OBARO IKIME

AFRICAN HISTORICAL BIOGRAPHIES

Chief Dọghọ of Warri

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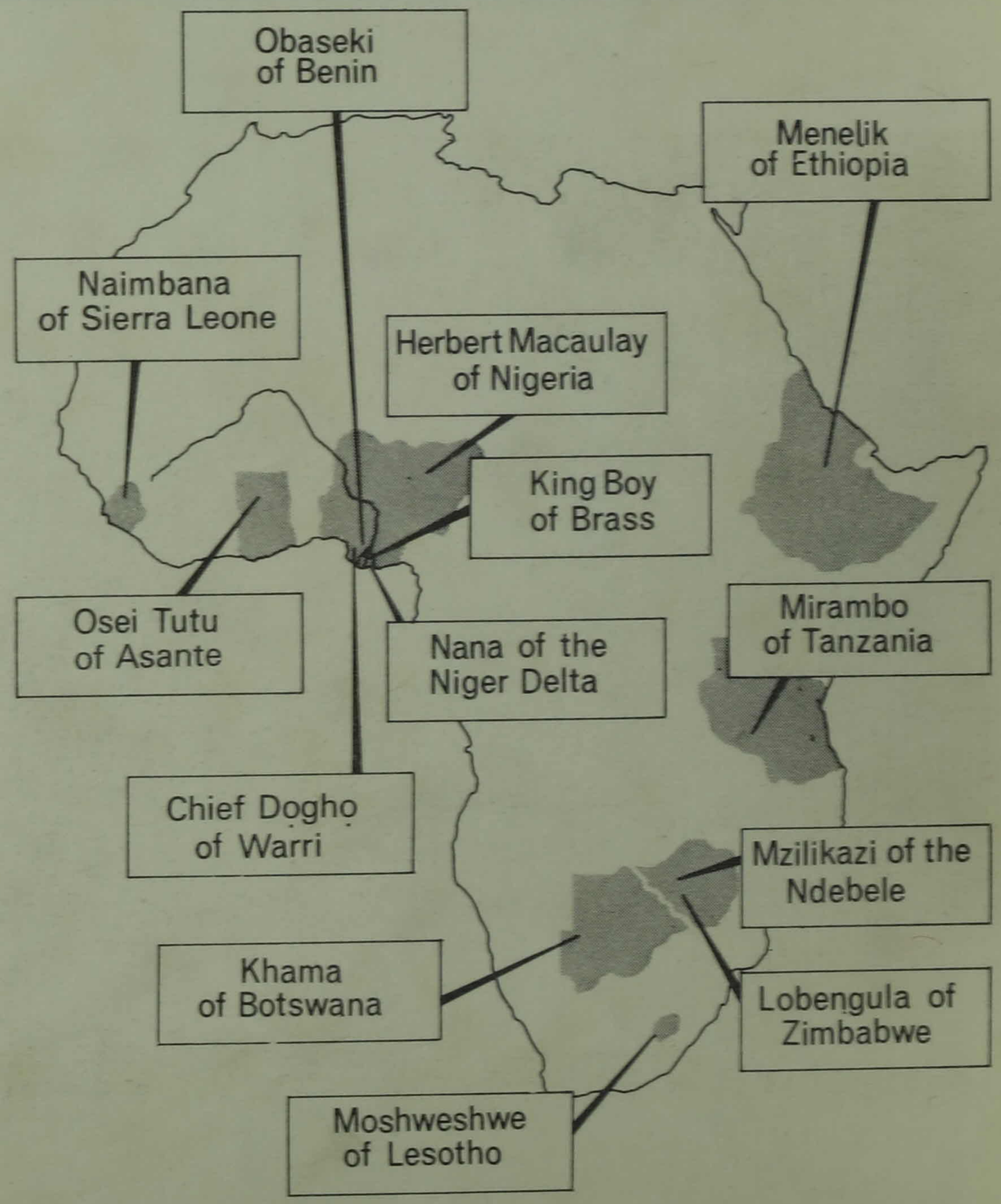

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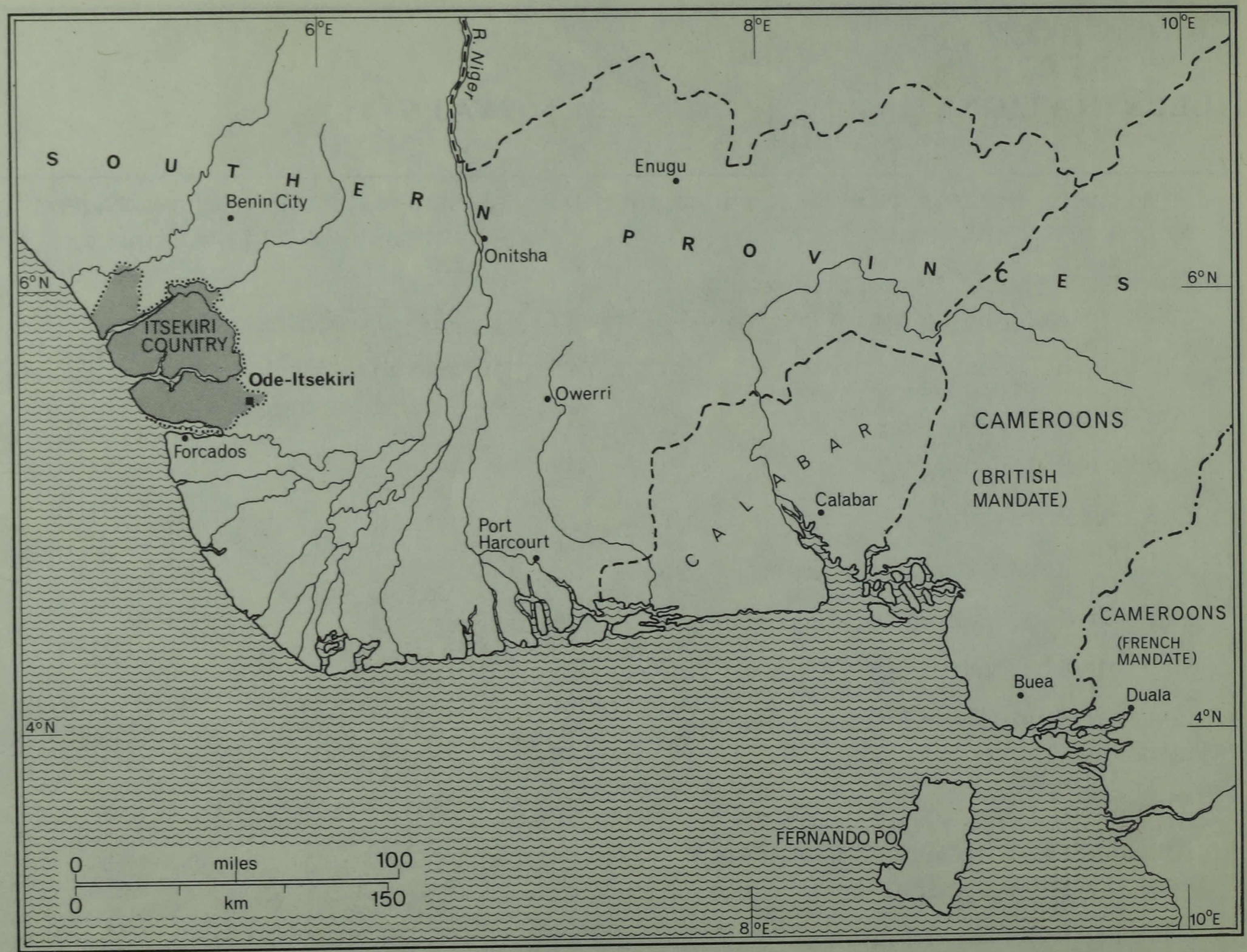


I Map of the Niger Delta in Nigeria showing Fernando Po and the Cameroons, Calabar, Forcados and the Itsekiri country (Post 1918)

1
The Historical Setting

Africa is a very large continent. Many different kinds of people inhabit it. Thousands of languages are spoken within the continent. There are different kinds of religions practised within it. The ways of life of the many peoples who live on the continent differ. Despite these differences, however, there is one sphere in which virtually all of Africa has a common experience. This experience is the colonial experience. Nearly all of Africa was divided up by the European powers in the period of the scramble for Africa and its partition. The exceptions to this are Liberia and Ethiopia. But even these two countries have had a little of the colonial experience. Ethiopia was occupied by Italy for a short time in the period 1936–1941. Liberia was for a while something of an American colony.

Many of the European powers which succeeded in carving out empires for themselves in Africa began their contact with the continent as traders. All of them took part in the overseas slave trade. Until the nineteenth century none of these powers was able or prepared to establish political control over any of the African peoples, if we leave out the case of South Africa, the history of which is very different from that of the rest of the continent. In fact it was as from the 1880s, in particular, that European powers began to make a determined effort to carve out colonies for themselves in Africa. By the outbreak of World War I in 1914 most of Africa had been partitioned. The European powers concerned in this partition were Britain, France, Germany, Portugal, Belgium, Italy and Spain. Of these Britain and France had by far the largest share of the continent. The life of the man discussed in this book was very much affected by the colonial activities of Great Britain in Southern Nigeria in the period 1884–1936.

Britain had been trading with the Niger delta peoples for many years before 1884. During most of this period, British traders did everything possible to win the friendship of the rulers of the different Nigerian peoples who inhabit the Niger delta area. They did not attempt to interfere with the local politics of these people. When problems arose between themselves and the Nigerian traders, such problems were referred to the rulers, who settled them in their own way. The sovereignty of these rulers was recognized by the British and other European traders, and the rulers regarded themselves as the equals of the rulers of the countries from which the European traders came.

This relationship began to change from the nineteenth century. As is well known, Britain decided to stop trading in slaves from 1807. She persuaded and bribed other European powers and America to do likewise. In West Africa, however, Britain did not pursuade or bribe. Britain forced the peoples of West Africa, especially the coastal peoples, to stop the slave trade by using her navy, the best and strongest in the world at that time. Suddenly the peoples of the Niger delta were told that they were no more to sell slaves to Europeans. They were made to sign treaties to this effect. They were requested to trade in palm oil and other products of the forest. Those who continued to sell slaves were bombarded by the navy when caught. Some were promised compensation for stopping the trade in slaves but got little or none of the promised compensation. The nineteenth century, especially the period from about 1830, thus became a revolutionary period for the delta peoples.

Part of this revolution was economic, part was political. The palm-oil trade, which, in the Niger delta, replaced the trade in slaves, posed new problems and resulted in a new kind of relationship between the delta middlemen traders and the European traders. We cannot enter into all the details of this new relationship here. But some of them must be mentioned. European traders began to stay in the Niger delta states for much longer periods than they had done before. By the middle of the nineteenth century, many European firms had established their branches in these states on a permanent basis. This development was important as it raised the question of how to control these Europeans. Also there were many disputes between the coastal delta traders and their European counterparts which called for settlement. Thirdly, the value of the British trade increased very much as the century wore on.

