

= Kingdom of Nri =

The Kingdom of Nri ( Igbo : ' ? ? ràèzè ?rì ' ) ( 948 ? 1911 ) was the West African medieval region in southeastern Nigeria , a subgroup of the Igbo speaking people . The Kingdom of Nri was unusual in the history of world government in that its leader exercised no military power over his subjects . The kingdom existed as a sphere of religious and political influence over a third of Igboland , and was administered by a priest @-@ king called as an Eze Nri . The Eze Nri managed trade and diplomacy on behalf of the Igbo people , and possessed divine authority in religious matters .

The kingdom was a haven for all those who had been rejected in their communities and also a place where slaves were set free from their bondage . Nri expanded through converts gaining neighboring communities ' allegiance , not by force . Nri 's royal founder , Eri , is said to be a ' sky being ' that came down to earth and then established civilization . One of the better @-@ known remnants of the Nri civilization is its art , as manifested in the Igbo Ukwu bronze items .

Nri 's culture had permanently influenced the Northern and Western Igbo , especially through religion and taboos . British colonialism , the Atlantic slave trade and the rise of Bini and Igala kingdoms , contributed to the decline of the Nri Kingdom . The Nri Kingdom is going through a cultural revival .

= = History = =

The Nri kingdom is considered to be a center of Igbo culture . Nri and Aguleri , where the Umueri @-@ Igbo creation myth originates , are in the territory of the Umu @-@ Eri clan , who trace their lineages back to the patriarchal king @-@ figure , Eri . Eri 's origins are unclear , though he has been described as a " sky being " sent by Chukwu ( God ) . He is credited with first giving societal order to the people of Anambra . Nri history may be divided into six main periods : the pre @-@ Eri period ( before 948 CE ) , the Eri period ( 948 ? 1041 CE ) , migration and unification ( 1042 ? 1252 CE ) , the heyday of Nri hegemony ( 1253 ? 1679 CE ) , hegemony decline and collapse ( 1677 ? 1936 CE ) and the Socio @-@ culture Revival ( 1974 ? Present ) .

= = = Foundation = = =

Archaeological evidence suggests that Nri hegemony in Igboland may go back as far as the 9th century , and royal burials have been unearthed dating to at least the 10th century . Eri , the god @-@ like founder of Nri , is believed to have settled the region around 948 , with other related Igbo cultures following after in the 13th century . The first eze Nri ( King of Nri ) , Ifikuánim , follows directly after him . According to Igbo oral tradition , his reign started in 1043 . At least one historian puts Ifikuánim 's reign much later , around 1225 CE .

In 1911 , the names of 19 eze Nri were recorded , but the list is not easily converted into chronological terms because of long interregnums between installations . Tradition held that at least seven years would pass upon the death of the eze Nri before a successor could be determined ; the interregnum served as a period of divination of signs from the deceased eze Nri , who would communicate his choice of successor from beyond the grave in the seven or more years ensuing upon his death . Regardless of the actual date , this period marks the beginning of Nri kingship as a centralized institution .

= = = Zenith and fall = = =

Colonization and expansion of the kingdom of Nri was achieved by sending mbùríchi , or converts , to other settlements . Allegiance to the eze Nri was obtained not by military force but through ritual oath . Religious authority was vested in the local king , and ties were maintained by traveling mbùríchi . By the 14th century , Nri influence extended well beyond the nuclear northern Igbo region to Igbo settlements on the west bank of the Niger and communities affected by the Benin Empire . There is strong evidence to indicate Nri influence well beyond the Igbo region to Benin and Southern

Igala areas like Idah . At its height , the kingdom of Nri had influence over roughly a third of Igboland and beyond . It reached its furthest extent between 1100 and 1400 .

Nri 's hegemony over much of Igboland lasted from the reigns of the fourth eze Nri to that of the ninth . After that , patterns of conflict emerged that existed from the tenth to the fourteenth reigns , which probably reflected the monetary importance of the slave trade . Outside @-@ world influence was not going to be halted by native religious doctrine in the face of the slave trade 's economic opportunities . Nri hegemony declined after the start of the 18th century . Still , it survived in a much @-@ reduced , and weakened form until 1911 . In 1911 , British troops forced the reigning eze Nri to renounce the ritual power of the religion known as the ìkénga , ending the kingdom of Nri as a political power .

= = Government = =

Nearly all communities in Igboland were organized according to a title system . Igbo west of the Niger River and on its east bank developed kingship , governing states such as Aboh , Onitsha and Oguta , their title Obi . The Igbo of Nri , on the other hand , developed a state system sustained by ritual power .

