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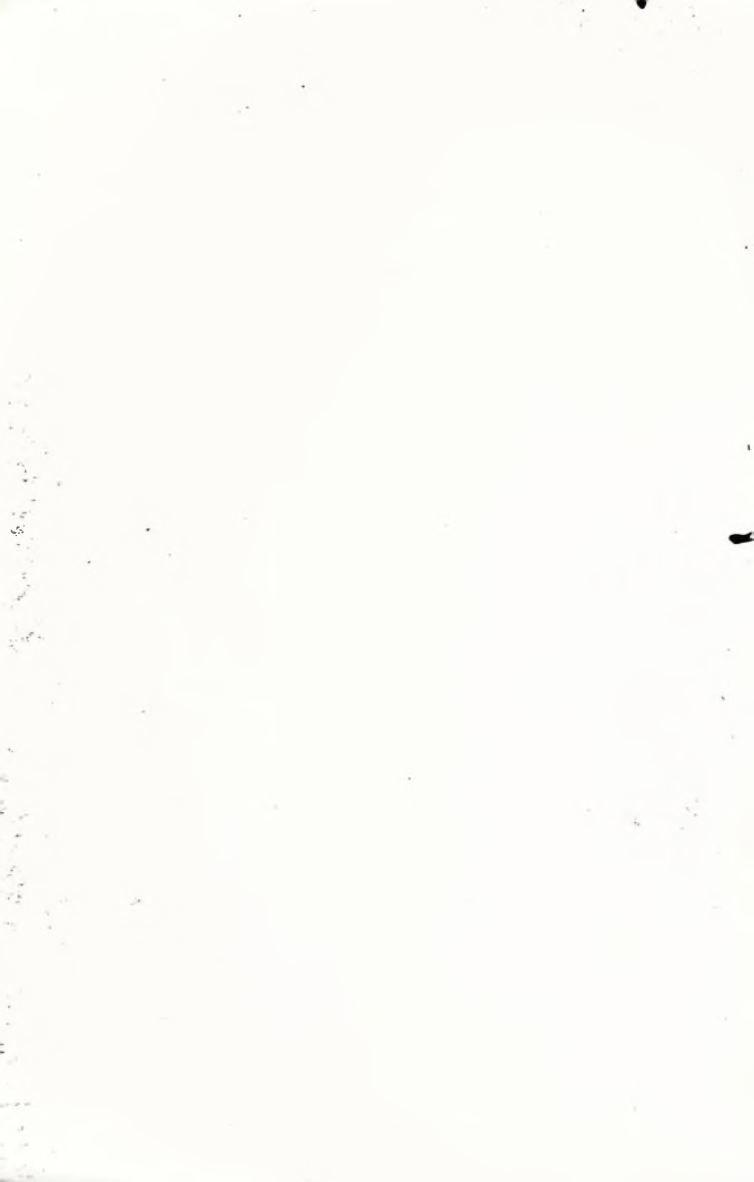


NIGERIAN PEOPLES

Edited by

- Basse W. Andah
- A. Ikechukwu Okpoko
- C.A. Folorunso





**SOME
NIGERIAN
PEOPLES**

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**Edited by Bassey W. Andah,
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List of Contributors

- AGBONTAEN, K.A.** *Department of Archaeology,
Obafemi Awolowo University
Ile-Ife*
- ALAGOA, E.J.** *Department of History,
University of Port-Harcourt,
Port-Harcourt.*
- ANDAH, B.W.** *Department of Archaeology
and Anthropology,
University of Ibadan, Ibadan.*
- DEREFAKA, A.A.** *Department of History,
University of Port-Harcourt,
Port-Harcourt.*
- ERIM O. ERIM** *Department of History
University of Calabar
Calabar.*
- FOLORUNSO C.A.** *Department of Archaeology
and Anthropology,
University of Ibadan, Ibadan.*
- MIACHI, T.A.** *Department of General
Studies, Federal Polytechnic,
Idah*
- NOAH, M.** *Department of History,
University of Calabar, Calabar.*
- OGUAGHA, P.A.** *Department of History,
University of Ibadan, Ibadan.*
- OGUNTOMISIN, G.O.** *Department of History,
University of Ibadan, Ibadan*
- OKPOKO, A.I.** *Department of Archaeology
and Anthropology,
University of Ibadan, Ibadan.*
- OKPOKO, P.U.** *Colonial Museum, Lokoja*
- OTITE O.** *Department of Sociology,
University of Ibadan, Ibadan.*

Some Nigerian Peoples

by

BASSEY W. ANDAH

Introduction

This special supplement represents the first in a series on the cultures and societies of West African peoples. This issue, as the title indicates, treats *Some Nigerian People*, primarily peoples of southern Nigeria where 'Southern' is used in a strictly geographical, rather than political sense. The conscious tone set for contributions is that of synthesis of what is known. Consequently, the approach is more or less anthropological, rather than strictly historical. All contributors in their distinct styles try to identify who the peoples they treat see themselves to be today; how they consider themselves to have been in the identifiable past, how they conceptualize their beginnings and their progress to the present; who they see as their neighbours and the nature of their relationships with them.

To answer these questions, especially those regarding the peoples, their origins and their early histories, as well as their distinctive cultural traditions, contributors have had to make concerted efforts to dig beyond the peoples everyday lives. All contributors try within the varying limits of information available, to tell our readers what is known of the overall cultural character of the peoples, their world views and symbolic systems, and where possible, how these came to be shaped or formed, how they changed with time and the major factors which moulded or influenced them.

The overall goal of this first volume in a series of hopefully other forthcoming ones, is to offer our readers useful glimpses

of these Nigerian peoples' conception, and understanding of their social and cultural histories. More often than not, it has required the contributors to attempt to properly reinstate their peoples' sense of history. This fact has usually meant a much more central and definite role for anthropological and oral historical sources than hitherto. To avoid simply mentioning the ancient pasts of these peoples in passing, our contributors have tried to go beyond the bounds of written documents (which are by their very nature very limited in time scope among other things), to explore relevant archaeological, oral historical and ethnographic data. The rationale for this attempt, at reconstructing the ancient pasts of these peoples is the recognition of the fact that a people's 'ancient' history provides the foundation for whatever experiences they have had in the more recent past. Because a primary objective of this series is to try to illuminate the present and the future with insights of the past, our contributors have found it necessary to find out first from the local sages what it is their peoples were used to, and from thence to what they are used to now.

The point which this volume attempts to make, sometimes forcefully, is that it should be these Nigerian peoples' historical time span and conceptions of time history and culture, not those of other peoples, that should serve as the chronological/historical framework. Hopefully, this perspective will be sustained as much as is possible in subsequent volumes within this series.

Besides trying to set the tone for remedying temporal and methodological limitations which characterise African historical studies, this series also draws attention to the invariable lack of a proper historico-geographical depth and perspective in earlier cultural historical write ups, be it by anthropologists or historians. African societies and peoples were usually treated in most pioneer studies as if they were unrelated groups, static and usually lifeless entities, with no yesterdays, no tomorrows, but only today. In this volume a conscious attempt is made not just to indicate how African peoples *lived*

socially and culturally, but also how they related to and with other peoples neighbouring them, by exploring among other things, the history of such institutions as title-taking, inheritance, kinship and marriage, laws, justice and discipline, technological practices and industries, as well as mortuary and funerary observances, religious beliefs and observances, and artistic traditions.

Where this is reasonable and or seen as possible, contributors have tried to discover group categories that genuinely represent historically valid hierarchies of cultural language, dialect, polity and settlement groupings. One approach employed here has been to find out how the peoples in question identify themselves within their socio-economic environment and to see how these categories relate or cut across linguistic and other like entities at the historical and regional levels; if and how one may recognize the evolution or development of coherent internal orders along locally recognized lines of lineages (matri or patrilineage) professional occupational groupings, land allocation and other settlement forms, cult relationships/structures and other locally recognized arrangements.

If anything is evident in all of the contributions in this volume, it is the fact that in so far as they represent social and historical processes, our Nigerian cultures, past, present and emergent, represent certain common traditions giving rise to a number of general attitudes. The major influences shaping these have been our age-long local religions and philosophies. It would seem that it is only recently that Islam and Christianity, Western commerce, education and culture have made in-roads into our cultural lives. Yet the impact of these has been such as to result in the growth of an intellectual class or new elite who are not rooted in our cultural traditions and therefore constitute by this fact, a major source of weakness as well as of strength in our body politic, and who yet are called upon to write about our histories, sciences, arts, religions, philosophies, technologies, and the like. For one thing, members of this new elite too easily fail to see that for the emergent

Nigerian society (and indeed African societies) to survive, it is essential that her social and cultural history is related and made pertinent to all strands within the society and not simply for the new elite (who are also an insignificant minority both in terms of numbers and ideas). Such histories would in fact be most meaningful if they derived as well as obtained their inspiration from our rural folks, who are the effective custodians of our real cultural heritage. All these and more, argue for a greater time depth, as well as a more home-spun socio-cultural perspective to our historical studies.



CHAPTER 1

The Ijo of the Niger Delta: An Historical Introduction

by

ALAGOA E.J. and DEREFKA A.A.

Introduction

The Ijo occupy the Niger Delta, over a territory extending from the Mahin River on the west, to the River Opobo on the east, and northwards to the confluence of the River Niger, Forcados and Nun. This lies between latitude $4^{\circ} 15'$ and $5^{\circ} 20'N$, and longitudes $4^{\circ} 45'$ and $7^{\circ} 45'E$. Geographical conditions are those of the humid tropics with high temperatures and thick equatorial forests. The area is traversed by a maze of rivers and creeks with salt water swamps on the tidal reaches nearer the coast, and fresh water conditions on the upper reaches of the delta. The immediate coastal islands form a ring of sandy beach ridges.

The Central Delta is a freshwater swamp area with reddish brown soil that is clayey. It has tropical rain forest with tall trees such as the *Afanfan* (corkwood tree) and *Bolo* (*Ochrocarous africanus* oliv.) which is used for making canoes. There are also the (*Raphia Vinifera* P. Besuv.) as well as oil palms. Beneath the tall trees are shorter trees and shrubs such as *ombii* (nettle), *Bita* (ginger lily) and *Kalakumu* (used as 'chewing stick'). The land is mostly flooded for about two months in the year during the rainy season and the swampy nature of the area is obvious even within settlements. During the dry season, however, the land is quite high above the water mark of the rivers and creeks in the area. Movement between a settlement and other settlements in the area is mostly by canoe

and for longer distances, by engine boat, especially during the rainy season. The same is true of movement between settlements and farmland.

The rich silt brought down by the waters of the Niger annually enriches the soil and makes farming profitable. The staple crops grown include yam, cassava, plantain and bananas. The manufacture of raphia products such as mats, baskets, and cordage is commonly practised by the woman. The Gbaran (again their women) had been famous in the past for their ceramic products. Another occupation is fishing, although this is done mainly to supplement the products from farming. Also, during the flood period, fishing is one of the people's major preoccupations; since the only farming activity one is likely to notice during the flood season is late harvesting of crops like cassava before the floods take over most of the land. Gin distilling is also an important occupation. The gin is distilled in the raphia palm *Koro* (*Raphia hookeri*) bushes in backswamp microenvironment. Palmwine, *Izion-uru*, is tapped from the *Koro*, fermented and distilled into gin, *Koun-uru*.

The people have developed architectural designs to ensure that their houses can withstand the effects of flooding. They live mostly in rectangular mud houses with raised and reinforced bases and palmleaf thatched roofs. It is interesting to note that even when a settlement moves to a site that is on high enough ground the design of the houses remains the same as those situated in sites constantly disturbed by flood waters as is said to be the case with Polaku. This seems to indicate a further line of investigation that would throw more light on claims of common origin by the Central Delta *ibe* on one hand and by *Ijose* and *ibe* outside the Central Delta area (both intra and inter).

There are upwards of forty distinct sub-groups of Ijo in the modern Nigerian states of Rivers, Delta, and Ondo, numbering over one million by the 1963 census. A majority of the Ijo are to be found in the Rivers and Delta states. It is, however, more convenient to identify groups of Ijo according to their

geographical location in the Niger Delta. Thus, the Ijo are distributed over the delta as follows (Alagoa, 1972): Western Fringe: Apoi, Arogbo, Furupigha, Olodiana, Egbema; Western Delta: Gbaramatu, Ogbe, Mein, Obotebe, Ogulagha, Iduwini, Seimbiri, Tuomo, Kabowei, Kumbowei, Operemo, Tarakiri, Beni (Oyakiri); Central Delta: Bassan, Olodiana, Apoi, Oporoma, Ogboin, tungbo, Kolokuma, Opokuma, Gbaran, Ekpetiama, Tarakiri Boma, Akassa; Northern Fringe: Okordia, Zarama, Buseni, Oruma; Eastern Delta: Nembe, Kalabari, Okrika, Ibani (Bonny); Eastern and Fringe: Nkoro, Ibani (Opobo).

These groups recognize themselves as belonging together as distinct units and are also so recognized by their neighbours. The members of these (i.e. *ibe*) usually speak a common dialect and believe in a common origin or ancestral founder, and often worship a common high god. However, the Eastern Delta groups developed state institutions or kingdoms of a type that incorporated in varying degrees, peoples of differing cultures. Such peoples were members of the group only in a political sense, although they tended also to acquire the language and culture of the dominant group. Thus, the Eastern Delta groups are more territorially defined units than the others.

The application of a language criterion has not been the overriding consideration in defining the Ijo groups listed above. The language and cultural criteria have been combined with a historical yardstick. Thus, some of the groups on the delta periphery in very close contact with neighbouring peoples have lost their Ijo dialects for the languages of their hosts. Thus the Apoi of the Western Fringe have lost their Ijo for Yoruba, they are, accordingly, listed as Ijo because of their historical traditions which link them to the Apoi of the Central Delta. Indeed, other groups have varying degrees of mutual contact and influence with the Edo, Isekiri, Urhobo and Isoko, Igbo and Ibibio.

This cultural blurring at the edges is a measure of the historical currents to which the Niger Delta has been subjected in

antiquity, as well as the fact that the Ijo have not been isolated occupants of the Niger Delta. In the Western Delta and Fringe, the Ijo have been in contact with the Itsekiri who are also delta inhabitants. The Urhobo and Isoko have shared historical experiences with many Ijo groups, while the Benin kingdom of the Edo has cast its political shadow over most of this region and beyond. It is clear from the traditions of origin and from recent linguistic classifications and studies that there have been migrations into the Central Delta of Edo-related peoples. These include the Engenni, Epie, and Udekama or Degema — named Delta Edo by the linguists (Williamson, 1976).

In the Central Delta and Eastern Delta, and Fringe, relations have been mainly with the Igbo. But groups related to the Efik-Ibibio, belonging to the Cross River languages, have migrated into the delta or its fringe regions. These include the Ogbia, Abua, Eleme, Ogoni, and the Obolo or Andoni.

In sum, although the Ijo are defined here in terms mainly of language and history, the linguists state (Williamson 1976, 136) that Ijo is diverse enough to be considered as four closely-related languages, namely:

- (a) Eastern Ijo — comprising Ibani, Okrika, Kalabari, and Nkoro.
- (b) Nembe-Akassa — comprising Nembe and Akassa.
- (c) Izon — comprising four sub-units as follows:
 - (i) southeast unit including Boma, Bassan, Apoi, Oladiama, Oporoma, Oyakiri, Ogboin, Tarakiri, and Ikibiri;
 - (ii) northeast unit, including Ekpetiama, Gbaran, and Kolokuma;
 - (iii) northwest unit, including Kabo, Kumbo, Tarakiri, Mein, Tuomo, Operemo, and Seimbiri; and
 - (iv) southwest unit, including Iduwini, Ogulagha, Gbaramatu, Arogbo, Egbema, Olodiana, and Furupagha.
- (d) Buseni-Okordia — comprising Buseni and Okordia.

The linguists acknowledge mutual intelligibility within the four groups, and at the borders between the four languages. Accordingly, the feeling among Ijo that they form a single group with different dialects is not completely unfounded.

Origins

According to the geologists, (Okonny, forthcoming), the Niger Delta itself is made up of deposits ranging from sixty five million years old to recent deposits, less than a million years old. Some of the coastal deposits are as recent as ten thousand years old. These dates are clearly too ancient to be reflected in any surviving historical traditions. The closets documents to the origins of the earliest populations in the Niger Delta would be those from linguistics, archaeology and palynology.

Talbot (1932: 5) postulated the fist theory of Ijo origins based on languages and ethnology and the absence of traditions of origin from places outside the Niger Delta: 'The Niger Delta, therefore is, with the exception of a few small tribes, occupied by this strange people – a survival from the dim past, beyond the dawn of history – whose language and customs are distinct from those of their neighbours and without trace of any traditions of a time before they were driven southward into these regions of sombre mangrove'.

Most of the theoretical bases for Talbot's conclusions are weak, but the general conclusion that the Ijo have lived for a long time in the Niger Delta, distinct from the major groups of the Nigerian hinterland, is confirmed by recent research. Studies of proto-Ijo and lexicostatistical comparisons of Ijo with Yoruba, Edo and Igbo suggest figures of the time-depth (seven thousand years ago) of separation of Ijo from these neighbouring languages, as well as the distance between the major dialects or dialect-clusters within Ijo. The dialects of the Eastern Delta seem to have been separated from the Izon or Central Delta dialects for periods between a thousand years and two thousand years ago (Williamson, forthcoming).

As for the matter of a possible place of origin for all Ijo-speaking peoples, linguistics have not yet provided a defini-

tive answer. The Central Delta was, for a time, a candidate for this location on the basis of its importance for the reconstruction of proto-Ijo. Recently, attention has begun to move towards the Northern Fringe, where the languages of the Oruma, Buseni and Okordia are being considered as possible residual languages of ancient populations. The linguists have also not determined the historical significance of the identification of Defaka as the closest linguistic relative of Ijo; which again is a little language community embedded in the Eastern Delta-speaking community of Nkoro in the Eastern Delta Fringe. There is merely the vague suggestion that the ancestral proto-Ijo speakers might have come down the River Niger into the Delta.

Archaeological excavations at old settlement sites indicated by oral traditions have taken place in several places in the Eastern Delta, and at two sites in the Central Delta. The dates obtained cannot tell us the location of the first settlement of the Niger Delta by the Ijo. The sites in the Eastern Delta have given dates prior to 1000 A.D. but radiocarbon dates from the sites in the Central Delta have been in the eighteenth century for Agadagbabou on Wilberforce Island in the Kolokuma area. The Eastern Delta sites which had provided radiocarbon dates prior to A.D. 1000 and 1500 are Saikiripogu and Onyoma in Nembe, Ke in Kalabari, and Okochiri near Okrika. These dates appear to be in tune with the linguistic distance of around a thousand to two thousand years of separation from the Central Delta dialects, but clearly do not reflect the age of Ijo settlement of the Niger Delta. This conclusion is supported by the palynological evidence obtained from cores taken from a location near Nembe (Sowunmi, forthcoming) of possible human interference up to 3,000 years before the present.

The range of the oral traditions is clearly short of the time-depth provided by linguistics, archaeology and palynology. Accordingly, the traditions of origin do not, in fact, go back to the times of the first settlement of the Niger Delta, but tell of times within the past one thousand years or a little before. These traditions tell of relations with neighbouring com-

munities, and of migrations mainly within the delta and out to its fringe regions. However, some traditions refer to Benin as a possible place of origin of some Ijo communities. Dike (1956, 24) has also suggested that there were other waves of migration into the delta from the hinterland, prior to the involuntary transfer of slave populations in the period of the overseas slave trade. There is no evidence of such migrations in the traditions of the Ijo or of their neighbours, and it is only necessary to treat the Benin traditions in summary form.

It is now clear that references to Benin in many Ijo traditions, especially, of the Eastern Delta, in fact, refer to the Itsekiri kingdom of Warri. This is the case of the Nembe traditions of Benin migrants. But the Nembe traditions refer to migrants into a community, not to founding ancestors. Other cases of Benin traditions in the Western Delta, such as the case of the Ngbelebiri and Ogholubiri Mein related to journeys undertaken by political leaders to obtain emblems of authority from Benin. There is, therefore no strong traditions of Benin origin among the Ijo. Benin was a relatively distant power whose reputation for power and magnificence was reflected in the folklore.

The Ijo, then, do not remember any place of origin outside the Niger Delta. This fact is reflected in the traditions of some groups which state that their ancestors dropped from the sky or came up out of the sea or rivers of the delta. These claims to autochtony are, in fact, statements of ignorance of an earlier place of origin.

Migrations

Ijo traditions of origin may be summarized in three categories (Alagoa, 1966/67): first, the migrations which started and ended in the Niger Delta from the territory of one Ijo group to that of another; second, migrations originating from one part of the delta to another, but with intermediate stops or a route through the hinterland; and third, migrations which began from the delta and ended on the fringe or outside the delta.

Attention was first drawn to the importance of the Central

Delta and seems to occupy a prime place in the reconstruction of Ijo origins and migrations (Alagoa 1972). Traditions (of origin) in other parts of the delta cite ancestral homes in the area. Traditions of origin within the Central Delta do confirm its reputation as the beginning point of migrations within the Niger Delta.

There is an indication in Central Ijo traditions of origin that the *ibe* is based on common descent such that the sons or, and grandsons of an ancestor founded the *ibe's* constituent settlements, which were in most cases eponymous. Kingship ties would, therefore, seem important to the Central Delta Ijo. It is also important to note that only males founded settlements in the Central Delta even in an *ibe* which had a female national god such as Gbaran with its Gbaran Ziba. Another interesting occurrence is that the relative age of the founders of the settlements in an *ibe* correlate (more or less) with the place of such settlements in *ibe* affairs. Thus, the town founded by the ancestor or his first son is usually the oldest and most respected town of the *ibe* and usually had the shrine of the national god. This could be an indication of the extent to which social relationships are based on age as well as a pointer to the premium placed on respect for elders. It could, therefore, be significant to note this phenomenon since it could help one understand the people's way of life (which the anthropologist is trying to do), by indicating one possible line of investigation in the attempt to rationalize the basis of the people's social organization (especially the role of social differentiation).

The traditions of origin also provide some insight into the subsistence strategies of the people at some point or points in time. For example, we are told that Gbaranwei was a hunter. We are also told that the reason why the Taylor Creek appealed to him was because fish was plentiful (which suggests that he was also a fisherman). We are told that some families returned to the banks of the Nun River because of the land they had near their earlier settlement opposite present-day Kiama (probably because they needed more land than they could get at Koroama for farming purposes). It is possible,

therefore, to infer from this version of Gbaran tradition that before they moved to the Taylor Creek; that hunting was one means of providing the protein component of diet in Gbaran subsistence strategy; that fishing provided the other source of protein in the people's diet; that although fishing is no longer as important as farming, there was a time when abundance of fish in a creek was enough reason to abandon one settlement permanently and start new settlements along the newly discovered creek; that at a later date, when the aquatic resources of the new environment had probably been considerably depleted, farming began to be of paramount importance; and when land requirements were more than available arable land, some of the population had to move back to the banks of the Num River. It should also be noted that from one settlement opposite present-day Kiama on the Num River, seven settlements were eventually established along Taylor Creek. With regard to how the subsistence strategies developed by the Gbaran were related to their attempt to acculturate to their environment, this development is instructive.

Gbaran traditions of origin separately and independently collected by both authors (Alagoa at Folaku, and Derefaka at Obunagha) indicate that seven settlements make up Gbaran *ibe*. Gbaran's eldest son was Okotiamá); his second son, Ogbolo, founded Ogboloma; Egbe founded Koroama; Ogboin founded Nedugo Agbia; and Ogoro's two children, Obunane and Okolo, founded Obunagha and Okolobiri, while Ibiyai founded a settlement bearing his name which later moved to the present Polaku.

One of us (Derefaka) has attempted a detailed interpretation of these traditions. According to him, after founding these settlements along the Taylor creek, some families in Koroama moved back to the banks of the Nun river and settled at such places as present-day Gbaranama and Igbainwari. They had returned to maintain their claim on lands they considered to be theirs by virtue of being the first to occupy such lands. After they had returned to the banks of the Nun, the Opokuma came. Then, the Kolokuma were still in Igbedi

creek. The twin towns that make up Sabagreia were the first of the Kolokuma *ibe* to come out of the Igbedi creek unto the banks of the Nun river.

When Gbaran and his people came to the Taylor creek they met 'stranger elements' (a different ethnic group), the Ikpaya (Ekpeye) people. There were three or four Ikpaya settlements along the Taylor creek, one of which is opposite Tezuba. All Ijo can trace their origin to their ancestor who come from Benin, settled at Aboh and because of the desecration of the ancestor's *juju* by the wife of the chief of Aboh who wore an ivory bracelet into the Ijo ancestor's shrine, there was dispersal from Aboh after the woman was killed.

In the first place, it is striking that no reference is made to the *mwain fulo* (duiker soup) story which is a common reason for dispersal in Central Ijo traditions of origin. The different versions of the story and a possible interpretation of these stories cannot be discussed at length here, but have a place in the consideration of the world-view and structural devices for the preservation of oral traditions in Central Ijo societies. Many of the Gbaran settlements along Taylor Creek may well have started off as temporary or seasonal sites for Gbaran fishermen fishing in different sections of the creek; and later, by maintaining a right of first claim over the aquatic and terrestrial resources of the creek discovered by their ancestor, the peoples may have developed these sites into permanent ones. It is, therefore possible to surmise that the settlement on the Nun from which the Gbaran came to Taylor Creek was one that depended more on farming than fishing since dispersals of settlements similar to that which occurred along Taylor Creek did not occur along the Nun. It is also interesting to note that despite the earlier arrival of Ikpaya (Ekpeye) people in the vicinity of Taylor Creek, they do not seem to have established the same pattern of settlement in the area as the Gbaran did. That the *mwain fulo* story is widespread in Ijoland is an indication of the importance of hunting in the subsistence strategy of the Central Ijo which is similar to the attempted reconstruction for the Gbaran above.

One should also note that it is mainly the male occupations that are highlighted in Central Ijo oral traditions. For example, whereas our informant tells us that Gbaran was a hunter, he does not tell us why land is important to the families that left the Taylor Creek to return to the banks of the Nun. Perhaps this can be explained by the fact that farming is mostly the woman's job among the Central Delta Ijo. One should also note that when our informant says some families left Koroama, he is referring to extended families each of which would sometimes consist of more than twenty individuals.

Traditions of origin in the Central Delta sometimes provide information (either corroborative or divergent) about migration by settlements in one or the other *ibe* (especially neighbouring ones). For example, my informant says the Gbaran were the first to settle on the Central Ijo section of the Nun river and that when they arrived the Kolokuma were still in the Igbedi creek (probably along Oruamatoru, while the Ekpetiama and Opokuma settlements had also not been founded. Similarly, the people of Ikolo (Attisa) near Ikibiri refer to a time when they and the people of Odi were living together at Puipah on Wilberforce Island, just before the present-day Igbedi as one sails down the Igbedi creek from Seibokorogba (Sabagreia). Thus, traditions of origin in the Central Delta suggest the pattern of Ijo settlement as well as the complexities of movements in the Central Delta. For example, if Ndo (the Kolokuma ancestor) did settle among the Mein before moving to Agadagbabou, then it would sometime seem that the Ogobiri area was settled somewhere before the Igbedi end of the Island, while the tradition at Ikolo suggests that present-day distance between settlements is not necessarily a reflection of the situation in the past. But perhaps the more important lesson from Ikolo traditions to the anthropologist, is that culture is not necessarily synonymous (or coterminous) with language.

In fact, from the Gbaran and other Central Ijo *ibe* traditions of origin, it should be possible to reconstruct relative chronology in the establishment of settlements along part of the Nun

and the creeks which are its distributaries in the Central Delta (mainly the Taylor and Igbedi creeks). Within the *ibe*, traditions of origin tend to indicate the temporal order of the founding of settlements making up the *ibe*. In the case of Gbaran, the clustering of all the settlements of the *ibe* along the Taylor creek and the reason given for the movement of the Gbaran to the Taylor creek seems to suggest that except for Polaku the other settlements of the *ibe* were founded fairly shortly after one another and perhaps in pairs.

