



A Comparative Study of Ivan the Fourth and Alaafin Sango of Oyo Empire

Abimbola Damilola Waliyullahi*

Post graduate student university of ibadan ibadan, Nigeria

Abstract

The reign of Ivan the 4th and the legendary Sango, 3rd Alaafin is of great importance to the historical world, Sango, a powerful king in Yoruba Land, known as a king of thunder because he spat fire from his mouth whenever he was angry. He ruled powerfully and successfully. According to a myth however, it was a defeat in a magical contest that led Sango to leave Oyo and hung. On the other side, I shall take a critical and careful look at the Ivan the IV or Ivan the Terrible as fondly called, tsar of Russia from 1530-1584. When he held sway, he established a tradition of absolute rule; he was ruthless and merciless following childhood abuse and repression, Ivan destroyed his rivals and claimed the throne of Tsardom. He beat back the last of the Mongols, provided some large territorial expansion, and centralized the bureaucracy. Ivan's blood thirsty character and sardonic personality made him infamous in history as being a lunatic ruler whom the people called "Terrible." This article examines a Comparative Study of Ivan the Fourth (Russia) and the legendary Alaafin Sango (Nigeria) relying on historical theory as a tool.

Key words: Empire; Territory; Russian, Tsars; Yoruba; Ruthless; Brutal; Nupe; Oya; Oprichniki; Osun; Oyo.

* Corresponding author.

1. Introduction

Although Tsar Peter I (1672–1725) founded the Russian Empire after a decisive peace treaty with his Swedish enemies in 1721, which resulted in important territorial gains and followed by other significant military victories but, the aforementioned wouldn't have been made possible without foundational achievement of Tsar Ivan the fourth. This Legendry monarch' history will remain a source of wonder. During its nearly two-hundred-year existence (1721–1917), the Russian empire was ruled by a succession of autocratic monarchs who assigned varying degrees of local authority to as many as fifty appointed provincial heads who are responsible only to the Tsar, the only way by which Tsarist autocracy was challenged was by acts of violent rebellion as there were no known forms of change of baton at the time.

Alaafin Sango was according to history a very strong and fearful ruler and magician, who succeeded his brother, Ajaka who appears to be weak. A double-headed axe represents swift and balanced justice is his symbol. Sango is the owner of Bata (drum), the Arts of Music, Dance and Entertainment in the Yoruba Culture and tradition. It is believed that in Olukumi ("my dear one"), Sango is the center point of the religion as he represents the Oyo people of south western Nigeria. Different sources have it that there are two Sangos, the King and the spirit but I shall postpone working on the spirit till the later day.

1.1 Theoretical framework

Historical theory is defined as a dynamic concept that is often used in different ways. Researchers usually will have a theory about historical events, happenings and connections, an orderly preplanned or preconceived impression of the phenomenon to be worked on. Theory and hypothesis could mean the same thing in this context or depending on the angle from which we view or look at it.

More evidently, a theory can be a view of past events or happenings, an opinion about the critical uniqueness of those aspects of the past that could be presented. For instance, a legal historian will be more interested in legal artifacts and precedence. And this is where and how Ivan the fourth and the great Alaafin Sango's leadership skills and dichotomy comes into relevance and the reason I have chosen to align or hide under historical theory.

2. Russian Empire and Ivan the fourth

Grey in [4] opined that "Russia was still struggling to establish its own identity after just emerging from the Mongol yoke in 1480. The princes of Muscovy had traditionally been tax collectors and law enforcer for the Mongols and not until Ivan the first managed to annex large swaths of land, furthering his power and gaining the trust of the Mongols that any single ruler began to emerge in Russia, in 1480, Ivan the III managed to buy up the entire surrounding realm around Moscow and proclaim him-self tsar".

Skrynnikov [9] submitted that, before the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, the Russian Empire was a European superpower, the largest in the world stretching from the Black Sea in the west to the Bering Sea in the extreme east of the Asian continent. It also had a huge population that included the Russians, large numbers of Germans,

Poles, Slavs and Asians, among this diverse population, just about every major religious faith was represented. This vast Empire was ruled by a series of Tsars, who were very autocratic which means that only the Tsar governed Russia; there were no legal or constitutional methods by which Tsarist power could be challenged, the Empire did not have a parliament or elected assembly and there were no elections.

