do not want enemies") served not only as identifiers but also as blessings for the child's future. These names embodied the community's worldview, where divine intervention was seen as a guiding force in life.

With the advent of Islam in 1914, a new naming tradition began to emerge. Muslim names were introduced alongside traditional names, marking the integration of Islamic identity into the people's lives. During naming ceremonies held on the seventh day after birth, children were given Muslim names such as *Basiru* ("The All Seeing"), *Rahim* ("The Merciful"), and *Mumin* ("The Custodian of Faith"). This dual-naming system not only honored the traditions of the past but also reflected the profound influence of Islam, symbolizing a cultural and spiritual transformation within the Auchi Kingdom.<sup>11</sup>

### **Social Unity and Political Expansion:**

Islam had a profound role in unifying the people of the Auchi Kingdom by transcending traditional divisions of family, clan, and ethnicity. It introduced the concepts of brotherhood and a shared sense of common authority that cut across various social and ethnic boundaries. The emphasis on unity and peace fostered by Islam encouraged cooperation and harmonious relationships among the diverse groups within the kingdom and neighboring regions. This religious cohesion was instrumental in promoting social stability, as it provided a framework for peaceful coexistence.

Moreover, the spread of Islam played a key role in the political expansion of the Auchi Kingdom. As Islam propagated, it facilitated the formation of larger political units and empires that integrated different peoples under a unified governance model. This broader political framework helped rulers extend their influence and establish cooperative networks beyond their immediate geographical borders. The commonality of Islamic teachings provided a foundation for governance that was accepted by various groups, promoting political unity and enabling the formation of more extensive and structured political entities.<sup>12</sup>

### **Spread of Literacy and Islamic Education:**

Before the arrival of Islam in 1914, western-style education was almost non-existent in Auchi. The predominant form of education in the kingdom was Qur'anic education, which focused on teaching religious texts and principles. However, with the introduction of Islam came the spread of literacy, primarily through the study of the

Arabic language. This new form of education opened the doors to a vast array of Islamic knowledge, including theology, philosophy, and sciences, which significantly enriched the intellectual landscape of the kingdom.

The establishment of Qur'anic schools across the Auchi Kingdom allowed for the preservation of oral history and traditions in written form, contributing to the documentation of cultural heritage. These schools not only played a vital role in religious education but also in enhancing governance. The spread of literacy empowered a new generation of educated individuals who could participate in administration, law, and diplomacy, thus contributing to the kingdom's intellectual and political development. The proliferation of Islamic education laid the groundwork for a more informed society, which advanced both the cultural and administrative capabilities of the kingdom.<sup>13</sup>

#### **Cultural Influence on Dress Code:**

Islamic values significantly influenced the dress code in Auchi, with a strong emphasis on modesty and decorum. Men in the kingdom traditionally adopted long flowing gowns, such as Kaftans and Jalabiyyahs, paired with caps, which served both as a cultural and religious symbol. These garments were designed to cover most of the body, exposing only the hands and feet, in alignment with Islamic principles of modesty. This change in attire reflected the broader societal embrace of Islamic values and the shift from traditional dress to a more standardized Islamic dress code.

For women, the Islamic influence was even more pronounced. They adopted full-body gowns, often worn with Hijabs (veils) to cover their heads, leaving only their faces visible. The practice of wearing the veil became an important part of the cultural identity for Muslim women in Auchi. The concept of seclusion, or purdah, also emerged,

especially for prominent women, where they were required to veil themselves and limit their public appearances. This strict dressing culture, rooted in Islamic modesty, remains a significant part of Auchi's societal norms to this day, reflecting the enduring legacy of Islamic teachings in shaping cultural practices.<sup>14</sup>

### **Characteristics of Auchi Muslims**

The Muslim community in Auchi, located in Edo State, Nigeria, is distinguished by a culture of peace, tolerance, and mutual respect, which starkly contrasts with the narratives surrounding radicalism or religious militancy seen in some parts of the world. This peaceful disposition is deeply rooted in the cultural heritage of the Etsako people, the indigenous ethnic group of Auchi. Their inherent values of hospitality, openness, and harmonious cohabitation with people of varying ethnic and religious backgrounds have been instrumental in shaping the town's religious and social atmosphere.

### **Religious Freedom**

While Islam is acknowledged as the dominant religion in Auchi having been officially endorsed by the Otaru (traditional ruler) religious freedom remains a cornerstone of community life. Individuals are free to practice the religion of their choice without fear of discrimination or persecution. This freedom is not merely theoretical but actively practiced, as evident in the composition of the royal family itself, where members openly identify with different religions, including Christianity and the Grail Message. Such inclusivity underscores the community's broad-minded approach to faith and its commitment to peaceful religious pluralism.<sup>15</sup>

### **Commitment to Peace and Nonviolence**

Violence and religious extremism are alien to the ethos of Auchi Muslims. Historical records, including during periods of potential conflict such as the Nupe invasions, highlight the community's preference for dialogue, negotiation, and peaceful resolution of disputes.