Moreover, settlements mentioned in Central Delta Ijo traditions of origin can be located, especially if the informants' attention is drawn to the importance of an accurate description of the exact location of the sites of settlements mentioned in their accounts in the reconstruction of their people's history. Informants' description of the location of earlier settlements can be quite vivid, for example Agadagbabou, referred to in traditions of origin collected at Sabagreia (Kolokuma *ibe*) in 1964 is an important archaeological site. Thus, indication of ancient sites through traditions of origin in the Central Delta and the identification of such sites by the anthropological archaeologist are important and provide reliable local and sub-regional chronology in reconstruction of the cultural history of the sub-region.

In the Central Delta, my (Derefaka's) informant at Obunagha indicated that the Ikpaya (Ekpeye) people had about four settlements on or near the Taylor Creek before the advent of Gbaranowei.

Overall the internal delta migrations seem to have originated from a number of primary centres of dispersion in the Central Delta. Obiama, Oporoma, and a number of locations on the large island (named on colonial maps as Wilberforce Island) and the regions of the Apoi Creek were the most important. On Wilberforce Island, Ogobiri and Ikibiri are mentioned by some significant traditions. Nembe, Ke, and Okrika in the Eastern Delta, and Oproza (Gbaramatu) in the Western Delta may be named as secondary centres of dispersion since their populations have traditions of previous migra-

tions from other centres (Nembe, Okrika, Oproza), or because their traditions account for a relatively small number of migrations (Ke).

The town of Obiama has been deserted for an unknown length of time, but is named as the place of origin by several Ijo groups in the Central and Eastern Delta. The entire Boma and Tarakiri *ibe* tell of traditions of migration from Obiama. The traditions of all Nembe settlements on the Atlantic coast, namely, Liama, Egwema, Twon, Odioma, and Okpoma, claim origin from Obiama. Some of these traditions derive the first settlers of the Nembe metropolis from Obiama. Ogoloma (Okrika) traditions of origin also mention Obiama as a major stopping place for its founding ancestors.

Ikibiri, or the northeastern part of Wilberforce Island, is the ancestral home of Seimbiri *ibe* of the Western Delta. The actual site of the ancestral home of Isomabou is said to lie six miles west of Ikibiri. Ogulaya, founder of Ogoloma in Okrika, is stated to have migrated from Isomabou. Other sites in the same locality named variously as Opuanbou and Opuanbiri also supplied the founders of many towns in Ekpetiama *ibe* and Onopa in Epie. Other traditions mention places in Kolokuma, Opokuma, and Abon as also settled by migrants from Ikibiri. Ikibiri traditions assign the destruction of Isomabou to attack from the Tarakiri (migrants from Obiama) to the south. The southern source of the attack may have accounted for the movements north, east and west, but not south.

Ogobiri on the western shore of Wilberforce Island, was the homeland of the large Mein group of the Western Delta. It also features in the traditions of Kalabari origins treated below in the second category of Ijo migrations. Kolokuma and Opokuma traditions of origin also mention various sites on Wilberforce Island as starting point for migrations of their ancestors. Ogboin traditions recorded at Amassoma (also on Wilberforce Island) mention an ancestral home somewhere in the interior of the island.

Oporoma is one of the few Central Delta groups that claim

authochthony; the founder having 'dropped from a cloud; Ekeremo, founder of the Operemo *ibe* of the Western Delta is stated in both places to have migrated from Oporoma. There are also traditions of Oporoma origin in Olodiama of the Central Delta, just south of Oporoma. Aguo, founder of Yenagao in Epie, to the north is from Aguobiri in Oporoma *ibe*, while the town of Oporoma in Kalabari far to the east was originally part of Oporoma of the Central Delta.

Oproza, near the estuary of the Escravos River in the Western Delta, was an important secondary centre of dispersal for groups in the Western fringe of the delta. Oproza features in the traditions of Arogbo, Apoi; of Kabowei and Kumbowei of the Western Delta; of the Gbaran *ibe*; and Gbaran town Apoi of the central Delta. These inter-related traditions suggest the following pattern of migrations. The Gbaramatu of Oproza would appear to have migrated from Gbaran town in the Apoi Creek of the Central Delta. Later groups of migrants then left Oproza for Arogbo, and some on a rebound eastwards to Kabowei and Kumbowei in the Western Delta, with a few going as far east as Gbaran *ibe* in the Central Delta.

In the Eastern Delta, there are recorded traditions which link the Buseni, Okordia, and Oruma of the Northern Fringe to the ancient Nembe settlement of Oboloma; and Nkoro of the Eastern Fringe to Okrika. Ke is reputed in the Eastern Delta for its antiquity; its people also claiming their ancestors to have come down from the sky (Alagoa, 1974). This reputation has attracted a number of traditions of origin from Ke. The Liama and Idema (Mini) communities of Nembe, as well as the Ekeni of Bassan in the Central Delta, claim to have migrated from Ke.

The second category of migrations involved passage through the Igbo hinterland. The traditions of both the Ibani (Bonny) and Kalabari (New Calabar) tell of original homes in the region of Ogobiri — apparently on Wilberforce Island — related to the migrations of the Mein into the Western Delta from this area. The direction of migrations for the Ibani and

Kalabari was apparently northeast up the Engenni Creek, and eastwards across the country. The Kalabari are said to have lived for a while at Amafa in Ikwerre country on the delta fringe (a little down New Calabar River from the University of Port Harcourt), before finally choosing a site in the Eastern Delta at Elem Kalabari or Elem Ama. The Ibani wandered in the hinterland much farther east, finally re-entering the delta through Ndoki country, down the Imo River and its tributaries, such as the Essene Creek to Bonny or Okoloama.

The third category of migrations were movements out of the delta to its margins into non-Ijo communities. In the Western Delta, traditions in Tuomo, at Gbaran town of the Central Delta Apoi, and Oproza in Gbaramatu, all claim the Urhobo town of Efferun (or Efurun) to have been founded by migrants from these places in the Niger Delta. There are, however, other traditions which claim Efferun to have been founded by Erohwa (Isoko) from the vicinity of Patani in Kabowei. The Urhobo groups of Owaha and Ughelle also retain traditions of their connection with Tarakiri *ibe* of the Western Delta. These traditions indicate movements out of the Western Delta into Urhobo country.

In the Central Delta, there are traditions of migrations out of the Ijo delta among the Epie, Ogbia, and Mini.

In the Eastern Delta, the Igbo-speaking Ndoki have traditions relating them to the Ibani. They claim to have come from the same homelands as the Ibani (Bonny), stated to be Benin, which is clearly a cliché for the Western Delta in Niger Delta traditions (Afigbo, 1974).

Eastern Delta States

The traditions of the four delta states of Nembe, Elem Kalabari (New Calabar), Bonny, and Okrika suggest that their founders came from homelands in the Central Delta to settle in the Eastern Delta. It may be inferred from these traditions that the migrants came with institutions and ways of life similar to those of Ijo groups of the Central and Western Delta. The state institutions developed in the Eastern Delta

then, must be assumed to have been achieved in response to challenges and new situations encountered in the environment of the Eastern Delta. Attempts have been made to suggest in what ways the communities might have changed their institutions, first, from those of the farming and fishing village of the Central and Western Delta model to those of the fishing village of the eastern salt water delta, and finally from the fishing village to the trading city-state (Horton, 1969. Alagoa, 1971 a).

From a comparison of simple models of the institutions of the village in the Central and Eastern Delta, one could infer from the traditions of origin that a development from one to the other is feasible. The Ijo groups of the Central and Western Delta were basically stateless, the village being the primary political and social unit (Leis, 1982). All adult males met in the village assembly or *amagula* to decide on common political issues. The oldest member of the village became president of the assembly — village elder or *amaokowei* he was the *ogulasowei* (spokesman). In ritual matters the village priest or *orukarowei* presided. There were many variations of this pattern in the Central and Western Delta, in names and numbers of leaders, as well as in the formals of age-grade organizations among some communities. There was usually little unity beyond the village level between member villages of a group. The unifying factors were mainly cultural: the use of a common dialect of Ijo, (often) historical belief in a common ancestor of the group; and religious — the worship of a common high god whose priest, *pere*, presided at periodic festivals, arbitrated inter-village disputes, and protected fugitives from local village justice at his shrine.

In the socio-economic sphere, lineage (*wari* or *polo*) authority was very strong, since rights over farm land in the fresh water delta resided in the lineage. The change to a salt water swamp environment and so to a fishing and salt-boiling economy would seem to have been decisive in producing institutional changes.

The fishing village of the Eastern Delta still had its village

assembly, but it was no longer presided over by its oldest member. The president was now named *amanyanabo*, (literally, owner of the town), and came from the lineage of the first founder of the site. There were still a village spokesman and priest. The lineage, however, no longer exercised as great an authority on the individual since fishing grounds on which his livelihood depended came to him through his membership of the village rather than of a particular lineage. Accordingly, the fishing village developed new institutions for the cementing of solidarity, especially as the bond of common ancestry was always weaker than in the farming village of the Central and Western Delta.

The cultural criteria for membership of the village and the group or *ibe* still remained, and were strengthened by other institution. The scarcity of settlement land in the Eastern Delta which gave the founding lineage a monopoly over the office of *amanyanabo* also created a cult of *amakiri* or god of the settled earth. The corporate spirit of the village embodying its history, character and density was revered in *amatemesuo*. These religious forces did not supersede the village god, *myanuoru*, but merely reinforced the sense of mystical solidarity within the fishing village community in its battles against the environment and hostile neighbours. The social club of *ekine* or *sekiapu*, the mask dancers, provided a forum for intercourse without reference to lineage or birth. In addition, individuals showed their loyalty to the village in wars against neighbours and in contests for fishing grounds, in their membership of the warriors' club, *peri ogbo*.

These elements of the fishing village of the Eastern Delta also characterized the trading states. The element that changed some of them in the direction that led to their becoming richer, bigger, and more powerful than their neighbours would seem to have been trade. Some of these communities began to change in the direction of state-formation and began to exercise power over their neighbours as a result of their participation in internal long distance trade before the beginning of European overseas trade (Alagoa, 1970).

The environment of the Eastern Delta also disposed its inhabitants to trade for agricultural products with their neighbours. The obvious first line of supply was the adjoining Ijo areas of the delta in the fresh water delta which carried on some agriculture. In the case of greater need, a second line of supply lay to the northern fringes of the delta or the hinterland. Thus the Nembe trade with other Ijo groups of the Central Delta, with the Ogbia, Abua, Odual (Saka), and Engenni of the northern fringe; and up the River Niger with the Igbo kingdom of Aboh, Onitsha and even with traders of the Igala kingdom. Similarly, Elem Kalabari traded with the Ikwerre to their immediate north, and up the Orashi River with the Abua, Ekpeye, and with Igbo in the Oguta Lake region. The Bonny trade in several of these places as well as in Ndoki country and up the Imo River with other Igbo groups. The Okrika traded with Ikwerre groups in areas around the present municipality of Port Harcourt, and especially with the Ogoni to their immediate hinterland.

In addition to these well attested north to south routes, however, traditions all round the delta suggest other routes of trade traversing the delta from east to west, and beyond to Lagos lagoon. Since most group over the delta carried on similar economic activities, trade over this area depended on specialization. Thus, although all the Eastern Delta states made salt, the Bassan of the Central Delta were acknowledged specialists. Further, groups in the Apoi Creek and neighbouring regions were specialists in making the large canoes used in the delta trade. The Itsekiri kingdom of the Western Delta was one focus of this trans-delta trade because of its pottery, and later for cassava products. Some traditions of origin, such as those of the Ododiana, Arogbo and Egbema of the Western Delta Fringe, suggest that groups moved to get to areas with timber suitable for making canoes or for trading in camwood and other products westwards into the lagoons. And from the Yoruba interior, through the coastal lagoon region, came handwoven cloth.

It is clear that all the Eastern Delta states took part in this

internal trade in varying degrees. Nembe traditions specifically refer to contacts with the kingdom of Warri in the Western Delta, as well as to trade relations with the Bassan of the Central Delta. Traditions among the Olodiana in Benin Division also mention traders from Nembe dealing in the large trade canoes of this region. For the states of Elem kalabari and Bonny, there is some documentary evidence. Thus an early Portuguese source (about 1500) reported internal trade at Bonny: 'The bigger canoes here, made from a single trunk, are the largest in the Ethiopias of Guinea; some of them large enough to hold 80 men, and they came from a hundred leagues or more up this river bringing yams in large quantities. They also bring many slaves, cows, goats and sheep,' (Kimble, 1937, 132). An eighteenth century trader in the Western Delta reported of the Benin River, that: much trade is carried on here with the natives of Bonny and New Calabar, who come in their canoes for that purpose' (Adams n.d. 35).

It must have been their prior development of this internal trade and of the appropriate institutions for carrying it on that made the Eastern Delta city-states the obvious centres and foci for the overseas trade. But once the overseas dimension was added, it meant that economic activities were stepped up and the routes and markets already known were exploited more intensively, and new ones opened. The internal effects on the development of institutions appear also to have been accelerated.

The institutions of the fishing village would appear to have been modified in the following ways to create those of the city-states. First, the office of *amanyanabo* became an effective executive authority and the power base of the community. The internal trade, and even more, the external overseas trade, vastly extended the field of external policy, and therefore, the competence of the *amanyanabo* as the sole official spokesman in external affairs. Second, the lineage or *wari* (House) became a trading corporation. This change was reflected in a number of ways. The criteria for the choice of new heads was geared

to wealth and the ability to increase the wealth and power of the House. Since the lineage head was leader of a commercial organization, he became also a recruiting agent. It was necessary to recruit new members to increase the labour force, but also to increase the fighting force to protect his trading canoes and establishments in the hinterland markets, and finally to fight in the wars of the state. The House, accordingly, became, not simply a lineage institution, but an institution for the integration of slaves and others. The new House system gave the head greater control over the lives of members than the lineage head of the fishing village over its members. Still, the ordinary member also had a say in the affairs of the House, and indirectly, of the state in his right to vote in a general meeting of the members for the election of a head.

Apart from the individual's direct participation in House government however, the city-state administration no longer had any place for the village assembly of all adult men. In its place, the *amanyanabo* or king was now advised directly only by a council of House heads.

In other ways, the functions of societies which cut across House or lineage membership became even more important in the city-state in the context of inter-House competition (Alagoa, 1971b). In addition, the mask dancing societies, *pari ogbo*, and others served to acculturate the large numbers of persons recruited by purchase.

The House then, was the central dynamic element in the constitution of the city-states of the Eastern Niger Delta. It was born out of the needs of trade, and was geared to competition for trade. But that very fact makes it important to stress the non-commercial interests it also served. The House retained its lineage idiom while it continued to develop in non-kinship lines. Still, the commercial prosperity of the House was envisaged in terms of the benefits it would bring to its members in the form of social and political security. In the state, it also functioned as a military formation to be activated in times of emergency to equip and launch a war canoe in defence of the state.

In spite of its central place in the state, the House had less symbolic significance than the kingship. The *amanyanabo* symbolized the state. From an analysis of king-lists, it is possible that the first kings were established by about 1200. The lineage system, of course, operated continuously throughout the periods, but their conversion to the city-state type of House organization was probably achieved not much later than the establishment of the kingship. From existing lists of House heads, however, it is not possible to date them to a period much earlier than about 1600. But Pereira's description of trade at Bonny around 1500 shows all the ingredients of the House trading system. What may be stated confidently therefore, is that by 1600 the city-state or trading states of the Eastern Delta had developed all their most basic institutions. They would continue to change and expand in response to new challenges.

Early times

Although the archaeological and linguistic work done in the Niger Delta so far is unable to locate an exact place of origin of the Ijo, these two disciplines together with ethnography are able to give good indications of early times (Anozie, Nzewunwa, Williamson forthcoming). For the Eastern Delta, the artefacts suggest considerable cultural as well as ecological and economic continuity over the past thousand years at least. The dates obtained from radiocarbon analysis for sites in the Eastern Delta cover a period of over one thousand years: Onyoma 1275-1690 A.D. and Saikiripogu 1010-1640 A.D. in the Nembe area; ke 770-1270 A.D. in the Kalabri area; Ogoloma 1255-1410 A.D., and Okochiri 940-1425 A.D. in the Okrika area.

A study of artefacts recovered at Onyoma suggest many cultural parallels from recent ethnographic practices in Nembe (Alagoa, 1973). The diet of periwinkle and fish as evidenced by the shell middens and fish bones is consistent with the ecology, and the observance of a periwinkle festival and other ritual significance accorded this shell fish in Nembe is noteworthy. Little pots discovered on the site were iden-

tified as *tamunobele*, used for the propitiation of the spirits of mothers and children. A piece of white chalk as well as a pierced canine tooth were similarly identified as a ritual chalk and a priestly ornament still in common use at Nembe.

The material recovered from the Eastern Delta as well as the two sites in the Central Delta related only to the Iron Age. Pottery was the most prolific find. Oral traditions indicate that most of it would have been produced locally, but that there was importation of some special purpose pots, for example, pots for salt industry in the Nembe area were apparently partly imported from the Western Delta from the Itsekiri. There is clear comparability between the types found at all the sites, although no systematic comparison has yet been made.

Smoking pipes were recovered in large numbers at Ogoloma, and a few also at Onyoma and in the Central Delta. Some of the pipes were made at Ogoloma before the beginning of contact with Europe, although many were made after 1410 and several had names of British manufacturers printed on them.

A number of terracotta figurines have also been recovered from Onyoma, Ke, and Ogoloma (Alagoa, 1974/75). One figure depicting an important person at Onyoma, possibly a priest or political leader, shows affinities with Nok, while the models of masks found at Ke appear to be unique. These terracotta add a new dimension to the study of Ijo sculpture and the masking tradition.

Materials connected with iron-smithing as well as a few bronze objects have been recovered from the excavations. These add to the larger collection of bronzes already known from shrines and finds from the surface at many locations in the Niger Delta (Horton, 1965; Neaher, 1976). Metal finds in the Niger Delta have up to now been attributed to external sources such as Benin, Igbo-Ukwu, and others, exclusively. The position is more likely to have been a combination of a modest internal output, commissioned works from external artists, and importation of finished works as well as raw materials. Commissioning of works of art from Europe and of

textiles from producers outside the delta is well documented (Aronson, 1980).

Archaeology and palynology are not yet able to tell us what food crops were available to the early populations of the Niger Delta. But ethnography and linguistics have given some help. The oil palm (*Elaeis guineensis*) and wine palm (*Raphia hookeri*) are well established in the Niger Delta and utilized for food, and as a sources of rope and cloth (*iga*) materials. Palm nuts were recovered in excavations at Onyoma, Ke, and Saikiripogu in a ninth century context. The linguistic suggest that the roots for both plant go back about seven thousand years. The same situation is suggested for guinea yam (*Dioscorea*) and kola. However, in the Niger Delta, the water yam (*Dioscorea alata*), from the Malasian or Southeast Asian food complex, was more important. Traditions also refer to a wild tuber, *tololo*.

In the Niger Delta, the evidence gives great weight to plantain, banana, cocoyam, and water yam as crops of great age, possibly two thousand years old. Most of these crops are connected with rituals in general or with specific rituals of their own. This has led to the suggestion that these crops were brought to this part of the West African coast directly from Malagasy by seafarers without passing through Central Africa overland (Blench, 1982). Williamson (1970) has also charted the route of diffusion of such recent South American crops like cassava from the Western Delta.

The general picture is briefly as follows. The speakers of proto-Ijo entered the Niger Delta with a knowledge of goats, dogs, canoes, the oil and wine palms, yams and kola, up to seven thousand years ago. The archaeological evidence suggests that they exploited the fish resources of the delta, both shell and others. They also hunted progressively more effectively with increasing improvement of technology. The archaeological evidence also suggests trade with the hinterland in special goods such as metals, pottery, and food. The delta communities used the plam and other material to make fishing gear and other tools which have not survived in the ar-

archaeological record, but recorded in the oral literature. For example, the use of raphia cloth (*ziga*) and imported cloth from the Western Delta by the rulers of Onyoma is reported in the oral literature (Alagoa, 1975). The use of some ornaments can also be inferred from the headgear on the terracotta. The Onyoma terracotta as well as some Petatition of the finds also suggest the growth of political and religious idea and institutions, in all probability along the lines postulated in the preceding section of this paper.

Trade and Change

European merchants traded at the Eastern Delta ports of Bonny and Elem Kalabari from the late fifteenth century. The Portuguese were the first, trading in slaves and local foodstuffs, such as yams, with which to feed the slaves on the passage to America. The Portuguese were followed by the Dutch, French, British and Americans from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. The earlier European merchant ships made occasional stops at other rivers, such as the Nun and Brass River in Nembe territory, and some in Andoni (obolo) territory, but the Rio Real remained their major port in the Eastern Delta. Accordingly, the kingdoms of Nembe and Okrika had to use the ports of Elem Kalabari and Bonny for most of their early trade. Thus, the major political effects of the trade on the history of the Eastern Delta states manifested themselves in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

It has already been observed that the House system served not only as an organization for trade competition, but also as a unit for the recruitment of new members into the state. For this purpose, it had a built-in mechanism for growth by segmentation (Jones, 1963). Once a House had grown so large that new rival leadership began to develop, the old House divided into two, the new leadership becoming head of a separate House but maintaining alliance with the old in state politics. However, this system of expansion by fission could not work out in competition for the highest political office of

amanyanabo. Accordingly, each of the four Eastern Delta states experienced changes in dynasty, resulting, apparently, from power changes within the ruling lineages created by the overseas trade in slaves. In Bonny, king Awusa gave up the leadership to Perekule (People) when he found himself unable to bear the expenses for the prosecution of a protracted war against the neighbouring Andoni. In Elem Kalabari, King Amakiri came to the throne, inaugurating the Amakiri dynasty that has ruled the Kalabari since then. Similarly, the Ado dynasty in Okrika, and Mingi in Nembe came into being within the same period. In these two cases, the rival dynasties did not give up the struggle for leadership. In Nembe, Ogbodo set up his rival rule on an opposite island.

The abolition of the overseas trade in slaves and the substitution of palm oil trade brought new challenges to the Eastern Delta states and communities. First, the exploitation of hinterland markets was intensified, and the states began to clash more often in competition for markets. Both the greater intensity of operation in the markets and the inter-state wars encouraged the enlargement of the Houses through the purchase of slaves. Accordingly, the abolition of the overseas slave trade did not lead automatically to a stoppage of internal trade in slaves in the Niger Delta. Second, the nineteenth century saw a vast increase in the number of new Houses founded out of the older Houses. The wealth accruing to new men from the palm oil trade and the diversion of slaves from the external trade to internal purposes may be one explanation for this expansion of the House system in the nineteenth century.

The new wealth from the palm-oil trade also created new tensions in the competition for the office *amanyanabo* in Bonny and Elem Kalabari (Alagoa, 1971b). In Bonny, the struggle in the People-lineage led to the two branches going separate ways: the Opubo Anna Pepple under the leadership of Jaja, a former slave, broke off in 1869 to found the new state of Opobo on the estuary of the Imo River, a while the Fubara Manilla Pepple remained in control at Bonny, but at the ex-

pense of the greater proportion of the hinterland markets and overseas trade in palm oil going to Opobo. In 1879, a similar struggle broke out in Elem Kalabari leading to the founding of Bakana on a similar line with Jaja by Will Braide. Elem Kalabari finally broke into the settlements of Buguma and Abonnema before the end of the century. Nembe and Okrika did not experience similar upheavals in the nineteenth century since the dynastic changes of the previous century had resulted in an equilibrium.

In the Eastern Delta, the trade was in the hands, of the rulers of the states. The other Ijo groups of the Central Delta and of the Western Delta had no direct contact with the European merchants or direct part in the trade. In the Western Delta too, the overseas trade was under the control of first, the officers of the Oba of Benin operating from the port of Ughoton (Gwato), and later, of the Itsekiri kingdom of Warri. The groups so excluded from the overseas trade showed their resentment in a number of ways.

In the Western Delta, all European traders' accounts of their activities on the Benin River include descriptions of the piracies committed by Ijo groups. The attacks were mainly directed at Itsekiri trade canoes, but sometimes European boats were also attacked. In the Central Delta, the trade canoes of Nembe on their way up the Niger to Aboh and elsewhere had often to fight their way through. Occasionally, special punitive expeditions were organized against specially difficult communities. These episodes are fully reported in the oral traditions of the state under the wars fought by different kings. It was no surprise therefore, that the trading and exploring voyages sent up the Niger following the discovery of the route by the Lander brothers in 1830 should have met with resistance by various Ijo communities between the Nun River estuary and Aboh. The British authorities sometimes falsely accused the rulers of Nembe of being the instigators of these attacks on their efforts to open up trading stations up the Niger in competition with the middleman trade of the delta states. In fact, in the majority of cases, the communities on the

route to the hinterland were acting on their own in resentment at their being by-passed.

Conclusion

By the close of the nineteenth century, the Ijo had already spread across all the Niger Delta from the Imo River estuary in the east to the Mahin River in the west. By the time too, the whole of the territory occupied by Ijo peoples had come under British colonial rule. Jaja led his peoples of Opobo in a diplomatic and commercial resistance that culminated in his deportation in 1887, just as King William Dappa Pepple had been deported from Bonny in 1854 for similar reasons. These strong arm tactics of the British did not prevent the Nembe people, under the leadership of King Koko, from engaging the Royal Niger Company in the Akassa War of 1895 (Alagoa, 1980).

These and other heroic efforts at stemming the tide of foreign occupation were, like the similar efforts of other Nigerian peoples, fruitless. The Ijo passed through the colonial experience to independence with other Nigerians, and were involved in the same traumas consequent to these experiences.

These accumulated historical experiences continue to influence the attitudes and reflexes of the Ijo to the new situations and challenges of the late twentieth century.

CHAPTER 2

The Efiks and Peoples of the Cross River Basin

by
ANDAH B.W.

Introduction

Up to the present, the impression given by most anthropological and historical studies is that the region of Cross River basin comprises so many ethnolinguistic communities that it is best regarded as a classic zone of fragmentation of people one into which there was an unending filtering in of peoples some of whom brought in the civilizing traits (food production; metal working, art styles etc.) Some scholars even claim that people did not begin to settle effectively in this region until very recently (ca 17th/18th centuries and even later Matthews, (1927) one of such scholars, argues that the Upper Cross River and its tributaries were unnavigable, thus impeding migration from the south and that this portion of the divide was relatively unattractive compared to the regions to the north and south of it. Although essays on the culture and history of some of the peoples (eg. Efik) have been made by historians, anthropologists, and more recently geographers (Hutchinson, 1978: 1-27), not only have such efforts not been sustained, the approaches employed have usually been so different that the point of being conflicting rather than complementary. This applies not only to the treatment of key concepts but to the choice of sources and the selection of materials.

ferent disciplines often mean different things. More important, one is hardly informed of the scale and character of the resultant settlement configurations generated in the newly settled areas. In particular, hardly any logical relationship is established between the direction of postulated migrations, the temporal/spatial structure of the settlements on the one hand, and the general culture ecological setting on the other.

Treatment of the subject of who the Cross River peoples were, and came to be who they are today has fared no better. The ethnic concept is of course an ambiguous one by any standard; its use in connection with Efik, and the so-called Ekoi speaking peoples' history has been no exception. While some would seem to be concerned with when and how people speaking Efik and Ekoid languages came to be *what* and *where* they are today, others see origins as search for ultimate point of dispersal of a bio-cultural community (e.g. Hair 1967). And yet some others worsen an already confused situation by simultaneously employing the various meanings of the term as if they were interchangeable.

Given these problems the early cultural history of Cross River region, one is confronted with a complex dynamic network of interrelationships (i.e. changes with times and space) which *imperceptibly* influenced, modified and ultimately changed the peoples' linguistic and ethnic domains. A network of which cultural and biological changes and movements which occurred independently or together. The precise linguistic, cultural and or biological configurations at any point in time were dependent on several variables acting within the general community/ecological framework prevailing at the time. These included the more permanent feature of the physical environment; the rural economic system as constrained by climate and technology; and the interlocking social systems established in relation to these.