Stride [10] affirmed that, the Tsar had a number of ministers who were chosen by him and answerable only to him in order to successfully run the vast Russian Empire and to challenge the Tsarist autocracy, there has to be some acts of violent rebellion, The only genuine limit to the power and influence of the Tsar was the sheer vastness of the Empire and the scale of corruption and incompetence on the part of his ministers and state officials.

Although, the far corners of the Empire, thousands of miles away from Moscow often prove cumbersome and ungovernable for the Tsar. Freedom of speech was strictly censored and the Tsar's will was enforced by a large police system (Militia) that would report suspicious behaviour and destroy subversive or worrying groups.

Smith [8] opined that "Ivan IV Vasilyevich (1530-1584), was the first of two children of Basil III and Elena Glinskaya, Born on August 25th, 1530 almost a year after his father's death when he was three years old. Basil died due to a small pimple on his thigh that had developed into a deadly sore. Basil requested at his death bed that his son Ivan be made the ruler of Russia at age 15, as soon as Basil passed on the boyars took over Russia, denying Ivan's right to the throne. Elena, Ivan's mother and some trusted boyars took control of the ruling party. She ruled Russia successfully for four years, until her sudden demise in 1538, possibly from poisoning, leaving eight-year-old Ivan behind as an orphan".

Ivan had remained alone, and even his brutal character attested to his never having forgotten nor forgiven the childhood indignities he had suffered. The boyars recognize him only when his presence was needed at a state function. Living in poverty he watched and heard murders, beatings, and verbal and physical abuse regularly. The boyars alternately neglected or molested him; Ivan and his deaf-mute brother Yuri often went about hungry and threadbare, incapable to strike at his tormentors, Ivan took out his terrible frustrations on defenseless animals; He tore feathers off birds, pierced their eyes and slit open their bodies.

Ivan flabbergasted the boyars by calling them to a meeting on December 29, 1543. He condemned them for their neglect of him and the nation, and denounced them for their misconduct. Prince Andrew Shuiksy, the leader of the boyars was thrown to a pack of hungry hunting dogs as an example to the others. After this the boyars conceded that their rule had ended and that Ivan had complete power. On Sunday, January 16, 1547, Ivan was crowned czar in Moscow's lavish Cathedral of the Assumption. Ivan married Anastasia Romanovna-Zakharyina-Yurueva, she bore him six children out of which only two survived infancy.

The administrative functions of the government were handled by two brothers of Ivan's mother during the commencement of Ivan's rule, Prince Yuri Glinsky and Prince Mikhail Glinsky abused their position in the government, maltreating the boyars and the citizens making Ivan vowed not to allow administration duties in the hands of other people except him.

Platonov [18] buttressed Skrynnikov point that “For thirteen years, Ivan governed with the assistance of competent and knowledgeable group of advisers called “the Chosen Council”. It was however not clear who wielded more power and influence among them (Ivan or the council). The Tsar announced a reformed code of laws and a new system for justice in 1550, the Sudebnik. Criminal acts now were clearly defined, and punishments were prescribed for each. In addition, judges who were appointed by Moscow would share their benches with representatives elected by local populations, in an effort to prevent the act of corrupt judges that subvert justice in favor of the rich and influential people. Now magistrates would, at least in theory, enforce the laws equally, without discrimination against persons of low status”. The central authority also became more professional through a division of labor prerogatives. Foreign affairs, the Bureau of Criminal Affairs, the Land Office, and the Office of Military Affairs were established. Indigenous officials were appointed to oversee the rebuilding of Muscovy's fortresses and given other responsibilities. In the 1530s local police officials were assigned to stamp out crime and social vices, which were rampant during the disorder of Ivan’s years. Skrynnikov concluded.