It was for all of these reasons, and others which we have no space to consider here, that the British traders in particular began to appeal to the government in Great Britain to take steps to seize political power from the Nigerian rulers of the Niger delta states so that they could control the trade more easily. The traders were encouraged and assisted by the missionaries who began to work in the area from the 1840s. These missionaries wanted the British government to seize power in this area so that African rulers might not put difficulties in their way in their attempt to spread Christianity.

In 1849, in response to this appeal, the British govern-

ment in London appointed John Beecroft as Consul for the Bights of Benin and Biafra. This meant all of the Niger delta. The duty of this consul was to protect the lives and property of British subjects trading in the area. He was also to see to it that the trade in slaves was abolished. In the attempt to carry out this duty, the consul began to interfere in the local politics of the Niger delta states. He was able to do this because he was backed by a man-of-war, a ship of the British navy, built for fighting on the high seas. Delta rulers did not take kindly to this development and many of them resented British interference in their affairs. Some, in anger, imprisoned British traders who failed to respect their authority. Quite often, however, such rulers were made to suffer by the consul, who bombarded their states with this man-of-war. In this way, by the 1860s, the British had succeeded in making their influence strongly felt in the Niger delta.

Although the British thus established their influence, they did not really rule the Niger delta effectively. There was only one consul, and he was resident first at Fernando Po and then at Calabar. He was responsible for the whole area from the Cameroons to Forcados. In this situation he could not do very much, and the delta rulers, therefore, still ruled their people as before. The main difference which the appointment of the consul created was that these rulers had to be very careful how they handled the European traders if they did not want the consul to visit them with his man-of-war. Until the 1880s this was the situation.

In the 1880s, and more so in the 1890s the situation changed rapidly. Britain decided that the time had come to establish a proper government over the Niger delta. The reason for the changed attitude is to be found in developments in European history at the time. Germany, which, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, was no more than a collection of small states, each independent of the other, had, by 1870, developed into a united nation with the strongest army in Europe. In fact in 1870 Germany inflicted a shameful defeat on France and even seized some French territories. France, disgraced in Europe, began to look elsewhere for territory and prestige. So she turned to Africa, especially North and West Africa. By the 1880s France was the dominant European power in North Africa, Egypt excluded. In West Africa too France became very active. Germany was at first satisfied with her victory in Europe. But later, by the 1880s Germany too was seek-

ing territory in Africa. Britain, which already had plenty of trade contacts with Africa, and was by the nineteenth century the leading colonial power and the strongest naval power, joined the race for territories in order to make sure that she too was respected in Europe. In view of this new attitude it was no longer enough to leave the affairs of the Niger delta to a solitary figure, the British Consul. It was now necessary to establish proper colonial rule over these parts, so that no other European power might claim them.

The British began the new policy by signing treaties with the Niger delta rulers. These treaties, known as treaties of protection, laid it down that the Niger delta rulers were not to have anything to do with other European powers without the permission of Great Britain. It was also provided for in the treaties that the rulers should bring all cases between them and their neighbours to the British for settlement; missionaries and European traders were to be allowed to carry on their respective pursuits as they saw fit. But it was not these treaties that really mattered. The treaties were only important because they gave the British a chance of telling Europe that the Niger delta peoples had accepted them. What really mattered was the fact that the British

1 Chief Nana Olomu,
from a photograph taken in Accra during his exile

had their navy, and any delta ruler who was stubborn and refused to accept British rule was bombarded, seized and deported. This was how the British succeeded in establishing their rule over the Niger delta in the period 1885–1900.

Two well-known examples of delta rulers who refused to allow the British to deprive them of their political power and control over the trade of their territories were Jaja of Opobo and Nana of Ebrohimi, in the Itsekiri kingdom in the Western delta. Both these men were deported by the British in 1887 and 1894 respectively. The same thing happened to the ruler of Brass in 1895. What was happening in the Niger delta was happening in other areas of Nigeria, in Ijebu in 1892, in Oyo in 1895, in Benin in 1897, in the Igbo country in the period 1900–1904, and in Northern Nigeria in 1900–1906. In all these places Nigerian rulers who stood for their independence were defeated in battle and killed, exiled, or forced to do what the British wanted.

The lesson of these wars was that it was impossible to defeat the British, with their superior weapons and strange methods of fighting. This was why some people in Nigeria, as elsewhere, decided that it was better not to oppose the British but to act as allies to them and so build for themselves a new source of power in the new colonial situation. Such a person was the man whose story you are about to read. His name was Ọmadọghọgbọnẹ Numa. The long first name was shortened to Dọghọ. The British, unable to grasp the name properly, gave it as Dore in their records. Throughout this book we shall use the proper shortened form, Dọghọ.

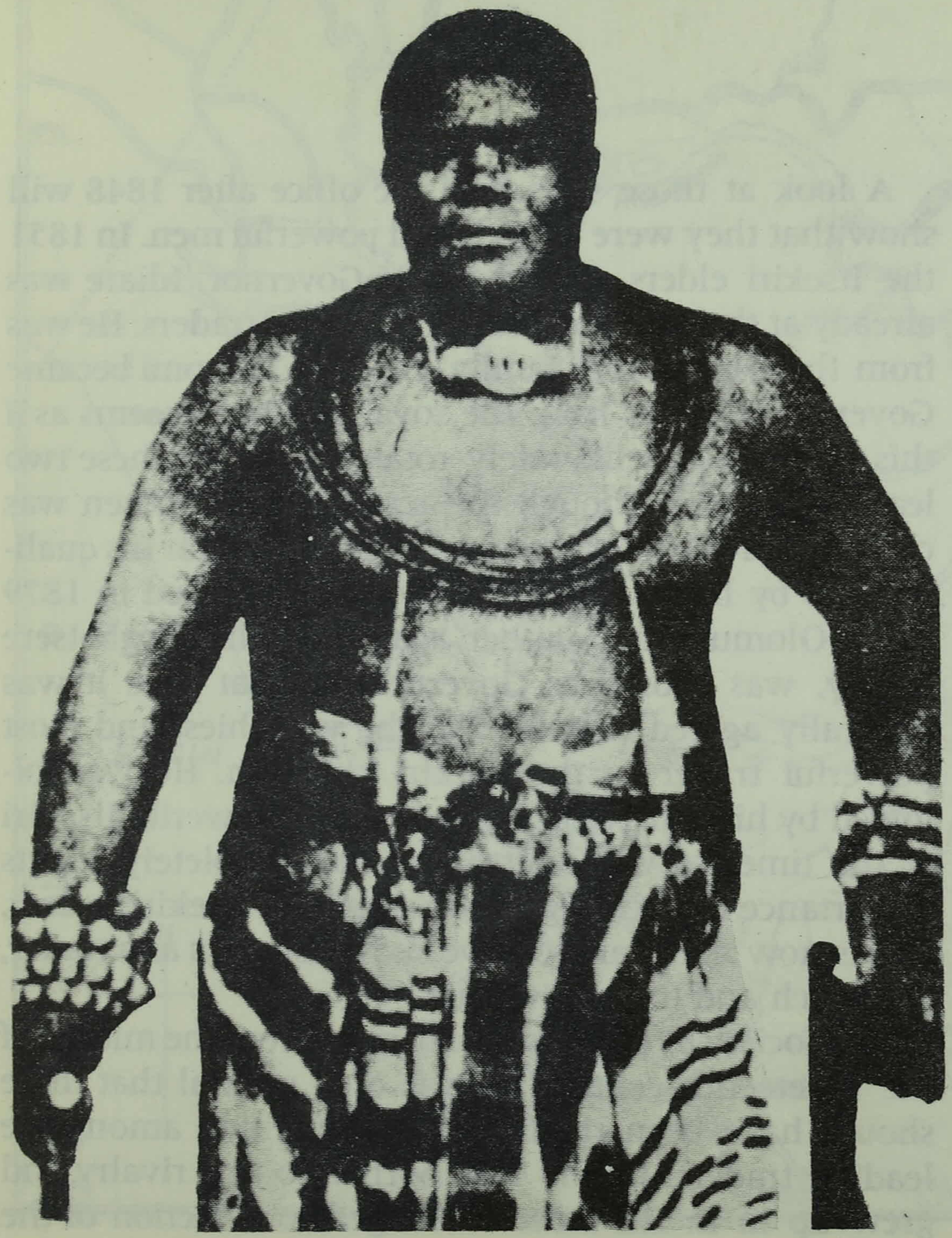
2
The Itsekiri Situation

Dọghọ was an Itsekiri man, born probably in the early 1860s. The Itsekiri kingdom is located in the north-western extremity of the Niger delta. Most of the kingdom lies in the mangrove swamp belt of the delta. There is very little firm land in this area. The kingdom itself is, in fact, a small one made up of a number of small settlements mainly along the Rivers Benin and Warri. A large number of creeks connect these rivers as well as the River Forcados, the other river which waters the kingdom.

The mode of life of the Itsekiri has been determined by their environment. Their land is too swampy for farming, so they have never been known for agriculture. Rather they have depended on the water for their livelihood. The bulk of the Itsekiri were fishermen. Some engaged in the making of salt from the salt water of the rivers which flow through the kingdom. Salt was also obtained by burning the roots and shoots of the mangrove tree, collecting the ash, filtering it and evaporating the filtered solution. The women-folk also engaged in the making of pots and other earthenware utensils. The products of their occupations – fish, salt and earthenware utensils – they exchanged with their Urhobo neighbours, who are an agricultural people who live in the hinterland of the Itsekiri kingdom.

In the history of Nigeria the Itsekiri are known not as fishermen, which the bulk of them were and are, but as coastal middlemen traders. In this regard they were just like the other delta states. Europeans first visited this area towards the end of the fifteenth century. By the sixteenth century these Europeans were already engaging in the slave trade. The geographical position of the Itsekiri made them the middlemen for the slave trade between their Urhobo and Bini neighbours and the Europeans. It was this trade that made them both well known and wealthy. When the slave trade was abolished and trade in palm oil substituted in its place, for many years they still remained middlemen in the new trade.

The Itsekiri were ruled by a king whom they called *Olu*. The Olu was assisted by a council of state made up of a number of title-holders whom the Itsekiri called *Ojoye*. The leader of this council was a man with the title of *Ologbotsere*. The Ologbotsere was the Olu's prime minister. The two most important families in the Itsekiri kingdom were thus the royal family and the Ologbotsere family. Most Itsekiri strive to trace their ancestry to one of these two leading families. Dọghọ,



the subject of this book, was descended from both of these families. His father, Numa, was the son of a princess of the Olu Erejuwa I, by name Uwala. His mother, Ejuonenowo, was the daughter of one Ogie, a son of an Ologbotsere. In terms of Itsekiri society, therefore, Dọghọ was very well connected. But it should be pointed out that he was descended from the female side of both the royal family and the Ologbotsere family. According to strict Itsekiri custom, Dọghọ could not hope to hold any important office in the kingdom based on descent. Only those descended through the male line qualified to hold such offices.