The Ecological Background

Cross River region consists primarily of hills, forests and swamps (Figs 1 a and b). Physically and culturally, the river

constitutes a divide between the east (now Cross River State) and (the rest of West-eastern Nigeria). The basin itself is the divide between the Bantoid people (to the east of the river), and the Sudanic peoples (found mainly in the west) (Fig 2). The basin is also the vegetation divide between West African and Central African plant species. The southern part has more in common with southern Cameroon than the rest of the former Eastern State, while the northern part has more affinities with the grassfields in respect of relief vegetation, populations and cultural affiliations (see Udo 1965, 65-72). The Cross River State divides into three main geographical zones — the Calabar plains, the Biase Obubra region, and the Obudu escarpment and Ogoja region, all in the old Calabar province (Figs. 1a and 1b).

Outstanding relief features and habitats, with respect to gradient, are the Cross River System itself, the Cross River plain which runs from south to north (320 by 80km), the highland regions of Obudu and Oban together with their escarpments. Indeed the landscape of the river basin rises gradually from plains under 200m A.S.L. in the south — west into highlands located in the east and northeast. This gradual ascent is interrupted by a series of steplike scarps which run perpendicular to its axis and reach over 520m height in the western flank.

The Cross River Network

The present Cross River system is a rejuvenated network which underwent several phases of evolution, leading to series of captures, especially owing to the emplacement of granites and other undifferentiated basement complex formation in the Oban and Obudu areas. It derives its waters from six principal tributaries in Cameroon and several others in south-eastern Nigeria among which are the Afi (95km), Okpanda (175 km), eastern and western Aboine. Before entering the sea, the Cross River receives the Enyong Creek (75 km), Calabar River and the Great Kwa (Fig. 3). These last two tributaries together with the main Cross River have drowned

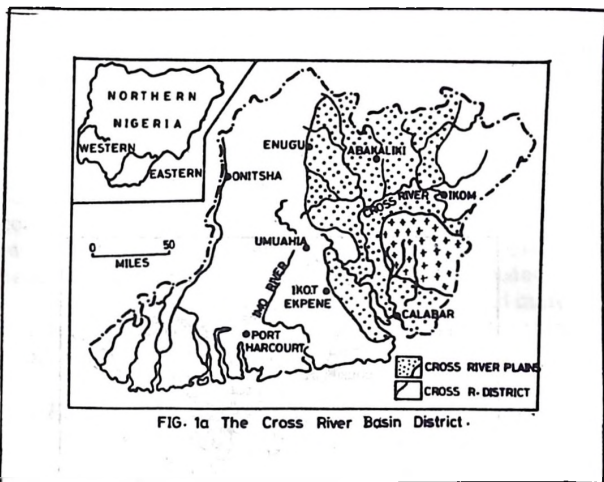


FIG. 1a The Cross River Basin District.

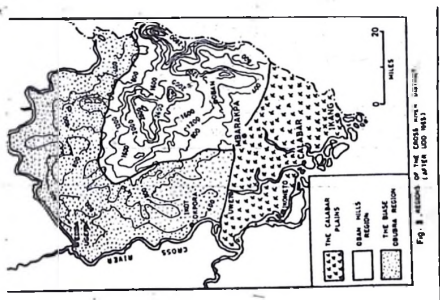


Fig. 1a The Cross River Basin district

Fig. 1b Regions of the Cross river district (After Udo 1965)



FIG. 2

Fig. 2 Cross River region and Environs: Major groups and places

lower courses or mouths following downwarping of the coast in the recent past. Structure and lithological differences have had a significant influence on the pattern and orientation of the river's drainage network.

The Valley of the mainstream

The valley of its mainstream is flanked at intervals by step scarps and isolated hills but there are no interruptions in its course. Consequently, it is the most navigable of the streams in south-eastern Nigeria, especially along its lower reaches, between Ikom and its mouth where it flows and meanders in a broad valley on wide plains. Traces of an older and more extensive flood plain are represented by the vast and seasonally flooded rice fields of Abakaliki and Afikpo.

The Plains

The Calabar plains (Fig. 1) are a uniform sandy sloping drainage basin slightly titled towards the south-east. Underlain by flooded argillaceous sediments of Cretaceous Age, it consists primarily of an undulating lowland much of which rises between 60m and 90m A.S.L. The highest parts (up to 122m A.S.L.) occur on both sides of the incised Ayim River, and close to where the plain meets the escarpment to the west and to the east (Fig. 1b).

The plains are drained by numerous rivers and slightly incised streams (most of them seasonal) meandering in a general south-easterly direction into the mangrove swamps at the fringe of the Cross River estuary. A daily maximum temperature of over 80°F throughout the year, high relative humidities and an annual rainfall exceeding 305cms are characteristics of Calabar and all of the plains (Fig. 4a) Except in the forested area, heavy rainfall results in deeply leached soils with strongly acid surface layers.

The dominant vegetal community of the plains is tropical rainforest. Fresh water mangrove swamp containing a great range and diversity of plant species are present in the Cross

River estuary and the lower reaches of the Calabar and Kwa rivers. The farmed areas have secondary plant cover, mainly oil palm bush, while the other areas between the Cross River and the Nigerian Cameroon border have high forests. The same vegetal type is present north of the foot hills of Obudu, while grass and open woodland of a secondary type occur in the rest of the bush.

The Highlands

Approximately, north of the line joining Uwet to Mbarakpa, the plains give way to the Oban Hills. This highland region is made up of numerous hills which rise to heights exceeding 1000m above sea level. Steep sided river valleys and swift flowing rivers, whose courses are interrupted by a number of rapids and water falls, are distinctive features. The hills are formed off granitic outcrops and are heavily forested. The soils of the region are sandy and shallow while in forested areas they have a superficial cover of organic matter derived from dead vegetation.

Flanking Oban hills to the west and south is the Biase Obubra region, which is an undulating upland that drops abruptly in the north and west into the Cross River valley. It is characterized by low forested hill (Figs 4b). Many of the present settlements of the river were previously located on these hills. Obudu plateau is the other highland region in the state. It lies to the far north-east. Both Obudu and Oban hills are westward extensions of the Cameroon-Adamawa highlands. Obudu is a plateau capped grassland ridge, up to 1525m above sea level in places. Its flanks are dissected, and it slopes gradually towards the southwest.

Paleoecology

The coastal and palm belts are thus essentially underlain by sands, which overlie laterites in some places. In some districts there are outcrops of impermeable layers of clay. On the grassland and plateaux, the tops are surfaced by falsebedded

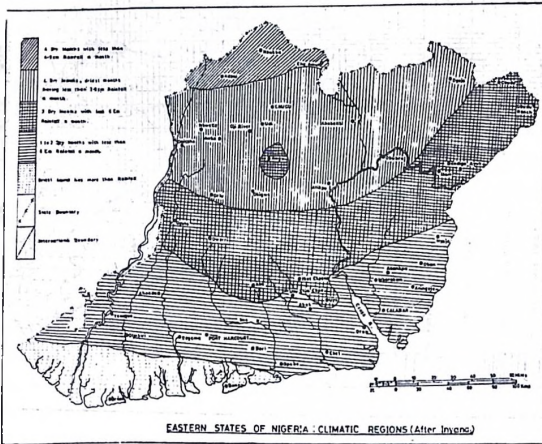
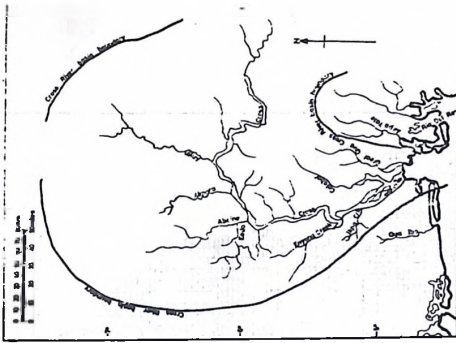


Fig. 3 The Cross River basin: river Network

Fig. 4a Eastern Nigeria: Climatic regions (after Inyang 1975)

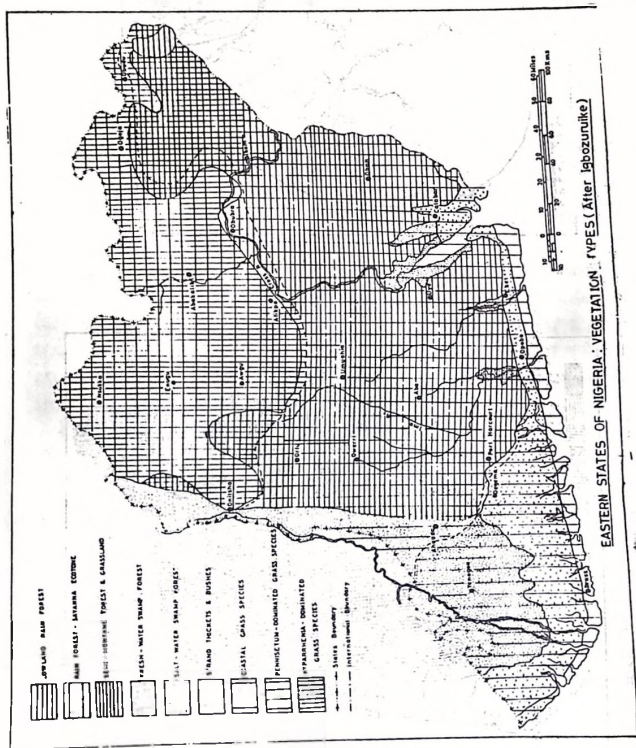


Fig. 4b Eastern Nigeria: Vegetation types (after Igbozuruike 1975)

sandstones, whereas many of the hills on the highlands are erosional remnants, made up of either thick hard concretionary ironstones, or very fine impermeable laterized clays. As a result of human activities through time, the original rainforest of the basin has been replaced by oil palm bush in the west, and derived savanna in the north. These changes in the vegetation do not seem to have had any effect on the morphogenetic system. According to Tricart and Cailleux (1955), parts of the coastal areas may have escaped marked climatic changes in the past. In other parts, forest was replaced by savanna during the Quaternary; when it seems that climate was cooler. As prevailing erosion processes are the same under forest and savanna, such changes have not qualitatively affected the evolution of the landscape.

Certain features of the environment outlined above clearly affected, in various ways and to varying degrees, the history of human settlement, including the distribution of language groupings in the Cross River basin. Important among these are the fact that (i) in the hilly regions, the streams traverse steep sided narrow gullies which lie 50 – 100 metres below levels of the adjacent interfluves, and the major water course flow in much deeper (300m) valleys into which minor water courses often enter as rapids and cataracts; (ii) the soils are usually weathered ferralitic products from the basement complex granite rocks of the regions, and are heavily leached because of the wet climate (over 4000mm mean annual rainfall). The overall result is that the clay fractions of the soils are essentially inactive (i.e. are low in action exchange reflecting low organic matter); (iii) vegetation and human influence. Three vegetation types prevail and have done so for a very long time. These are grasslands widespread in the interfluves, the upper part of sides of valleys and in some valley bottoms forests present in the steep sided valleys separating areas of grassland; and the escarpments and in rare instances on saddles or level ground; (coarser grasslands with woody shrubs and shrubby herbs, especially in interfluves considerably affected by human colonization (farming etc.). Other equally

important factors were (iv) the lowlying aspect of the basin (drowned character of the coast, the highest point being 200 to 300 ft. — below 100m A.S.L.); (v) its mostly stoneless character; (vii) the fact of annual rainfall varying from above 150 cm in the north to 375 cm on the coast, while temperatures are fairly constant throughout the year (varying according to season between 70°F and 95°F (vi) the related fact that the northern parts of the basin appeared to be more favourable than the central zone and many parts of the south, for Neolithic Iron Age, particularly agricultural life and settlements.

The presence of soils derived from shales, and mostly gently sloping and poorly drained terrains (Fig. 5) in the north would seem to have comfortably supported yams, cassava, maize and legumes from Neolithic and iron age times (testified to by the monolith culture of Ogoja). The deep loamy alluvial soils of the central region (Anyim to Enyong creek) have by contrast hardly been suited for cultivation of local crops. This means that in Neolithic and Iron Age times, settlements, if present, would have been sparse and scattered, since the area may merely have served as a link between north and south. The red sandy permeable soils derived from thick porous sandy deposits and present in the region west of Enyong creek, and the yellow sandy permeable soils in the southern zone, both support oil palm and banana, some cassava, yams and other vegetables and may well have been colonized by agricultural man for a longer period than some other parts and perhaps even as long as the northern zone. The human induced change of vegetation from forest to palm bush seems to lend further support to this idea. The large forest section east of the confluence of Enyong creek and Cross River are also unsuited for crops and therefore agricultural life because it is underlain by sloping sandy soils derived from weathered crystalline rocks. The alluvial soils around the Cross River estuary may well have been suitable for agriculture, but one hesitates to hazard a guess as to how long, given especially the fact that as already pointed out, this part of the

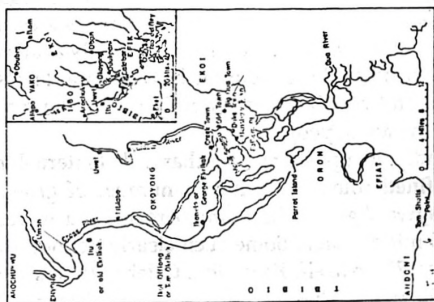
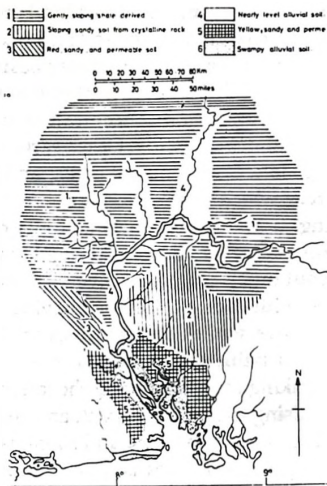


Fig. 5 Cross River Basin: Soils (after Latham 1973)

Fig 6a Cross River: The Coast and Creeks

coast had been subsiding since Late Pleistocene times.

Not only is it logical for yam and other local crops to have been cultivated from early times in the soil rich plains and valleys of the northern parts of the Cross River basin, it is very probable that this part of the basin constituted at least one of the earliest centres of population concentration and development from Neolithic times onwards. Other early centres may have been the regions west of Enyong creek, and those parts of the southern areas which were suited for oil palm, yam and vegetable cropping. It seems then that the topography of the Cross River region had at least two important consequences: first it brought about much ecological diversity over relatively restricted surfaces, with each sub-region having distinct features. Thus, for instance, while fishing thrives on the coast and by the rivers, the oil palm grows best in the southern and western regions flanking the plateau and the latter appear better suited for the raising of small livestock and for an agricultural production based on both forest and savanna crops such as yams, cocoyam, gourds and beans. The central and northern parts of the plateau specialized in the production of iron that was traded towards the oil producing areas. There was local specialization in the production of raffia bags, clothing, cane weaving, wooden carvings, earthen wares, hides and tobacco, etc. as was made possible by locally available resources, but at times these went far beyond local levels. Game is plentiful and hunting was certainly one of the main occupations of the forest people.

Secondly, it appears to have channelled internal trade along well defined routes on which a number of groups like the Efiks, Agwa Aguna, Ikom and Arochukwu in recent times acted as middle men. Some such clearly defined routes were the Cross River itself, Kwa Ibo, Calabar Rivers and some of their tributaries. These have also served through the ages to carry cultural influences in various directions.

It seems that despite losses suffered during the overseas slave trade of the 16th through to part of the 18th century, that the population of these regions, and indeed most of south

eastern Nigeria, soon attained densities among the highest in rural Africa and in some cases as pointed out by Northrup (1978, 13), in excess of 800 persons per square mile. Ironically enough, perhaps largely as an aftermath of the slave trade, the peoples of this region now live in dispersed compound among their fields, with the basic political unit being the patrilineage in some areas and in others the village.

In the past 20,000 years, conditions in West Africa generally have varied markedly with respect to the rainfall regime. Throughout this period the presence of the adjacent Cameroon highlands would have been responsible for local wet conditions which ensured that forest species persisted here even when almost all the Nigerian forest to the west disappeared between 20,000 and perhaps 5000 year ago during dry phases. The forest associated with the Cameroon highlands is thus much older than that elsewhere in Nigeria, but that further east has probably persisted for just as long. The forest further west is mostly poorer in species; of those present many are relatively efficiently dispersed. Whilst species entering from other lowland areas probably spread rapidly within what is now the Nigerian forest zone when conditions suitable for forest returned, re-invasion by species able to persist in the wetter areas, on and close to the high ground would be minimal because of relatively inefficient dispersal methods (wind dispersal among forest plants of those highlands is rare).

Dry climatic phases have not been associated with sufficient reduction in temperature for the forest on the high ground to disappear, and do not therefore sufficiently account for presence of a grassland flora rich in highland species. The limited extent of the high ground and its wetness rules out the occurrence of a rain shadow at anytime. There are indications, however, of the presence of a rain shadow in the much more extensive but adjacent Cameroon highlands – that is those portions which receive only 1200 – 1300mm of rainfall per year. At drier past periods, highland and other forest species which now reflect East African affinities became established

here. Disturbances by man through time encouraged the persistence of these species here as also in some other places. If so it means that the grassland flora of the Obudu plateau and associated high grounds is a biotic climax which, through human activities, has replaced much older forests.

Another ecological factor which influenced the history of human occupation in the Cross River basin area is that of changing sea level and the related position of the coastline. At the coastal stretch, the Cross River basin is located within a zone of submergence which stretches from Benin river to Mount Cameroon (64km; 400ml). Present here are the submerging Niger Delta which has several openings into the sea wide shallow continually changing bars formed by an eastward coastal drift and some estuaries which are lined with continuous mangrove swamps (e.g. Cross River and Rio de Rey).

The Niger Delta apparently started subsiding substantially from Late Pleistocene times, and in contrast to the generally rocky shore of Ghana (parts of which were occupied in stor Age times), it is sandy. Three major cycles of Quaternary deposits have been identified. From the bottom upward these are holomarine, submarine, younger lower and upper deltaic plain. Allen interprets this sequence as reflecting retreat of the sea, succeeded by a rising of the sea, and finally deposition caused by a subsiding delta. The most recent regression (subsiding delta) has been dated to around 30,000 B.P.; the rise of the sea immediately preceding this is dated between 12,000 and 5,500 B.P.; while the older regression has dates between 30,000 and 13,000 B.P.

Allen (1964) has also identified three terraces on the submerged part of the delta caused by several shallow channels of former distributaries of the Niger River. In his view these represent drained barrier beach or island complexes formed during stillstands of the Holocene rise in sea level. Allen and Wells (1962) also described coral banks that grew in former shallow waters along a belt at the seaward edge of the delta (between 7,000 and 3,000 B.P.) when water temperatures

creased.

It seems also that ancient surfaces near the coast did experience repeated, monoclinical down-warping which led to the rejuvenation of southward flowing streams (like the Cross River and smaller streams) and a greater degree of dissection of the low plains near the coasts, than of the high plain of the interior. The down warping resulted in this as well as some other stretches of the Guinea Coast having a drowned character with the lower parts of valleys flooded to given estuaries.

The Evolution of Cross River Plains

In the case of the Cross River, it seems that the plains are the result of alternating denudational and aggradational activities of an ancient drainage system. According to Kitson this ancient drainage which he calls Older Benue flowed from the present Upper Benue entering the sea at the mouth of the present Cross River. According to Udo (1970, 89), the headward erosion of streams draining from the plateau suggests that the present position of the escarpment marks the stage reached so far in the westward extension of the Cross River plains. As against this, the most recent aggradational land surfaces apparently lie further south, along the coast and comprise the coastal plains, islands and sand bars separated from the mainland by a series of lagoons and creeks. They are mainly sandy deposits in the west but muddy ones in the east, all apparently of Quaternary age.

Language and Population

Greenberg places the Cross River languages under his Benue - Congo branch which he subdivides into Plateau (7 sub-groups) Jukunoid, Cross River (3 sub-groups) and Bantoid. It is far from certain however that the Benue - Congo branch as a whole form a closely knit unity and in particular whether they can be sharply distinguished from Kwa languages, and just what their relationship is to the Bantu languages. Specifically the unity of the Cross River group is disputed. In the view of

specialists who disagree with Greenberg's classification, Cross River sub-group 2 and 3 are closely related while Cross River sub-group 1 is different from them and closer to Bantu. However, research by the Benue-Congo working group of the West African Linguistic Society (summarized by Williamson 1971) suggests the existence in the region of two fairly closely knit linguistic groups (same as Greenberg's Cross River 1 and 3) and third much less closely knit group (Greenberg's Cross River 2).

Cross River 1 is regarded by the working group to be the closest knit of all the three groups. It comprises a group of languages spoken mainly in north-eastern section of the region (i.e. northern) part of Old Ogoja province with a slight overlap into Western Cameroon. This is Crabb's Be-ndi on analogy with the Bantu, but Winston's Boki-Ebekwara after the two largest members of the group. This group is thought to be closely related to Bantoid both in its noun class system and in its vocabulary, but it has non-nasal prefixes in the three noun classes where a Bantu language would typically have nasal ones (which explains why Crabb (1967 - 1968) calls it Bantoid and not Bantu). The three noun classes of this group are: Class 1: *u - ndi* (person) (cf. Ekoid *n ne*); Class 3: *undi* (rope) (cf. Ekoid *nnigi*) Class 6: *a - bi* (breasts) (cf. Duala *ma - be*). Other special communities of this group are Bele and Bise.

According to Williamson (1971), Cross River 2 and 3 languages extend from southern division and northern Ogoja province down the Cross River and Greenberg's Cross River 2 forms a fairly close knit group. Comprising languages spoken in the Upper Cross River area, it apparently includes as a sub-group Winston's Lower Cross River sub-group which is included within his larger middle Cross River group. Williamson (1971) however notes that it is not clear whether 'this group includes the Okoyong-Uyanaga and Efik-Anda groups. Its interesting phonetic feature is the contrast between fortis and lenis consonants observed in Gbo, Humono, Ukele Mbembe and Ufia. Languages in this group all have functioning noun class systems.

Cross River 2, the least closely knit, is subdivided by Williamson (1971) into four sub-groups regarded as co-ordinates of Cross River 3. One of these Okoyong-Uyanga group, and a substantial part of another, the Efik-Andoni, belong to the present Cross River State, while the remaining two, Ogoni and Abua, fall into Rivers State.

The Okoyong-Uyanga group is known only from Goldie (1874) and Talbot (1912) accounts. It is not known to what extent they are still being spoken or whether they have given way to Efik, although it is shown on some old maps (e.g. Talbot's and Thomas' maps) as having been spoken between the Cross River languages and Efik. (Latham 1973; Frde 1956).

The Efik-Andoni — named after its most easterly and westerly member — spans southern Cross River, Akwa Ibom and western parts of River State. Efik has only a few alternating singular and plural noun prefixes but there is regular concord in the very prefixes with singular or plural subjects and vestigial singular/plural concord of adjectives with nouns. A similar situation obtains in Ibibio and Anang, but it is not known to what extent this is so in the other languages of the group. Biase is another language in this group. Spoken in northern Enyong division, its speakers all use Efik as a second language. The eastern group of these languages is dominated by Efik, whose political and economic importance has led to its being used as a standard written and spoken language by speakers of other languages of the group.

A further look at the linguistic map of the regions shows some links with ecological features. In particular, the Boki Bekwara, located to the north-eastern sector of the region, seems to be centred on the northern highlands and to extend with it into western Cameroon. Similarly the Cross River 3 group of languages appear to fall squarely under the Upper Cross River, although there seem to be remnant speech pockets of these in the middle and lower Cross River regions. By contrast the Cross River 2 languages appear to be scattered all over remaining parts of the region, not having any special geographical character to its spread.

The equatorial habitat, particularly the forest habitat, also seems to have played a unique historical role in the evolutionary history of these languages. Chilver and Kabery (1968, 12) observe in this respect that the majority of the peoples of the Bamenda Grassfields also speak Bantoid languages which, with the possible exceptions of Esimbi and Tikar, have a common lexical store drawn upon in different proportions.' This lexical store is, to a very great extent shared with the speakers of the so called Bemileke languages. The Nkom and Bamileke languages are actually regarded as divisions within a larger group. There is also a marked overlap with the Mamfe border language. The general picture is of the confluence and superimposition of different streams which probably had a common source in the remote past. 'Perhaps this common source was ancestral to true Bantu, the Bantoid languages of the Cameroon plateau and those of the Benue and Cross River Areas'. The non-Bantoid languages found scattered along the northern borders or in pockets elsewhere are all, it appears fairly recent entrants into this general area.

The unique impact exercised by geography appears to be very evident in the evolutionary history of Efik Andoni languages. Unlike all the other Cross River peoples, all sub-groups of the Efik-Ibibio groups live either on the mainland or in the creek island sections of the Lower Cross River basin within the forest zone. One question arising is why is it that Ekoid groups like the Ejagham are found spread across the Upper, Middle and Cross Rivers, but not the Efik, while the people belonging to Cross River I (Ekoid speaking peoples) are located immediately to their north in both forest and savanna country? Were they (the Efik) formerly widespread but were pushed down south or west? Or have they intruded relatively recently into the area?

Linguists have little or nothing to say presently on when or how and why Efik-Ibibio language, or rather dialects, came to be in existence in the Lower Cross River basin. They disagree though on what is its precise relationship to the neighbouring Ibo (Kwa) and Ekoi (Bantoid and Bantu) languages. While it is

known that many of the Cross River languages of Nigeria and Cameroon, are Bantoid, it is not known whether Efik-Ibibio is one of these. One is not clear about the kind of relationship this language bears with the proto-Bantu languages traced directly to the Cameroon area.

Welmers (cf. Williamson 1971, 251-2) concluded from lexi-co statistical comparison of some eastern Kwa and Benue-Congo languages that Efik is more closely related to Igbo (a typical eastern Kwa language) than to Tiv (another Benue-Congo language of the Bantoid group), but that this Igbo-Efik group was not particularly close to other eastern Kwa languages such as Yoruba and Bini. As a result, he broke up Kwa (though to be a co-ordinate branch of Niger-Congo by Greenberg) into several branches; with Igbo and Efik featuring in one, and Yoruba and Bini in another group.

Williamson (1971, 252) accepts Welmer's general contention that no clear boundary exists between Kwa and Benue-Congo, but objects to Welmer's inclusion of Igbo and Efik in the same group for two main reasons. One reason is that the presence or absence of noun class system is not adequate for distinguishing the Benue-Congo languages of this region from the Kwa ones, especially because there are Benue-Congo languages without noun class systems (e.g. Jukun), and Kwa languages with noun class system (e.g. Degema and other Edo languages). Secondly, Igbo and Efik have in fact been in intimate contact for a long period, and it is quite possible that a large amount of undetected borrowing even in basic vocabulary has occurred. In place of Welmer's thesis, Williamson proposes the following general developmental sequence: (i) A central or innovating Benue-Congo group comprising Greenberg's Bantoid Plateau (or at least some of them, e.g. his Plateau 1-3) and according to Crabb (1965), the Cross River 1 languages which are spoken mainly in the northern parts of Ogoja, (ii) Jukunoid, (iii) Cross River 2 and 3 (possibly with Igbo and a few other eastern Kwa languages) which extend from southern Idoma and northern Ogoja up west wards along the Niger coast, (iv) some other groups formed out of

the Kwa branch. As explained by Crabb (1965, 140), most linguists are now generally agreed about the existence of a number of languages in both the Cross River and Benue basins, which belong to various levels of Bantu sub-groupings. In their view, one such large sub-group was spoken in the area of the Cross River and has been since *Homo sapiens* lived here. The premise here is that the Cross River constitutes one geographical and trading area, and contains languages which may be Bantu, in intimate contact with others which share a long period of common development, due to common ancestry, with all the Bantu languages prior to some later period of separate development. The Bantu languages in the area are identified on the basis of evidence that they have preserved from this hypothetical period of separate development – evidence from the period when the proto-Bantu speech community was isolated from the immediate ancestors of the other languages spoken in the area. This evidence must be seen then to match what is already known of proto-Bantu as compared with what is known, of all the other languages of the Niger-Congo family, to have occurred after the isolation of the proto-Bantu speech community, but before its own dissolution into descendant isolates viz. innovation dating from a period of common historical development in which the languages shared' (Greenberg, 1963, 32). If the general thesis is now accepted by most linguists, it has not been possible to apply these criteria to all specific languages, and Efik-Andoni sub-group of Cross River 2 group appears to be one of such.

