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The Nri Kingdom: *The Oldest Kingdom in Nigeria*

By Chuka Odike

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THE NRI KINGDOM

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“King of Ndri & his people. Clapping of hands.” Agukwu Nri, c. 1911. MAA Cambridge.

“In his own house, or in the town of Aguku, a large single bell is used and, when the Eze-Nri strikes this, all the people present clap their hands.” Northcote Thomas, 1913.

The oldest kingdom in Nigeria is widely believed to be the Kingdom of Nri, which dates back to around 900 AD or even older. The Nri Kingdom is part of the Igbo civilization and is often considered the spiritual and cultural heart of the Igbo people. It was established by the Nri people and ruled by a figure known as the “Eze Nri”, who was seen as both a religious leader and a king.

The Nri Kingdom is unique in that it operated as a theocracy rather than a traditional monarchy. The Eze Nri was regarded as a divine ruler, who held spiritual authority rather than military power, and the kingdom spread its influence through religious and cultural means, rather than conquest. Nri’s influence extended over much of Igbo land, spreading customs, trade, and religious beliefs. The kingdom is known for Spiritual leadership, peaceful settlement of disputes through religious influence, advanced bronze arts, and the shaping Igbo culture.

Archaeological evidence, including artifacts such as bronze sculptures found in Igbo-Ukwu, provides insights into the kingdom’s advanced metallurgy and craftsmanship, which further attests to its significance in Nigerian history.

The Kingdom of Nri remains an important symbol of Igbo history, culture, and religion, marking it as one of the oldest known civilizations in West Africa.

Osae, E. O. (1971). Chiefs and society in Igboland: Studies in Igbo society. University of Nigeria Press.

Onwuejeogwu, M. A. (1981). An Igbo civilization: Nri kingdom and hegemony. Ethiope Publishing Corporation

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chuka Odiike

I'm a dedicated civil engineer with a passion for infrastructure development and community empowerment. With a strong background in engineering, my work focuses on creating sustainable solutions for urban and rural development projects. Outside of my professional career, I'm deeply interested in Igbo history and culture. I actively explores ways to impact society by using historical lessons to inspire and educate others about the rich cultural heritage of the Igbo people, aiming to bridge tradition and modern development.



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