In the age in which Dọghọ grew up, however, it was not family connections that decided how important a man became in Itsekiri society. Rather, it was success in trade. The last Olu to reign before Dọghọ's birth died in 1848. His two sons and heirs died within months of his own death. Thereupon princes and the slaves of the dead Olu seized control of Ode-Itsekiri, the capital, for a while, and prevented any other person being installed as Olu. At any rate, none of those qualified to be Olu appeared strong, wealthy and generally acceptable enough to have been put on the throne by popular acclaim. The interregnum which thus started lasted until 1936.

II Map of the Itsekiri country

The Itsekiri Situation

Without an Olu, the Itsekiri system of government was disorganized. No title-holders could be created. The council of state, which was usually summoned by the Olu, could not meet. In this situation an officer known as the Governor of the Benin River became the only officer of state who exercised some kind of control over certain aspects of Itsekiri life. The Governor of the River in normal times was the Olu's collector of customs and chief trading agent. Because trade was the kingdom's major source of wealth and power, the Governor had become quite an important officer of state even before the interregnum.

In the interregnum he became even more important still. He was the man to whom the Europeans looked to maintain law and order in the Itsekiri kingdom and to ensure a continued flow of trade. The Itsekiri on their part looked up to the Governor to protect their interests against the Europeans. Whoever was Governor therefore became really important. The Europeans usually made sure that he was one of their biggest customers. He collected the customs duties from the Europeans and shared it among those entitled to receive a share. He was the one with whom all foreigners dealt in matters affecting the kingdom as a whole.

A look at those who held the office after 1848 will show that they were all rich and powerful men. In 1851 the Itsekiri elders elected Idiare Governor. Idiare was already at that time one of the wealthier traders. He was from the Ologbotsere family. In 1870 Tsanomi became Governor. He was from the royal family. It seems as if this office was deliberately rotated between these two leading families, though the actual person chosen was chosen more for his success and power than for his qualification by birth. This point was well proved in 1879 when Olomu, Nana's father, again from the Ologbotsere family, was chosen as Governor. At that time it was generally agreed that he was the wealthiest and most powerful trader in the Itsekiri kingdom. He was followed by his son, Nana, again the most powerful Itsekiri at the time. So while birth had not completely lost its importance in deciding a man's place in Itsekiri society, it was now necessary to have shown success as a trader, to be rich and to be powerful.

In a society like the Itsekiri became from the middle of the nineteenth century, it was only natural that there should have been rivalry and competition among the leading traders. Dọgho was born into this rivalry and grew up in it. His father belonged to a section of the

5°E
5°30′E
6°E
6°N
6°N
0 5 10 miles
0 5 10 15 km
River Benin
Ebrohimi
Jakpa
River Benin
Obobi
Batere Creek
I T S E K I R I
BIGHT
OF BENIN
River Escravos
Warri
5°30′N
5°30′N
Ode-Itsekiri
N
River Forcados
5°E
5°30′E
6°E

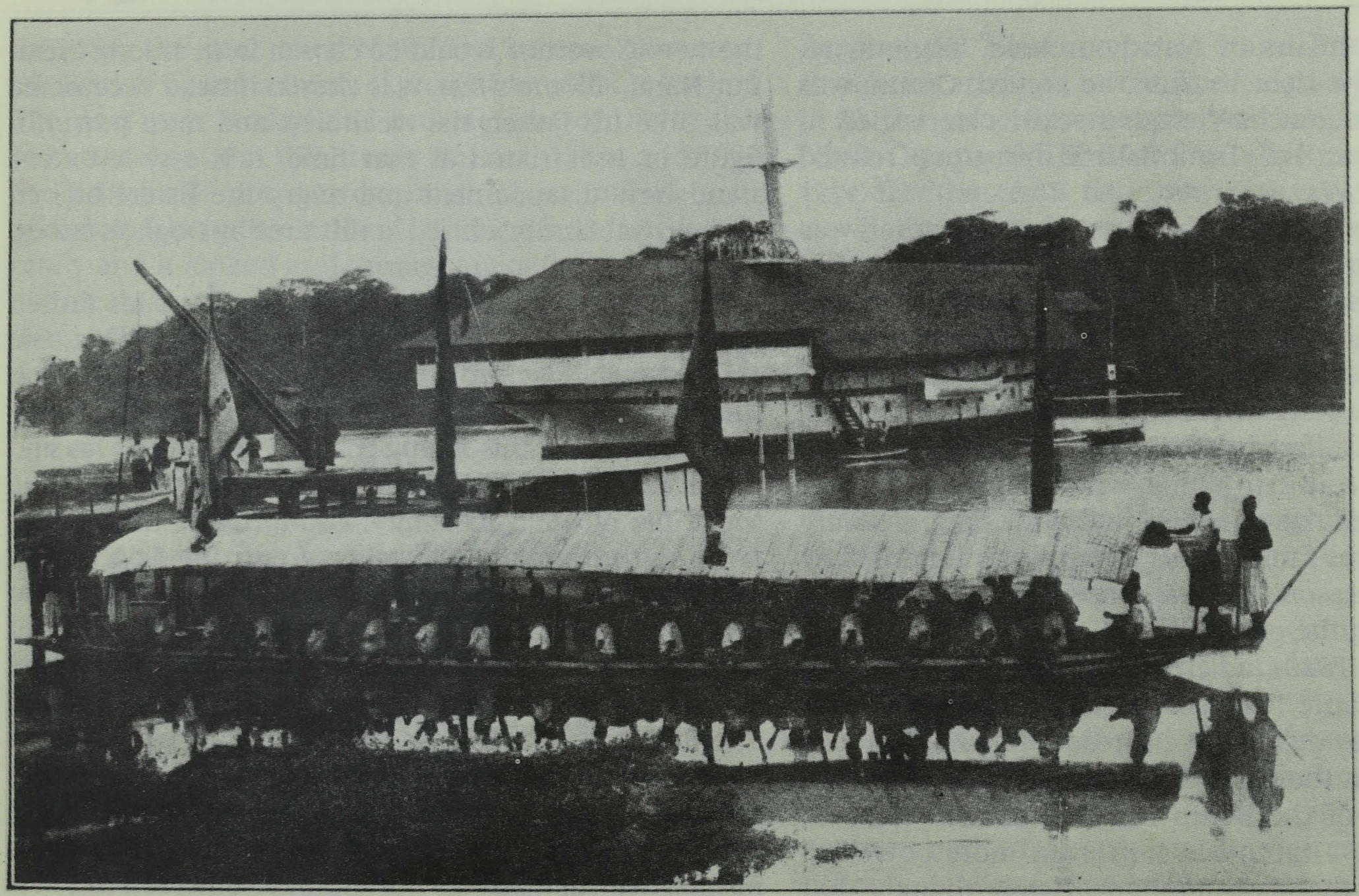
royal family which had founded the town of Batere on the southern bank of the Benin River. The other section of the royal family continued to live and trade around the capital, Ode Itsekiri. There was a third group, the Ologbotsere family. By the 1840s this group had founded Jakpa on the northern bank of the Benin River. While rivalry between traders was a common feature of Itsekiri history at this time, that rivalry was particularly pronounced, between the section of the royal family in Batere to which Dọghọ belonged, and the Ologbotsere family resident in Jakpa to which Olomu and his son Nana belonged. Dọghọ's life and career were very much affected by this rivalry.

Rivalry between Itsekiri traders took various forms. It took the form of showing off wealth so that European traders could trust them and trade with them. The worst aspect of this rivalry, however, had to do with the struggle to obtain the largest supply of palm oil from the Urhobo people, who produced the oil in the hinterland. The wealthier Itsekiri traders actually established small settlements in the Urhobo country where they stationed their men to buy oil for them. Each wealthy trader did his best to prevent other traders from operating in any area where he had established a settlement. Naturally those other traders were determined not to be excluded. The result was that clashes occurred between the trading agents of the leading Itsekiri traders in the Urhobo country. Occasionally, matters connected with this type of clash led to small wars between the Itsekiri traders.

There were, however, not many such wars, largely because the Itsekiri kingdom was a small kingdom and many of the leading traders were related by blood and so did not usually go to war against one another. Two such wars may be mentioned here as a background to Dọghọ's career. We are not sure about the date of the first of these wars. But it was sometime between 1850 and 1866. The war was between Olomu, Nana's father, and the royal princes led by one Oritsemone. The princes wanted to exclude Olomu from trading in the Ukan area of Urhoboland Olomu refused to be excluded and went on to trade there. The princes sent their war canoes against Olomu's war canoes but were defeated. This worsened the rivalry between the Ologbotsere family and the royal family.

The second war took place later. Iye, a sister to the Olu who died in 1848, owed Olomu some money. This debt remained unpaid for a long time. By the time Olomu began to demand the payment of the debt, Tsanọmi was

3 *War-canoe of Chief Dọghọ*



managing the affairs of Iye's household. Tsanọmi refused to pay the debt because, he argued, Olomu was demanding too much. Various Itsekiri elders tried to settle the matter but Tsanọmi and his group refused to co-operate. War followed, and Tsanọmi was very badly defeated by Olomu, who, as was said earlier, was the most powerful Itsekiri trader at the time.

So, for the second time, the Ologbotsere group defeated the royal group in war. This time it had been, as it were, Jakpa versus Batere, and Jakpa had won. The Batere elements were determined to avenge the humiliation they had suffered. What is even more important, Tsanọmi was a cousin to Numa, who was Dọghọ's father. Numa continued the enmity between the Olomu family and the Tsanọmi family. This enmity was inherited by Nana, Olomu's son, on the one hand, and Dọghọ, Numa's son, on the other.

Thus, by the 1880s, when the British were seeking to establish their rule over the Itsekiri kingdom as over the entire Niger delta, there already existed this deep enmity between the Olomu and Numa families. Olomu was Governor of the Benin River from 1879 to 1883, when he died. That made him even more powerful. When he died, the royal family in Batere thought that the new Governor would be chosen from among them. But Nana, Olomu's son, was chosen instead because he was, like his father, the wealthiest and most powerful figure in Itsekiriland at that time. It is easy to understand how disappointed and angry the Batere branch of the royal family felt, led at this time by Dọghọ's father, Numa.

By 1883, the year Nana took over from his father, Numa must have been an old man. Not so his son, Dọghọ, who was probably only in his early twenties. The Batere group therefore decided that their best plan was to build up this young man, Dọghọ, who was said to be clever in political affairs and prominent in the social life of the community, and to use him as the opposition to Nana and the Jakpa group. But Dọghọ himself was wise enough to know that Nana was much too powerful for him to oppose openly. He therefore decided that he would have to be sly, to seek a roundabout way of bringing about the downfall of the powerful Nana. The fact that a new force, the British, appeared on the scene at about this time, played into his hands. We must now see how Dọghọ used the British to bring about the downfall of Nana, and at the same time to become the most powerful figure in Itsekiriland from 1894 to 1932.