It is not clear whether Greenberg and Crabb include Efik in their category of semi-Bantu and if, following from this, Efik is a plausible candidate for reclassification. Greenberg's Efik data consists of 51 lexical items intended to demonstrate tonological and phonological correspondences between it and pro-Bantu. But Haig-Der Houssikan (1969, 319) questions the validity of Greenberg's correspondences on the grounds that these form comparisons of totally different levels of abstraction, the sources for the Bantu forms being ambiguous. He reduces the number of non suspicious items from 51 to 36 and

the validity of posting prototonemes is at best uncertain. He observes though, that if the correspondence of tones between Efik and proto-Bantu forms is reliable, it would be interesting, so would be the segmental correspondences, even if these are based on non-comparable data. As such he concludes (p. 321) that if the Efik evidence can maintain its comparability under rigorous analysis, it could lead to an ultimate reclassification of Westernman's 'Berfue-Cross', and other 'semi-Bantu' as strict Bantu. Given the non-uniform ways in which the variety of ecological and socio-cultural variables known to exist in the area may have operated through time, it would seem most reasonable to seek to identify not just straight-forward expressions of historical divergence, but varying degrees, types and levels of divergence, convergence and reconvergence from both linguistic and culture historical data for peoples who lived in the Cross River basin.

Historical evidence (oral and documentary, and ethnographic), clearly indicate that at least, as far back as the 16th century, and in some instances before, there was substantial cultural contact and interaction that took place between most peoples living in the Cross River basin of Nigeria and Cameroon. Indeed this cultural contact/interaction extended far north beyond this basin to embrace at least the peoples of the lower section of the Benue River basin. The cultural interaction took different forms and led among other things to the diffusion of cultural ideas, concepts and items. Perhaps the most important of the agents of contact were trade, intermarriage and the least important purveyor warfare.

Oral Traditions and History of the Cross River Peoples

Oral traditions suggest that the colonization of the Cross River estuary was a gradual and complex process involving elements from many eastern Ibibio groups (Goldie 1874, 357; Jeffreys 1935, 26-32). On first getting to Creek Town it seems that the Efiks reported finding a small village of Efut settlers living in the immediate vicinity. The Efut for their part have

traditions of having migrated originally from the southern Cameroon.

Efik traditions about themselves, seem, for their part to be divided on the question of ethnic origin. While some claim Ibibio affiliation, some others claim Igbo (specifically Aro) and yet some others non-Ibibio and non-Igbo origin (e.g. Palestine, Sudan, a spot on the Niger, Ghana). There are yet those who claim that the Efik inhabited some other parts of southeastern Nigeria or some part of Cameroon before they migrated into Ibibio occupied terrains. These suggest three successive stages in Efik history; (i) pre-Ibibio phase (for some Igbo) (ii) an Ibibio phase (iii) a drift to the riverain area and the coast.

According to the traditions which recognize an Ibo phase, the Efiks settle at *Ututu* in Igbo country until they were expelled by the indigenous people for refusing to acknowledge their local god, while they are said to have been referred to as Eburutu (corruption of words 'Hebrew') and *Ututu* (or is it of place called Burutu in the district of the Niger Delta). Significantly enough, this term seems confined amongst the Efik to only one large lineage and not to all Efik. Some Efik groups, for their part, trace their common ancestry to Obong Otung Ema (or Oton Ema) one of whose five children was Eburutu Otung Ema. It is further contended that those who 'founded' Old Town (Obutung), Creek town (Ikoritungko), Duke Town (Atakpa), Henshaw Town (Nsidun), Adiabo and Ikonetu (figs. 6a and b) were all descendant of Eburutu Otung Ema. Clearly then the term Eburutu was not generally adopted by other groups of Efik descendants who led their immigrant groups of supporters to various habitats. Besides being a lineage of the large Efik clan it is probable that Eburutu has no geographical significance associated with it.

The version of the Efik tradition, which claims Ibibio ancestry for the Efiks, asserts that the Ibibio came originally from Ibom area located in present day Arochukwu. They were expelled by the Akpa. One version of this tradition states that the Ibibio aided by the Ada were expelled by the Aro

aided by the Akpa. According to one version, Ibom was an Akpa town. The oracle known to Europeans as *Long juju* and formerly an Ibibio shrine was situated between Ibom (of Akpa origin) and Amanku (of Ada origin). Ibom was wrested by a combined force of Igbo and Akpa from an Ibibio group. A second variant postulates that the Ibibio derive from Mbang Idem (a mythical stock), while a third version holds that the Ibibio came originally from an area south of the Benue River and east of the Niger (i.e. origins to be traced back to the Benue valley).

In any case, according to the Efik tradition deriving their origin from Ibom, during the Ibibio phase of dispersion, the Efik dispersed in general directions from Ibom, some canoeing down the Enyong Creek and into the Cross River area where a portion stopped and built Mbiabo Edere (or Akani-Obio). If as Harding (1932) claimed, the Mbiabo, like the other Efik came from the Arochuku Town of Ibom about nine generations ago, it means that this 'movement, occurred somewhere in the middle of the 17th century. This version also reports other Efik groups as having proceeded down the river and landed at Oku Iboku, near Ikot Offiong. Ilot-Offiong soon broke up and the Efik moved to Esuk Odu in Ibibio land (or Egbo shary as it was known to the Europeans) near present day Ikpa.

The Efik who argue that they are of Ibibio origin trace the history of their migration from the settlement near Ikpa and more specifically from their arrival at the Ibibio hamlet of Uruan (Fig. 6b). Legend has it that the Efik group at Uruan consisted of four of the Eburutu lineages. The four are identified as the Abayere, Usuk Akpa, Enwang and Iboku. In this version, the Ibibio settled originally at a place referred to as Aqua Akpa (great sea) at the mouth of a river which they called Aqua Inyang (great river). If the river is the Cross River, then the original habitat of the Ibibio must have been in the region of the estuary of the Cross River. The precise date of such an occupation is not known, although the traditions relate that it was a time when the 'river was not as big as it is

today, nor was the width of its mouth as large as it is today. It was a small youthful river with a narrow mouth, so that it was easily crossed from one side or bank to the other. The region of the mouth of the river was not broken up into bits of tiny islands as it is today' (Udo Ekong Obio Offiong 1958, 11). One approach to checking the validity of this claim is through careful review of the paleoenvironmental evidence for this part of southern Nigeria. Tradition further asserts that the youthful stage of the river was succeeded by an adolescent stage of constant and dangerous flooding and lateral erosion leading to destruction of many houses and farms. This forced many inhabitants to leave. It is suggested that perhaps the Efik left Ibibio country at this stage.

Although variations exist, the basic story told by the Aro, as well as their Igbo neighbours, relates that the land they now occupy was first inhabited by the Ibibio. Igbo settlers in the area (by some accounts slaves) were unable to take effective control from the Ibibio until they formed an alliance with a group from east of the Cross River called the Akpa. The identity of the Akpa is not very clear, but one view holds that they might be an offshoot of the Okoyong or Ododop people of Calabar division.

Viewed from the standpoint of the context of the traditions, their type, how they relate to the prevailing social system and their chronological placement, (and where proper attention is paid to the background of informants), the socio-political circumstances of the time, as well as to the group (whether family lineage, clan or cluster of clans) the informant (not collector) really had in mind and to which the informant's data really applies, we find that the Efik, Ibibio and Aro traditions of origin usually fall into the following categories:

- (i) Aetiological myths connecting peoples in question with specific places and sites named as point or points of origin in legends;
- (ii) traditions referring strictly to descent groups who have moved to their present areas from a number of different areas;

- (iii) traditional histories recounting the movements of purported ancestors of the present major sub-cultural divisions of the people, and sections within these sub-divisions.

Finally, it does seem necessary to distinguish traditions pertaining to people that are Efik and /or Ibibio culturally, but not linguistically from those traditions of groups that are Efik and /or Ibibio linguistically but not necessarily so culturally.

The temporal problem is related to that of the nature of the traditions and their relationship to their sociocultural setting and here again not much has been done as yet. Talbot (1926) more inclined than many other early workers to credit Ibibio oral traditions with a certain measure of credibility and value as source material for the people's early history, suggested the following time sequence. Up to 1300 A.D. the Ibibio lived in the general area around Arochukwu. Between 1300 and 1400 A.D. they were driven from their Arochukwu homeland by the incoming Igbo and as a result they dispersed into the present homeland. Some may be tempted to say that this chronology sounds reasonable especially in the light of some of the linguistic data; but the hard fact, as pointed out by Afaribo (1971, 66), is that Talbot's dates are merely guesses.

Latham (1973) by contrast, relying primarily on Efik royal genealogies, postulates that the Efiks merged to Calabar in the late 16th century. According to him, these genealogies are shorter than those of Bonny and Kalabari — two communities which are assumed to have been settled in the late 15th centuries. Therefore the Efik communities in Calabar must be younger than the Bonny and Kalabari communities. But Jones has correctly pointed out, genealogies and oral legends associated with kingship institutions cannot be regarded as reflecting sufficiently the antiquity of the communities to which they relate, because this category of social order does not predate the centralized institution with which they are associated and whose existence they often legitimize. In any case, usually for most communities, centralized institutions begin to develop only after the societies in question have

been in existence for some time. The other problem about genealogies which Latham does not deal with adequately is the fact that some of these genealogies deal with structural rather than historical time.

Although we do not as yet have a proper time scale within which to treat Efik traditions of origin, some positive conclusions can still be drawn from what is presently available. The first is that one of the traditions which derives Efik speaking peoples from Uruan deals with, perhaps, the most recent phase of Efik history, since it refers to the break away of some Efik (an *ibibio* clan?) groups from their *Ibibio* present group.

It seems certain also that what has received emphasis as the oral tradition of origin and migration of the Efik or *Ibibio* and *Aro* peoples are indeed little parts of their recent local history. In the instance of the Efik and *Ibibio*, these tell how some of the Efik-*Ibibio* clans (at least linguistically, if not culturally) crossed what had up to then been the greatest barrier of all, the Cross River, to the left where they met the *Qua*, the *Efut* and the *Abakpa*. This crossing brought these related and unrelated clan groups in contact with different communities with cultures different from their own.

That the Cross River was probably the greatest barrier is further suggested by the fact (Ardener 1968) that Old Calabar was not the first important focus for trade by Efik or *Ibibio* peoples on the coast. It was preceded by *Samson's* on *Rio del Rey*. It seems that by the late 17th century, *Samson's* decline was sparked off by movement towards the estuary by, among others, the inland Bantu speaking people now known as *Balundu*. The *Ibibio* group known as *Effiat* (Forde and Jones 1950, 89) who occupy fishing villages in the estuary of *Rio del Rey* appear to have lost their foothold on the mainland and especially on *Rumby* estuary (Fig. 6a) to these peoples whom they called *Efut* and *Ekita*, and who called in their return *Ifiari* or *Fiari*. *Efut* mingled with Efik in the group known as *Isangele* to the north of *Rio del Rey* and some became part of the population of Old Calabar.

The *Ibibio* speaking *Isangele* population of *Oron* and

Amutu villages were the traders of the later Rio del Rey at the head of the estuarine system. Their traditions as assembled by Anderson (1933) speak of movement to Rio del Rey, from Foyong and the establishment of trade with the Portuguese. It helps to account also for the uniqueness of their dialect in relation to the Efik or to other Ibibio groups.

There is also evidence that some important trading families in Old Calabar came originally from Cameroon. One such family was that of Ambo (N.B., there is a street in Calabar by that name). Their own name for themselves, *Mbarakom* appears to derive from the milieu of the Upper Cross River Banforo speaking peoples and not from that of the coastal Bantu. Traditions have it that the Ambo moved from Ikon Eto to settle in Creek Town, while another group from Ikpa Ene went to Ndodoghi, and from there to Creek Town defeating the Adadia who had earlier migrated to Creek Town from Uruan district. Indeed several inland movements of various kinds and dimensions seem to have been set off by the growth of Old Calabar as a trading centre which affected the whole Cross River Basin, and by the 19th century had touched the inland grassland plateau (Ardener 1968, 100-111). Unfortunately, the importance of this latest part of the area's history has often been so exaggerated that many historians and anthropologists alike appear to have lost the proper time perspective.

The fact really is that the present distribution of the Efik and Ibibio clan groups is the result of a very wide variety and types of movement which date to well beyond the 15th century. One major result of this phenomenon is seen in the fact that most of the Efik and Ibibio clans are culturally composite, having been made up of different descent groups having different traditions of origins and sometimes speaking different languages previously. The classic example of such mixing of differing cultural elements is Efik land. This mixing was obviously substantially heightened from the late 16th century onwards because of Calabar's newly acquired importance from trade.

Lineage segmentation is reported by Nair to have become distinct in the Creek Town phase of Efik settlement history, while the Efik house organization (*ufc'k*) was far from being a purely commercial corporation. Rather, it was originally an association for the maintenance of law and order, and state defence in times of war. The houses were known by the names of their founders and grew naturally from the patriachal character of Efik social organization. Oral evidence certainly indicates that Efik family groups recognized a common paternity even before such groups arrived at the estuary of the Cross River.

Lineage segmentation became clearer during and following the Creek Town phase, because the memories and reminiscences of the informants are sharper on the more recent 17th and 18th centuries factors which defined the structural relationships between lineages and towns and also because Creek Town was an important point of population dispersal. However, there was a major difference between the dispersal of the Efik in Creek Town and that which occurred earlier elsewhere. While the prime reason for migration in the earlier phases had much to do with disputes that arose between the migrating Efik groups and other settled groups, in the Creek Town and subsequent phases, Efik 'migrations' seem to have been prompted by a need to achieve some form of social equilibrium within a social system which was undergoing inter-lineage tensions. If the Efik had previously conceived themselves as a single community united against a common oppressor, in the 17th and later centuries their ties with one another seemed tenuous. No longer were external factors an argument for cohesiveness, instead the various lineages consolidated themselves and drew their strength from their relative numerical strength and the wealth they were able to accumulate. With the prosperity of the slave trade, dissension arose within the framework of a segmentary lineage society when all the major lineages were equals and rivals at the same time.

Weaker parties in quarrels were usually driven out or left

voluntarily. Disturbances and changes within the total lineage system were related largely to fundamental limiting economic conditions, competition for trade, quarrels within settlement over land that was becoming short and disputes with regard to succession to the throne. In other words, the politics of the days of migration began to give way to the politics of a society settling down. If the earliest important centres of settlements were located further north (north-west and north-east), written European sources clearly attest to a substantial gravitation coastwards from around the 16th century and stemming largely from the development of overseas trade.

Multilingualism

The language density within the Cross River groups appears to have been for long and still is considerable both in terms of the small geographical area for each variety and the relatively small numbers of each variety. It is not clear if there was a lingua franca in this region prior to European advent, but from at least the late 17th century Efik appears to have started assuming that role as language of trade and later on language of instruction adopted by the missionaries. In the 18th and 19th centuries, much of inter-group communications was being done no longer by multilingualism but by Efik.

A striking feature of the Cross River basin is its seeming homogeneity at least in cultural and socio-political features, if not immediately in linguistic ones. Also striking is the fact that much of these cultural affinities appear to be shared with neighbouring regions of the Grassfields and south-west Cameroon to the east and the lower Benue region directly north. Indeed the affinities would suggest that peoples of the Cross River region have had close contact of one sort or another amongst themselves as well as with the peoples of the neighbouring regions. One evidence of this intra and inter cultural contact is the prominence in some places and presence in others (still surviving in places to this day) of multi-lingualism.

In Cross River region as in the Grassfields, multilingualism appears in recent times to have been geared to two regional processes — population movements and trade. Certainly, in recent centuries, much of the population of this region seems to have been constantly in the process of being re-distributed as one sure way of resolving conflicts of various kinds (succession disputes, open warfare etc.) within specific groups. More often than not, especially from the 16th century, with heightened threat posed by the European demand for slaves, at any point in time, there were confederacies of clans and lineages or small chiefdoms that represented a blend of linguistically composite communities which often had an official language and one or more minority languages. Daily communication within the chiefdom, depending on its degree of linguistic heterogeneity, implied a corresponding degree of multilingualism (see Warnier 1979, 412–413). A careful study of the multilingual situation together with the pattern of inter-marriages combined with genealogies of lineage segments and oral tradition should help reveal something of the pattern of these population movements in different parts of the region and for as far back in time as the evidence takes us.

Trade in this general region, including the Grassfield, appears to have been carried on by series of short link connections. Household heads conducted the bulk of this enterprise with the help of male members of the household. This involved the maintenance of formal trade friendships for purposes of security, food and shelter, marketing credit, and the supply of trade goods in a number of communities within a two or three days walking radius. In the absence of a trade language, it involved a practical knowledge of the languages spoken in these places. Indeed because much of the success of a trading household depended on its linguistic competence, multilingualism was actually promoted and considered as an asset of critical importance. Trading houses and communities actively recruited relevant 'foreign' members by cultivating inter-community marriages and or by adoption. By adoption we refer to a situation in which a person or a group of persons

was permanently or temporarily put under the authority of a household head in the position of classificatory son or daughter. What Warnier noted for the Grassfield situation (1979, 414) appears to apply equally to our region namely, that a trader often sent one of his sons to live as a 'son' in the household of his "foreign' trade partner. This way the son could improve his knowledge of the foreign language, establish connections, and possibly initiate a marriage alliance. Ambitious household heads also went to adopt as 'sons', refugees (groups or individuals) who had vacated a neighbouring community following conflicts over succession, accusations of witchcraft, serious conflicts within descent groups and the like. In addition, chiefs and clan heads saw it as their duty to marry wives from communities with which they maintained close trade and socio-political relationship, which action often fostered various degrees and levels of multilingualisms.

Ethnography

Historical and socio-cultural facts available for the Cross River suggest that we can usefully distinguish between two polar social types with various gradations in between. On the one hand, we have a polar type comprising peoples usually occupying more open and or upland terrain and who live in large settlements, usually villages and towns, made up of dispersed hamlets. Even when they are forced away from such terrain into forested lowlands, many such people are known to have held on to such social settlement styles for as long as practicable. This social set up is also characterized generally by degrees of heterogeneity and stratification. The most common hierarchy discernible in recent times has been a division between nobles, commoners and slaves.

As against the above, the other polar type has generally been more prevalent in the heavily forested lowland parts of Cross River which are located more to the south and west. The peoples who fall into this extreme type have social systems noted for egalitarian principles leading to competition,

fission and small mobile villages. This tendency to fragmentation of settlements appears to be more characteristic of the heavily forested regions, save for the unique case of the Efik.

Both society types imply different systems of distribution of wealth. In the more heterogenous types, of goods and services were managed by privileged (usually land-holding) classes. One way in which these tended to demonstrate and commemorate their advantages was by commissioning large scale sculptures that could be expected to remain in one place. Evidence for this is, the presence in definite geographical areas of distinctive sculptural traditions both historic (e.g. Akwanshi monoliths) and ethnographic.

The ethnographic instances are normally fashioned by perpendicular reduction and associated with certain interrelated cultural features. They usually serve as focal points in competitive interaction between local groups of societies with diffuse rather than centralized political systems. As such they were held to be imbued with magical powers and they served as the bases of the *esprit de corps* of special groups within the society.

Lack of sufficient study together with the disturbed history of this region in recent times notably the Chamba and Tiv incursions from the north, the north-east Igbo from the west and the Efik and latterly the Ibibios from the south, seem to have obscured sculptural traditions that almost certainly existed prior to the onslaught of the slave trade. Perhaps most outstanding in this regard is the *Njom*, which serves to indicate a basic concept of sculpture: the carving of tree trunks by perpendicular reduction in the culture history of the peoples of this general region who have non-centralized political systems. This art tradition covers the entire area between Cross River and Sanaga River in Central Africa, and may well be vestiges of a distinct culture area prior to the recent disturbances. The functional aspects of this kind of art actually extend beyond this area today. Societies whose social and political patterns resemble those types here mentioned are known to show analogous traditions, expressed in different materials

and techniques of using art to resolve crises and to proclaim sub-group identity and excellence.

The most prominent examples of this principle in the Cross River culture area are the *Njom* or *So* and the *Mgbe* or *Ekpe* ritual. Its extension is the *Mbari* ritual of the Owerri/Igbo. In the fashioning of logs into large slit gongs with sculptural themes at one or both ends as in the case of the Mbembe, or in the case of the Igbo, the fashioning of a microcosm of earthen images, we find the same concern with resolution or averting of crises; the initiation of participants, the prestige of a lineage, and the variable arrangement of symbols. It seems that in all these the one common theme is sacrifice by art. An outlay of wealth is put into an unusual form in order to please and propitiate supernatural powers.

Ethnographic and art historical studies indicate that many cultural features are common to the region in question reaching up to and including the Niger confluence and Grassfields of Cameroon. Amongst these are the prominence of men's secret societies, especially that of the *leopards*, and in some parts *pythons*; the religious origin of most of the art traditions; the prevalence of certain masking traditions; and the special position held by the ancestors in the non-centralized societies on the one hand and the queen mother in the centralized hierarchical ones on the other.

The *leopard* masquerade was probably evolved by the Ejagham, living in the heartland of the middle Cross River, and spread from there up river toward the Cameroon Grassfields and downriver to the coast, several centuries before the slave trade. But the peoples received renewed flows from this source during the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries and again in the 20th century in response to economic and political conditions. Trade in slaves and palm oil provided fresh impetus, and diffusion occurred on occasion through movement of certain peoples especially the Qua and the Aro, but more generally by purchasing of the society, but not through warfare. During these secondary and tertiary stages, this institution apparently spread at the periphery, from Ejagham east to

the Banyang, Bangwa and other groups, and west to the Yako from the Aro and southern Igbo area (further north), more for reasons of status and perhaps aesthetics than of trade, although social control appears also to have been a factor (e.g. Banyang). There was a later spread, this time outside of Africa to Cuba via Calabar. The evidence for spread is unassailable, nor can it be doubted that the slave trade and subsequent palm oil trade served as an impetus. What is very questionable is the view, that these were the sole impetus and that spread only commenced when these activities were introduced into the region.

Ostensibly, it is quite plausible to hold that the Efik adopted the *Ekpe* institution from the Ejagham in a bid to meet the considerable European demand for slaves in the 17th and 18th centuries. It has even been claimed that the cult provided the Efik with what Latham describes as a genuinely African capitalist institution of elementary kind, and with this they were able to modify drastically their classically acephalous Ibibio type segmentary lineage organization. It is also commonly held that the purchase of *Ekpe* by other Cross River communities in search of European credit, notably by the Aro Igbo created a vast *Ekpe* polity. However, the fact that Calabar and Arochukwu became focal points of a new form of power and distribution is no proof that they and other places established at the same time as they were marked the first manifestation of this wide spread cultural unity, nor was this proof that the Efik adopted the *Ekpe* and related institutions from the Ejagham.

Indeed it is also known that this cultural feature and its masquerade also helped create greater cultural unity in some areas without leading to political centralization. This clearly shows that this spread did not necessarily go hand in hand with political centralization nor was it necessarily dependent on trade. And we know in any case, that besides trade inter-marriage was another major vehicle of cultural inter-change, and this long predates the slave trade. This line of evidence thus suggests that the widespread diffusion of the *leopard* cult

together with those traits which go with it — the skin covered carvings, body masks, *nsibidi* signs, mysterious sounds, music, lodge with shrine, various kinds of hierachical organization, the usage of particular costumes by particular grades and the emphasis on secrecy for social control — may long predate the advent of the slave trade.

A very striking feature that is attendant on this phenomenon is how the type of society and its masqueraders were able to adapt to a variety of political structures in the area; ranging from control of the community by wealthy traders (Efik, Arochukwu, Bende) to broader community control (Ejagham, Ibibio, Annang, other Igbo) to adaptation to nucleated settlements, and finally, to control by single chiefs. We will need to find out if there is any chronological ordering to these and if so what this is.

It seems also striking that both skin-covered head pieces and helmet masks were distributed in much the same area as the body masks. All have apparently moved over much the same routes to similar areas and to the same people. Ottenberg reports that both the skin covering and the body masks relate to the idea of separation as does also *nsibidi* and that these may therefore be a metaphor for the distinctiveness of the community. If so we certainly need to know how old this trait complex is in the region. The same is applicable of the symbolic essence of the masquerade, namely when the concept of *leopard* masquerade as a symbol of power, of authority, of physical force, having associations with the general spirit of the secret society, if not the spirit of the society itself, was first dispersed and from where, in which direction, to which people and how?

Ottenberg (1985) has suggested that the fibre and cotton costumes remind one of nature, its net-like quality suggests catching or trapping, and that the *Ngbe* cult may have started in the Ejagham area when hunting and possibly fishing were still important to the economy. If indeed there is a historical connection between costume and capturing of animals, it could mean that the feature came into existence very far back

in pre-historic times. If so it is also very likely that there was some spread long before the 16th century and that the European slave trade merely heightened its importance and was not its original motive force.

It is noted also in the connection that the fibre costume may be older than its complement the cotton body mask, since the former may be associated with an hunting phase of existence, while cotton costume seems more closely allied with an agricultural phase, if of course as Ottenberg observes, the earliest cotton material came from the silk cotton tree.

The existence of skin-covered carvings in roughly the same areas as the netted fibre mask seems to reinforce the hunting motive since the skins are of animals. Besides its political trading, legal status and recreational functions, the society also apparently performed a major role in the funeral rites of its members in different places and cultures. Indeed there is the strong possibility that initially, this society complex spread as a religious or a religious political institution. And archaeological finds from the same area and which we shall next discuss seem to support this idea as well as the thesis that it long predates the time of European advent to this area.

Grassfields Groups

Leopard societies are found also as far afield as Mambilla and Kaka. At these places the societies are called *so*. They have net body costumes, albeit more loosely woven than those of the other societies, and they are decorated with large independent circles and other geometric forms that interpret the leopards natural body markings. It is usually worn with and without a face-mask or feather headdress. The costumes appeared at annual celebration as well as during and following hunting excursions.

The fact that these costumes accompany the *so* presentations and that they have the same basic form of construction as do others used by the *Nghe/Ekpe* societies, plus the knowledge that Cross River trade routes extended beyond the Banileke into Bamum country suggests the possibility of rela-

tion between the *Ekpe* society as found among the Mambilla and Kaka and those in the Cross River region and between the two regions independent of and predating the era of European presence.

The net body costume may also have spread north into the Benue region, but this needs careful study as does also the subject matter of trade routes from the Benue area south into the Cross River region and the Grassfields and north and north-east from Calabar and Duala.

According to Ruel (1969, 250) *Ngbe* appears to have spread to the south-eastern neighbours of the Ejagham before moving into Efik territory. Silver states that eastern areas of the Grassfields including the Bamum were on trade routes that cut between Mbam and Mungo to the Bakossi mountains (1961, 238). This suggests that the influence could have travelled north-east into the Grassfields before, or at the same time that it was beginning to spread from Calabar as well. Although trade routes criss-cross the Grassfields, connecting many groups from different directions, definitive archaeological or historical information is needed to ascertain the validity of these claims.

Historical and Archaeological Insights Pre 1500 Era

Taken as a whole the material remains so far unearthed from the Cross River region and neighbouring areas (e.g. Monolith culture of middle Cross River; Igbo Ukwu civilization of Anambra valley; Benue valley and the Cameroon grassfields finds) indicate the existence in these parts of people whose craft industries were highly developed in skill and artistry. While earlier and some times richer than the more recent evidences, these finds do not diverge from the general trends of cultural development in the Benue and Cross River basins. Yet these crafts probably represented high point in economies whose bases we still know too little about. Despite this lack of direct archaeological evidences, what is available seems to in-

dicating the existence of iron working and/or farming peoples who produced agricultural surplus capable of supporting settlements that were not just well populated but harboured people of diverse occupations and sometime ethnolinguistic backgrounds. During these early times, while the economies of these peoples lacked many of the West Indian plants which were to be introduced in the course of the Atlantic trade, it seems that they were already growing various local yam species and palm oil as staple foods, and that the cultivation of some of these dated from pre-Iron Age times. The Lower and Middle Cross River basin may well have been one area or a part of a larger area in which these two plants were indigenously cultivated. There is evidence that the oil palm spread following the clearing of the primeval forest and were therefore closely associated with continuous agriculture activity, while sleeping sickness prevented the maintenance of large animals. Goats, sheep, fowls and a resistant breed of dwarf cattle have long been raised in the area.