### **Promotion of Education**

Auchi Muslims place high importance on education as a means of personal development and societal advancement. Their leaders, particularly Islamic scholars, are well-educated in both Western and Islamic disciplines, allowing for a more informed and balanced worldview. They actively advocate for educational advancement within the community, and Islamic schools (madrasas) complement formal education by teaching moral and spiritual values. This dual emphasis on secular and religious learning has fostered a community of enlightened individuals who are less susceptible to radical ideologies and more inclined toward peaceful living.<sup>16</sup>

### **Understanding and Practice of True Islam**

The religious practices in Auchi reflect an adherence to what is often referred to as *pristine* or *authentic* Islam the original message and lifestyle modeled by Prophet Muhammad. This includes the understanding that coercion in matters of faith is not permitted, as illustrated in Qur'an 10:99, which acknowledges that not everyone is destined to be Muslim. Auchi Muslims embrace this theological perspective, promoting interfaith understanding and peaceful coexistence. By internalizing this divine principle, the community actively resists extremist interpretations of Islam.

### **Equitable Leadership by the Otaru**

The role of the Otaru in maintaining peace and religious harmony cannot be overstated. As a traditional leader, his influence transcends religious boundaries, and his judgment is widely respected. His impartial approach to governance ensures that justice is dispensed fairly, regardless of the religious affiliations of those involved. Notable examples include his rulings on land disputes and inter-religious conflicts, where his balanced decisions helped avert potentially explosive situations. His leadership style is a vital stabilizing force in the community.<sup>17</sup>

### **Strong Culture of Tolerance**

Religious tolerance in Auchi is not just a passive ideal it is actively practiced. Remarks or actions that might typically incite conflict are generally dismissed as ignorance rather than met with hostility. This mature approach to inter-religious relations cultivates an atmosphere where people of different faiths can engage openly without fear of confrontation. According to local leaders, such tolerance is a defining characteristic of the community and a major contributor to its enduring peace.

### **Absence of Religious Discrimination**

In Auchi, religious affiliation has no bearing on an individual's social or economic opportunities. The community fosters an environment of inclusivity, where both Muslims and Christians participate fully in communal life. This inclusivity is most visibly demonstrated during major religious celebrations such as Christmas and Eid-el-Fitr. In these moments, community members, regardless of religious background, contribute to and partake in each other's festivities.<sup>18</sup>

### **Prevalence of Interfaith Marriages**

Another unique feature of Auchi's Muslim community is the acceptance and encouragement of interfaith marriages. It is not uncommon for Muslim families to give their daughters in marriage to Christian men, and vice versa. This openness is inspired by the precedent of Prophet Muhammad, who had Christian spouses. Such unions have proven to be a powerful tool for bridging religious divides, fostering familial and community ties that transcend religious labels. These marriages serve as practical examples of peaceful coexistence and are a significant reason why the community has remained relatively free of religious tension.

### **Conclusion**

Religion fostered a deeper sense of community and identity among the people of Auchi. The Islamic lifestyle promoted values such as honesty, charity, humility, and justice, which reinforced moral conduct in both public and private life. Through regular prayers, fasting, almsgiving, and other religious obligations, individuals became more spiritually disciplined and socially responsible. The emphasis on modesty in dress, respect for elders, and peaceful coexistence with others contributed to enhanced communal harmony and solidified Auchi's reputation as a center of Islamic culture and learning.

## Endnotes

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## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **CONCLUSION**

This study examined Trade and Religion and International Relations: A Case Study of Auchi before 1894, the chapter one is the introduction which presents that Auchi was a thriving pre-colonial community before 1894, with a strong foundation in trade, religion, and contacts with nearby communities. Due to its advantageous location along

important trade routes, it served as a major marketplace where locals traded goods with neighbouring ethnic groups including the Hausa, Nupe, Yoruba, and Igbo, including textiles, agricultural food, and iron tools. Mutual understanding and cultural integration were promoted by these trading links. Auchi's growth was also greatly impacted by religion. Initially practicing local religions, the people gradually adopted Islam as a result of exposure to northern traders, particularly the Hausa and Fulani.

Chapter two reveals that Auchi, one of the oldest and most influential towns in present-day Edo North, which traces its origins to migrations prompted by wars and socio-political upheavals in the northern regions. Oral traditions suggest that the ancestors of the Auchi people migrated from Udo in the Benin Kingdom, settling eventually in the forested and hilly area now known as Auchi. Over time, they established a stable society organized around kinship, age grades, and traditional religious beliefs, governed by elders and clan heads. The town developed into a cohesive community known for its strong values, communal living, and respect for authority, which later laid the groundwork for the centralized kingship under the Otaru.

In pre-colonial times, Auchi had a robust and self-sustaining economic system largely based on agriculture, trade, and craftwork. The people cultivated crops like yam, cassava, maize, and vegetables, and they also practiced animal husbandry. Farming was communal and seasonal, deeply embedded in the cultural life of the people. Auchi's strategic location made it a trading hub that attracted itinerant traders from Nupe, Hausa,

Yoruba, and other neighboring ethnic groups. Markets flourished with the exchange of local produce, textiles, pottery, and iron tools. Women played a vital role in commerce, especially in the sale of food items and handmade goods. The integration of external trade networks, especially with Muslim traders from the north, eventually facilitated not just economic exchange but also cultural and religious interactions, which contributed to Auchí's transformation in the later colonial period.