3
Dọghọ becomes British Political Agent

In 1884, the year after Nana had become Governor, the British signed a treaty of protection with the Itsekiri. The next year Itsekiriland became part of the British protectorate of the Oil Rivers. Between 1884 and 1891 the British did not do very much about making their presence felt in Itsekiriland. The consul visited only rarely and it looked as if the signing of the treaty would not mean any major change in the Itsekiri way of doing things. But, even without a British consul being actually present in Itsekiriland, a few things happened which showed that the future would be different from the past.

One of the sources of quarrels between the Itsekiri and European traders was the prices which the Europeans paid for palm oil. These Europeans sometimes paid very low prices. They explained this by saying that prices were low in Europe. The Itsekiri could not check on whether the Europeans spoke the truth or not. When they were dissatisfied with the prices the Europeans paid, they decided not to trade with them unless they raised the price. In 1886 Nana, as Governor of the Benin River, stopped trade with the Europeans because of low prices. The European traders complained to the British consul. The consul wrote to Nana and warned him that if he did not allow the trade to be re-opened, he would be deposed. So Nana re-opened trade. British power was thus being made to be felt in a new way.

At the same time as this was happening the Royal Niger Company, a British firm which later became the UAC (United Africa Company) was expanding its activities in the Forcados and Warri River areas. By doing this, the company was competing against the Itsekiri traders. As these Itsekiri traders began to lose their trade to the Royal Niger Company, they complained to the British government. Even the other European traders also complained. Similar complaints about the activities of the Royal Niger Company also came from other parts of the delta in this period.

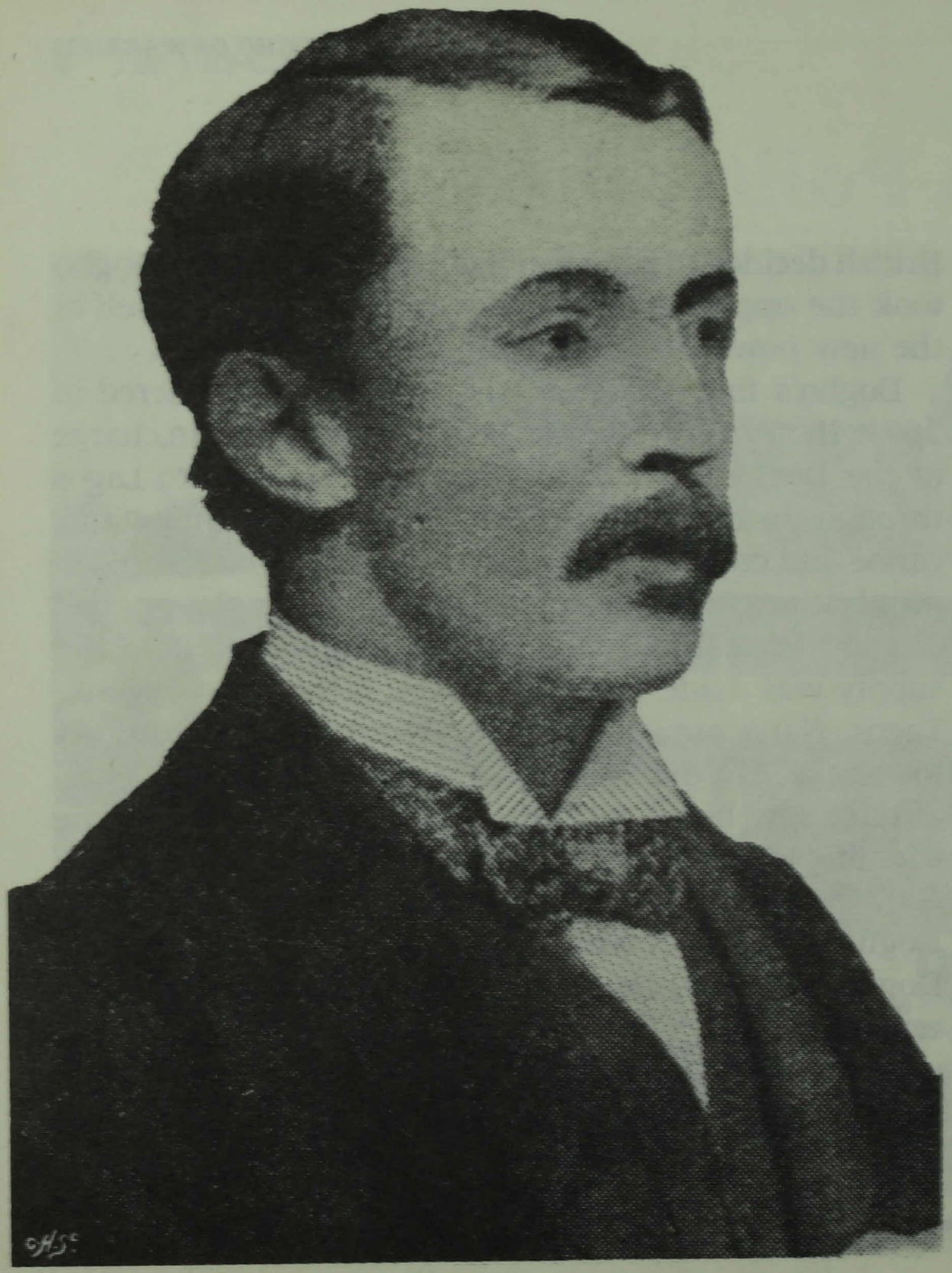
As a consequence of the complaints, the British Government in London decided to reorganize its protectorate in the Niger delta, as well as to reach some agreement with the Royal Niger Company about the areas where the latter was to operate. So in 1891 the Oil Rivers Protectorate became the Niger Coast Protectorate. This time not just one man was appointed to look after all of the Niger delta and its hinterland. Rather there were appointed a Commissioner and Consul General, and a team of some six vice-consuls and other officials. It was now possible to station vice-consuls in

the Itsekiri country for the first time. In 1891 one such vice-consul was stationed at a point now near the UAC premises in Warri. Another was stationed at a point along the Benin River.

By this time the British had decided that they would no longer be satisfied with merely trading and staying around the coasts. They would rather penetrate into the country behind the coastal belt where the oil itself was produced. The Benin River, Warri and, later, Sapele were the centres from which the move to the hinterland was to be organized. The British determination to move into the hinterland was a big threat to Itsekiri trade. The Itsekiri had become wealthy because they controlled the trade between the Europeans and the hinterland peoples, and vice versa. The new British move would mean that European traders would no longer depend on the Itsekiri. In this situation it was only sensible that Itsekiri traders would try to keep a good hold on their Urhobo customers, so that even with the new move, these customers would continue to sell oil to them. This was exactly what Nana did. But for doing this he was regarded as opposing British policy. He was accused of obstructing trade and making the Urhobo people hate the British. It was for this and other reasons that the British decided to go to war against Nana in 1894. Dọghọ took the opportunity of that war to establish himself as the new power in Itsekiriland under British rule.

Dọghọ's first service to the British was rendered in 1891. Henry Gallwey, the British vice-consul in charge of the Benin River district, wanted to travel to Lagos through the creeks. He asked Nana to supply him with a canoe and crew. Nana supplied the canoe but refused to supply the crew. He argued that in Lagos slavery had already been abolished. The only crew that he could supply was made up of his slaves. If these slaves got to Lagos, Nana argued, they would take the opportunity to escape. He did not want to lose his slaves. Dọghọ at once saw his chance of showing himself to be more friendly towards the British. He supplied the crew. Gallwey was not only grateful, but became a friend of Dọghọ. In a report which he wrote in 1892, he described Dọghọ as 'a very loyal supporter of Her Majesty's Government'.

Between 1891 and 1894, when the British went to war against Nana, Nana was, as has been said above, charged with various offences by Gallwey. Sometimes he was charged with engaging in slave trade; sometimes with oppressing the Urhobo people. At other times he



was accused of practising human sacrifice, something of which Nana was never guilty. At all times he was accused of preventing trade from flowing properly. Quite often the British vice-consul had no evidence at all for these charges and accusations other than that he had been so informed by those who were described as 'friendly chiefs'. These friendly chiefs were Dudu and Dọghọ.

Dudu was an Itsekiri trader who had settled in Ebrohimi, Nana's settlement. After some time Dudu found that so long as he remained in Ebrohimi he could not expand his personal trade because Nana's influence and wealth were too much for him. So he decided to leave Ebrohimi. After he left Ebrohimi, he became one of the great opponents of Nana, one of the many Itsekiri traders who were so jealous of Nana's power that they wanted him to be overthrown. It was only natural that Dọghọ and Dudu should have become friends, and together they carried false reports about Nana to the British. They did not always do this directly. Dudu had a son called Harrison. Harrison was the interpreter to the vice-consul. It was therefore usually through Harrison that these false reports were made to the British. It was a very clever plot. The British wanted Nana removed from the scene because he was too powerful for

them. Dọghọ and others who were jealous of Nana's success wanted the same thing. So Dọghọ became an ally of the British.

In 1894 the British went to war against Nana. Although the British had four men-of-war (gun-boats) and a military force of 300 men and 25 officers, with much more modern arms and ammunition than Nana's, they did not find it at all easy to take Nana's town. This was because Nana's town was built inside the swamps, and the only creek that led to it was so well defended that the British could not use that creek without being wiped out. Left to themselves the British would have found things even more difficult than they did. But they were not left to themselves. Dọghọ came in to help them. He provided the British with men who showed the British forces the best route through which to approach Ebrohimi by cutting a road through the mangrove swamps. He also provided the British with spies who found out what Nana's men were doing and reported back to the British. It was with this kind of help provided by Dọghọ that the British finally captured Ebrohimi on 25 September 1894.

When the British captured Ebrohimi, Nana was not there. He had escaped. For days the British searched for him in the creeks, but could not find him. Nana had sought refuge with his Ijo friends in a village called Okotobo. It was Dọghọ who found this out. Not only did he find out where Nana was, he provided the war canoes and men who went to fight against Okotobo in an effort to arrest Nana and bring him to the British. But Nana was again too clever for his enemies. He escaped from Okotobo to Lagos. Even so, Dọghọ had offered great service to the British in the war against Nana. The British were extremely grateful. They awarded Dọghọ a medal for his services to them. This was only the first of many honours that were yet to come.

In 1897 Dọghọ again rendered great service to the British. After his arrival in Lagos, Nana finally surrendered to the British. He was tried and exiled to Ghana. With the fall of Nana, Dọghọ became the most influential Itsekiri in the kingdom. The British were his friends; they trusted him and sought his advice on many issues. But there was still another powerful figure not too far away. This was the Oba of Benin. The British feared the power of the Oba of Benin and wanted to break this power. In 1892 a treaty had been signed with Benin. But despite that the Oba had continued to rule as he had always done. After the fall of Nana the British turned

6 *J. R. Phillips, Acting Consul General, 1896*

their attention to the Oba.