Finds from Late Stone Age sites in Benue (and Adamawa) suggest also that hunting has for long been of major economic importance in this region, providing food and other animal products. One such animal which art motifs on the Bronzes of Igbo-Ukwu depict is the elephant. According to Shaw (1970, 284-5), ivory may have been the item of exchange for expensive metal and bead imports. Hunting and the rearing of sheep and cows appear to have continued in importance up to the 15th century, for the Portuguese sources refer to them. Pereira mentions trade in ivory and leopard skins. The ivory trade was especially active in the Benue River area among the Opuu (Igbo) and in the vicinity of Mount Cameroon, while the eastern delta furnished some ivory as well.

Fishing would appear also to have been important during this early period in the many rivers of the hinterland, and especially in the Niger Delta where it seems to have been the major source of livelihood along with salt-making. At the time of Pereira's description, the salt-water marshes and islands of the delta were generally well populated and he mentions one

where there were over 2,000 souls at the mouth of the Rio which specialized in melong and. There are references to other salt towns in later accounts which suggest a salt boiling industry in the delta areas among others.

The fishermen of the coast and the farmers of the hinterland did not live in isolation from each other. Rather from an early date there had developed a regional pattern of exchange between the two both in food and in their products of their other special industries. In part this trade was based on an nutritional necessity. Large portions of the delta are too swampy and saline to support much agriculture or livestock, while most of the hinterland lacks natural salt deposits. In the resulting exchanges, yams, palm-oil and livestock from the hinterland area were traded in return for salt and dried fish from the delta. But the trade was not a simple subsistence exchange between complementary ecological zones.

Traces of former settlements, many of them containing monoliths, were initially found in the upper parts of the Lower Cross River. Subsequently, they have been discovered further afield in the middle and upper parts of the Cross River region. And it is clear that with more concerted search more will be found in these 'Upper' regions. What has so far been discovered throws very useful light on the early settlement history (i.e. Pre-1600) of the Cross River region.

Allison (1967, 1968), the first to report on these monoliths in some systematic fashion, recorded the presence of some two hundred and ninety five stones usually still in place together with collections of small shaped stones usually of cylindrical or ellipsoid form, in a wide angle area bounded by the Cross River and one of its confluent, the Ewayon. The monoliths (large stones in place) were representations of human forms showing up varying degrees of elaborateness. According to Allison's (1968 a and b) report, the largest groups of most elaborately formed monoliths are found among the Akaju, Abanyom and Nde (Fig. 7). Basalt was mostly used to fashion the monoliths, while some groups were made from limestone. The Nta and Ndele are said to refer to the carved stones as ak-

wanshi (dead person in the ground) whereas in some other areas they are referred to as *atal* (the stones). Allison counted twenty-nine separate groups and eleven single specimens totaling 295 carved stones. Twelve of these groups contained over ten individuals and two numbered over thirty. In ten of the groups the arrangement was reported as circular, although not all the circles are complete. All carved stones were located apparently in existing or abandoned village sites, in some cases occupying the central open area of the village sites designated as the (playground). Numerous dressed but uncarved stones occurring either as separate groups or among carved examples were also recorded.

Specific regions of peoples were characterized by distinct traditions of carving. Especially among the Nta, Nselle and Nnam, the monoliths were large and either shaped as phalliciform (*Nta*) or carved as board decorated boulders (Nnam). It has been suggested that the Nselle forms could be intermediate between the above two (Anozie and Ray 1982, 20). Allison suggests, that there was a typological development from simple forms to the more elaborately carved monoliths. And he sees the survival of dynastic traditions linking the monoliths as memorials to the *Ntoons* or priest chiefs among the Nta as evidence of autochony for the *Ntoon* pillar. By contrast, the pillars of groups like the Nta, Nselle and Akaju are seen as reflecting intrusive peoples.

Since Allison's work, several more monoliths have been discovered particularly to the north of the area studied by him. Recently, Anozie and Ray (1982) found traces of former settlements and or monoliths at Ukele, Wanikade and Nsadop all in the western, northwestern, and central parts of Ogoja. We on our part have discovered monoliths in the boundary zone between Nigeria and Cameroon up on the Obudu ranch.

Although Allison regarded the Nta Nnam distribution as central and other examples, usually poorly executed, as peripheral, Anozie and Ray have shown that small monoliths, some of which (at least in Ukelle) are decorated, occur well beyond the limits of Allison's recorded examples; occurring

also in present-day and abandoned village sites. In the latter, they were however found in or near identified 'play ground'. Although unable to examine groups of these stones *in situ* because their visit was rather brief, they did note that the names for the stones in these places were also generic; *Obawa* (stone), *boku* (stone) or *atal*; rather than *Akwanshi*. Indeed the presence of monoliths at Nsadop and up on Obudu plateau near the cattle ranch introduces very important new dimensions not considered by Allison, especially to do with the nature of the cultural stratum responsible for the development of this art and its overall age.

The Middle Cross River Peoples and their History

Allison did correctly observe that this geographical zone has been long neglected by anthropologists and historians. Not surprisingly and as rightly pointed out by Anozie and Ray (1982, 22), the history of the middle and upper Cross River peoples of south-eastern Nigeria and south-western Cameroon, as of such other unstudied groups lacking a written history of their own, has so far been a story of outsiders views of them. Even the name 'Ekoï' used to denote most of these people is an Efik word used for describing indiscriminately all people up river from their own lands (Anozie and Ray 1982, 22-23).

As we have already tried to show recent historical and linguistic studies indicate that some of these so called 'Ekoï' groups, like the Boki, are clearly distinguishable from one another. However the relationship of people like the Ejagham to many other of their their neighbours is far from distinct. Earlier writers like Talbot (1926) regard the Nta Nnam people and neighbour as migrants from Ejagham land, while others like the linguist, Waters (quoted in Ita 1981, 109-111) researching proto - Ekoid', regard them as close to an original dispersal area by the confluence of the Ewayon and Cross Rivers. Allison identified three main styles which, in his view,

might be chronologically significant. These were (i) the Nta style with cylindrical figure and a definite groove separating the head from the body; (ii) the Nnam massive boulders covered with profuse and well executed surface decoration; and (iii) the Nselle style which tends towards the Nta style but with occasional carvings of individual originality.

Methods observed by Allison as having been used to work such hardstones were pecking or chipping with a hammer stone. Apparently only a few of the Nta stones were given fully sculptured heads. Elsewhere only the protuberant navel stood out from the surface, while the nose, lip and some other features appeared in low relief. Much of the decoration consist of engraved lines; probably made by continuous rubbing rather than chipping. One of the former age grade companies of the Nnam was called *Anepeptal*, meaning the stone makers'. They were said to have been responsible for setting up the stones – an extremely laborious work probably carried out by a team of workers under the direction of a master sculptor.

Allison notes that the people of the Akwanshi (including the Nde) speak distinct but related forms of an Ekoid-Bantu language (see Crabb 1965) as against the Nyum and Iyala neighbours who speak a Kwa language.

There is also the fact that in immediate pre-colonial days they were divided into two warring factions, who still regard each other with hostility. Relying largely on these, and the fact that in recent (ethnographic) times the affairs of each community were directed by the elders under whom the young men were organized in age-grade companies with *Ekpe* society providing the social scale for men, Allison postulates that the Nta Akwanshi represented 30–40 *Ntoons* (priest chiefs or village heads) whose function in recent times has been mainly religious and ceremonial and ending around 1900 A.D. An estimate of ten years reign for each *Ntoon* enabled Allison to place their origin somewhere around 1600 A.D. The Nta group of stones was regarded by him as showing the most internal stylistic development, and so these were regarded as the earliest to be made.

Allison argues that the development of the stones as *Ntoon*

materialism was part of a general trend towards socio-cultural complexity spurred on later by contact with coastal peoples, through them with European traders and through them too, with a wider world. More plausible alternative explanations for the observations so far recorded do exist and should be taken into account. Ethnographic evidence indicate that the extent of the *Ntoon's* authority varied, from a single village to the whole of the sub-group. It is thus not unlikely that in pre-slavery times the group was larger and much more closely knit, with the *Ntoon* being both a religious and political head. With slavery came social disruption and so, break up into independent units who had to fend for themselves or perish. The disruption wrought by slave-raiding and slave trade may make it extremely difficult to obtain authentic oral traditions for reconstructing the cultural setting and time which gave rise to the stone sculptures. Allison is convinced with reason that seniority was a traditional qualification for the selection of the *Ntoon*; but his contention that each *Ntoon* may not have occupied the post for more than an average of about ten years is mere speculation, not a truly historical postulation. While his claims that the *Akwanshi* were memorials of the founders of the dynasty finds ethnographic support, his interpretation of the lifespan of the dynasty as lasting for four to five centuries is based on a rather static functionalist and very ahistorical view of the social system of the 'Ekoi' – that is that they were always organized in small rather egalitarian set-ups.

An alternative and more reasonable interpretation of the historical data as presently available is that the people were organized as a large kingdom either like those of Bini and Yorubaland or like that of Nri. Indeed the construction of the large and early *Akwanshi* burial memorials predicates a relatively strong, centralized and large scale socio-political set-up centralized in some sense and at least such that it could mobilize sufficient labour force for its needs. If this was so, the average rule of the kings would be anything between 25 and 30 which would mean that the origins of the *Akwanshi* may

fall any where between the last two or three centuries of the first millenium A.D. and the first two-third centuries of the second millenium A.D., that is about the same time as Igbo-Ukwu. The onset of the trans-Atlantic slave trade would appear to have affected this state, adversely leading to social fragmentation and degeneration in the art (Andah and Anquandah 1988). The stone scupture continued to degenerate until recent times, but is continued today mostly in cylindrical logs of wood.

Recent archaeological findings seem to confirm this alternative hypothesis. At both Emangabe and Alok, one kilometer away, Ekpo Eyo (1984) identified monoliths arranged in perfect circles (seventeen in all) at Alok. Fifteen of the Emangabe stones are carved. Two of these had smaller stones (said to be children) placed in front of them. The stones are reported to have been arranged in such a way that the human features on them looked inside the circle. Inside the circle there were a number of broken stones and slabs big enough to be sat upon, and arranged in a sort of deep horse shoe formation. At its closed end there was a pile of stone representing a fire place. Ekpo Eyo sank a trial trench within this enclosure. Although it did not yield any artefacts, it revealed a fire place and charcoal from the ashy soil in the immediate vicinity of the fireplace dated to 1780 ± 50 B.P., that is around 200 A.D. If this date is anything to go by, it would be very significant since it is much more clearly in agreement with our postulated time scheme than Allison's and points to the fact that the sculptures are the work of previous inhabitants who may be related in some way or another to the present inhabitants of northern Cross River and indeed other parts of the region.

According to Eyo (1984, 103), the stones of the Alok circle are shorter, more squat and with wider grooves than those of Emangabe. In the middle of this circle stands an enormous cotton tree with other smaller cotton trees dotted within the complex. If these cotton trees, said to have been planted during inauguration of certain age grades, were planted at same time as the stone circle was built, then the stone circle

may be dated through dating trees. But there is a possibility, that the circle and trees relate to two distinct time periods and even societies. In any case all available indication suggest that at least the oldest series of the stone circles long predate the slave trade and were the handwork of relatively large and well organized societies. It is not unlikely that *Nsibidi* writing, which was used by these so called 'Ekoi' peoples was one of the other achievements of this early civilization in this region. An *Nsibidi* symbol in the form of a hoop, which represented the former manilla currency and indicted wealth, is recognized on certain stones. Such a state have had a reliable agricultural/technological base, with iron being in use. It also seems reasonable to assume that long distance trade was a major feature of life connecting such a state to peoples to the north (Tiv, Jukun etc.), west (Igbo-Ukwu, Niger Delta peoples; Bini and Ife) and Bantu peoples to the east. Quite clearly, archaeological work is urgently required in this area if the substantial gaps in the history of Akwanshi state and society is to be filled.

Such work must be done within proper historical context, bearing in mind that (i) the main ethnic groups in Akwanshi land speak languages that are mutually intelligible and appear to have conformed to similar political and social usages, although they seem to be traditionally divided into two antagonistic groups – the Nta Nselle Abanyom and Akaju on the one hand and the Nnam, Nde and Nkum on the other (considered to be interlopers from the north by the former group) and (ii) traditional Nnam parent village is Alok and from this centre the surrounding settlements of Emangabe Nlul Ntelakor Ekulegom, Ntol-Sin and Edamkono, each with its group of Akwanshi, were established. The Nnam then pushed westwards towards the Ewanyom River and founded Agba-said to be the most recently founded Nnam town where Akwanshi is set up.

While Allison's chronology for the Akwanshi does not appear to be supported by the little archaeological evidence yet available, some of his other general observations are quite

valid. Firstly we agree with him that research into these questions should be regarded as urgent, particularly because this is part of that Nigeria-Cameroon zone which linguistic studies suggest may have been the homeland of proto-Bantu language and the point of original dispersal of Bantu and (or Bantoid language). Secondly, Allison observed very correctly that the task goes beyond the competence of linguists, traditional historians and custodians of local traditions. Indeed it is beginning to be evident that archaeology has a very central role to play, and not just for verifying the historical models put up earlier but to make available new and more reliable approaches to the study of past periods for which there are little or no oral records.

From very random surface collections following a week end visit to sites in the Ogoja area (Ogomogom I and II in Ukelle, Nsadop and Boka Botuom in Nsadop), comprising of a few pottery sherds (36) and two fragments of clay smoking pipe bowls at Ogomogom II, Anozie and Ray reach conclusions which appear to contradict Allison's centre - periphery model which places the first carved monoliths at the Nta areas, and as late as 1600. These clay smoking pipes, being of the heavier local type, clearly place the site to at least a pre-European advent. Noting also that the abstract features of the Ogomogom I stone are closet in style to the Etinka Nta group while the shape of the stone is yet more basic, Anozie and Ray argue that if these are indeed the earliest, then there is certainly no one point of origin for the carving practice. They also draw attention to evidence of a 'storage pot' and dish which appears to link the Nsadop I settlement site directly with Boka Botuom and its use as a shrine. If this relationship dates back in time, it may well be significant for understanding why and how particularly the phalli-form pillars and related shapes came to be associated with ancestors.

Finally is the fact that all who have investigated these monoliths observe that most are deliberately set at definite angles. Anozie and Ray indicate specifically that they stand at an angle of between 150 and 200 from the vertical at

Ogomogom I and at 20–25° at Nsadop I. Where the standing stones have not suffered much disturbance from man or environment, their orientations could have some archaeo-astronomic implication as we now know to be the case for similar upright slabs and basalt columns used for graves at 'Ngamoratunga' in Kenya and dated to around 300 B.C. (Lynch and Robbins N.D.; Soper and Lynch 1977).

Since hardly any systematic archaeological work has yet been done in the Nigerian part of the Cross River basin, it is not really possible at this stage to compare this region's history with findings from related areas as Afikpo to the south and the Benue and Grassfields regions to the north. At Ezi Ukwu Ukpa I rock shelter at Afikpo, a culture assemblage spanning from about 500 B.C. to 2500 B.C. has a stone component which includes heavy flaked hoe-like tools and axes and adzes, besides smaller tools and some microliths; and is marked by the first appearance of pottery. Pottery is also known to exist in the Nsukka area from as far back (at least) as 3230–3340 ± 125 B.C.

Both ecological and the archaeological evidence so far available at site like Ezi Ukwu Ukpa I in Afikpo and Nsukka University farm strongly indicate the possibility that earliest Neolithic farmers in this general region may have found the uplands of Nigeria and west Cameroons much more attractive because the forests would have been easier to clear and slower to regenerate than at lower altitudes, and the soils were specially fertile. Epidemiological factors may also have encouraged such settlement and population expansion (increase). In any case, from the Cross River basin east to that of the Sanaga, and to the upper Kadei and thus into the Congo basin, there are widespread traces of peoples whose material culture included stone axes and other heavy duty, perhaps agricultural tools besides smaller stone artefacts; which eventually resulted in the creation of what Letonzey (1968), called the zone post-forestiere. David claims that the presence of Kwa speakers at a similar technological level would have militated against the evidence of Nsukka farm, the Ezi Ukwu

Ukpa rock shelter in Eastern Nigeria, Sumlaka rock shelter (5° 52'N. 10° 5'E) and Abeke rock shelter, 10 kilometers to the north east, all in the Cameroon grasslands. The first is dated to between the early 6th M and Late 4th M B.C. Pottery formed part of the equipment of most of these peoples. It seems also that these constituted part of a relatively high grassland region (including at least, Obudu if not the Oban hills) with favourable conditions for early food producers, which they actively exploited: light easily cleared forest, fertile soils, lower incidence of diseases like sleeping sickness and malaria, and general excellent potential for a mixed economy, (though there is as yet no direct evidence of cattle rearing). Indeed many have postulated (David 1982, 9) that given its ecological advantages, this general region was probably a centre of population increase from which groups expanded eastwards into the lowland forest to begin the process of clearing which eventually resulted in the creation of a zone (post-forestiere). David claims that the presence of Kwa speakers at a similar technological level would have militated against migration to the west, while either Adamawa peoples had already colonized the plateau, or its poorer soils discouraged Bantu expansion in this direction.

Archaeological findings from Tse Dura rock shelter in the Katsina Ala River basin (Benue), directly north of the Obudu plateau region, indicates knowledge of iron working in the early centuries B.C. (200–400 B.C.) and possibly even earlier. This significant improvement in technology probably initially spread along natural communication routes such as rivers which by now were probably lined up with settlement of Neolithic farmers and fishermen.

Extensive archaeological field survey is likely to turn up more evidence of early (pre-historic) settlements especially in the northern regions than have so far been located. The fact that we have located such evidence immediately north in southern Tiv country (in the Adikpo Katsina Ala region) gives ample support to this view. Anozie and Ray (1982, 27) suggest that such earlier sites are more likely in locations somewh-

away from the sites with monoliths; for instance, rock shelter sites in the Nsadop area. They note quite correctly that the discovery of Late Stone Age and Early Iron Age objects, which might be interpreted as ancestral in style to the later monoliths, could help in finding out origins of the practice. In Agbo village in Adadama area of Obubra, Nicklin reports finding a rock shelter and a cave in the vicinity of a hill top settlement; in the Ukelle section of Ogoja local government area and Nkarasi in Ikom local government area, he found abundant evidence for iron working. Interestingly enough, both people's have traditions of Igbo origins. The sites and settlements in Ejagbam forest, also need to be studied. There is urgent need to carry out a systematic surface survey of abandoned 'playground' sites, in particular their settlement debris and features – present over the entire area between Abakaliki and Ikom. It is only by this means that much more structured and historically meaningful comparisons can emerge, specially as concerns the interrelation of monolith-style (location, and ceramic evidence). Where necessary the sequential and other relationships of observed material cultural style variability (in particular for lithics and ceramics) can be investigated by excavation.

Thirdly there is need for a more detailed examination of the Nta–Nnam zone focusing explicitly on the *Ntoon* stones and associated burials. Of course we would need to obtain both the permission and close collaboration of the local people. If such a use of historical archaeological and oral historical approaches is attempted, it ought to lead to a much better understanding of the more recent contact history of these societies. Allison has already pointed to the existence of imported trade goods in the graves by the *Etinta Ntoon* stones. Apart from these mostly 'historical' questions concerned with establishing an internal sequence, archaeology can also help immensely in the investigations of questions concerning the cultural context and meaning of the monoliths as well as the nature of the relationship between these Ejagham peoples and those who now regard themselves either as the 'real Ejagham'

or those who consider themselves as entirely different, such as the Boki (Anozie and Ray 1982, 28).

The urgency of such archaeological work cannot be over-emphasized. In the Cross River region, as indeed other parts of Nigeria, economic development proceeds at a very rapid rate and has already resulted in the damage of some very important historical sites, and consequently, permanent loss of evidence. The construction of highways and buildings especially industrial estates has resulted in the irrevocable damage of sites like those of Marian road extension and 'SESTRADE' supermarket in Calabar and Nkarasi, which is within the area of distribution of the Cross River monoliths (Allison 1968).

It is clear from the fore-going that we know far too little about these areas anthropologically and, especially, archaeologically and so cannot really comment definitively on the culture histories of, as well as time relationship between the earliest agricultural populations of its relatively ecologically advantaged areas. Who existed first before the other, the yam producing northerners, the palm growing peoples further south or the fishing and salt boiling communities established near the coast? Were they established simultaneously? Were these 'related' linguistically and or culturally? In our present state of knowledge it is not clear whether these three contrasting economic systems, which were undoubtedly the earliest to be established, were set up originally by subdivisions of one and the same linguistic or cultural group, or by three linguistically and/or culturally distinct peoples. Put differently, we cannot as yet be definitive as to how geographical and cultural factors interacted in this region to give us the present linguistic and cultural divergences evident in these areas within which the earliest food producing societies of the region were established and from which some of them may have moved for different reasons and in different directions in the course of time. Linguists, archaeologists, cultural anthropologists and physical anthropologists can help by collaborating to study these three nuclear centres in their various ways. Archaeologists can of

course help in such a study if and where their investigations succeed in identifying the locale for the production of durable goods such as pottery, raffia cloth, metal (iron) works, wood work (e.g. canoe manufacturing); the scale of such industries as well as their histories.

CHAPTER 3

The Early History of the Ibibio People

by
NOAH M.

Geographical and Historical Environments

The Ibibio people occupy the southeast corner of Nigeria and are estimated to number over three million. They share a common boundary with the Igbo people to the north-west and the Ijo to the west and south-west. To the north and north-east, Ibibio settlements intermingle with those of the Ekoi. The Bight of Bonny (formerly known as the Bight of Biafra) forms the southern boundary. On the map the people are located between latitudes $4^{\circ} 30'$ and $5^{\circ} 30'$ north, and longitudes $7^{\circ} 30'$ and $8^{\circ} 30'$ east; but there are also some Ibibio settlements in some of the creeks and estuaries of the Cross and the Qua Iboe Rivers.

Topographical. Ibibioland is fairly flat, with no part of it rising beyond 180 metres above sea level (Talbot, 1914). The main physical features of Ibibioland are the Cross and Qua Iboe Rivers, both of which take their parallel course to the sea and receive small affluents on the way (Talbot, 1914). Even though there is the absence of significant heights in the region, the monotony of the flat featureless landscape is broken by river valleys most of which remain dry from greater part of the year (Udoh, 1970). Particularly around Itu, this undulating nature of the landscape creates low hills with valleys, some of which are inundated during the rainy season. And where these depressions are underlain with clay, water can collect there for several months of the year. The main tributaries of

the Cross River which drain the Ibibio area include the Ikpa, Uya Oron and Jamestown Rivers while those of the Qua Iboe River are the Awa, Ubium and Eket Rivers. Some of the tributaries of the Qua Iboe River drain a common area with the Imo River.

Toward the sea, the land is flat and low-lying that the lower courses of these rivers are so well connected by creeks and rivulets, constituting continuous waterways with the Opobo and Bonny Rivers. The existence of natural canals and creeks in the area makes it possible for one to travel by sea to Bonny, Sapele and even beyond.

Around Itu, the region is constituted a vast coastal plain densely over-grown with forests. These are said to be secondary forests, scarcely more than two hundred years old – the theory is that this area might have been inhabited some two hundred years ago (Stevens H.D.). For some reasons not all too clear, the population was exterminated by either pestilence or some gigantic slave raid and the forest returned. (Stevens H.D.). Whatever happened, these are evergreen tropical forests with varieties of plant life ranging from mahogany to the silk cotton tree, and they connect themselves through Oban to the Cameroons and the Congo (Urwin, 1920). Also along river banks in Ibibioland can be found long tongues of fringing forests which extend into the dry forest zone. This is due mostly not only to the greater amount of moisture available for growth but also to the greater amount of sunlight reaching the ground, which has the effect of encouraging vegetative growth (Morgan & Pugh, 1969).

Immediately beyond the secondary forests along the river plains is the oil palm belt. Although the palm belt of Nigeria stretches through the breadth of southern provinces, the Ibibio areas of Ikot Ekpene, Abak, Uyo and Etinan constitute the major oil palm belt of south-eastern Nigeria. These oil palms grow wild for the most part and, as it will be shown later. Most economic activities of the people were centred around the oil palm.

In recent historical times, it has been shown that the Por-

tuguese reached Ibibio area in 1472 and by the 16th century, gave some of the major rivers in the area names. Foremost among these were the Cross and the Qua Iboe Rivers. Talbot, however, recorded that it was not until the 17th century that the Ibibio area came into historical limelight. The most important factor responsible for this was the slave trade.

Before 1793, when the invention of the cotton gin made the cultivation of cotton a profitable undertaking, the demand for African slaves was stimulated by the labour needs of the sugar cane plantations in the Caribbean Islands. The spread of the plantation system throughout the Caribbean (Barbados, Antigua, Antigua, St. Kitts and Jamaica) in the first half of the 17th century (Mannix and Cowley, 1968) called for more labour in order to make the cultivation of sugar cane a profitable venture. This innocuous crop became responsible for increased demand for African slaves. Slaves of Ibibio origin were exported to the Caribbean Island along with slaves of other nationalities.

The earliest known reference to the Ibibio people appeared in a work written in 1627 by a Jesuit priest who laboured among the slave population in Latin America (Hair, 1967). The priest, Sandoval, attempted to establish the ethnic origins of slaves in the Caribbean Island and showed that among them were a people known as Moko. Moko was the name by which Ibibio slaves were known in the West Indies and might have originated from the Ibibio word, *omokop* (Have you heard me? or Do you understand me?) One field informant maintained that the name originated from the Ibibio word, *mboko* meaning sugar cane, and this has been explained as follows (Chief Akpaidem, 1978). Since many slaves of Ibibio origin who worked in the West Indian sugar plantations were already familiar with this crop in their country of origin, the use of the word, *mboko* (sugar cane) could have become common among the slaves. They might have even developed work slogan arising from the dominance of *mboko* in their daily lives. Sandoval, working among slaves in Latin America, must have encountered Ibibio slaves whose frequent use of

the word *mboko* had made a corruption of the word their nickname hence, MOKO.

The identity of Moko need not detain us. Specimens of the Moko language collected by Oldendorps in the Caribbean Island are the same with the present Ibibio language (Oldendorps, 1777). Writing about the Igbo neighbours of the Ibibio people, John Adams once remarked that 'the country inhabited by a nation called Ibibby (Ibibio), or Quaws (the Mocoos of the West Indies) bounds it (Igbo country) in the east' (Adams, 1823). Mary Kingsley also noted that 'the Kwa are a tribe from whom drawn the supplies of Kwo or Kwa slaves known under the name of Mocoos in the West Indies' (Kingsley, 1896). It needs, however, to be mentioned that the Ibibio and some other peoples of the Lower Cross River were known by many deferent names, including Kwa or Kwo, Moko and Egboshary or Egbòshari.

The Ibibio people speak a language of that name and even though its origins are not clear, it has been speculated that it might have originated from either the Ibibio command word of 'Ibibio' (we say that he/it should be beheaded) (Udo, 1983) or from Ibibio encounters with the pygmies who occupied parts of Ibibio country in very ancient times (Herodotus, 1949). Among the Ibibio, pygmies are known as *ibio-ibio Ibon* (short, short people). In the event of an attack by the pygmies, against whom the Ibibio had to fight for land, *ibio-ibio* (short, short) might have been a popular war cry sufficient to rally the people to a war against the pygmies.

Origin and Migrations

Even though our information about the origins of the Ibibio people is meagre, fragmentary and sometimes capricious, available evidence, nonetheless, points to Cameroon as the place of the evolution of the core of the Ibibio people. It seems also, that the Ibibio are among the longest living people to have inhabited the region between Lower Cross and Qua Iboe Rivers. These points will now be taken separately.