Bobrick [3] stated that Ivan led his newly assembled army of 100,000 troops down the Volga toward Kazan in June 1552; he besieged the Tartar stronghold in late August and waited for its surrender, after victory over Kazan, Ivan received the second part of his name that still remains today from his troops. The name that he received is “Grozny”, which has been taken to mean "the terrible ". Ivan's victories over Kazan and Astrakhan extended the Russian empire to the Caspian Sea in the south and to the Ural Mountains in the east, adding nearly 1,000,000 square kilometers to his territory.

Ivan targeted Livonia, a small, Baltic-coast country in 1558 to expand his empire further, following the unlock of Livonian monopoly on trade between Russia and Western Europe, merchants from far away Holland and France rushed to Narva to negotiate trade cooperation with the Russians. Ivan had established ties with England, opened the port of Archangel to British merchant vessels, and traded directly with the Western Europe. He brought a wide variety of artisans to Moscow to teach his people the new trades that were necessary for success in the modern world, sweeping reforms in the army and the church were instituted and even the way the country was governed.

Boahem [2] confirmed that, shortly after his arrival from monastery visit, Ivan set up the Oprichniki, which became a separate police state within Russia. They dressed in black, the traditional colors of death, and rode black horses, from whose seat hung two emblems, those of a broom and a dog's head”. The broom signified the rider's mission to sweep Russia clean of Ivan's enemies; the dog's head symbolized that he was watchful for the czar, it is very important to state here that the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) in Nigeria may have derived the idea of broom handling symbol from the Russian Oprichniki police. The Oprichniki does not hesitate to burst into a church during service; either abducting the priest or murdering him in front of the worshiper. Ivan founded a pseudo-monastic order, he was the 'abbot' and his Oprichniki were the 'monks'. Supposedly they regularly performed sacrilegious masses that were followed by extended orgies of sex, rape and torture

Platonov [7] noted that “Ivan brutally murdered the head of the Metropolitan church, Filipp Kolychëv, who had

criticized the Oprichnina, on the basis of unproved accusations of treason in 1570; Ivan murdered the 60,000 citizens of Novgorod with his Oprichniki. Novgorod's archbishop was first sewn up in a bearskin and then hunted to death by a pack of hounds. Men, women and children were tied to sleighs, which were then run into the freezing waters of the Volkhov River. In the same year, there were mass public executions in Moscow. Crimean Tatars were able to sack Moscow in 1571, and much of the land around Moscow was depopulated.

The Oprichniki would later be disbanded following her inability to defend the seat of Tsardom in 1572 and in lieu of this; Ivan abdicated and replaced himself with a Tartar general, Simeon Bekboelatovitch, on the Moscow throne and retired to a country estate. Ivan regularly visits the capital to pay homage to the new Tsar, this lasted for a year.

Platonov [7] stated that, “as a result of his temperament, on November 19, 1582, Ivan’s pregnant daughter-in-law Elena who immodestly dressed was attacked by Ivan leading to miscarriage, Ivan Ivanovich, his son rose in defense of his wife, in the process got killed unintentionally by the tsar, this left as heir to the thrown, Ivan's feeble-minded son Fyodor”

Ivan died on March 18, 1584 of heart failure while preparing to play a game of Chess and left behind a moody and unhappy Russia, the exhumation of his body would later showed that the tsar suffered from mercury poisoning.

2.1 Oyo Empire and Alaafin Sango

Ayittey [8] “linguistically and historically, Oyo is situated in the South-west of Nigeria, the State has more ancient cities with many historical origins than any Yoruba speaking enclave, these cities and towns are about the oldest in Yoruba land. Some kingdoms had existed with Oyo Empire which was founded by Oranmiyan, a popular son of Oduduwa around 13th century”. There used to be two extinct townships of Oyo-ile and Igboho, the present Oyo was established in 1830 when Igboho was burnt down by the Fulani Jihadists led by Alimi.