In 1896 General Phillips, who was in charge of the British government of the Niger Coast Protectorate, decided that he wanted to visit the Oba. The purpose of the visit was to get the Oba to do things the way the British wanted them done. Accordingly, he sent a message to the Oba to inform him of the visit. The Oba sent back a message that, as it was festival time in Benin, Phillips should not visit Benin. Dọghọ, whose advice Phillips sought, also warned the Acting-Consul not to visit Benin at that time. But Phillips remained stubborn and decided to go on. Dọghọ provided him with over two hundred carriers. Early in February 1897 the party made up of Phillips and nine other Europeans set out.

Meanwhile, in Benin, the news of Phillips' visit reached the Oba. We cannot go into the details of the discussions that took place in Benin. What happened in the end was that Benin soldiers attacked Phillips' party and killed him and all the Europeans except two. A large number of the Itsekiri carriers were also killed. When the news reached Dọghọ, he sent his canoes to patrol the creeks to pick up any men who might have survived. It was his men therefore who picked up the two Europeans and carried them to safety.

Later in 1897 the British government decided to avenge the death of Phillips. A huge expedition was prepared. The ships and men arrived in the Benin River before they set out for the attack on Benin. Once again Dọghọ was largely responsible for providing carriers and other necessaries required by the British. It is not clear whether he himself accompanied the British on the Benin expedition. The British successfully took Benin and eventually deported the Oba to Calabar. Once again Dọghọ had rendered very useful service to the British. Once again he was awarded a medal.

It was probably about this time that Dọghọ was formally appointed a British Political Agent, a kind of African assistant to the British officers. In 1897 the British consul wrote: 'Chief Dore is the most able and trustworthy Political Agent in the division.' His appointment as Political Agent made him the most influential man in the Itsekiri kingdom. Having overthrown the Nigerian authorities in the Benin River District, the British decided to establish their own instruments with which to govern the area. To this end, they set up a Native Court at the Benin River and in Warri in 1898. Dọghọ was appointed vice-president of the Benin River court. Gallwey himself was president. As Gallwey did not always attend the court, Dọghọ was often the effective president. So, from being an underdog in the 1880s, Dọghọ had become the leader of the Itsekiri. He it was who now settled cases, imposed fines and so on. True, he was assisted by other persons appointed as court members, but he was easily the most influential and powerful man among them.

Dọghọ was influential not only among the Itsekiri but also among the European officers. A European who visited the Benin River area in the late 1890s has left a record that shows how respected Dọghọ was. Dọghọ was invited to dinner with the vice-consul. The visitor wrote:

> *There sat down with us a Nigerman attired in plain white linen whose name is a power in the Delta and whose counsel has been taken by Government in times of anxiety. His fine white gig* [boat] *lay alongside the bank, flying the jack* [the British flag] *above her stern; and the writer was informed that when a newly arrived and zealous official ordered its owner to abandon the use of a flag sacred to imperial service, he received a hint to let Chief Dore alone.*

So by 1900 Chief Dore, as the British called Dọghọ, had become such a respected figure that not even European officials were allowed to show him any disrespect. Yet his career was only just beginning.

4
Dọghọ as Political Agent, 1900–1914

The main duty of British Political Agents was to explain to the people the policies of the British government in the Protectorate. Often this meant that these agents travelled with the vice-consuls, or District Commissioners as they were later called. It also meant that these agents accompanied the many patrols and punitive expeditions that the British organized against Nigerian peoples who refused to accept British rule. Dọghọ, as Political Agent for the Benin River District, accompanied the British on a number of their patrols and expeditions.

We have already seen the role he played in the Benin expedition of 1897. In 1904, the Kwale people in the hinterland of Sapele began to give trouble to the British officers who were trying to establish their rule there. A military expedition was organized against the Kwale. Dọghọ accompanied this expedition to help secure the co-operation of the people with the British. In the Ijo country there were two occasions on which the British had to use force to get the people to obey. Dọghọ accompanied the British on both occasions. Again in 1910 Dọghọ's services as Political Agent were called for by the British, when the people of Abbi in the Kwale country rose against the British. He had to accompany the force sent into the area to put down the rising. It is easy to imagine how important Dọghọ must have appeared to the Kwale and Ijo people as he accompanied the British forces. He was no doubt seen as a black District Commissioner.

At the same time as Dọghọ was carrying out these duties as Political Agent, he was sitting as vice-president of the Benin River Native Council. This council was the court of law to which the Itsekiri of the Benin River area took their cases. But it was more than just a court. It served as the local government body, like modern district councils. Dọghọ, as virtual president of this council, thus had a great deal of influence and power. The vice-consul had plenty of work to do, so he very often left Dọghọ to manage the affairs of this council. From all the evidence it appears that Dọghọ was an able man who knew that the only way to keep the new power and influence he enjoyed was to do his work well and to do it as the British wanted it done. As early as 1900 Gallwey was already confirming this opinion of Dọghọ as a capable man. Writing a report about the Benin River Council, Gallwey noted that the District Commissioner had not sufficiently supervised the work of the council. But, wrote Gallwey, 'it is fortunate that they have a man

7 and 8 Two scenes from the Niger delta

like Dore who thoroughly knows his work'.

In 1906 there occurred an event which showed two aspects of Chief Dọghọ's character. In that year the British began to consider allowing Nana to return from exile. Egerton, the Governor of Southern Nigeria at the time, asked the Provincial Commissioner in charge of the Central Province, in which the Itsekiri were located, to advise him on whether or not Nana should be allowed to return after over ten years in exile. The Provincial Commissioner sought Dọghọ's advice. Nana was Dọghọ's former rival and enemy. Dọghọ had helped very much to bring about the fall of Nana. Now he was being asked whether this enemy, of whom he had been so frightened, should be allowed to return to the Itsekiri country. It must have been a difficult question to answer. A really wicked man would have taken this opportunity to further harm his enemy by advising that Nana should not be allowed to return. But Dọghọ advised that Nana should return.

In 1906 Nana was over fifty years old. Did Dọghọ think that he was already too old to be able to give him any real trouble when he returned? Or did he feel that his position with the British was so strong that he could afford to be kind to a former enemy? We cannot answer

these questions exactly. But we know that after he had advised that Nana be allowed to return, he became worried about what the British intended to do for Nana. He wanted Nana to return; but he did not want to lose his position, his power, his influence, as a consequence. So when Governor Egerton visited the Warri area in October 1906, Dọghọ had an interview with the Governor at which the Governor assured him that his position would not be affected by Nana's return from exile. This shows how important Dọghọ had become in Southern Nigeria. Very few Nigerians, including even the educated class in Lagos could, in 1906, seek and obtain an interview with the Governor.

In 1908 and again in 1911 the British Government decided to acquire some land in what is now Warri. It was Dọghọ as Political Agent, and Ogbe representing the royal family, who signed the lease which gave the land to the British. This fact has been of great significance in deciding the ownership of the land of Warri as between the Itsekiri, the Urhobo people, who live in the Okere and Agbassah sections of Warri, and the Ijo, who lay claim to the Ogbe-Ijo section of Warri. All three peoples – the Itsekiri, the Urhobo and the Ijo – were already living in Warri when Dọghọ signed the lease that gave the land to the British. The Urhobo of Agbassah challenged the right of Dọghọ to collect rents from them, arguing that the land on which they lived belonged to them, not to the Itsekiri whom Dọghọ represented. The matter went to court in 1925, but the Urhobo lost the case. Dọghọ's position as Political Agent was largely responsible for his having signed the lease. His signing the lease was part of the reason given in 1925 for the Urhobo of Agbassah not being able to claim ownership of Agbassah lands. So Dọghọ's position became an advantage to the Itsekiri as a whole.

What happened in Warri also happened in Sapele. There too in 1908 Dọghọ signed a lease which gave land to the British. There too the question of the ownership of the land became a court matter. Early in 1932, just before his death, Dọghọ told the Itsekiri living in Sapele not to pay rents to their Urhobo landlords because, as he claimed, Sapele land belonged to the Olu of the Itsekiri, and he represented the Olu. The Urhobo questioned this claim. The matter went to court in 1941, some nine years after Dọghọ's death.

The evidence during the hearing of the case showed that Dọghọ received £40 of the £100 rent paid by the government for the land. The Urhobo argued that they

gave this to Dọghọ for his services as a go-between for them in their dealings with the government. They argued that Dọghọ was able to play this part of go-between only because he was the British Political Agent. The Itsekiri argued that Dọghọ signed the lease on behalf of the Olu of the Itsekiri. The Itsekiri lost the case this time because the Urhobo elders were able to show that it was they, not the Itsekiri, who gave out land to the various European firms who were trading in Sapele from about 1891. But even though the Itsekiri lost the case, we can see from this incident how the career of one man can affect the history of a whole people, even years after he is dead. Dọghọ may have thought that he was serving only his own personal interests. He was also serving the interests of the Itsekiri people.

In 1910 something happened which widened the area of Dọghọ's influence and power. At about the same time as Dọghọ was appointed Political Agent for the Benin River district, one George Eyube was appointed Political Agent for the Warri District. It was this Eyube who had worked with the British in most of the Urhobo country until 1910. In May 1910 Eyube died from a shot accidentally fired from his own pistol. The British did not appoint another Political Agent to take Eyube's place. Chief Dọghọ, as the only Political Agent in the area, therefore began to extend his activities into the Warri area as well.

The British, who had since 1885 established a protectorate over the Niger delta, may have appointed Political Agents, and they may have established Native Councils of the type over which Dọghọ presided in the Benin River. But they did not consult the Nigerians who lived in this protectorate before they decided on whatever policy they wanted to carry out. It was only in Lagos that a few Nigerians sat with the British officials to discuss policy. Even so, the British could decide on any policy even if the Nigerians were opposed to it because the Nigerians were a very small minority in the Legislative Council. In 1906 Lagos and the rest of southern Nigeria were amalgamated, with only one Governor whose headquarters was in Lagos. But despite this, the old protectorate areas were not asked to send any people to sit in the Legislative Council in Lagos.

In 1912 Sir Frederick (later Lord) Lugard was appointed Governor-General of Nigeria. His main job was to amalgamate Southern and Northern Nigeria. This amalgamation was to become effective in 1914. But before that Lugard began to prepare the way. One of the

things he did was to set up what was known as the Nigerian Council, to discuss various aspects of government policy. Lugard appointed five Chiefs to this council: the Sultan of Sokoto, the Emir of Kano, and Alafin of Oyo, Chief Henshaw of Calabar, and Chief Dọghọ.

The appointment of Chief Dọghọ was perhaps the greatest honour that was ever done by the British to the man. A semi-illiterate, who could barely sign his name, was appointed to a council to which much more important rulers like the Oba of Benin, the Shehu of Bornu, the Alake of Abeokuta and the Oni of Ife were not appointed. This shows the esteem in which Dọghọ was held. At the beginning of the 1890s Dọghọ was of little importance even in the Itsekiri kingdom. Only some twenty years later he was sitting with British governors and their assistants to discuss matters which affected Nigeria as a whole. His educational background did not make him an effective member of the council. Even though he attended a number of meetings he contributed little to the debates, and was replaced in 1918. But the honour had been done him.