Writing in 1846 about the Ibibio people, Daniel remarked

that their ancestors migrated from a distant country up the Cross River (David, 1948). Given the fact that the Cross River rises in the Cameroon mountains and flows for about half of its three hundred and twenty kilometres course in that country before emptying itself in the Bight of Bonny, Daniel's observation certainly points to the Cameroon as the likely place of origin of the core of the Ibibio people. Henry Nau, a pioneer Lutheran missionary among the Ibibio, also remarked that these people might have migrated from the Cameroon (Nau, 1949) and Dike (1956) also noted that the Ibibio people migrated from the Cameroon highland along with many Nigerian peoples of the Niger Delta. More recently, Floyd expressed the same opinion when he said that the Ibibio might have migrated from the Cameroon upland to the east, settled around the Cross River estuary and started to spread from there until they were checked by other people (Floyd, 1969).

Written evidence has also been corroborated by oral testimonies. Accordingly, one field informant maintained that the core of the Ibibio people is Afaha lineage whose original home was in Usak Edet in the Cameroon. (Ekong, 1978). For our limited purpose, it should be noted that the Afaha kinship is found in almost all parts of Ibibioland. Among many Ibibio people, Usak Edet is popularly known as Edik Afaha (Afaha's creek) if only to reflect the fact that all the Afaha peoples in Ibibioland originated from Usak Edet (Ekong, 1978) Even though the Afaha kinship permeates almost all parts of Ibibioland, it is important to point out that an ethnic group is not a biologically homogeneous breeding population. In other words, no ethnic group can make claims to biological purity. For a number of reasons, people move and relocate in new areas and eventually become absorbed by the original settlers. This in part explains the existence of different and widely divergent stories of origin even at the level of the village. Ibibio society is patrilineal but there are instances when the offsprings of a marriage desert their parents and escape to the village of their mother (*edem eka*), raise their family and live there in perpetuity. Depending on the circumstances that

compelled their flight, their offsprings may completely disown their fatherland their ancestral origin can be explained only within the context of the new reality.

Economic forces can be a major factor in creating ethnic complexity, so also can warfare and the factor of claims. Superior economic or political opportunities elsewhere may encourage a relocation of a people and lead eventually to the emergence of a new ethnic group. Some or all of these factors can be operative in the formation of an ethnic group. For whatever reasons, however, it should be noted that an ethnic group is a melange of people drawn from several and different ancestral stock. The one-father theory which seeks to explain an ethnic group only from the perspective of a single ancestor is clearly inadequate and untenable. The implication of this with respect to Ibibio origin is that after the core of the Ibibio people might have left the Cameroon and settled in their present location, they certainly received people from other ancestral stock who came to identify themselves as Ibibio and are today known as such.

It may never be known when the Ibibio groups who derived from the Cameroon came to their present location. As against this, however, Talbot remarked that 'the Ibibios would seem to be a people of hoar antiquity, and so long have they dwelt in this region that no legend of an earlier home can be traced among them' (Talbot, 1914) Researching among the Ijo, Talbot (1932) was told by an informant that the Ibibio are the first ever made by God.

Commenting on the antiquity of the Ibibio people in their present location, Robert M'Keown (1912) remarked that the Ibibio are 'probably the stock native from whom most of the small tribes in the Qua Iboe and Calabar have sprung.' Based on their antiquity in southern Nigeria, Talbot suggests that by 7000 B.C. firm formations of some of the ethnic groups in the Ibibio area had begun. He noted, for instance, that the Ibibio area, with its abundant wild fruits, fish and salt obtained from the salt rivers, was capable of supporting human life from very early times (Talbot, 1926). Unfortunately, archaeological

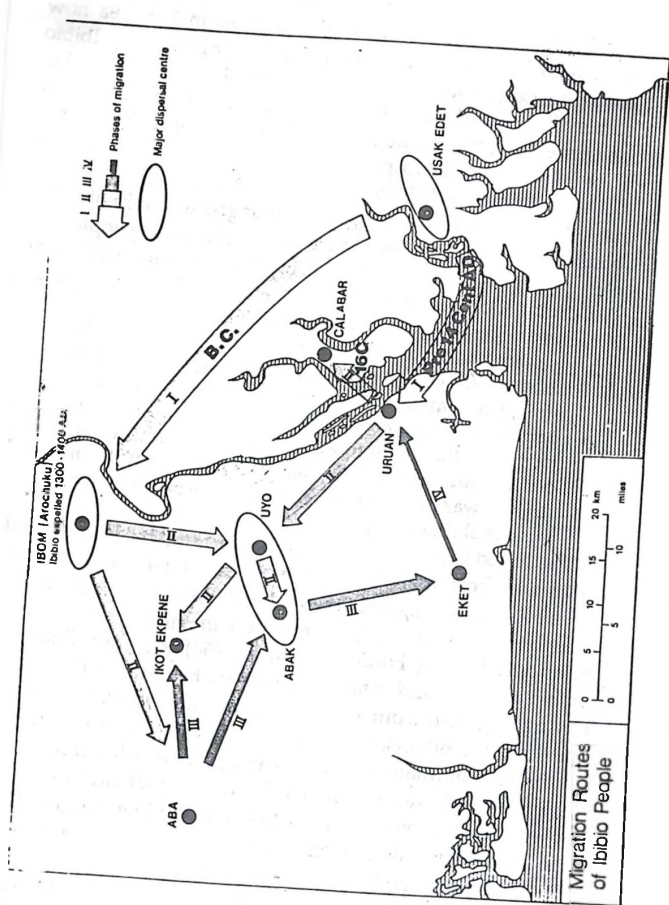


Fig. Migration Routes of Ibibio People

information from the Ibibio area is lacking, if not-existent.

After the bulk of the Ibibio had arrived in the area now known as Nigeria, the earliest point of settlement by Ibibio speaking people appears to have been Ibom in Arochuku. Ashley has remarked in this regard that it is 'probable that at one time the whole of the Aro district on the right bank of the Cross River was Ibibio country' (Ashley, 1929). In a similar manner, Jeffreys (1935) observed that the Long Juju which gave the Aro their notoriety once belonged to the Ibibio. According to Chief Ikpe, the Ebrutu clan of the Ibibio people was the principal clan in charge of this famous shrine at Arochuku. Commenting on the extent of Ibibio influence in Arochuku, Shankland (1955) wrote as follows:

It seems fairly certain that before the coming of the Ibos, the Ibibio had a Juju, Ibiritam, situated by a little stream not far from the present town of Ibom. What particular property or power was supposedly attached to the Juju in those early days will be ever uncertain but certain it is that the Juju survived the (Ibibio) war and was before long to become the most famous shrine in Nigeria.

The Ibibio must have lived in Ibom for quite sometime but migration from there to other parts of Ibibioland seemed to have begun not long after their arrival in Ibom. This led to the conglomeration of Ibibio population in the Uyo/Abak corridor described by Forde and Jones (1950) as eastern Ibibio or 'Ibibio proper', and whose inhabitants have no traditions of having migrated from anywhere nor of having displaced any previous inhabitants. From this second point of dispersal (see map), parts of Imam, Ikot Abasi and perhaps Ubium received settlers. In this respect, it will be noted, that oral evidence shows that sections of Ikot Abasi and Oniong migrated to their present locations from the Uyo/Abak corridor so also were the bulk of the inhabitants in Abak. (Udoh, 1971).

Traditions of origin of the Uruan and Oron people maintain that they reached their present locale by sea, after having left Usak Edet. This would suggest a migration pattern in which the Ibibio people reached the mainland parts of Ibibioland

both by sea and by land from Usak Edet. Be that as it may, one cannot be very rigid on routes of migration and relocations do occur, thus making it extremely difficult to discuss with precision the subject of routes of migrations of peoples in oral societies.

The last group of Ibibio people left Ibom as a result of clashes with the Igbo people which resulted in a war often referred to as the Ibibio war (Shankland, 1955). Driven by land hunger, the Igbo came into collision with the northern fringe of the Ibibio people. War ensued, and to avert a defeat, the Igbo sought the assistance of Akpa mercenaries. The last named were of Okoyong origin – 'a fragment of a Cameroon tribe now long resident in Calabar Division' (Shankland, 1955). Led by two war captains, Osim and Okuma, the intervention of the Akpa mercenaries on the side of the Igbo tipped the scale against the Ibibio, (Shankland, 1955). Talbot (1926) has estimated that the Ibibio war which resulted in the expulsion of the last group of the Ibibio people from Ibom might have occurred between 1300 and 1400 A.D. and that the Aro themselves might have been descendants of the Ibibio people.

Even though the Usak Edet theory of origin of the Ibibio people is the most popular, Arikpo (1957) has speculated that the Ibibio, the Efik, the Aro and the Ejagham peoples must have migrated into their present location from somewhere around the valley of the Benue. He associates the Jukun with the formation of some of the ethnic groups in the Cross River basin. Jukun influence in Old Calabar at some historical time period is not open to doubt. The widespread use of the manilla in the Niger/Benue region has given rise to speculations that the Jukun used the port facilities at Calabar for the consignment of their slaves; and since the manilla was a popular currency in the Calabar region, Jukun trade with these people might have been responsible for the introduction of this currency in that region. Jukun southern drive to the coast appears to have been recent, compared to the formation of Ibibio settlements in their present locations. But it is possible that Jukun activities in the area did result in widespread population dis-

location, forcing people to seek new homes in some of the Ibibio areas which had already been settled. There is nothing to suggest that Jukun appearance at the Atlantic coast at the height of their power in the 16th century signalled the formation of the various ethnic groups in the Ibibio areas. The other speculations of the Ibibio migrating from Ethiopia (Atai, 1978) or Abyssinia (Jeffreys,) can be seen as nothing more than a dim reflection of a historical migration from the east of their present location.

Political and Social Organization

Ibibio political organization in traditional times remained essentially segmentary. There was no centralized political organization, and to this extent, authority was not concentrated in the hands of any one individual. Governing was not a full time occupation. The heads of the various political units combined whatever functions were attached to their offices with recognized occupations or trade.

The typical political unit in Ibibioland was the village, and each village was lineage-based, with the family (*idip*) constituting the smallest unit. The family consisted the man, his wife or wives and the children. Ibibio society remained patriarchal, with the man as the head of the family. The *Ekpuk* (extended family) had its lineage head (*Obong Ekpuk*) – often the oldest and respectable male member of the lineage. This individual performed sacrifices at the shrine of the ancestors of the lineage, and since he remained the custodian of the ancestral shrine, he was sometimes referred to as *okup ekpo*.

The largest most effective political unit in Ibibio society was the village (*idung*) whose head (*Obong idung*) was selected from the family that could claim direct descent from the founder's first born male. This individual enjoyed wide respect among members of the village. The strict genealogical restriction of succession to this office often gave greater weight to his opinion particularly in judicial matters. As the person considered as having greater acquaintance with the correct custom, his opinion on judicial matters was considered

to be divinely inspired and therefore an authority.

To assist the village head in the work of governing, there was the village council. This remained the highest legislative body for the village and had powers of life and death over all members of the village. The practice by which political offices in the village were shared among the various lineage heads precluded the concentration of political power in the hands of any one individual. The heads of the various secret societies in the village were chosen from among the heads of the lineages. All heads of lineages were members of the village council which often met once a week unless in the case of emergency.

Preceding the meeting of the village council was a meeting of the lineage assembly (*mbono ekpuk*), which usually took place in the compound of the lineage head. A meeting of the lineage assembly provided members of the lineage with the opportunity for voicing their grievances and offering opinion on pending village legislations. The lineage assembly also enabled the lineage head to sound opinion of its members on a wide variety of matters of interest to the lineage which might be brought up in the village council.

Sitting in the village council, presided over by the village head, members made laws to govern the village. Laws were made for the protection of life and property of individuals, the conservation of soils; the protection of crops; the regulation of harvests; village sanitation, particularly the roads, squares and sources of water supply; the protection of the chastity of women; and for orderly behaviour whether at home, market places or playground. Laws were also made to govern burials of the dead, treatment of twins and their mothers and for the protection of visitors and strangers. These laws were very rigidly enforced and apparently very much obeyed for fear of punishment. Offences could be handled at the level of the family, the lineage, the village or by a specially constituted jury.

Among the Ibibio, there were two classes of laws. One class consisted of laws whose breach was held to be not only illegal but also an offence against supernatural powers of the land.

Of the perpetrators of such laws, it would be said that they have offended the land (*oduo obom*). Included in this class of laws were laws which governed the relationship between in-laws and grandchildren (*eyeyin*). For offences for which the culprit was not known, *mbiam* was often employed. *Mbiam* was a dejection supposed to have magical powers and capable of detecting culprits and punishing them. The belief was that by employing the services of *mbiam*, the guilty person would fall sick and die, usually by dropsy, unless such an individual confessed his transgressions. Then the curse which *mbiam* had inflicted was removed (M'keown, 1912). Appropriate punishments existed for every infraction of the law. Even tale-bearing (*inua iko*) or gossiping was punishable by law. Upon investigation the information was found to be un-

Besides known punishment for violations, laws in Ibibio had sanctions of moral coercion as opposed to sanctions of physical coercion. In the former, the individual who broke the law was subjected to open expressions of reprobation or to ridicule and such moral or satirical sanctions that often compelled strict observance of the law.

The Ibibio people used a number of devices to communicate the laws of the society to her citizens. Lacking in an institutionalized means of transmitting messages, societies maintained the pedestrian system of communication. The use of plants in this regard was very popular. Such plants as the young shoot of the palm tree (*Ela eisguineensis*) known among the Ibibio as *eyei* or *ekpin* served useful functions in conveying messages of prohibitive intent. Thus if a faction wished to declare war on a neighbouring village, an envoy would be sent carrying *eyei* to the enemy village to announce the intention. This plant would assure him of safe-conduct through the enemy territory because of the belief that any contravention of this age-old convention was bound to result in a sure defeat in the impending war (Afia, 1978). *Eyeyi* could also be used as an emblem of injunction, especially in cases of land dispute. If it was desired that neither party should make use of a piece of

land under dispute, *eyei* was often displayed on a conspicuous spot on the land nobody would do any farm work on the land until the matter was settled. (Afia, 1978).

Sometimes known as *ofong is in ekpo* (the devil's loin cloth) (Okon, 1981) *eyei* tied at the entrance of an *ekpo* grove meant that the area was prohibited to none members of the *ekpo* society. If placed on a bundle of firewood, bamboos or palm fruits, it served as a warning that unauthorized person should not tamper with those items. Among the Ibibio, a vehicle carrying a corpse is often decorated with *eyei* in the belief that by so doing, evil spirit will not drag the vehicle in the opposite direction and thus stop it from moving. If the family of a defendant accused of a serious crime tied *eyei* to a manilla and gave the emblem to a powerful chief, the chief would communicate this action to the family of the plaintiff and so restrain them from taking unilateral action until the matter was settled.

Other Ibibio plants used as symbols for conveying messages included the *mbritm* or the ginger lilly (*costus afer*) and *mkpatatat* (*selaginella*). The ginger lilly was usually split and lined on a plot of land or tied to the entrance of the plot to serve as warning against defecation on the land or cutting of trees therefrom when the land was to be farmed that planting season. *Mbritem* and *mkpatatat* could be burnt in a house at night because the odour emanating from them was believed to be inimical to evil spirit.

The actual enforcement of village laws was the responsibility of a number of organizations like the *ekpo* security and age-groups or age-sets. *Ekpo* secret society was so awe-inspiring that nobody would dare question its actions. Village laws were always enforced to the letter by the agents of the *ekpo* society.

These *Ekpo* messengers which executed village laws were always masked in order to hid their identity. Horton has observed in this regard that masking represented a device to ensure the acceptance of the harsher sanctions applied by society on offenders of community law. He noted, for instance, that

when messengers are masked, 'it becomes possible for the public to accept their actions, however harsh, as impersonal manifestations of the collective will' (Horton, 1971). On the other hand, if they are unmasked and therefore identifiable, their actions may cause dangerous resentments through suspicion of sectional interest (Horton, 1971). To reveal the identity of *ekpo* messengers constituted an offence punishable by death in most cases, or by suspension from membership of the society, and a heavy fine for a member who revealed it to a woman. Membership of the society is secret and if revealed to a non-member, the tale-bearer would still have to pay a heavy fine (Horton, 1971).

Other secret societies of stature in Ibibioland included the *ekpe ekong* and the *ebre*. *Ekpe* operated mainly in the riverain parts of Ibibioland and *ebre* was an exclusively female society, membership of which was gained only through a demonstration of uprightness of character and payment of initiation fee. The head of the *ebre* society usually took part in discussing village affairs and participated in making decisions, especially those that affected women.

Women in traditional Ibibio society did exercise enormous political, social and economic power. A women organization known as *ibann isong* constituted the most potent female organization in matters concerning winning political and social rights. Literarily meaning 'daughters of the land', they were practically owners of the land. No man of whatever standing in the society dared cross paths with *iban isong*. If a man were to address a woman using obscene language, the aggrieved lady could report the matter to the head of the women in that village. Depending on the seriousness of the matter, women usually marched in a group to the compound of men who offended womanhood to demand that he should 'wash the women clean'. And until he did that the man would be abused in the fowlest language possible. Should the matter be prolonged, the women could decide to 'sit in' on the man. To 'sit in' on a man amounted to a declaration of war. The women would stay in the man's compound and the man

would be responsible for their maintenance for as long as the 'sit in' lasted. Husbands found to be adulterous, recalcitrant or lazy and men in the habit of letting loose their cattle and goats to destroy women's farm crops were disciplined through such means (Ross, 1939).

Ibibio society in general was divided into age-sets or age-groups (*nka*). This was an institutional device to ensure social cohesiveness, and according to Goldie, each age-set was given a special assignment. A specific age group provided the bulk of the village army, another looked after the roads and public places and yet another was in charge of policing the town, while the senior age-group played the role of advisers and moderators (Talbot, 1926). No special ceremony for admission into a particular age-group was required; children were admitted into the first grade when they are about three to five years of age (Talbot, 1926). The male and female age-groups never mixed and each tried to settle disputes among members. Through the institution of age-groups, both the young and the old became aware of their mutual indispensability.

In matters of religion, the Ibibio people believed in the existence of a supreme being whom they called *Abasi* and who was seen as the creator and preserver of all things. Without him, nothing was possible. Among the Ibibio, sacrifices and libation served the same function of prayer as in the Christian faith. Four types of sacrifices can be identified. These are the sacrifices (i) of expiation, in which the performer sought to regain the favour of God for sins already committed; (ii) for warding off molestation from evil spirit; (iii) invoking the assistance of God for proposed projects, and (iv) thanksgiving. Sacrifices were regarded as definite denials and the higher the object of sacrifice, the greater the degree of denial.

Ancestors also played a central role in the people's religious practices. The family on earth was supposed to be in constant communication and co-operation with the family beyond which is made up of departed ancestors. It was only through such means that the protection and goodwill of the

ancestral spirits could be secured. At regular intervals and at such times considered necessary, sacrifices of food, fowl and other animals were offered by the priest at the family shrine to perpetuate memories of the founding ancestors of the family.

Improper and negligent conducts were abhorred because the people believed that such may arouse the anger of the departed ancestors, and so cause sickness. A major concern of the family, therefore, was to see that the dead were buried in a befitting manner. The Ibibio believed that when a person died, the individual joined the earlier ancestors in their own section of the country of the dead (*obio ekpo*) where everything to which the individual was accustomed to while on earth were also available. Only very old men and heads of families who were members of certain secret societies were buried in the house where they lived. Their burials always took place in secret before the death was made public. Great ceremonies often accompanied the burials of important men and women with all the member of the secret societies to which they belonged, participating. For some such people, there was often a second and even a more expensive burial ceremony when monuments with beautiful paintings and mould figures were erected.

Other members of the village had their own burial grounds according to their age and circumstances of their death. Thus women who died during labour, people who died from fall from great heights or those who committed suicide were given separate burial ground. Among the Ibibio suicide was a stigma on the family of the deceased, and the act often required sacrifices in order to avoid repetition.

Economy

Given the fact that Ibibio area covers a number of ecological zones including mangrove swamps, forestlands and the oil palm belt, it can be divided into two occupational zones. Those who lived along the river banks, on the estuaries and creeks were mostly fishermen, while those who lived in the upper drier parts were mostly farmers. However, these oc-

cupational zones were not mutually exclusive. Where either the Cross or the Qua Iboe River cuts deep into the area, farmers in the upper drier parts some fishing, and where possible, fishermen along the estuaries and creeks owned farmlands.

Even though the economy in early times was largely environment based, there was greater diversification than has been generally recognized. The economy, even in traditional times, showed elements of inventiveness regarding ways in which the people harnessed the products of the environment for their daily survival.

The coconut tree theory, put forward by the Europeans about Africans that live in climates where nature provides them with everything they need, and so need not exert themselves, (Herskovits 1940) does not apply to Ibibioland. In any case the thesis is based on very unsound logic. In actual fact, no part of Ibibioland was entirely self-sufficient. Not all Ibibioland was equally endowed with the raw materials needed for the manufacture of even the basic needs. The concentration in a particular area of raw materials needed for the manufacture of certain goods tended to foster long distance trade.

The deltaic Ibibio people were essentially fishermen and manufactures of salt (from the salt water) which they exchanged for the products of the farmers. Certain parts of Ibibioland lay under water very early during the planting season, so when the water receded, crops like okra and other vegetables were planted and harvested before other crops, like *etikke* Isong Inyang (okra from Isong Inyang), cultivated later in the upper drier parts were ready for harvesting. Since corn and okra are indispensable food items among the Ibibio people, this climatic factor which enable certain areas of Ibibioland to produce them earlier than others tended to encourage long distance trade.

Even where the rang of raw materials was the same throughout an area, custom and tradition still restricted the manufacture of certain products to one group and a different

kind of goods to another group. For instance, the people of Ikot Ekpene were known for their superior wood carvings and woven materials which were often preferred to carvings from other Ibibio areas. Moreover even though sections of the Ibibio people specialize in pot-making, they still preferred pots from the neighbouring district of Umon. The yam produced in Ibibioland had to be supplemented with imports from Ogoja, Ikom and Abakaliki. These imports from non-Ibibio areas were exchanged for the products of Ibibioland, which included items like fish, salt, crayfish and palm oil.

Other products of Ibibioland in very great demand within and without Ibibio territory were the palm wine, mats, honey and spices. Spices known locally as *odung ubio*, *utasi* and *uyayak* constituted important food additives for which the people had some cravings. Even the alligator pepper was an indispensable item in the concoction of charms and preparation of other forms of medication. The Ibibio people also obtained their fermented and non-fermented drinks and other stimulants from the palm wine tree and from other plants.

The palm wine in particular was often in great demand, because no social or ritual activities was complete without the palm wine. There was even a guild of tappers and in most cases the owner was not the tapper (Jeffreys 1957). When the tree came of age, the right side was cut for the sap. A palm tree could yield five or more gallons of palm wine per day. The wine was taken fresh or fermented. The fermented wine was distilled into gin which the colonial masters dubbed 'illicit' gin (Jeffreys, 1957). Roofing mats, raffia for weaving and bamboos were all obtained from the wine tree.

Labour for economic activities was provided mainly by the family, though outsiders were co-opted sometimes. In order to meet the farming schedule, some co-operative arrangements were entered into, the most common practice being organizing what was known as *mama*. This was an arrangement by which people, not necessarily related, joined together to clear their land, plant crops and harvest them. Every member in the group was helped in turns until the last person had

received his share.

Such co-operative arrangements were employed for all kinds of economic activities, including farming, fishing and hunting. But it was perhaps in mat-making that shirkers were easily exposed. On the average, a skilled mat-maker did upwards of sixty mats a day. At the end of the day's work, the total number of mats made by an individual was noted and that was the degree to which the owner of the house was obliged to him come his turn. In this way, it became easy to find out who worked hard and who shirked.

With only few exceptions, there were no strict division of labour in the way the Ibibio people organized their economic activities. Even though age and sex weighed heavily on occupational roles, such considerations were often modified by circumstances. Thus, even though women were not expected to roof a house, sometimes circumstances compelled women to discharge this duty. Thus sex division of labour was never adhered to with anything like the rigidity often assumed, except in the few instances of carving and the climbing of the palm wine tree or the oil palm tree. Apart from the taboos associated with the climbing of the palm wine tree by women, their apparels were also unsuitable. Carvings were used in masking most of the messengers of some secret societies and since some of them were sacred to women, carving by the female sex was not generally allowed.

A diachronic description of traditional economy of the Ibibio people is fraught with a number of problems. There are no written records, and oral testimonies are not amenable to a reasonable chronological perspective. This explains why such accounts appear to be static or timeless. One can however, measure the volume of trade in early times through the size of caravans and the size of the canoes used for trading. Canoes were the most important means of transportation, especially in long distance trade. And according to Robert Smith, the earliest forms of boats were fallen tree trunks 'on which prehistoric men sat astride, either paddling or poling with a branch' (Pereira, 1937). Later, the Ibibio appear to have

deliberately felled trees and hallowed canoes from the trunk which process was completed with the use of fire to preserve the fabric and drive out insects (Pereira, 1937). By the 16th century A.D., Duarte Pereira (1937) reported of canoes which he encountered in the area of the present study which were large enough to hold eighty people: 'they come from a hundred leagues or more up the river (Rio Real) bringing yams in large quantities ... and they also bring slaves, cows, goats and sheep'. According to Dapper (1986) some of the canoes were provided with facilities for cooking and storage of crew's belongings.

Users of land routes, according to Ifemesia (1978) often made use of caravans. Inter-ethnic marriages made the villages of the in-laws important resting places. He noted:

The leader of the caravan was usually a widely known and respectable personage who had concluded blood pacts ... with the principle authorities on the way and had accepted responsibility for the safety of the persons and property of the travellers and for their accommodation.

Equiano observed in this respect how he saw 'many convenient well built sheds along the roads at proper distances, to accommodate the merchants and travellers who lay in those buildings along with their wives, who often accompany them' (Edwards, 1967). These testimonies and observations clearly indicate that the economy, even in pre-European times, was neither static nor lacking in its dynamics.

Inter and intra-ethnic commercial activities were encouraged, not only by the fact that products from certain regions were regarded as superior even by people who themselves produced similar goods, but also by the fact that certain areas were more endowed than others. Accordingly, working on the good assumption that trade existed in quite early prehistoric times', (Herskovits, 1940) it is reasonable to conclude that markets had existed in Ibibioland from very early times. This can be seen from the fact that some of the days in Ibibioland like *Udua Ukat* and *Udua Obom* were named after

important markets in the area (Uta, 1981). Even those calendrical days not named after markets still reveal the influence of markets, in that some of them were named to mean 'the day after a particular market, or 'the second day after a particular market', and so on (Hill, 1966). There are eight calendrical days in an Ibibio week and all of these days witnessed intense commercial activities with the exception of *Edere Etaha* which was similar to the Sabbath day.

Before concluding this section, it should be added that trade in early times was encouraged by peace and stability which prevailed in Ibibio society. Before the introduction of the overseas slave trade in the 16th century, there was not as much warfare and violence as came in the wake of the Atlantic slave trade. The trade in farm and sea products required peace in order for goods to move from one region to another. Slave trade was an invitation to warfare and violence because the attendant chaotic condition was favourable to capturing slaves. On the other hand, pre-European trade in yams, palm oil, fish and crafts required peace and mutual coexistence among the various ethnic groups. At the end of the slave trade, for instance, Europeans spared no efforts to restore peace in the area, since they had come to realize, as the Ibibio always did, that it was the only condition that would encourage trade in farm products. In short, *Pax Britannica* was only an attempt to restore peace and tranquillity to an area that had been long ravaged by trade in slaves.

Summary

A study of the early history of the Ibibio people such as the one attempted here is bedevilled by a number of problems. As is the case with the early history of many other African peoples, very little exists by way of documentation on the early history of the Ibibio people. Archaeological information is either scanty or non-existent and oral testimonies have their limitations, especially when dealing with topics that require quantitative analysis. These limitations notwithstanding, it is still possible to write the early history of these peoples based

on available documentary, linguistic and oral materials. This is what has been attempted here.

From all available sources, the core of the Ibibio people migrated from a point in Usak Edet, now in the Republic of Cameroon, where they were known as Afaha. When exactly is not known, save that it must have been in the early times. After leaving Cameroon, their major point of settlement was Ibom in Arochuku from where most of them spread to other parts of Ibibioland. But since an ethnic group is not a biologically homogeneous breeding population, the Ibibio must have received other peoples not necessarily from the original ancestral stock who eventually became absorbed by the original settlers from the primary migration.