Chapter three reveals that the emergence of Islam in Auchí, a prominent town in Edo State, Nigeria, can be traced back to the 19th century, primarily through trade and cultural interactions with Muslim groups such as the Hausa, Nupe, Yoruba, and especially the Fulani. These groups, particularly the Fulani, who were known for their Islamic zeal and scholarship following the Sokoto Jihad led by Usman dan Fodio, played a critical role in the introduction and propagation of Islam in the region. The Fulani influence reached Auchí through northern trade routes and missionary journeys, as they moved southward in search of converts and economic opportunities. Their Islamic teachings and practices gradually took root among the Etsako people of Auchí, who were previously adherents of indigenous religious systems.

A turning point in Auchí's religious history came with the leadership of King Momoh I (Momoh Idaeó), who officially adopted Islam and encouraged mass conversion among his people. He worked closely with northern Fulani scholars, inviting them to settle in Auchí and educate the locals in Islamic doctrine, law, and values. These scholars

helped establish Quranic schools and introduced Islamic judicial and administrative systems. The king's reforms, which included offering incentives like Islamic attire and names to converts, and dismantling traditional shrines, marked a definitive shift from traditional worship to organized Islam. The northern Fulani influence thus not only strengthened the Islamic identity of Auchi but also fostered religious education, social reform, and peaceful coexistence, embedding Islamic values deeply into the town's cultural fabric.

Chapter four reveals that the Fulani people, alongside the Nupe and Hausa, played a significant role in the religious and socioeconomic transformation of Auchi, a town in present-day Edo State, Nigeria. Through interactions with traders in the 19th century, Islam was introduced to Auchi, and by 1914, it became the official religion under the leadership of King Momoh I. As a visionary ruler, King Momoh I actively promoted Islam by offering incentives such as Islamic clothing to new converts and inviting Muslim scholars to educate the people. By the time he officially became the Otaru of Auchi in 1919, Islam had taken firm root, traditional shrines were dismantled, and Islamic governance structures were established throughout the kingdom.

Beyond religion, the Fulani, along with the Nupe and Hausa, influenced Auchi's social and economic life. Islamic cultural practices reshaped marriage customs, education, and dressing styles. Marriages were often conducted as acts of religious charity (*sadaqah*), while Koranic schools and educational centers enhanced literacy and access to Islamic

sciences. Dress codes shifted to reflect Islamic modesty for both men and women. This transformation also led to cultural integration, with the adoption of Islamic names and principles becoming part of daily life. Overall, the Fulani's impact fostered a peaceful, religiously tolerant society that continues to define Auchi's identity today.

In conclusion, the historical narrative of Auchi prior to 1894 reveals a vibrant and dynamic pre-colonial society characterized by economic prosperity, cultural pluralism, and religious tolerance. Strategically situated along key trans-regional trade routes, Auchi emerged as a significant hub of commercial interaction, facilitating the exchange of agricultural produce, textiles, iron implements, and other commodities with neighboring ethnic groups such as the Hausa, Nupe, Yoruba, and Igbo. These commercial engagements transcended mere economic transactions; they served as vital platforms for intercultural exchange, mutual understanding, and the cultivation of enduring interethnic relationships that promoted peaceful coexistence and collective prosperity.

Moreover, the increasing influence of Islam introduced primarily through sustained interactions with northern traders, particularly the Hausa and Fulani marked a turning point in the town's religious and sociopolitical landscape. While the community remained deeply rooted in its indigenous belief systems, the gradual assimilation of Islamic teachings and practices ushered in a new era of spiritual and administrative transformation. Islam not only reshaped the religious identity of Auchi but also enhanced social cohesion through its emphasis on literacy via Qur'anic education, promotion of

interfaith marriages, and governance frameworks underpinned by moral and ethical principles.

This harmonious interplay between commerce and religion created a socio-cultural ecosystem in which diversity was embraced, dialogue was encouraged, and unity was sustained. Auchi thus evolved into a cosmopolitan center where economic enterprise and spiritual life reinforced one another, laying the foundation for a resilient and forward-thinking society. The pre-colonial experience of Auchi exemplifies how indigenous agency, trade networks, and religious integration can collectively foster stability, development, and communal harmony in the absence of colonial oversight.

Consequently, the influence of Islam has significantly shaped the people of the Auchi Kingdom, instilling in them a strong sense of religiosity and kindness. Religion has transformed their way of life, impacting all aspects of their daily activities, including their dress and social practices. However, it is important to acknowledge that the introduction of Islam has also influenced their cultural traditions, bringing some changes to longstanding customs. While the arrival of Islam in 1914 did alter some cultural and traditional values, it is clear that its impact has been largely beneficial. Practices such as idol worship and polytheism were eradicated, making way for a more unified belief system. Since its introduction, Islam has had a positive influence on the Auchi Kingdom, and its effects on the community's values, morals, and overall well-being will continue to be felt positively in the future.

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