

Palace Courtyards in Iléṣà: A Melting Point of Traditional Yorùbá Architecture

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Abstract

The Yorùbá courtyard is an important architectural space in traditional Yorùbá architecture that has not received adequate scholarly attention. This paper examines the courtyards in the palace of certain chiefs and Ọwá Obòkun in Iléṣà, in southwest Nigeria. Fieldwork identified about ten courtyards in the palace of the Ọwá, four in the Rísàwẹ̀ palace, and two in the palaces of the Lẹ̀jọkà and Ọ̀dọ̀lé of Iléṣà. It uses these courtyards as models for courtyards in Yorùbá architecture. The study revealed that most of the courtyards in the Ọwá's palace are generally not used for one specific function, though some are used mainly for religious purposes. The courtyards in the palaces of the chiefs are more functional, and better maintained than those of the Ọwá's palace. The paper concludes that—considering their ancient and social function—the courtyards form a melting point within Yorùbá architecture. It suggests that efforts be made to ensure that the existing courtyards in these palaces are designated as landmark architecture and properly cared for to serve as tourist attractions.

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