The village remained the most effective political unit and each village was politically autonomous and independent. These village republics had powers of life and death over all its inhabitants. The political structure of the village was a simple one in which individual could wield all the powers. Secret societies were responsible for enforcing village laws and women played important political, social and economic roles.

Traditional economy, though largely governed by the environment, displayed elements of inventiveness. Trade within and without the area was encouraged by the relative peace that existed in the region. It was mainly the overseas slave trade, introduced in the wake of European arrival in the 16th century, that led to a breakdown of law and order. Lawlessness and violence, for which the region gained its notoriety up to the beginning of the present century, were obvious by-products of the trade in slaves.

CHAPTER 4

The Igbo People

by

OGUAGHA P.A. and OKPOKO A.I.

The Igbo people inhabit a stretch of territory lying between latitude 5° and 7° north and longitudes 6° and 8° east. This area is bounded on the north by the Igala, Idoma and Ogoja peoples, on the east by the Ibibio people, on the south by the Ijo of the delta region, and on the west by the Edo-speaking peoples. It covers an area of 40,922 square kilometres (Uchendu, 1965) with a total population of 9,246,413 in 1963. The bulk of the Igbo population are located in Anambra and Imo states. They form the second largest ethnic group next to the Edo in Bendel State, and are also found in substantial numbers in the Rivers State. It should be noted that outside their homeland, the Igbo are found in virtually every nook and cranny of the country. This development was brought about by the increased economic opportunities that came with the advent of British colonialism, and acted as a safety valve to ease the population pressure. Igboland is split into two unequal parts by the river Niger with the greater portion to the east of the river. The eastern section of Igboland is a tableland which rises gradually to the northern highlands consisting of two ridges which run in a north-south direction. Apart from the Niger, the other major rivers are the Imo, Orashi, and Anambra Rivers to the east, and the Ase river to the west.

Until fairly recent times, the Igbo had no common name and individual village groups were generally known by the names of their ancestral founders. (Forde & Jones, 1950) The word 'Igbo' itself was used as a term of contempt by the riverain Igbo inhabitants to refer to their hinterland kinsmen.

M.D.W. Jeffreys suggested that the word 'Igbo' originally meant 'people of the bush or forest and later acquired the derived, or secondary meaning of serf'. (Jeffreys, 1956) By probing into the semantics of some Igbo names, another writer has concluded that the word 'Igbo' means 'the community of people' (Onwuejeogwu 1972). In modern times 'Igbo' is used to refer to Igbo territory, to Igbo-speaking people, and to their language.

The Igbo categorize their territory into three sections based on geographical location and environmental conditions. The land mass between the Niger and Imo rivers to the east is called *Anaocha* – a name which refers to the dry and infertile nature of its soil; the territory between the Niger and the Edo-speaking people to the west is called *enu-ani* – the fertile highland; while the territory on both sides of the Niger is called *Olu* – the low-lying, fertile riverain section. (Jeffreys, 1934). Modern ethnographers have classified the Igbo into five main groups based on territorial location and general cultural similarity. These are the northern or Onitsha Igbo, the Southern or Owerri Igbo, the western Igbo the eastern or Cross river Igbo and the north-eastern. (Forde & Jones, 1950). Although the Niger divides Igbo territory into two parts, it has not been a communication barrier between the two sections which have retained their linguistic and cultural unity. Oral traditions among the western Igbo communities show that the migration pattern has in the main been from the east to the west with occasional movements in the opposite direction.

However, different versions of Umueri traditions of genesis as contained in the works of scholars like Jeffreys (1934), Hendrson (1972) Onwuejeogwu (1972 & 1974), Oguagha (1984), Afigbo (1981) and Okpoko are relevant for a proper appraisal of the early settlement history of the Igbos. Their traditions of origin appear to support the thesis that Northern Igbo was the earliest point of settlement.

The Umueri (Fig. 1) constitute a clan in Igboland that settled in two sections, roughly midway between Onitsha and

Awka in Eastern Nigeria; the northern, section centred at Aguleri on the left bank of the River Anambra, and the southern section at Nri some 46 kilometres south of Aguleri (Boston, 1960). The Umueri towns are distinct among the Igbo in that they form a group whose elders claim a common origin and the same ancestor (Jeffreys, 1934). (There are also some towns like Ogwashi-Ukwu, Isele-Ukwu, Ogboli-Ibusa, Illa, etc., west of the Niger, that claim Nri origin.) However, like the rest of Igbo groups, patrilineality and agnation are well defined in most Umueri towns, and residence is normally patrilocal; the Umueri live in patrilineages called *umunna*. Again like the rest of the Igbo groups, the typical Umueri household is made up of a man and his wife or wives, his children and his married sons and their wives and children. The wife/wives co-operates/co-operate with the man in the upbringing of their children, but decision-taking lies ultimately with the man who controls the affairs of the house. A number of households form a compound (*obi*) and closely related compounds form a lineage (*umunna*) while related lineages form a village (*oghe*) and a number of villages federate to form a town called *obodo*. Unlike most other Igbo groups, the Umueri clan possesses a ritualized kingship system as in the case of Nri, Oreri and formerly Aguleri (Onwuejeogwu, 1980).

Analyses of the traditions of origin and migrations suggest three chronological phases for Umueri culture history. The first phase deals with the events that took place at Aguleri when it was occupied by Eri and his children. Movements/migrations of the children of Eri from Aguleri after the death of their father occurred in the second phase (which is referred to here as the primary migration phase). During this phase, the children of Eri migrated from Aguleri, their original homeland, to 'found' or occupy 'new' settlements. Lastly, in the third phase (the secondary migration phase) the children of Nri (sons of Eri) moved from Nri to 'found' or occupy 'new' settlements on the east and west banks of the river Niger. None of the versions of the traditions mentions that the

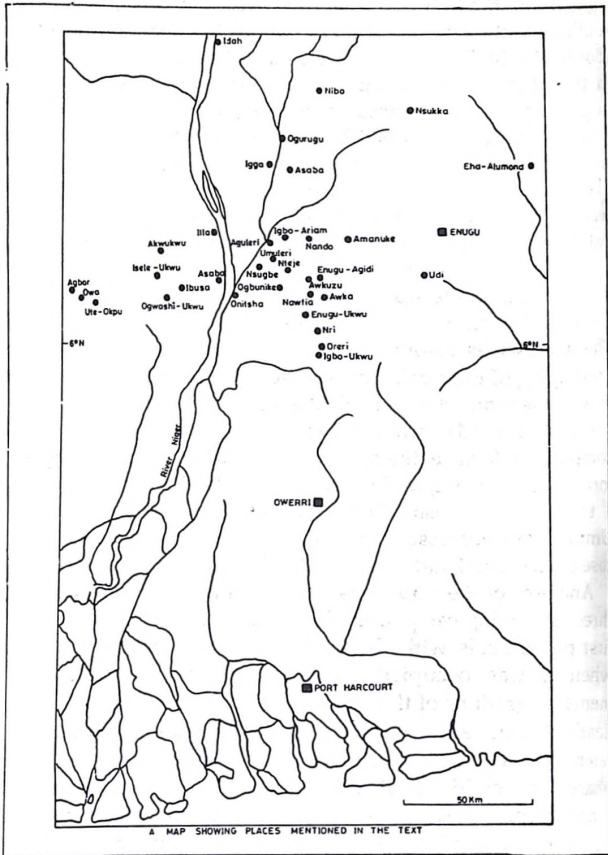


Fig. 1 Places mentioned in the text

children of Aguleri, Amanuke and Igboarim: founded 'new' settlements or migrated to other areas.

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By deriving their progenitor from the sky, the Umueri clan claim autochthony in Igboland. They also claim that when Eri came down from the sky the land was still soft and water-logged. Both claims suggest that the occupation of the Anambra valley by the Umueri is of great antiquity. In Igbo folklore, the chameleon (*ogwumagala*) is considered an ancient animal. To prove this claim the Igbo say that when this reptile came into the world the land was very soft, and hence, it had to walk very carefully so that it would not pierce the land with its feet – explaining the way that the reptile walks. 'Thus the tradition that the land is soft and water-logged when Eri came down is an assertion of the antiquity of the (Umueri clan)' (Afigbo, 1981). Secondly, another feature in the traditions suggesting antiquity of occupation of the Anambra valley by the Umueri is the claim that this valley was occupied by them before the beginnings of food production in this part of the world. Like any other parts of West Africa, the date of the beginnings of food production in the Anambra valley is not yet known. But studies by Onwuejeogwu (1973) and Gray (1962) suggest that yam cultivation in the Anambra valley is

of some antiquity. For instance, the work of Onwuejeogwu suggests that the *ifejioku* spirit (deified yam spirit) and its festival associated with yam cultivation originated from the Anambra valley, and Gray is of the opinion that the grassland fringe found on the northern forest margins of this valley indicates that in pre-European times, title-taking in parts of the Anambra valley was dependent on the number of lines of yams available on a man's yam barn and the people have a good knowledge of cultivation and preservation of yams. For example, large eating yams are cultivated in heaps, while seed yams are cultivated in ridges and yams are well preserved in barns suitably constructed for the purpose. However, with the present state of knowledge, we cannot tell the species of yam first cultivated and when such cultivation began in the Anambra valley and when and how yam cultivation began to influence the settlement pattern and socio-political set-up of the inhabitants. For a proper understanding of the beginnings of yam cultivation and early effects of such cultivation in this valley, we need to have botanical, entomological, linguistic, ethnographic, and oral traditional evidence supplementing the archaeological data.

Thirdly, the Igbo-Ukwu archaeological material seems to substantiate the antiquity of occupation of the Anambra valley by the Umueri. Shaw (1969) and Onwuejeogwu (1972 & 1977) associate the Igbo-Ukwu materials with *Eze Nri* at Nri and Oreri which have cultural connection with Aguleri – the original homeland of the Umueri. Four of the five radiocarbon dates from the Igbo-Ukwu sites are 9th century A.D. while the fifth is of the 15th century. There are debates on the subject of dating Igbo-Ukwu materials, but in line with the original excavator, it would seem reasonable to place more reliance on the four dates which agree than on a single date which stands out. Recent radiocarbon dates obtained by Shaw fall within the same time range as the 9th century dates (Shaw, 1983). Shaw (1985) in review of the Okpoko (1984), also has this to say:

The writer makes the important observation (p. 112) that among the excavated sites it was only the lower

layers of Umuekete (Aguleri) that produced grooved pottery decorated with spirals or concentric circles and patterns reminiscent of Igbo-Ukwu. Perhaps this is some confirmation of the oral traditions connecting Nri and Aguleri, and for the early dating of Igbo Ukwu.'

But we should bear in mind that the Igbo-Ukwu bronze object suggest an already highly developed technology based on a food producing economy and wide range of commercial contacts. Therefore, an incipient stage of this technology would have occurred much earlier than the 9th century. Afigbo (1981) thus suggests (although this is yet to be substantiated) that 'the culture with which the Igbo-Ukwu bronze were associated must have taken at least a millennium and a half to attain that degree of sophistication and wealth. That takes us back about 600 B.C.' There is still the need, however, for much archaeological research in the Anambra valley and related areas in order to establish, among other things, the earliest date of its occupation and for the beginnings of food production and iron/bronze working. The earliest date (255 B.C.) so far obtained from any site near the valley comes from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka farm site. As already mentioned, some village quarters/lineages around Nsukka claim Nri origin. The excavator of this site (D.D. Hartle), who studied the recovered pottery, deciphered some elements of similarities in terms of forms and decorations between the excavated and present-day pottery in this area, (Hartle 1966 and 1967) thereby suggesting continuity of its occupation by the same or related people from about the third millennium B.C. However, it is currently difficult to determine how much reliance one can place on this date. This is because, apart from the fact that only two dates were obtained from this site, the upper layers give an earlier date (2555 B.C.) than the lower layers (1460 B.C.), and this suggests reverse stratigraphy at this site. We are unable to establish a clear idea of the nature of this site, especially its stratigraphic sequences (natural and cultural) until the professional report is written.

Based on oral traditional, ethnographic (including genealogical depth of families), demographic, and ecological evidences, a number of scholars (Leonard, 1906; Jones 1963; Forde Jones, 1962; Allison, 1962; Thomas, 1913; Buchanan and Pugh, 1962) have come to the conclusion that northern Igboland, especially Onitsha-Awka-Orlu areas (in which the Umueri towns are located) constitutes an ancient settlement centre and the earliest centre of population dispersal in Igboland. (As already mentioned here, a number of Igbo towns east and west of the Niger claim Umueri towns specifically as their ancestral home.) Suggested reasons for this population dispersal include increases in population, prolonged farming, and exploitation of natural resources of these areas, most likely made possible by the development of iron technology. Given the ethnographic, ecological, oral traditional and archaeological evidences, it is very likely that the Umueri claim of autochthony in Igboland, in the words of Oguagha, (1984) contains a kernel of historical truth'. He also asserts that the 'Nri traditions about Eri are similar to the Ife traditions about Oduduwa in Yorubaland' but that the Nri traditions did not attain universality in Igboland as did the Oduduwa legend in Yorubaland, most probably because of the differences in the pattern of settlements and socio-political settings in the two areas.

Studies in linguistics have shown that the Igbo language belongs to the Kwa group (of the Niger - Congo family) located somewhere around the Benue - Niger confluence. It has also been suggested that the Igbo diverged from proto-Kwa thousands of years ago. Using the method of glottochronology to get some idea of absolute times: Armstrong (1964) came up with separation periods of 4,000 to 6,000 years between Yoruba and Igbo. Although the use of glottochronology for absolute dating is highly questionable, these dates do have some historical implications. They at least appear to throw light on the age of the Igbo language and therefore on the antiquity of the existence of the Igbo speaking people as a separate language group or unit. But it is not yet clear

whether the Igbo occupied their present location before or after the divergence of the Igbo language from proto-Kwa.

The first version of Umueri traditions of origin also claims the Igala as the half-brothers of the Umueri clan (thus making the Igala the earliest Nigerian group to come into contact with the Umueri, perhaps during the primary migration phase; although the nature of such contact is not clear in the traditions). However the second version, emphasizing Igala conquests of the people of the Anambra valley and related areas, derives the whole of Umueri from Igalaland. The first version, which suggests the migration of the Umueri half-brother to the Igala country seems to be in accord with the postulated population dispersal from Onitsha-Awka-Orlu areas; a dispersal which seems likely to have extended as far north as Idah. The date of this population dispersal is not known. Using the principles of generational stratification and generational interval, Onwuejeogwu has, however, dated the 'primary migration phase' (period of migration of the children of Eri from Aguleri to other parts of Igboland and beyond) to about 1040 - 1250, (although these dates may have some degree of tolerable inaccuracy) (Onwuejeogwu, 1981). Oguagha (1984) has also argued that before the rise of Igala kingdom as a powerful militarized kingdom (c. 17th/18th centuries) the 'Igbo ritual and political influence with its centre at Nri extended to surrounding areas including Igalaland'. The Igala for their part do not claim any genetic relationship with the Umueri clan, but their traditions suggest that they have been having important historical connections with the Umueri (Boston, 1960). Boston (1968) has pointed out that the legends of origin of Igala kingship tend to fall into two categories, one centering upon founders of noble birth and the other upon founders who are said to have been hunters by profession. One of the legends says that the founding queen of Idah (Ebelejonu) had an Igbo husband (a hunter by profession) whom she made the first *Achadu*. This legend thus suggests some form of contacts or relationships between the Umueri and the Igala in the proto-dynastic period. It should be noted

that Ebelejonu was one of the first four Igala royal ancestors described by Boston (1968) as 'proto-dynastic' ancestors 'who are not sharply differentiated from each other'. Boston places the Igala proto-dynastic period between the 13th and 16th centuries AD (notice the nearness of these dates to those of Onwuejeogwu). It is pertinent to mention that the *Achadu* is the head of the Achadu clan – the 'kingmakers' who are the senior members of the *Igala Mela* clans (the nine Igala clans said to be the original inhabitants of Igalaland before the establishment of the Igala dynasty).

Igala traditions also point to a war hero, Onoja Oboni, as the founder of the kingship system in Ogurugu, an Igala town by the bank of the Anambra river. Interviews conducted by the present writer in September 1977 and February 1980 with Chief Tagbo Ukwella (Chief of Ogurugu), his councillors, and some Ogurugu elders, point to Onoja Oboni as the illegitimate son of Obatamu (an Igbo hunter) from his union with Oboni, a woman said to have come from the royal family at Idah. Being related to the royal family through his material side, Onoja was not qualified to be an *Ata* of Igala. Consequently, he travelled to Ogurugu where he established his base. From here he raided the Igbo border country from the Nsukka escarpment to the Niger capturing slaves for the Atlantic slave trade. The situation of his base, coupled with the strong tradition that Onoja Oboni conquered the town of Asaba (by the Niger) and Igala trading settlements (also along the Niger, near Onitsha), makes connections between his activities and the Igbo settlement at Aguleri most probable (Boston, 1960; Seton, 1928; Meek, 1930). However, the walls around Ogurugu and some settlements of the Anambra valley suggest a period of raiding in the Anambra valley – conflicts in which the Igbo and the Igala might have participated. These raiding activities of Onoja Oboni are highlighted in the second version of Umueri traditions of origin. But such major conflicts amongst the Igbo and the Igala are recent phenomena in their histories. The conflicts occurred mainly in the 17th/18th centuries in attempts by the Igala to expand their kingdom

and capture slaves for the Atlantic slave trade. This second version of Umueri traditions of origin is a clear example of telescoping of events, which sometimes occur in oral traditions and which may not be detected if such traditions are not carefully collected, studied and interpreted.

The occurrence of the two different versions of the origin of Eri in Aguleri can be explained by pointing out the fact that Onoja Oboni raiding activities occurred after the dispersal of Eri children from Aguleri and their establishment of 'new' settlements (like Nri and Oreri) far from the Anambra valley. It is very likely that Aguleri within the Anambra valley and raided by Onoja Oboni during the Atlantic slave trade period still retains, to a large extent, the memories of such horrifying raids. Hence, some informations in this settlement (a version recorded by Idigo) attempt to derive Eri from the Igala country. However, Nri, insulated from Igala raids due to its location in the hinterland, still retains the original pattern of events. It is also possible that the second version of Umueri traditions of origin originated from Igala warriors, because 'some Igala traditions affirm that riverain towns like Asaba, Ojor and Igga along the Anambra River were formerly Igala military and trading outposts established by emigrants from Ogurugu' (Oguagha, 1984). Finally it is likely that Onoja Oboni, an Igala culture-hero, was a very powerful war leader of his time, hence, his name came to be retained in Aguleri-Nri traditions of origin of the Umueri clan.

Archaeological surveys carried out by one of the authors (Okpoko) in the Anambra valley suggest a dichotomy. Although no identifiable weapons were recovered from any of the archaeological sites studied, the ramparts at Umuekete-Aguleri, Nsukka, Ogurugu, Ifite-Ogwari and Umueje, all in the Anambra valley, bear testimony to a period (or periods) of conflict as mentioned by Hartle, (1967) who speaks of eleven forts between Unadu and Ogurugu. War and raiding in the Anambra valley conflicts in which the Igala and Igbo were involved belong to the later phase in their relationships.

The cultural materials recovered from the excavations,

however, suggest more peaceful forms of Igbo-Igala interaction, dating most probably to as far back in time as the 13th century A.D. and from the early phase of interaction. The Igbo-Ukwu finds seem to extend such interactions back to the 9th century A.D. Similarities in the pottery (in form, decoration, thickness and manufacturing techniques) from Idah and Aguleri suggest a considerable degree of interaction and common traditions between the people of these two and related areas, perhaps from about the 13th century A.D., interactions which could have been in the form of trade or peaceful movements of people from Igbo to Igala areas or vice versa. The presence of horse at Umueje Aguleri also suggests trading connections between the Igbo and their northern Igala neighbours from, perhaps, as early as the 13th century A.D. which the 'horseman hilt' and other finds from Igbo-Ukwu seem to extend these trading connection to the 9th century A.D. Although we cannot say when horses were first imported into Igboland by the Igala, it is well established that in recent centuries the northern Igbo (Aguleri and neighbouring areas) have bought horses in considerable numbers from the Igala (Okpeko, 1984).

As already stated, some settlements east and west of the Niger derive their origins from Nri. The founders of these settlements were said to have migrated from Nri. It is difficult to determine the exact causes and nature of these migrations which most probably were mainly of a few individuals (leaders) or families. However, these migration stories seem to highlight the extension of Umueri/Umunri cultural influences to their neighbours. For instance, Nri local 'historians' claim that 'in the heyday of Nri hegemony (about 1250 - 1670 A.D.), Nri influence extended as far as Nsukka, Owerri, Okigwe, Kwalle and Agbor areas' (Onwuejeogwu, 1972). How far this claim is true is yet to be fully established. But *Eze Nri* and his men sponsored men in other neighbouring Igbo towns through the *ozo* title ceremonies and gave them their emblems of office, the *ofo*. This gave Nri (Agukwu-Nri) wide religious and cultural influence. Basden maintained that Nri priest

(ritual experts) travelled so widely in the past, and Thomas described the *Eze Nri* as 'the spiritual potentate over a large extent of Igbo country' (Basden, 1938; Jeffreys, 1934).

Also, the people of Nri do many things or look tolerantly upon those actions which the surrounding Igbo towns (e.g. Agulu, Adazi, Awka, Nise, Nibo etc.) abhor. For example, at Nri, contrary to what is customary among their neighbouring Igbo towns, women may, if they wish, climb palm trees provided they cut fronds only but not touch the nuts. Also it is taboo in parts of Igboland for a woman to wear an *ogodo* (a piece of cloth tied around the waist in simulation of a pair of pants) as a man. A small girl could do so in ignorance. Even such a girl at Awka was exiled to Nri to be either sold or taken as a wife by an Nri man; she would not return home (Basden, 1938). These actions of Nri people seem to confirm that they acquired aspects of their way of life elsewhere.

It is pertinent to mention that the present Nri town is made up of three major villages, Akamkpisi, Diodo and Agukwu which are divided into smaller units. Relying on the work of Jeffreys (1934), Onwuejeogwu (1972) and oral information collected by the present writer, it is possible to divide Nri history into two phases: (1) the pre-immigration phase, a period, when, for example, the people of Umudiana of Akamkpisi section claim to be autochthonous (they had a distinct way of life before the impact of immigrant influence began to be felt) and (2) the immigrant phase. The immigrants from Aguleri came with a different type of social organization (*Eze Nri* kingship system) and as a corollary, a new pattern of settlement. It was in this second phase that Nri influence came to be felt in many parts of Igboland. Onwuejeogwu (1972) is of the opinion that geographical factors (Nri being in a depression and almost encircled by high ridges) placed Nri men at an advantage in their dealings with others in the past. According to him, in the past, Nri men were seen performing political and ritual services in many parts of Igboland with no one knowing definitely where they came from because they could go out to others but others could hardly come to them.

Onwuejeogwu (1972) mapped various abandoned sites in Nri, some of which the present writer visited in an effort to determine their archaeological potentialities (Fig. 2). Some of these sites still contain, in terms of archaeological remains, evidence of past human occupation.

Again, based on the work of Onwuejeogwu (1974) the abandoned sites can be divided into two chronological phases: sites of pre-immigration phase and the immigrant phase sites. The three sites in Umudiana Akamkpisi (Umudiana I, II and III) fall within the first phase. Umudiana I and II are located in an area which the people collectively call *ngene ogwugwu*. This area is thickly forested but the forest area is separated into two sections by an open vegetation of grass and farm plants. Area of scatter of archaeological materials (potsherds, fallen walls, house post, etc.) in Umudiana I is about 90 by 55 metres. In Umudiana II, the present writer found a rubbish heap which if the informants are correct, has been used to the very recent time. The top section of the rubbish heap contains plates and bottles, and in the general area of the site there are evidences of ancient pits which the local people claim were dug for defensive purposes. Umudian III, not as thickly forested as Umudiana I and II, is regarded as the compound (*obu*) of Ezikanebo whom the local people claim to be the founder of Umudiana. If this information is correct, the site (Umudiana III) is likely to have evidence of early human occupation. Area of scattered of archaeological remains is about 100 by 30 metres.

The two sites (Namoke I and II) occupied successively by Eze Nri Namoke and his group, fall into the second chronological phase. Namoke I, a few kilometres from Agukwu, besides Agulu lake, was later abandoned for another area (Namoke II). It was in this second site that Nri Namoke died. Eze Nribuife, who succeeded him, occupied the same area. It was after his death that the area was abandoned.

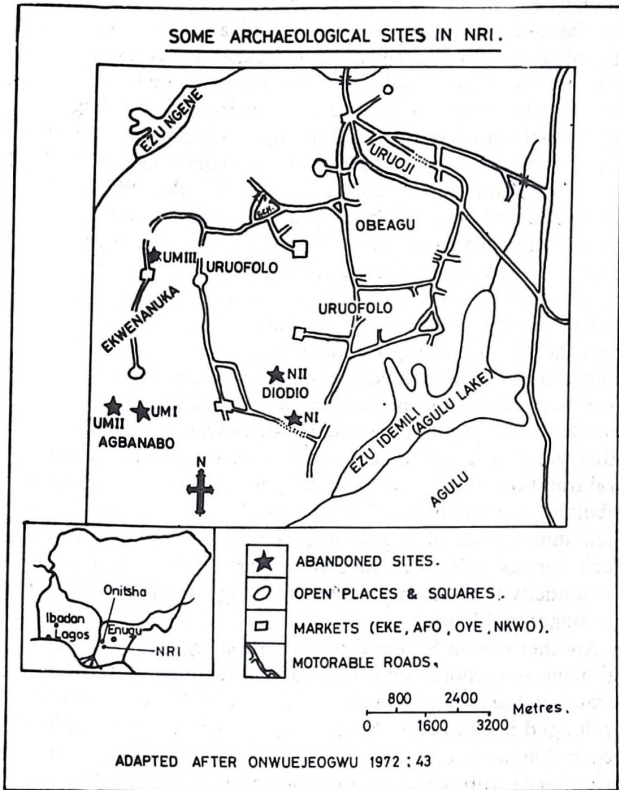


Fig. 2 Some Archaeological sites in Nri (after Onwuejeogwu 1972)

Whereas archaeological remains in the form of potsherds, fallen walls and iron blades of hoes are still found in Namoke I site Namoke I is almost completely cultivated; but there is a strip of land within the site quite untouched for years. In this strip I found a mound and a pot buried at a spot on it.

Most ethnographers believe that having left the Niger-Benue confluence, the bulk of the Igbo population came to concentrate on the belt composed of what later became Owerri, Awka, Orlu, and Okigwe divisions. (Hartle, 1967). This theory is based on a number of reasons, one of which is that the Igbo inhabitants of this area lack traditions of migration from elsewhere. Instead most of the communities in the area lay claim to being the original inhabitants of their locality. Such claims generally take the form of deriving their ancestors from the sky or saying that they emerged from the ground (Uchendu, 1965). Also field investigators in northern Igboland have been struck by the genealogical depth of many of the families as compared to the relative shallowness of those from other parts of Igboland (Onwuejeogwu, 1972). Furthermore, oral traditions from other parts of Igboland point to northern Igboland, especially the Onitsha- Awka and Orlu areas as their initial place of migration (Leonard, 1906; Jones, 1963). Such corroborative evidence from parts of Igboland lends authenticity to the theory that northern Igboland is an area of prolonged residence.

Another reason for the above assertion regarding northern Igboland is anchored on ecological consideration. Igboland is located in the rain forest belt of West Africa. However, due to prolonged habitation of the territory and farming, the original vegetation has been greatly modified to that of 'palm studded secondary scrub, savanna, and grassland' (Allison, 1962). The Igbo farming practice of leaving extensive tracts of exhausted farmlands fallow for a number of years to regenerate their fertility has encouraged systematic encroachment into the rain forest in search of virgin land. In Igboland it is in the northern area that vegetational change has been most remarkable. This area belongs to the 'over-farmed land, in which forest trees

have been largely eliminated and only oil palms are preserved' (Forde and Jones, 1950).

