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The story of Aare Ona Kakanfo Afonja, and the fall of the great Oyo Empire is absorbing. If you're interested in this beautiful history of pre-colonial south western Nigeria, keep a date with me later tonight. ■■

The Kakanfo and fall of Oyo Empire.
Thread.
Of the 14 Kakanfos so far, the tenures of three of them who were military commanders considerably impacted the history of, first, the Old Oyo Empire, and by extension, the rest of Yorubaland.

The three Kakanfos were Afonja of Ilorin, Kurunmi of Ijaye, and Obadoke Latoosa of Ibadan. The last two of the 14, who were civilians and honorary holders of the title nevertheless impacted the history of Yorubaland, and also the entire Nigerian nation.

Aare-Ona-Kakanfo Afonja:
In the mid-1700s, around 1750 and thereabouts, a powerful Oyo warrior was growing in stature; a man called Afonja. His father was Laderin. Laderin himself was the son of Alugbin, who himself was the son of Pasin.

Alaafin Majeogbe ruled Oyo from 1754 to 1770, and was succeeded by Alaafin Abiodun same year. Abiodun was on the throne for about 19 years, until 1789 when he was murdered by his own son, Aole.
Aole became Alaafin, and ruled from 1789 to 1796.

It was during those years that Afonja was Kakanfo, and was domiciled in Ilorin, a small town that nestled on the banks of a tributary of the River Niger, the River Awun. Afonja was the sixth Kakanfo, coming after Oku of Jabata, and was succeeded by Toyeje of Ogbomoso.

His tenure as Kakanfo signposted the loss of the Ilorin area to the Sokoto Caliphate, after a dispute between him and Alaafin Aole degenerated into insurgency. This development has remained of great impact on the history of the Yoruba peoples north of Oyo till date.

Crisis with Aole:
The crisis that spawned Afonja's insurrection essentially centred around conventions, and oaths that he did not want broken. The Kakanfo generated issues with Alaafin Aole when he was commanded to attack Iwere-Ile, the home town of late Alaafin

Abiodun’s mother.

It is not known why Aole, described as a pompous, haughty and high-handed individual would order the home town of his paternal grandmother sacked. In any case, there existed a curse to the effect that any Kakanfo who attacked Iwere-Ile would die a horrible death, ostensibly...

placed by Alaafin Abiodun whose mum hailed from there. In addition, Kakanfo Afonja was also under oath from Abiodun. As a result of these, and other considerations, Afonja declined to carry out the orders of his commander-in-chief.

But Alaafin Aole, also called Arogangan (the high-handed one) had another assignment for Afonja. In 1795 he ordered the Kakanfo to attack Apomu, a market town that is part of Ile-Ife. In 1795, Aole ordered the sacking of Apomu, a town that forms part of the territories of Ile-Ife

the acclaimed source of the Yoruba peoples.
This order Afonja complied with; but on his return he himself had other visions, or perhaps was executing another planned agenda. He marched on Oyo, stormed the palace, and demanded that Aole should abdicate.

In all of these, it would seem that the metropolitan forces under the command of the Bashorun were complicit; Afonja encountered no obstacles in dealing with Aole. The Alaafin committed ritual suicide after that.
Afonja returned to Ilorin, his headquarters, leaving Oyo rudderless

Aole was succeeded by Adebo who ruled barely a year from 1796 to 1797; and was succeeded by Makua, who ruled a few months and also died in 1797. From 1797 to 1802 the Oyo throne was vacant. Alaafin Majotu was crowned in 1802 and he then reigned till 1830.

Ultimately, Afonja’s undoing came about when he decided to implement a human resources overhaul of his troops and commanders. By this time he had made who had settled in Ilorin and who had brought with him many slaves and other clerics.

Afonja had developed the notion that Hausa slaves and Fulani mercenaries would make better soldiers and commanders than his own people, who previously formed the bulk of his forces. He then ordered his adjutant, an officer called Ologolo to disband his troops and induct Hausa...

slaves and slaves of other nationalities into his fighting force.
When Shehu Alimi died, his son Abd Salaam, whom Afonja did not know was an ambitious man, saw his opportunity and struck.

In summary, Oyo’s commander at Ilorin, Kakanfo (Field Marshal) Afonja, led a rebellion in 1817 that destroyed the unity of the empire. He was aided by Mallam Alimi (a Fulani from Sokoto), by Fulani warriors and slaves, and by Hausa slaves.

Afonja was increasingly dominated by the Muslim Fulani, and, upon his assassination, Alimi’s son, Abd al-Salam (Abdul Salami), became Emir of Ilorin and pledged allegiance (c. 1829) to the Sokoto caliphate.

As a Muslim emirate, Ilorin subjugated several towns in Yorubaland and destroyed the Oyo capital, Oyo Ile (Old Oyo, or Katunga), 40 miles (64 km) northwest, in 1837. Abd al-Salam conducted a jihad toward the sea and was only stopped by the Ibadan victory over his cavalrymen at...

Oshogbo in 1840.
Throughout the 19th century, Ilorin served as a major trade centre between the Hausa of the north and the Yoruba of the south. It strongly resisted British rule, and not until 1897, when the army of the Royal Niger Company arrived after conquering Bida (106 miles

east-northeast), did Ilorin recognize British supremacy. In 1900 Ilorin emirate was the only part of Yorubaland to be included in the Northern Nigeria Protectorate, which, later in the colonial period, developed into the Northern Province and then the Northern Region.

Adekunle Adekoya, Encyclopedia Brittanica and other sources.
#Afonja
#OyoEmpire
#YorubaHistory
#NigerianHistory