Oral tale has it authoritatively that, Oyo derived from a great Yoruba ancestor Oduduwa, who, according to Yoruba myth, migrated to Ile-Ife, and whose son became the first Alaafin of Oyo. Linguistic evidence has it that those two sets of immigrants arrived Yoruba land between 800 and 1000 BC, the second settled at Oyo in the hinterland country side north of the Guinea forest which became preeminent among all Yoruba states because of its favourable and strategic trading position, its resources and industry of its citizens. Oyo was once a powerless state around 15th and 16th centuries before its northern neighbours of Borgu and Nupe whom conquered her in 1550.

Cunningham [5] opined that “the power of Oyo was already growing by the end of the century (1550), thanks to the Alaafin Orompoto, who used the wealth derived from trade to establish a cavalry force and to maintain a trained army. Dahomey kingdom was subjugated in the west in phases by Oyo Empire in 1724–30, 1738–48 and traded with European merchants on the coast through the port of Ajase (Porto-Novo). As her wealth and influence increased, so also its leaders’ political options; some of them wished to concentrate more on amassing wealth, while others advocated the use of wealth for realm expansion. This dichotomy was not settled until the

Alaafin Abiodun (reigned c. 1770–89) conquered his opponents in a bloody internecine war and pursued economic policy development based primarily on the coastal trade with the European traders”.

Alaafin Abiodun’s neglect of everything but the economy weakened the army, and thus the means by which the central government maintained control. His successor, Alaafin Aole, inherited local revolts, and administration tenuously maintained by a complex system of public service, and a decline in the power of tributary chiefs, the decline was exacerbated by quarrels between the Alaafin and his advisers; it continued throughout the 18th century and into the 19th, when Oyo began to lose control of its trade routes to the coast. Oyo was invaded by the newly risen Fon of Dahomey, and soon after 1800 it was captured by militant Fulani Muslims led by Alimi from Hausa/Fulani land in the northeast.

Olaniyan [6] concluded that, Sango, the third Alaafin of Oyo Empire and second son of Oranmiyan, the founder of Oyo Empire, was such a brave and powerful man who inherited most of his special traits from the Nupe, his mother’s tribe. When Alaafin Ajaka held sway, Oyo Empire was always under threat of war from Olowu of Owu Kingdom. Olowu sent his warriors to capture Alaafin Ajaka and bring him to Owu. In their bid to rescue Alaafin Ajaka, the Oyomesi (Council of chiefs), sent for Sango in Nupeland, an area in present day Niger and parts of Kwara states where he had lived for help in rescuing Ajaka who was rescued by Sango. In appreciation for his bravery, the king makers crowned him the new Alaafin and Ajaka was sent into exile.

Historically, Sango had three wives while alive, Oba, the legitimate in the eyes of Yoruba customs and tradition, Oshun, and Oya, the third, illegitimate (No dowry paid) Oya was a spirit who has the power to transform from human to animal. She has the power to summon rain with Sango’s thunderbolt, together with Sango; they had terrific victories in battle. Jealousy by her matrimonial rivals, Oba and Oshun makes Oya to be closer to Sango, becoming his princess consort (Ayo) and having access to Sango’s thunderbolt (Edun Ara) which later culminated in his doom. When Sango held sway, he had two generals, Timi Agbale Olofaina (known as Oluode) who could shoot arrows of fire and Gbonka (Known as Eliri). When Timi and Gbonka disobeyed Sango’s direct order not to march on Owu in Battle, Sango yielded to Oya’s advice to get rid of them by having them sent to govern the border towns of the Empire. Timi obeyed and left for Ede but Gbonka declined and stay back in Oyo to pose further threat. Sango sent Gbonka to Ede to capture Timi which he did. Sango who believed that the match in Ede was staged asked for a re-match in Oyo and Gbonka defeated Timi. Sango ordered that Gbonka be burn to ashes, Gbonka appeared mysteriously after three days and gave Sango the ultimatum to vacate the throne for his infidelity. Sango angrily requested for his Edunara from Oya who had being in possession of it. The Edunara was found to be wet and stained with blood from Oya’s menstrual period; he left the palace to a high mountain to re-affirm the potency of his thunderbolt.