The Kingdom of Nri was a religio @-@ polity , a sort of theocratic state , that developed in the central heartland of the Igbo region . The Nri had a taboo symbolic code with six types . These included human ( such as twins ) , animal , object , temporal , behavioral , speech and place taboos . The rules regarding these taboos were used to educate and govern Nri 's subjects . This meant that , while certain Igbo may have lived under different formal administration , all followers of the Igbo religion had to abide by the rules of the faith and obey its representative on earth , the eze Nri .

An important symbol among the Nri religion was the omu , a tender palm frond , used to sacralize and restrain . It was used as protection for traveling delegations or safeguarding certain objects ; a person or object carrying an omu twig was considered protected . The influence of these symbols and institutions extended well beyond Nri , and this unique Igbo socio @-@ political system proved capable of controlling areas wider than villages or towns .

For many centuries , the people within the Nri hegemony were committed to peace . This religious pacifism was rooted in a belief that violence was an abomination which polluted the earth . Instead , the eze Nri could declare a form of excommunication from the odinani Nri against those who violated specific taboos . Members of the ìkénga could isolate entire communities via this form of ritual siege .

= = = Eze Nri = = =

The eze Nri was the title of the ruler of Nri with ritual and mystic ( but not military ) power . He was a ritual figure rather than a king in the traditional sense . The eze Nri was chosen after an interregnum period while the electors waited for supernatural powers to manifest in the new eze Nri . He was installed after a symbolic journey to Aguleri on the Anambra River . The authorities must be notified prior to commencement of this journey to obtain the Ududu @-@ eze , the royal scepter . There , the process of paying of homage to all the necessary shrines / deities in Aguleri by the new Eze Nri , visitation to Menri`s tomb at Ama @-@ Okpu , collection of Ofo , purification of the virgin boy to receive the clay from the chosen diver from Umuezeora in Aguleri , sitting on the throne of Eri at Obu @-@ Ugah in Aguleri by the new Eze @-@ Nri before going back to Nri on the seventh day to undergo a symbolic burial and exhumation , then finally be anointed with white clay , a symbol of purity . Upon his death , he was buried seated in a wood @-@ lined chamber . The eze Nri was in all aspects a divine ruler .

= = = ìkénga = = =

While the eze Nri lived relatively secluded from his followers , he employed a group of Jesuit @-@ like officials called ndi Nri . These were ritual specialists , easily identifiable by facial scarifications or

ichi , who traveled with ritual staffs of peace in order to purify the earth from human crimes . The ndi Nri exercised authority over wide areas of Igboland and had the power to install the next eze Nri .

Areas under Nri influence , called Odinani Nri , were open to Ndi Nri traveling within them to perform rituals and ensure bountiful harvest or restore harmony in local affairs . Local men within the odinani Nri could represent the eze Nri and share his moral authority by purchasing a series of ranked titles called Ozo and Nze . Men with these titles were known as mbùríchi and became an extension of the Nri 's religio @-@ political system . They controlled the means for agriculture and determined guilt or innocence in disputes .

Both the Ndi Nri priests and mbùríchi nobility belonged to the Ikénga , the right hand . The Ìkénga god was one dedicated to achievement and power , both of which were associated with the right hand .

= = Economy = =

Nri maintained its vast authority well into the 16th century . The peace mandated by the Nri religion and enforced by the presence of the mbùríchi allowed trade to flourish . Items such as horses , which did not survive in tsetse fly @-@ infested Nri , and seashells , which would have to be transported a long ways due to Nri 's distance from the coast , have been found depicted in Nri 's bronze . A Nri dignitary was unearthed with ivory , also indicating a wealth in trade existed among the Nri . Another source of income would have been the income brought back by traveling mbùríchi .

Unlike in many African economies of the period , Nri did not practice slave ownership or trade . Certain parts of the Nri domain , did not recognize slavery and served as a sanctuary . After the selection of the tenth eze Nri , any slave who stepped foot on Nri soil was considered free .

Nri had a network of internal and external trade , which its economy was partly based on . Other aspects of Nri 's economy were hunting and agriculture . Eri , the sky being , was the first to ' count ' the days by their names , eke , oye , afor and nkwo , which were the names of their four governing spirits . Eri revealed the opportunity of time to the Igbo , who would use the days for exchanging goods and knowledge .