From 1900 to 1914 Dọghọ had served the British as Political Agent. In this role he had worked hard both for the British and for his own personal interests. Though a Political Agent, he was also a trader. His political duties enabled him to build up his trade easily, just as the governors of the Benin River used to use their positions to improve their commercial empires. The only difference was that where those governors had to fear their rival Itsekiri traders, Dọghọ did not now have to fear such rivals. So long as he carried out his duties satisfactorily, he knew that the British would support him against any of the Itsekiri who, because of envy, turned against him. And yet the years of real power for Dọghọ were yet to come.

5 Dọghọ at the Height of his Career: Paramount Chief, 1914–1926

In 1914 Southern and Northern Nigeria were amalgamated. Lord Lugard became the head of the government as Governor-General. Lugard had governed Northern Nigeria from 1900 to 1906. While governing the North, he had used the Emirs as agents of local government in a system of local government known as Indirect Rule. These Emirs are the big chiefs of the North. Before the British conquered Northern Nigeria, the Emirs had ruled large areas. They recognised the Sultan of Sokoto as their head, but within their own areas they had great powers, like any ruler would have. Lugard used these rulers as Native Authorities to run local government. Before becoming Governor-General, then, Lugard had become accustomed to working with powerful chiefs who, before the coming of the British, were accepted as rulers by their people.

When he became Governor-General, he tried to carry the northern system into the south. From what has been said about Dọghọ so far, it must have become clear that in the south too the British had been using Nigerians to help them run the government at the local level. But, except in parts of the Yoruba country, like in Oyo where the Alafin enjoyed very wide powers, there were not many individual big chiefs having authority over wide areas. Such big chiefs are known in Nigerian history as Paramount chiefs. It was Lugard who tried to ensure that there were paramount chiefs in the south just as there were in the north.

It was in accordance with this policy that Dọghọ was appointed, on 13 September 1917, Native Authority for Warri Division. The Warri Division at the time included all the Itsekiri, most of the Ijo in the Mid-western state of Nigeria, most of the Urhobo, and nearly all the Isoko. By this time Native Courts had been opened in every part of the Division. These Native Courts served as Native Authorities for their own areas. But, in the same notice in which the appointment of Dọghọ was published, it was said that all of these other Native Authorities were to be subordinate to Chief Dọghọ. Chief Dọghọ thus became Paramount Chief of the Warri Division, a division which included most of what is now the Delta Province of Nigeria. In fact only the Aboh and Ukwuani were not directly brought under him. Dọghọ, who had not been able to establish himself on his own merit in the competitive Itsekiri society, had now become the local ruler of nearly the whole of Delta Province. He was obviously doing very well for himself by serving the British faithfully.

9 *Sir Frederick Dealtry Lugard*

As Paramount Chief Dọghọ had not only influence but real power. The law laid it down that the Resident, the British official in charge of the province, should consult with the Paramount Chief before appointing members of the Native Courts in the area. This gave Dọghọ real power. He made sure that he was friendly to all Residents who worked in the province from 1914 till his death in 1932. He ensured that these Residents trusted him. The Residents in turn had such confidence in him and his ability for hard and efficient work that they sought his advice on most matters. Thus all Itsekiri, Urhobo, Ijo and Isoko who wanted to become members of Native Courts knew that the surest way to secure appointment was to be friendly with Dọghọ. Elders in these areas today tell stories about how they used to send gifts to Dọghọ in Warri to secure his favour. Some even sent their own children to work for him as labourers. He was feared and respected because he was so close to the *oyibo*, the white man. As Paramount Chief he earned £300 a year. For some years he was given £100 travelling allowance. From 'gifts' and 'presents' he must have also realized a great deal. Dọghọ thus became not just powerful and influential but also very wealthy.

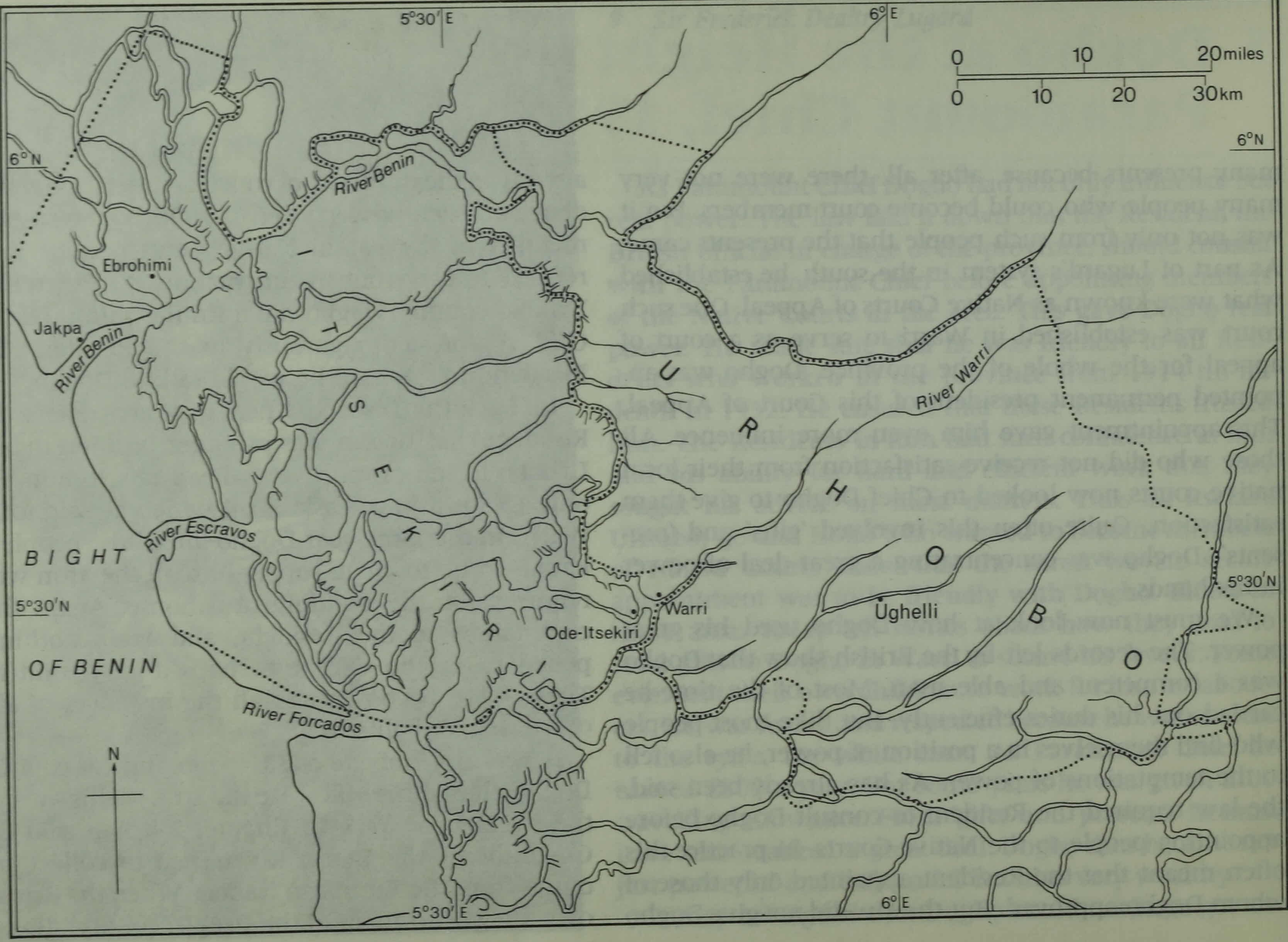
It may be argued that Dọghọ could not have got to

many presents because, after all, there were not very many people who could become court members. But it was not only from such people that the presents came. As part of Lugard's system in the south, he established what were known as Native Courts of Appeal. One such court was established in Warri to serve as a court of appeal for the whole of the province. Dọghọ was appointed permanent president of this Court of Appeal. This appointment gave him even more influence. All those who did not receive satisfaction from their local native courts now looked to Chief Dọghọ to give them satisfaction. Quite often this involved 'gifts' and 'presents'. Dọghọ was concentrating a great deal of power in his hands.

We must now look at how Dọghọ used his great power. The records left by the British show that Dọghọ was a competent and able man. Most of the time he carried out his duties efficiently. But, like most people who find themselves in a position of power, he also fell to the temptations of power. As has already been said, the law required the Resident to consult Dọghọ before appointing people to the Native Courts. In practice this often meant that the Resident appointed only those of whom Dọghọ approved. But the law did not give Dọghọ any say in the dismissal of court members. Only the Resident had such powers. Yet in 1920 Dọghọ suspended a member of the Patani Native Court because the latter refused to carry out his instruction. At Evwreni in the Urhobo country Dọghọ did a similar thing. The District Officer protested vigorously to the Resident. But the Resident merely said he would talk to Dọghọ.

In 1919 the District Officer of Warri reported to the Resident that Dọghọ was using his position to force the Urhobo to sell oil at a very cheap rate to him. He paid only £5 for a huge cask of oil which he sold for £20 in Warri. In the same year Dọghọ forced the people of Frukama, an Ijo town, to supply him all the 'iron wood' he required for the building of a house. Again the D.O. complained to the Resident, and again nothing happened to Dọghọ except perhaps a very mild rebuke. These were by no means all the instances of abuse of office, as we shall see.

It was not only in the Urhobo and Ijo country that Dọghọ abused his office. He did so with his own people, the Itsekiri, as well. In Chapter 2 it was said that the Governor of the Benin River used to collect customs duties from the European traders. When the British took over the government of the Itsekiri country, they began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to collect these duties. In order, however, to compensate all those who had been receiving a share of the duties collected before their rule, it was decided to pay them what were called annual 'subsidies'. The Government knew who were entitled to receive these subsidies. Usually when such a person died, the subsidy was paid to the next head of that family. But from the twenties, Dọghọ began to collect some of these subsidies for himself without handing them over to the new heads of families.

In 1926 Chief Awala petitioned the Governor, complaining that Dọghọ refused to pay to him the £40 due to his family every year since the death of his father. He had written to Dọghọ about the matter but had received no reply. In the course of looking into this matter, it was discovered that Dọghọ was also drawing £80 a year due to Chief Dudu. Altogether Dọghọ was drawing £224 from subsidies even though he was entitled to only £100 a year. Despite this clear evidence, the Governor replied to Awala that he was not prepared to stop Dọghọ drawing the subsidy because he had been doing so for nineteen years.

One must ask the question: Why was Dọghọ able to do these things and escape punishment by the British? There are many sides to this question. First, the British saw Dọghọ as essential to their government. As Paramount Chief and President of the Appeal Court, he was doing useful work which the British would otherwise have had to do themselves. In doing this work he was usually efficient and capable, and the British therefore seemed prepared to overlook what they must have regarded as a few minor errors in conduct.