The thunder stroke the palace and burnt it down, Oba and Osun; lost everything to the inferno left the palace in anger blaming one another for allowing Oya so much access to Sango. The two became the under goddesses of the rivers Oba and Osun. Oya, went back to the forest in Nupeland where Sango met her and became the under goddess of Odo-Oya (river Niger)

Sango left the town heartbroken followed by the chiefs and members of his royal cult (Baba-Mogba) persuading

him not to leave. After an unyielding persuasion, the chiefs went back as they approach an Ayan tree in a place called koso with the news that the king has hanged, but that is not true. Only a few of the Baba-Mogba who did not go back knew the truth.

Oral tale has it that Sango was attacked by Gbonka but Sango unwilling to engage Gbonka vanished into thin air only to surface in the sky to destroy Gbonka and those peddling the rumors that he hanged. – Hence the popular saying “OBAKOSO OR OLUKOSO” meaning the king did not hang. As told by the Baba-Mogba who was alive to tell the story.

2.2 Convergences and Divergences between Ivan the Fourth and Alaafin Sango

There are certainly clear convergences and divergences between Ivan the fourth of Russian empire and the legendary Alaafin Sango of old Oyo Empire, two of the world most significant and daring rulers during their reigns. One of them (Sango) is well known for magical and mysterious power, spitting fire from his mouth whenever he is angry, he could summon rain when the needs arise and just like Ivan, Sango had used his magical strength to annex swaths of land that does not belong to him, and up till this moment, Sango is still being venerated and worshiped in Yoruba land, part of Yoruba speaking population in the francophone Benin republic and the Caribbean. Sango was said to have brutally terminated over sixty lives in a day in anger. Ivan mistakenly murdered his son following argument with his daughter in-law who was on immodest dress causing her miscarriage. Ivan brutally gushed out the eyes of the architect who help designed his building to prevent him from repeating such. Ivan executed head of the metropolitan church, Filipp Kolchiev who had criticized an organ of his government on the basis of unproved allegations of treason around 1570, he also killed some 60000 citizens of Novgorod with his Oprichniki, Novgorod’s archbishop was not so lucky as well, he was sewn up in a bearskin and then hunted to death by a pack of hounds. Men, women and children were tied to sleighs, which were then run into the freezing waters of the Volkhov River. In the same year, there were mass public executions in Moscow. While Ivan suffered from childhood maltreatment leading to his lost of feelings, Sango’s temperament was said to be hereditary from his Nupe blood tie, oral tales tell us that while alive, Alaafin Sango had three wives unlike Ivan who had just one.

2.3 Recommendations

Evidently, Ivan the fourth and the legendary Alaafin Sango shared some things in common, therefore, comparative studies of these two heroes be encouraged and made compulsory at schools for students and more funding be made available for research, where by some useful tactics of their military and administrative prowess extracted and modernized to meet up the 21st century world governance dynamism.

2.4 Conclusion

The reigns of Ivan the fourth and the Alaafin Sango of Oyo Empire had been interesting, horrific, and terrific and at the same time inspiring because of their peculiar similarities, although, the two were said to be brutal, but left their empires better than they met it, as explained in the body of this work. Ivan annexed part of non-Russian lands in the Volga region and some areas east of the Volga in the Urals and Siberia. What remained of

Russian society changed suddenly during Ivan's reign as Tsar, Peasantry began with Ivan. Many princes and other members of the elite were to answer to the tsar and no longer flex muscles with him for power sharing following the expansion of the service class. "Ivan laid the example for the absolute and all powerful tsar, creating clearly that Russia had completely broken away from its days as a Mongol tribute colony (state). An example that would be copied (except sycophancy and brutalities) by the Russian exemplary leaders, such as Peter and Catherine the Greats" Troyat[11]. Sango left Oyo Empire liberated from Borgu, Nupe, Dahomey, Owo and other Yoruba kingdoms, thanks to his magical and mysterious power to summon rains and spit fire from his mouth when ever he speaks. He (Sango) left the Yoruba race with another form of religion other than the imported Islam and the Christianity and until this day, Sango is still being venerated and worshiped in the Caribbean (Brazil, Cuba, Jamaica and the Tobago).

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