= = Culture = =

= = = Art = = =

Igbo @-@ Ukwu , a part of the kingdom about eleven miles south from Nri itself , practiced bronze casting techniques using elephant @-@ head motifs . The bronzes of Igbo @-@ Ukwu are often compared to those of Ife and Benin , but they come from a different tradition and are associated with the eze Nri . In fact , the earliest body of Nigerian bronzes has been unearthed in Igbo territory to the east of the Niger River at a site dated to the 9th century , making it ( and , by extension , Nri ) older than Ife .

It appears that Nri had an artistic as well as religious influence on the lower Niger . Sculptures found there are bronze like those at Igbo @-@ Ukwu . The great sculptures of the Benin Empire , by contrast , were almost always brass with , over time , increasingly greater percentages of zinc added .

The bronzes of Igbo @-@ Ukwu pay special attention to detail depicting birds , snails , chameleons , and other natural aspects of the world such as a hatching bird . Other pieces include gourds and vessels which were often given handles . The pieces are so fine that small insects were included on the surfaces of some while others have what looks like bronze wires decorated around them . None of these extra details were made separately ; the bronzes were all one piece . Igbo @-@ Ukwu gave the evidence of an early bronze casting tradition in Nri .

= = = Religion = = =

Religious beliefs were central to the Kingdom of Nri . Nri oral tradition states that a bounty of yams and cocoyams could be given to the eze Nri , while blessings were given in return . It was believed that Nri 's influence and bountiful amount of food was a reward for the ruler 's blessings . Above all , Nri was a holy land for those Igbo who followed its edicts . It served as a place where sins and taboos could be absolved just by entering it . Even Igbo living far from the center of power would send abnormal children to Nri for ritual cleansing rather than having them killed , as was sometimes the case for dwarfs or children who cut their top teeth before their lower teeth .

Nri people believed that the sun was the dwelling place of Anyanwu ( Light ) and Agbala ( Fertility ) . Agbala was the collective spirit of all holy beings ( human and nonhuman ) . Agbala was the perfect agent of Chukwu or Chineke ( the Creator God ) and chose its human and nonhuman agents only by their merit ; it knew no politics . It transcended religion , culture and gender , and worked with the humble and the truthful . They believed Anyanwu , The Light , to be the symbol of human perfection that all must seek and Agbala was entrusted to lead man there .

= = Tradition = =

Nri tradition was based on the concept of peace , truth and harmony . It spread this ideology through the ritualistic Ozo traders who maintained Nri influence by traveling and spreading Nri practices such as the " Ikenga " to other communities . These men were identified through the ritual facial scarifications they had undergone . Nri believed in cleansing and purifying the earth ( a supernatural force to Nri called Ana and Ajana ) of human abominations and crimes .

= = = Year counting ceremony = = =

The Igu Aro festival ( counting of the year ) was a royal festival the eze Nri used to maintain his influence over the communities under his authority . Each of these communities sent representatives to pay tribute during the ceremony to show their loyalty . At the end the Eze Nri would give the representatives a yam medicine and a blessing of fertility for their communities . The festival was seen as a day of peace and certain activities were prohibited such as the planting of crops before the day of the ceremony , the splitting of wood and unnecessary noise . Igu Aro was a regular event that gave an opportunity for the eze to speak directly to all the communities under him .

= = = Nri scarification = = =

Ritual scarification in Nri was known as Ichi of which there are two styles ; the Nri style , and the Agbaja style . In the Nri style , the carved line ran from the center of the forehead down to the chin . A second line ran across the face , from the right cheek to the left . This was repeated to obtain a pattern meant to imitate the rays of the sun . In the Agbaja style , circles and semicircular patterns are added to the initial incisions to represent the moon . These scarifications were given to the representatives of the eze Nri ; the mbùríchi . The scarification 's were Nri 's way of honoring the sun that they worshiped and was a form of ritual purification .

Scarification had its origins in Nri mythology . Nri , the son of Eri who established the town of Nri , was said to have pleaded to Chukwu ( the Great God ) because of hunger . Chukwu then ordered him to cut off his first son 's and daughter 's heads and plant them , creating a ' blood bond ' between the Igbo and the earth deity , Ana . Before doing so , Nri was ordered to mark ichi onto their two foreheads . Coco yam , a crop managed by females , sprang from his daughter 's head , and yam , the Igbo peoples ' staple crop , sprung from his son 's head ; Chukwu had taught Nri plant domestication . From this , the eze Nri 's first son and daughter were required to undergo scarification 's seven days after birth , with the eze Nri 's daughter being the only female to receive ichi . Nri , the son of Eri , also gained knowledge of the yam medicine ( ogwu ji ) . People from other Igbo communities made pilgrimages to Nri in order to receive this knowledge received in exchange for annual tributes .