Second, Dọghọ had been in power since Nana's fall in 1894. Over these years he had built up a great deal of power for himself. Most of the province feared him because he was so powerful. This fear helped to keep the province quiet and peaceful. The British were afraid that if they did anything to disgrace him, the fear and respect would be destroyed. Another figure like Dọghọ would be difficult to find and build up, and there might be unrest in the province.

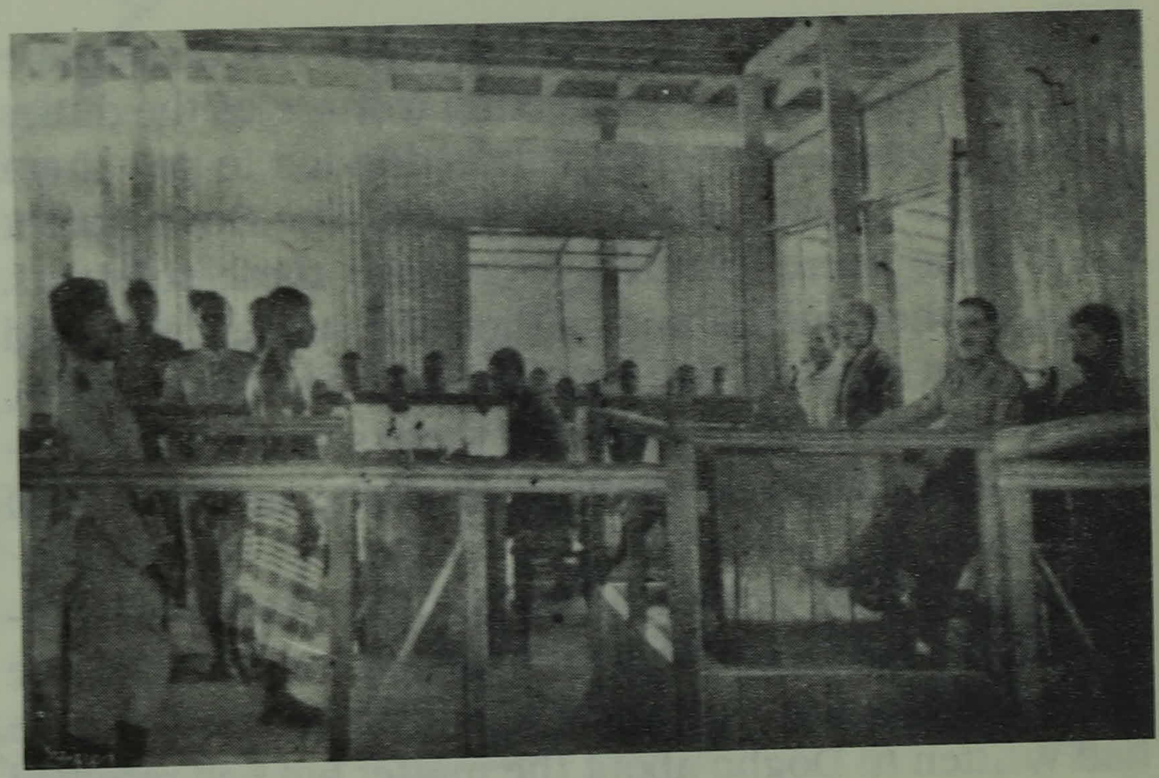
Third, Dọghọ was not a fool. He knew that those who mattered were not so much the D.O.s but the Resident and more senior officers. With the Resident and more senior officers, then, he put on his best behaviour, so much so that quite often D.O.s were afraid to report Dọghọ to the Resident for fear that the Resident would turn against them. It was the Resident who advised

the Governor about the events in the province. But the D.O.s sometimes had their way. It was largely due to the efforts of the D.O. in charge of the Urhobo that the native authorities in Urhoboland ceased to be subordinate to Dọghọ in 1926.

So far we have been talking about Dọghọ as a Paramount Chief. What about him as President of the Native Court of Appeal? In this connection Dọghọ must have found it rather difficult. Many people must have tried to bribe him by giving him 'presents' so that he could get the court to decide in their favour. The records show that despite such pressure Dọghọ was usually a reliable judge. But where he was interested in one of the parties in a case he did not pay too much attention to the evidence. He lost his patience and usually reliability and shouted at the other side. D.O.s often complained about this weakness in Dọghọ. But, as we know, even today this kind of thing still happens. Judges still fall a prey to temptation. We must not therefore judge Dọghọ too harshly.

What was the reaction of the people to Dọghọ? Already we have said that they feared and respected him, and tried to be in his good books. However, the non-Itsekiri people were sometimes unhappy that Dọghọ,

10 *Consular Court House Benin – Royal Niger Coast Protectorate*



who had no right at all to rule them, had been allowed by the British to have so much power over them. What worried them most was the Native Court of Appeal. Most of the members of that court were Itsekiri, and the Urhobo, Isoko and Ukwuani did not see why they should have their cases tried by Itsekiri people since their laws and customs were different. They therefore protested vigorously against the court. In 1923 a separate Court of Appeal was opened for the Ukwuani. Appeals from Sapele also stopped being heard by Dọghọ's court. The

Resident wrote, 'No appeals from Sapele Native Court are now allowed to be taken in Warri Appeal Court over which Dore dominates.' Then in 1926 the Isoko had their own Court of Appeal opened for them at Ase. These steps were taken in answer to the people's protests. These protests must be seen not just as protests against Chief Dọghọ's person and position but also as protests against the very idea of making people with different laws and customs have a common appeal court, without making the members of the court fully representative. But there can be no doubt that Chief Dọghọ's very influential position in the court made the people feel the unfairness of the system even more.

What about the Itsekiri people themselves? Just as some Itsekiri, including Dọghọ's family, grew jealous of the wealth and power of Nana earlier on, so must some have grown jealous of Dọghọ's position, which, because it was supported by the British, was even stronger. People like Awala, whose subsidy Dọghọ refused to give them, could not have felt happy. In the 1920s, it was the direct descendants of Olu Akengbuwa, the ruler who died in 1848, who began to question Dọghọ's position in Itsekiriland. These descendants felt that Dọghọ was behaving as if he was the Olu. He was accused, for example, of offering sacrifices to the departed royal ancestors, an act reserved for the Olu or a regent.

In 1922 members of the Akengbuwa family took Dọghọ to court. They challenged Dọghọ's right to have given out land in Warri to the British. They challenged his right to collect the rents from the land. They challenged his right to keep the rent collected to himself. Chief Denedo and William Moore represented the Akengbuwa family in the case. They argued that they, as descendants of the Olu, not Dọghọ, should enjoy the rights which Dọghọ was enjoying. Dọghọ won the case. The British judge claimed that Dọghọ was the man the Government recognized as the head of the Itsekiri. Here we can see how his appointment as Paramount Chief put him above Itsekiri laws and customs.

Although Dọghọ won the case, the government knew that something was wrong. William Moore and the others had argued that Dọghọ was keeping all the £306 paid as annual rent on the land to himself. They had argued that as the land belonged to all the Itsekiri the money should be used for public purposes. The Lieutenant Governor saw sense in this argument. In November 1924 he visited Warri and summoned a meeting of the leading chiefs. At this meeting it was decided to set up an

11 Village on Forcados River

Olu Trust Fund. Five-sixths of the rent was to be paid into this Fund. The remaining one-sixth was to be paid to Chief Dọghọ. Three chiefs – Dọghọ, Ogbobine and Omagbemi – were to be in charge of the Fund. The money was to be spent for public purposes. But no money was to be spent without the prior approval of the Resident.

From what has been said in this chapter, it is clear that Dọghọ was at the height of his career during the years 1914–1926. Already, however, people were questioning his position. The British had succeeded in maintaining him in that position. But events were soon to occur which made Dọghọ's position difficult to maintain. The end was, in fact, quite near.

6
The End of a Career: 1927–1932

In 1927 the Government decided to introduce direct taxation into what is now Delta Province. Up till this time this province, together with all the Eastern Provinces, did not pay any direct taxes. Only the North, the Yoruba country and Benin Province paid such taxes. The British government felt that this was unfair, and decided to tax the remaining part of the country.

The time chosen to introduce taxation was unfortunate. Trade was bad. The people were getting very low prices for their oil and other export products. Yet the cost of imported goods was rising. The people therefore had little or no surplus money with which to pay the tax. In addition, it does not appear as if the government discussed the matter sufficiently with the people before they began to get ready to collect the tax. The result was that the people throughout the province reacted violently against the introduction of direct taxation.

In Itsekiriland the protest against taxation was led by one Eda Otuedọn, who formed what was known as the Young Itsekiri Party. According to the Resident, this party included within it most of those who were against Chief Dọghọ. The party blamed direct taxation on Dọghọ. It argued that Dọghọ had been consulted by the government and that he had agreed that the Itsekiri be taxed without discussing the matter with the people. This, they argued, was because Dọghọ stood to gain from taxation. The Government would pay him a certain percentage of the tax collected from the Itsekiri country. No doubt Dọghọ, in his position, knew the government's intentions. Other chiefs also probably knew. The anti-Dọghọ party, however, found it easy to blame it all on Dọghọ.

It was not only the Itsekiri who protested against direct taxation. Other people in the province did too. The protests took the form of a boycott of trade with Europeans and closure of all Native Courts. In addition the people attacked all British-appointed chiefs, court messengers and court clerks. In a few places D.O.s were even threatened, though none was actually beaten up. Prisons were attacked and the prisoners freed. From July to October 1927, the whole province was in a state of confusion and roiting. Police were drafted into the province and the riots were finally put down by the end of the year. A large number of people were imprisoned for rioting. What happened in the present Delta Province (it was called Warri Province then) also happened in the East, especially at Aba, where the riots were even more serious.

12 An elderly Itsekiri woman dressed for a non-ceremonial occasion

The British were surprised at the seriousness of the riots. They therefore decided to investigate them more thoroughly. The background to the riots has already been stated. The British found that in addition the people were very dissatisfied with the chiefs, court clerks and court messengers appointed by them to run the local government. These chiefs were too powerful, and very corrupt. Their messengers and clerks were also too powerful, and extremely corrupt. The people argued that many of those who had been appointed chiefs were not men who would otherwise rule the people. They wanted the British to base their own rule on the kind of government that existed before the British came.

The British accepted the arguments and decided that in future only those qualified by the people's customs to rule would be appointed as Native Authorities or as court members. This decision raised the question of Chief Dọghọ's position.

The decision to reorganize local government was a decision of general policy. The Itsekiri could not be an exception to this policy. So the British began to investigate Itsekiri government before colonial rule. It was not difficult to discover what this was. The government

of the Itsekiri used to be in the hands of an Olu and a council of titled men. There was no Olu in 1928. Those who held titles when Akengbuwa died in 1848 were nearly all dead, though those qualified to step into their shoes were well known. At village level government was in the hands of the elders. The job before the government now was to make these councils of elders act as Native Authorities in the villages, and to see to it that an Olu was installed so that the Itsekiri council of state could be appointed to act as the central native authority.

