LANGUAGE & CULTURE

Ebira means behaviour when translated literally with ethics and hospitality as compliments. The unique features of Ebira culture with its ethnic aestheticism are appreciated most in the event of traditional marriages. Ebira people are republican by nature, outspoken and very hard working. Farming and cloth-weaving are occupations for which the Ebiras are well known. Primary crops grown for export are yam and cassava. Guinea corn is an important local commodity as the staple of most meals and is used in the brewing of beer. Due to abundance of rivers and streams on the Niger-Benue plateau, fishing is conducted by individual households. In recent years, larger fish farms have been developed by private and public firms.

They are presently spread in five Local Government Areas of Kogi state namely: Adavi, Okene, Okehi, Ajaokuta and Ogorimagongo. A sizeable number is also found in Lokoja Local Government Area and Oyo state. The paramount ruler of the people is called Ohinoyi of Ebiraland. The Ebira cherish their traditional festivals and have several annual cultural festivals. The most prominent ones are ‘Echane’, ‘Eche Ori’ and ‘Ekuechi’.

Ebira pay homage and respect to the dead. Many of the ritual practices associated with the Ebira are directly related to those of the Jukun, their distant ancestors. Although political power often rests in the hands of the patriclan, religious power usually is in the hands of the matriclan. This arrangement allows for a balance of power between kin and also allows the kinship relationships to be extended.

STUDYING EBIRA IN THE UNITED STATES?

Michigan State University

Please contact the National African Language Resource Center, or check the NALRC web site at http://www.nalrc.indiana.edu/

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WHO SPEAKS EBIRA?

Ebira, also spelt Igbira or Igbirra, is an ethno-linguistic group of Nigeria. Majority of the Anebira’s are from Kogi State. Other groups of Anebira can be found in the Edo State (Ebira - Etuno), Abaji (Ebira - Koto), Nasarawa State (Ebira - Toto). They are the scion of the Igala. Like Igala, they have their dwelling in Nigeria’s Middle Belt region.

Ebira history is tied to that of their neighbors, the Jukun and the Igala. Oral history claims that they originally came from the east and entered Nigeria between the Mandarra highlands and Lake Chad sometime during the last millennium. It is believed that Igala broke away from Jukun, and Ebira broke away from Igala. According to oral tradition, Ohinnagedu established the first Ebira chiefdom at Panda and was given the royal staff by Atah of Idah, Igala leader at the time. Ritual connections, however, were still maintained with the Jukun.

Ebira consists of two smaller groups: the Northern and the Southern groups. The Southern group claims to have broken away from the main group around 1850 during the time of the Fulani-led holy wars. Northern Ebira traditionally had a highly centralized government that recognized a chief who inherited his power in a patrilineal fashion. The supreme Ebira chief was divine and resided at Panda. The Southern Ebira group was somewhat less centralized than their northern counterpart. Their governing system acknowledges local leaders for each of five founding families, but does not recognize a supreme chief.

WHY STUDY EBIRA?

Ebiraland, the home of Ebira Tao, is located in the central senatorial District of Kogi state. It has a landmass of 3,426 km$^2$. The 1991 national census puts the population of the area 722,032.

Students interested in African Art, African history, anthropology, archaeology, the international relations, NGO (non-governmental organization) work and government work will find the Ebira a valuable language to study.

Some typical Ebira greetings:

Wadahi---------------- general greeting
Tao--------------------- general greeting in the Okene dialect
Chao------------------- general greeting in the Igara dialect
Taaru------------------ greeting spoken to a chief