It was not difficult to establish the village councils. But it was very difficult to settle the question of the central Itsekiri native authority. One problem was that of reaching agreement about who was to become the Olu. The royal family was divided. But the greater problem was the position of Dọghọ. At the end of 1928 the Resident reported that Chief Dọghọ's position made it difficult to appoint an Olu before his death. The Resident argued that Dọghọ's position had been too long established for him to be removed and an Olu put in his place. In other words, if the Itsekiri wanted to benefit from the new policy, they had to wait for Chief Dọghọ to die first. This shows how highly the British regarded Chief Dọghọ. In every other place new appointments were being made and the former chiefs were being removed. But Dọghọ was not removed.

The British were worried by the situation. The officials who were running the province felt that the exception made in Dọghọ's case was not really satisfactory. They suggested to Dọghọ that he should retire and that they would pay him a pension if he did. But Dọghọ refused to retire. He had enjoyed too much power, wealth and influence to be satisfied with a pension. In 1930 the British decided to set up an Itsekiri Native Council. This council was made of the leading chiefs and some of the 'young intelligentsia'. When it met as a court of law to try cases, Chief Dọghọ sat as president. When the Council met for other purposes, Chief Omagbemi, who was appointed Regent in 1929, sat as the president.

At the meeting of the Council in February 1930 some members proposed that Chief Dọghọ be appointed Olu. Eighteen people voted in favour and thirteen against. Those who voted against the move to make Dọghọ Olu reminded the council that Dọghọ was descended from the female side of the royal family and that according to Itsekiri law and custom he could not become

13 Complete set of Itsekiri drums

Olu. Dọghọ himself is said to have refused to hold that office. He no doubt knew that it was going too far to want to become Olu. Moreover, by 1930 Dọghọ was over sixty years old, and he probably felt that he was too old to worry about becoming Olu.

So the British continued to run Itsekiri local government at the centre with the Itsekiri Native Council, while they waited for Dọghọ to die so that an Olu could be appointed. Dọghọ died on 24 September 1932. In 1936, Emiko, great grandson of Akengbuwa, was installed as Olu. The death of Dọghọ and the installation of Ẹmiko marked the end of one phase of Itsekiri history and the beginning of another.

7
Dọghọ's Place in History

There can be little doubt that the man whose career we have been studying in this book was a great man. He played an important part in the establishment of British rule over the western part of the Niger delta and its hinterland. From the 1890s, the establishment of British rule over what is now Nigeria was easily the most important movement in its history. That movement was a sign that the times were changing, that authority was changing hands. Dọghọ became involved in that movement in a manner which ensured that some of that authority which was passing into British hands also passed into his own hands. While appearing to be no more than a servant of the British, he nevertheless built up great powers for himself.

Born into Itsekiriland at a time when rivalry for trade was great, he belonged to a group that was battling against superior rivals. He was brought up to hate these superior rivals; trained to seek revenge for the humiliating defeat which Olomu inflicted on his father's cousin, Tsanọmi. He accomplished the wishes of his family when he helped the British to overthrow Nana. He turned the tables on Nana's family when, first as Political Agent, and then as Paramount Chief, he became the leading figure in Itsekiri history from 1894 to 1932. This was a great achievement.

It is true that he was only able to achieve all he did because the British supported him and used him for their own purposes. But even so, he could not have achieved so much were he not clever, hard-working, efficient, and a good politician who knew when to take chances and when not. Besides, it must be remembered that man is always changing his way of life, his attitude to things, to fit in with changing circumstances. In the days of Nana's father and Dọghọ's own father, the way to success was through trade and building up arms and ammunition. The coming of the British changed this. No arms and ammunition owned by any Itsekiri could make him succeed if the British were against him. This was what Nana's fight against the British showed very clearly. It therefore became necessary for the Itsekiri and other Nigerian peoples to find a new way to success. In the early years of colonial rule, one such way, indeed the surest way, was to support the British. Dọghọ saw this way and used it effectively. He adapted his methods, his life, to suit the new circumstances.

We do not, unfortunately, know a great deal about his private life, about him as a man. Over the question as to whether Nana, his old rival, was to return to Itse-

kiriland or not, he showed that he could be considerate once his own position was secure. Different people give different accounts of him. Many say he was so powerful that he was often oppressive. Others claim that he was a kind man. He was no doubt a mixture of many qualities, like most men are.

Although in the last ten years of his life the Itsekiri themselves began to question his position, there can be no doubt that Dọghọ's career constituted a source of pride for the Itsekiri within the then Warri Province. His career was the best example of the role which the Itsekiri played in the early years of British rule in the province. In the period up to 1914 and from 1914 to 1927, Itsekiri chiefs were appointed to serve on native courts outside their own kingdom. This was especially the case in parts of Urhoboland. Such chiefs not only sat in Urhobo native courts but took advantage of their presence in Urhoboland to organize their trade in palm oil. Most of these chiefs owed their appointments to Chief Dọghọ.

Dọghọ's position also helped the Itsekiri to lay claim to considerable areas of land in Warri. It will be remembered that one reason why the Agbassah lost their case against the Itsekiri in 1925 was that Dọghọ had signed the lease which gave land in Warri to the British. What would have happened if the Political Agent had been Urhobo? We cannot tell. But there is no doubt that Dọghọ's official position affected this judgement. We have also seen how, for the same reason, the Itsekiri tried to claim Sapele land, though they failed in this case. There can be no arguing about the fact that Dọghọ's position put the Itsekiri at a great advantage over their neighbours in the province.

Then there was Dọghọ's power both as Paramount Chief and as President of the Native Court of Appeal until 1926. This power made Dọghọ look like a black Resident. It is true that the power which Dọghọ had was given to him by the British. However, from the 1920s, when the Urhobo and the Itsekiri began to quarrel, Dọghọ's career was part of the evidence which the Itsekiri used to claim that they once ruled the Urhobo people. In this way, too, Dọghọ's career became a source of pride to the Itsekiri. Not even his enemies among the Itsekiri can deny his importance in the province right up to his death in 1932. The British were even prepared to wait for him to die before putting a new policy into effect. Few Africans received such recognition and respect from their colonial masters in those days.

Finally we must look at the career of Dọghọ from the wider viewpoint of Nigerian and indeed African history. It is sometimes said that the Europeans found it very easy to conquer Africa and to rule. When one remembers the stories of people like Menelik of Ethiopia, Nana, another Itsekiri, or Moshweshwe of Lesotho,* one cannot but question this claim. For these were men who stood for their rights and fought against the Europeans. Where they failed, it was largely because the Europeans had better arms and ammunition and also knew how to use firearms better.

There were, however, other leaders in Africa, such as Obaseki of Benin, Khama of Botswana, Naimbana of Koya in Sierra Leone,* and the subject of this book, who did not fight against the British but co-operated or appeared to co-operate with them. So what does one say? That African leaders and African peoples reacted differently to European imperialism. The attitude adopted depended very much on the nature of local politics. It has to be remembered that people did not always know that the Europeans were going to stay for so long in Africa. Some saw the Europeans as no more than just another set of allies or enemies. They therefore used the Europeans to fight their own internal political battles. Dọghọ fits very well into this category. The British arrived just at the time when his family was engaged in political battle with Nana's. So he used them as his allies to defeat Nana.

The reason why Dọghọ sought to defeat Nana was not just to take revenge. It was also to replace Nana as the leading figure in Itsekiriland. But the British were already the most powerful people in the land. So how could he now achieve his end? He decided to serve the British, to become a British instrument. The British accepted him and used him for their own purposes. It is also very clear from what has been said in this book that Dọghọ also used the British to build up his personal power, influence and wealth. It would, therefore, be wrong to see Dọghọ purely as one who betrayed his fellow Nigerians or Africans and helped the British to conquer them and to rule them. He was no doubt such a one. But to say just that is to be unfair to Dọghọ, to oversimplify the situation. He was one who was anxious to repair the fortunes of his group within the Itsekiri kingdom, but who was caught up in the period of British colonial expansion. He discovered that the only way to

*All these men are the subject of biographies in this series.

pursue that ambition was to throw in his lot with the British. So he allowed the British to use him. But he used them too. Seen in this light, there were many Dọghọs in Africa, men who continued to exercise great power even despite the British. Herein lies part of the greatness of Chief Dọghọ, British Political Agent and Paramount Chief of Warri Province from 1894 till his death in 1932.

AFRICAN HISTORICAL BIOGRAPHIES

Edited by Obaro Ikime
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1. *Menelik of Ethiopia* by R. H. Kofi Darkwah
   Menelik defeated the Italians at the battle of Adowa in 1894 and thus preserved the independence of his Empire.

2. *Khama of Botswana* by Anthony J. Dachs
   Rhodes's British South Africa Company, the Boer republicans, and many other rapacious people wanted to exploit Khama's position.

3. *Nana of the Niger Delta* by Obaro Ikime
   British gunboats pushed this great merchant prince from his position as middleman in the palm oil trade on the Benin River.

4. *Moshweshwe of Lesotho* by Peter Sanders
   Moshweshwe held his mountain kingdom together against the pressures of the Zulus and the Boers.

5. *Obaseki of Benin* by Philip Aigbona Igbafe
   Agho Obaseki by force of personality rose to a position where he dominated Benin politics after the British expeditionary force had seized Benin.

6. *Osei Tutu of Asante* by K. Yeboa Daaku
   Osei Tutu is the best-remembered of all the Asante kings. At the beginning of the eighteenth century he made Asante the strongest of the forest states of West Africa.

7. *Herbert Macaulay: Nigerian Patriot* by Tekena N. Tamuno
   Although in 1893 he became the first Nigerian civil engineer, he had a far greater success as a political engineer. He took every chance in the courts and newspapers to fight the great causes of Lagos and the emerging Nigerian nation.

8. *Chief Dogho of Warri* by Obaro Ikime
   Dogho played an important part in the establishment of British rule over the western part of the Niger Delta in the 1890s.

9. *Naimbana of Sierra Leone* by Adeleye Ijagbemi
   Naimbana, Regent of the Koya Kingdom from 1775 to 1793, was visited by the founders of the Colony of Sierra Leone. He had become rich through slave trading but he co-operated with the strangers to put an end to the slave trade.

10. *King Boy of Brass* by E. J. Alagoa
    King Boy brought the English explorers, the Lander brothers, from Aboh to the Nun estuary in 1830. At last it became clear to the Europeans that the Oil Rivers formed the Delta of the Niger.

11. *Lobengula of Zimbabwe* by Ngwabi Bhebe
    Lobengula, despite considerable personal gifts, was never sufficiently autocratic to enable his people to resist Rhodes.

12. *Mirambo of Tanzania* by A. C. Unomah
    Mirambo, a great military ruler, established a powerful kingdom not in response to the European outsiders but to the situation in East Africa.

13. *Mzilikazi of the Ndebele* by R. Kent Rasmussen
    Mzilikazi broke from Chaka, clashed with the Boers and founded the Ndebele state in the ruins of the Rozwi empire.