Again demographic data from Igboland appears to confirm that the northern area was an early centre of settlement for the Igbo people. Most parts of Igboland carry a substantial population, but the heaviest population densities have been recorded in northern Igboland. Population densities here appear to exceed seven hundred per square mile and in parts of Orlu, Owerri and Awka figures of one thousand per square mile have been recorded. Such figures are among the highest for a rural population in the world (Forde and Jones, 1950; Buchanan and Pugh, 1969). Since increase in population takes some time, greater population centres would appear to indicate a long period of continuous settlement. In addition, the increase in population would also help to explain the vegetational change which was examined above. Oft-times, the growth of population necessitated the quest for more farming land. Finally, as was previously pointed out, the radio-carbon dates obtained from some sites in this area attest to its early occupation by people, who may well have been the Igbo.

Evidence from the oral traditions of many Igbo communities affirm that it was from northern Igboland that Igbo population dispersed in various directions. The anthropologist, G.I. Jones by examining such traditions of origin has suggested the following pattern of migration in Igbo territory: an early population movement to the Nsukka-Udi highlands in the east and southwards into Ikwerre, Etche, Asa, and Ndokki area; a later movement from the same locality to the Eastern Isuama areas subsidiary movements from the eastern Isuama area, one of which went south-south-east to form the Ngwa group, and another went to the east into Umuahia area and from there to the Ohaffia-Arochukwu ridge; from the Ohaffia-Arochukwu ridge a population offshoot diverged northwards to form the north-eastern Igbo group; and movements from the Awka region westwards across the Niger to form the western Igbo group (Jones, 1963).

In addition to this pattern of internal population dispersal,

the Igbo received some immigrant population from the neighbours. Perhaps the best known of these migrations were those from their western neighbours, the Edo kingdom of Benin – well attested to by late nineteenth and early twentieth century European ethnographers (Leonard, 1906; Thomas, 1914; Talbot, 1926). Two sets of traditions about Benin origin are found in Igboland. The first makes a straightforward claim to an ancestral home in Benin, while the second belongs to the Ezechima tradition, which from its name appears to be Igbo refugees fleeing from Benin attacks, rather than Benin emigrants. The Igbo communities who trace their origin to Benin are concentrated in the west Niger Igbo area, and on the Niger river banks (Forde and Jones 1950). Another set of traditions deals with migrations from their northern neighbour, the Igala kingdom. Some riverain Igbo towns as well as many communities in the Nsukka area trace their origin to Idah, the Igala capital. (Osomari, 1963; Milne, 1934).

Apart from Benin and Igala kingdoms, Igboland also received a relatively minuscule population from other areas. For example, the Igbo village group of Odiani in the west Niger Igbo areas was founded by emigrants from Yorubaland and Ishan (Forde and Jones, 1950). To the southeast of Igboland the population of Arochukwu, a famous ritual and commercial centre, was similarly of diverse origin being composed of Igbo, Ibibio, and Akpa elements (Shankland, 1950; Talbot, 1926).

The primary occupation of the Igbo people is agriculture. The extent to which the original rain forest vegetation of Igboland has been replaced by the derived savanna, as well as the density of Igbo population which has subsisted on agricultural products, attest to the widespread practice of this occupation. The standard farming implements are short-bladed hoes, cultasses, and diggers. In the more fertile north-eastern area of the territory, a special type of hoe, made of large circular blade and measuring a foot or more in diameter, is used. This big hoe (*ogu uku*) accounts for the name which ethnographers have labelled the inhabitants

the area (Forde and Jones, 1950). Most Igbo communities practise 'shifting cultivation'.

The Igbo have a root crop economy and produce such crops as yams, cocoyams and cassava. Maize, plantain, melons and pumpkins are also cultivated as subsidiary crops. Among the Igbo, yam is regarded as the king of crops, and as such, it occupies a prominent place in the social and economic life of the people. The yam spirit called *Ifejioku* is widely venerated in Igboland to ensure an abundant harvest of the crop; and there are also yam festivals and titles (Uchendu, 1965). It was formerly believed that yam cultivation was introduced into West Africa through diffusion from Asia. Later research showed that some varieties of yam are indigenous to the region (Coursey, 1967). Cassava on the other hand spread into Igboland through the delta region of Nigeria where it was introduced by the Portuguese (Alagoa, 1971). It is regarded as an inferior food by the Igbo and lacks the prestige of yam, the traditional staple. Nevertheless, its ability to flourish in poorer soils, as well as the relatively low cost of production, have been crucial in sustaining the Igbo inhabitants of the over-farmed portions of the territory.

In Igboland, the farming cycle begins in January and February each year with the clearing of the bush by the men and the collection of sticks for staking yams later. Actual planting begins in later March or early April with the first rains. The men prepare the yam mounds, plant the seeds, and train the yam vines. Following the planting of yams, the women cultivate such crops as maize, melon, pumpkins, cocoyams and cassava in between the yam mounds. This system of intercropping helps to check erosion, and also provides the food supply before the harvest. The yams are harvested in October and stored in yam barns called *oba*. The vines are left undisturbed and this results in a secondary growth of the small tubers which are used as seeds during the next planting season. In some areas, yam production is also for prestige purposes, and successful farmers could take the yam title called *eze ji* (Meek, 1937; Uchendu, 1965).

Next to yams in importance are palm oil and palm kernel which are also produced in large quantities by the Igbo. The palm fruits are cut by the men, while the women and children are responsible for the collection and processing. Two types of palm oil are produced depending on the method employed, namely, the soft and the hard varieties. To produce the soft oil, palm nuts are boiled until they are tender and then pounded in huge mortars. The fibres are then separated from the nuts and pressed for the oil which is collected in gourds. For the hard oil, the unboiled palm nuts are pounded and the fibre mixed with water. The oil rises to the surface and is skimmed off and boiled before storage. The soft oil is generally preferred for consumption because it lasts longer while the hard variety is mainly for export. The palm nuts are also cracked to extract palm kernels which are used for the manufacture of local pomade, while a large quantity are exported (Meek, 1937; Uchendu, 1965). Igbo men also tap the sap of the oil palm tree which is consumed as liquor. They have emerged a professional group of tappers who depend to a great extent on the sale of palm wine for their livelihood.

Owing to the significance of agriculture, land plays a key role in the life of the Igbo. The earth spirit (*ani, ala*) is the most prominent deity in most Igbo communities. Almost every town has its own earth deity in whose name laws are made and oaths sworn, thus, providing the ritual and political focus for the unit. Certain conducts such as homicide, kidnapping, suicide, and yam stealing are regarded as offences against *ani* and have to be ritually cleansed to avert disasters in the form of bad harvests and famine or premature deaths in the community (Forde and Jones, 1950). Apart from the role of agriculture and land in Igbo religion, they also have largely determined the settlement patterns. Most Igbo villages are made of homesteads clustered around a centrally located market place with their backs to the farmlands. The idea behind this pattern of residence is to provide enough land for subsequent habitation and farming with increasing population, and thus curtail friction among neighbouring com-

munities arising from encroachment on territorial rights (Henderson, 1972; Jones, 1961).

Apart from agriculture, the Igbo also possess specialized craft industries. Prominent among these is smithing, which supplies the farming implements, household utensils and weapons for the people. The most famous smithing centres are Awka, Abiriba and Nkwerre. The Awka are itinerant smiths and in the past divided Igbo Territory, and neighbouring groups into occupational zones which were serviced by specific quarters in the town. They used raw iron smelted by the Agbaja people who live on the Udi highlands (Thomas, 1913; Meek, 1937). Abiriba and Nkwerre smiths obtained their iron ore from the Okigbwe Arochukwu ridge (Isichei, 1976). Nowadays, the smiths make use of imported scrap metals as their raw material. The Igbo are also noted for their great skill in wood carving. They produce carved doors, wooden stools, mortars and pestles, laddles, and beautiful masks for the masquerades. Many of the wood carvers have become professional carpenters.

Textile manufacture is also an important and widely practised craft in Igboland. It is largely in the hands of women, to whom it is a leisure occupation. The Igbo obtain their raw material from locally grown cotton and also import a substantial quantity from their northern neighbours, the Igala and the Idoma. The Nsukka Igbo, as well as the southern Igbo town of Akwete, are notable centres of textile production (Afigbo, 1973).

Another major source of livelihood for the Igbo is trading. In the past, trading was regarded as a subsidiary occupation to farming, but recent developments have ensured its primacy among some Igbo groups. The first reason is the unproductive nature of the over-farmed areas which has made agriculture an unrewarding pursuit and stimulated a shift to trading and other occupations. Secondly, the construction of roads and railways, and the availability of enormous quantities of manufactured goods have made trading a lucrative enterprise. There has, therefore, been an increase in the num-

ber of Igbo merchants. A development that accounts, to a great extent, for their widespread dispersal throughout the country.

Most Igbo village groups have markets which are held once in the four-day or eight-day week. With the advent of colonial rule and urbanization, two types of markets can now be distinguished based on location and periodicity. These are the urban markets which hold daily except on Sundays, and the rural markets that operate according to the traditional market cycle. In general, there are two types of trade; the local trade in which commodities for domestic needs are exchanged, and which is dominated by women, and the long distance trade within and outside Igboland. The latter catered for goods like horses, beads, ivory, and in former times slaves, but presently is largely concerned with the movement of manufactured goods. It is predominantly in the hands of men and requires a substantial capital for the purchase and transportation of the goods (Ukwu, 1967; Uchendu, 1965).

In their political organization, the Igbo of recent historical (i.e. the post 16th century) times were noted by observers not to come under one monolithic state structure. Apparently they were essentially a segmentary society. The largest political unit is the village group (the town) which the Igbo call *Obodo*, *ala* or *mba*. This is composed of a number of contiguous villages which believe that they are the collective descendants of a common ancestor. In most cases these villages are ranked in an order of seniority; the most senior being regarded as the descendants of the first son of the founder, while the most junior are believed to be the offsprings of the most junior son. Besides this territorial unity and ancestral origin, the unity of a village-group is also based on its possession of common customs, and an earth deity where sacrifices are made for the welfare of the community (Forde and Jones, 1950; Meek, 1937; Afigbo, 1973a). A common feature of many Igbo village-groups is the territorial dual organization in which the villages are divided into an 'upper' and 'lower' sections. Sometimes the division is based on geographical location, for

example *Ndi Elugwu* (the people of the hill top) and *Ndi Agbo* (the people of the valley), in other cases, it is based on seniority, and the senior group is called *Ikenga* and the junior one *Ihitte* (Jones, 1949; Afigbo, 1973b). Each village is made up of a number of lineages believed to be the descendants of the sons of its founder. As in the case of the village-group, the lineages are ranked in order of seniority.

There are two types of democracy in the Igbo system of government of recent history. The first is the direct democracy which operates up to the village level, while the second is the representative democracy which is found at the village-group level. At the lineage level, the oldest man in the unit, called *Okpara*, is the focus of ritual and political authority. He takes charge of the *ofo*, the symbol of justice and authority, and offers sacrifices to the ancestors for the welfare of his kinsmen. For these services, he is accorded respect and receives occasional gifts from members of the lineage. If there was a serious dispute, however it was settled by an assembly of all the adult men of the unit, and the women when the issue concerned the latter. Everyone was qualified to contribute to the discussions, at the end of which some elders were selected for special consultation. Their decision was then announced to the assembly for approval. If the decision was acceptable it was approved, otherwise it was reconsidered and re-presented until there was a general agreement.

Government at the village level is in the hands of the village assembly composed of all the male adults. However, this assembly has as its core an inner council (*ama ala*) made up of lineage heads, title holders, and other wise and respected elders who are selected *ad hoc*. Public matters are openly discussed, and every member is free to make a contribution. At the end of the debate, the *ama ala* follows a consultation (*izuzu*). After that a spokesman, who is a reputable orator, announces the decision. If it is accepted by the assembly that is the end of the matter, otherwise the process is repeated until there is a general consensus.

While government at the village level is based on direct

democracy, that of the village-group involves the representative principle. The village-group assembly is composed of representatives from the component villages. The representatives include lineage heads, title holders, and respected elders. They do not form a permanent body but are selected as the need arises. The procedure for arriving at decisions is similar to that of the village assembly. The decisions taken at the meetings are enforced by the age-grades, and 'secret societies' of each village. This means that decision cannot be implemented by such agencies from another village, since it will underscore the autonomy of the affected village. In recent years, however, the autonomy of the villages has been de-emphasized as various Igbo village-groups recognize the need for a wider political community in the quest for modernization.

The Igbo governmental system described above could be regarded as the 'typical' political organization. It has been called the 'village republic' by ethnographers (Uchendu, 1965; Afigbo, 1973b; Meek, 1937). But owing to influence from their neighbours, the political system of some Igbo groups located on the periphery of Igbo territory shows some difference from the basic type. This has largely entailed a combination of the 'typical' political system with special features borrowed from their neighbours. For example, the west Niger Igbo communities, some parts of northern Igboland to the east and the riverain towns along the Niger, which had contacts with the Benin and Igala kingdoms possess centralized political institutions. In each of these towns there is a king and other titled officials who assist him in the administration. These titled offices are in most cases the privileges of certain lineages and are not open to every citizen. Some of the officials are in charge of the administration of specific territorial units on behalf of the king. In this way they act as vital links between the king and the lineage heads and his subjects. The king and his officials constitute a council which formulates policies that are presented to the village-group assembly for approval. Thus they fulfil the role of the *ama ala*, the difference being that

while the king's council is a permanent body, the *ama ala* is normally selected *ad hoc*. These Igbo kings called *eze-obi*, wear regalia and maintain courts like their Benin and Igala counterparts, although they are not as politically powerful as the latter. This political system has been called 'the presidential monarch.' (Meek, 1937; Forde & Jones, 1950).

A good example of the presidential monarchy is found in Onitsha. The king of the town bears the title *Obi*. Next to him in rank are three grades of titled officials (*Ndichie*) appointed by the king from *Ozo* title holders, namely, *Ndichie Ume*, *Ndichie Okwa*, and *Ndiche Okwareze*. The first grade of officials, *Ndichie Okwea*, are about twenty-two in number. They assist the *Ndichie Ume*, are six in number and bear the titles *Iyase Ajie*, *Odu*, *Onya*, *Ogene* and *Owelle*. They are the heads of the six administrative units of the town and also the war leaders. The second grade of officials, *Ndichie Ume* in carrying out their civil and military functions in the subdivisions of the administrative units. The third grade of officials, *Ndichie Okwareze*, numbering about twenty-three, are the king's principal attendants. They decorate the palace during festivals, take charge of the king's regalia, and supervise sacrifices for the welfare of the town. They also assist the *Ndichie Ume* in the maintenance of law and order in their respective administrative units. The *Ndichie* are, thus, the main intermediaries of the *Obi* in his relations with the people, and the representatives of the people to their monarch (Nzimiro, 1972).

Among the north-eastern Igbo groups of Abakaliki and Afikpo, there was close contact with non-Igbo groups living near the Cross River, where the age-set played active roles in government. As a result these Igbo groups evolved a political system in which the focus of authority was the senior age-set called *ndi Uke*, who were ritually installed at an elaborate ceremony. They and the lineage heads constitute the deliberative body similar to the *ama ala* during the village-group assembly meetings. Their decisions are enforced at the village level by another age-set that is also specially installed as the executive arm of government (Forde and Jones, 1950; Jones,

1961). Similarly the southern Igbo groups of Ohuhu and Ngwa, as well as the south-eastern Igbo of Aruchukwu and Abam, because of their interaction with their Ibibio neighbours borrowed from the later the institution of 'secret' societies. Among the Ibibio, the *Ekpe* and *Ekpo* societies are the executive authorities and every rich freeborn is a member of one of them. The Igbo versions of these societies included the *Ekpe*, *Okonko* and *Akang* which are also open to every freeborn citizen who could pay the fees. Decisions reached at the village-group assembly were implemented at the village level by these societies. They collected fines, adjudicated disputes and kept peace (Forde and Jones, 1950; Shankland, 1933).

Justice among the Igbo is regarded as another aspect of government and there is no separation of powers between the legislative, the executive and the judicial arms. The same village assembly, and its equivalent at other levels of administration, such as the title and age-grade associations, which enact the laws also interpret and execute them. Depending on the nature of the offence committed and the parties involved, trials could be held by the lineage, village, village-group, title association or age-grade assemblies. There is no rigid division between civil and criminal offences, rather there is a distinction between conducts which are regarded as abomination (*nso*, *alu*) and those which are not. Homicide, incest and yam theft for example, belong to the first category and are regarded as crimes against the earth spirit and are capable of polluting the community. This means that even after the culprits have been punished, their crimes still have to be ritually cleansed to avert disaster in the area. When the evidence against a suspect is not convincing, he is made to swear an oath to prove his innocence. At other times intractable cases were taken to oracles for solution. The oracles served as the final courts of appeal and were regarded as impartial arbitrators (Uchendu, 1965; Forde and Jones, 1950; Meek, 1937).

An important feature of Igbo social organization is the age-grade system (*Otu*, *ogbo*). Age-grades are organized on village

basis and are composed of age-companies which are formed triennially among boys beginning from the age of thirteen to fifteen years. Members of a particular age-company elect their leader and chose a name by which they are known by other citizens of the town. About two or three age-companies are then merged to form an age-grade association. But as the boys grow to manhood, their companies are periodically upgraded through successive age-grades until they reach the ranks of the elders, which was the highest age-grade. In some towns the transition from one stage to another takes place at intervals of six years while in others it could be less (Meek, 1930; Anene, 1966).

There are no standard names for these age-grades but a specific example could illustrate their functions in the society. In the Anam village-group located in the Anambra River basin, there are four age-grades. The most junior is called *Isiagana*, and is made up of boys between thirteen and eighteen years old. The next age-grade is called *Ikolobia* and consists of young men between the ages of nineteen and thirty-three years. These two age-grades form the labour corps and are responsible for cleaning the path, building bridges and markets. During these engagements, they are supervised by the next age-grade called *Otu Owanuno* made up of men between thirty-four and forty seven years old. This group also serves as the messengers and executive agents for the implementation of decisions taken at the village or village-group assemblies. The other two age-grades are *Otu Mkpokulo*, for men between forty-nine and fifty-four years old, and *Ikenyi*, for men of fifty-five years and above. These age-grades are in charge of the legislative and judicial aspects of the village life: If there is an important issue before the village assembly, the *Otu Mkpokulo* is expected to carry out investigations and report back to the *Ikenyi* for a decision. It is also from the *Otu Owanuno* and *Otu Mkpokulo* that the warriors are selected (Stone, 1934). Each age-grade is sensitive about its prestige and checks misbehaviour through the imposition of fines or expulsion of deviant members. The institution is thus a means

for upholding the societal norms and maintaining stability.

In addition to age-grades, the Igbo also have well-developed title societies called *Ndi Nze* or *Ndi Ozo*. The essential qualifications for admission to these societies are free birth, ability to pay the fees, and an upright character. The titles, whose names vary from one village-group to another, are generally graded in an ascending order of prestige, privilege and ritual status, and are expected to be taken in that order, beginning from the lowest. In Aguleri, for example, there are seven titles, namely, *Amanwulu*, *Ifejioku*, *Ichi*, *Ekwu*, *Asomo*, *Oba* and *Ogbuanyinya* (Stone, 1932). The first three titles are taken at the lineage level and does not confer any privilege outside it. The last four titles are taken at the village-group level and are more expensive and prestigious. Membership of the upper echelons of the societies enables one to participate in the decision-making processes of the community. Again every titled man is entitled to a share of the fees paid by new members. In this way the associations serve the role of mutual insurance societies for the investment of wealth to ensure some measure of security and prestige during old age. Like the age-grades, the title societies exercise a form of social control by insisting on strict codes of conduct for their members and in this way promote peace in the community. In northern Igboland *ozo* title holders are widely respected; the society thus fosters a pan-Igbo consciousness. (Meek, 1930; Uchendu, 1965; Forde and Jones, 1950).

Finally, it is worthwhile to discuss the Igbo concept of a political community. To the Igbo a political community is a union of the living, the dead, and the gods of the land. This means that communal laws are regarded as having been ordained by the ancestral founders of the community and the gods from the beginning. It is believed that infraction of the social laws even in secret would be punished by these unseen agents. In this way, the frequency of anti-social behaviour is substantially reduced, and this would help to explain the rudimentary nature of the executive arm of government in Igboland.

Contacts between Peoples of the Anambra Valley and the Niger-Benue Confluence Region: An Archaeological Perspective

by
OKPOKO A.I.

In recent times there has been a shift in emphasis from the traditional archaeological concern with typology and technology of material objects (material cultural approach) to how culture serves as an adaptive system within an ecological frame, how religious, social and political ideas may have guided technology, subsistence and settlement, and how these in turn affected such areas of culture (the cultural process approach), (Adah, 1980). As Andah rightly points out, this second approach promotes a better understanding of the value and potential of our cultural and environmental resources and of our traditional economic and social practices. Archaeological researches in the Anambra valley and the Niger – Benue confluence area, emphasizing the cultural process approach, should thus help us identify the nature of the regions' environment and resources during prehistoric times; and the relationship, as well as, the nature of interactions between the past inhabitants, their creative skills, and traditional abilities both in terms of food production and technology (arts and crafts). We should note though, that we cannot in the cultural process approach do without the material cultural approach, because typology and chronology (whether relative or chronometric) are very necessary in archaeological interpretations.

However, the cultural process approach is very useful in any meaningful study of inter-group relations, provided em-

phasis is laid on regional surveys and large scale excavations rather than on vertical excavations (test pits and trenches) which deal mainly with establishing cultural/chronological sequences through time. Such regional surveys and excavations done in conjunction with proper use of ethnographic data help greatly with meaningful reconstruction of life ways of past inhabitants of an area or region being studied. In making use of the ethnographic data, the 'direct historical approach' is often more reliable. In such an approach, a connection in time and/or space can be demonstrated between the archaeological and ethnographic cultures. Some degree of historical/cultural continuity between the past and present populations can then be assumed (Okpoko, 1982). Scholars like Ascher (1961) and Anderson (1969) have emphasized the positive contribution of ethnographic analogy for archaeological investigations in those areas where analysis of current or recent practices and archaeological data indicates continuity or where the ethnographic information comes from a group closely related to the pre-historic culture being studied.

In dealing with the subject of inter-group relations in the Anambra valley and the Niger-Benue confluence region from archaeological perspective, one is faced with certain basic problems. Most of the excavations carried out so far in these regions are vertical excavations and most of the scholars who carried out the archaeological surveys and and excavations did not have such an objectives (inter-group relations) in mind while studying their finds. Apart from the few areas studied by the present writer and Andah with his team, proper ethnographic studies relevant for archaeological interpretations (ethnoarchaeological studies) are yet to be done in most parts of the Anambra valley and the Niger-Benue confluence region. Therefore, deductions made from the scanty evidence so far available will be highly tentative until enough systematic ethnoarchaeological/regional studies are done in these regions.

Peoples of the Anambra Valley and the Niger-Benue Confluence Region

The Anambra valley is presently occupied by both the Igbo and Igala speaking peoples, but of the few settlements along this valley, this chapter concerns itself with those of Aguleri and Ogurugu, where some archaeological work have been done, (since 1976). The Niger-Benue confluence region on the other hand, is occupied by such groups of peoples as the Igala, the Bassa Komo, the Idoma and Alago, the Tiv, the Afo (or Eloyi), the Koro, the Gbade, the Igbirra (Ebira), the north-east most Yoruba, some Gbari (Gwari) and the Nupe (Obayemi, 1984). In this context we are concerned with the few areas occupied by the Igala, the Idoma, Nupe and Tiv, where few archaeological finds have been made (see map).

Possible Routes/Avenues of Contacts amongst People of Both Regions.

The Anambra valley and the Niger-Benue confluence region lie in the mixed leguminous wooded savanna or forest savanna mosaic zones. This open savanna type of vegetation makes for easy movements of peoples and corollarily, ideas. Possible avenues of contracts between the Anambra valley (e.g. Aguleri and Ogurugu) and the Niger-Benue confluence region include the overland routes running from Nsukka-Udi highland north-westwards and entering the Igala and Idoma countries at several points. Afigbo (1987) is of the opinion that one of the routes from Aku went through 'Obimo and Okpuje to Adoru in Igala and from there headed to Idah. From Obimo a branch went through Nkpologu and Nimbo to Ogurugu where it joined the Niger-Anambra route and so helped to tap the products as well as supply the needs of the mixed Igbo and Igala of that region. From Aku another branch ran northwards through Oza-Ila, Oba, Ibagwa and Nnadu to Akpanya in Igala, from where it went to the important Ejure horse market in the heart of Igala kingdom'. How these routes which entered the Igala and Idoma countries moved northwards to the Benue is not yet clear given the present state of knowledge.

The River Niger and its tributary, the Anambra River, acted

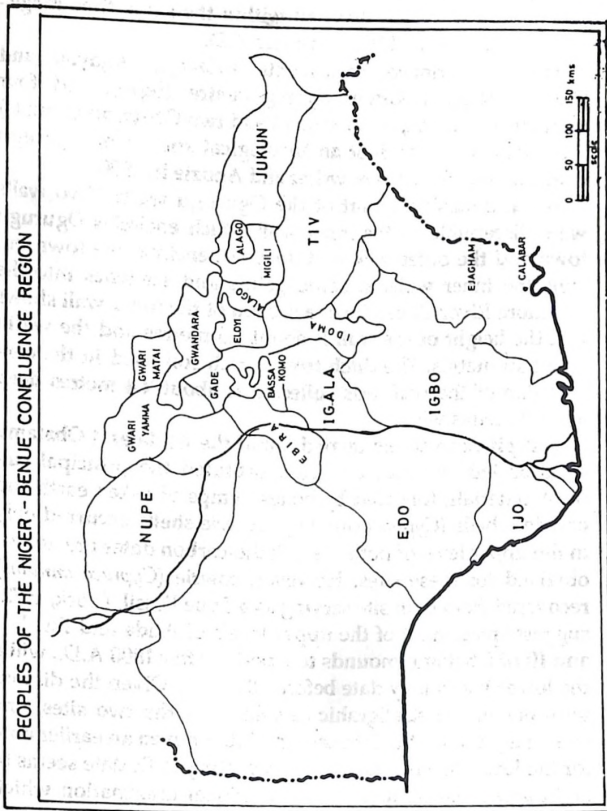
as important channels of communication. The Niger links the north-western Igbo with the Nupe, Igbirra (Ebira) and Igala on its course southwards to the Atlantic oceans. The Anambra River rises from Ankpa in Igala country and flows southwards through Igboland into the Niger at Onitsha. These rivers (the Niger and Anambra) provided opportunities for commercial activities among the Igbo, Igala, Igbirra, Nupe and other inhabitants of their banks. The river routes seem to have been used more regularly since the overland routes through the low lying Anambra basins get flooded during the wet seasons. These land and river routes might have acted as channels of communication between the peoples of the Anambra valley and the Niger-Benue confluence region from the early periods of their histories (Henderson, 1972; Boston, 1960; Hodder and Ukwu, 1969; Okpoko, 1982).

Archaeology of the Anambra Valley: A Survey

The first systematic archaeological work was started in the Anambra valley in 1979 by Anozie when he located two abandoned settlements ('Okpuno Igala' and 'Okpuno Nri') and Ekpe Umuleri (Umuleri earthwork).

'Okpuno Igala' site is located at Umuekete village in Aguleri. It has a ditch and a wall around it. The northern two-thirds of the site is sub-rectangular with the southern third semi-circular in shape. The maximum dimensions of this site are about 800m (length) and about 500m (width). The wall is largely destroyed but traces of the bank, in some cases quite substantial, are visible. Almost at the centre of the enclosed area is a mound about 1m high and 30m across. The people of Umuekete describe the mound as *ukpo-eze* (king's dias). Part of this mound was excavated in 1977 by Anozie, the present writer and Nzewunwa. We recovered iron slag, clay nozzles (tuyere), parts of furnace walls, stones (including iron stones), glass, bones (including horse bones) and plenty of potsherds.

Analysis of the cultural materials done by the present writer suggests that two phases of activities were represented at the mound site. One phase (lower phase) is without while



Peoples of the Niger-Benue Confluence

the other (upper phase) is marked by iron smelting/smithing. Although the five dates obtained from this site are not precisely in sequence, they fall within the same time range—between the 13th and 17th centuries A.D.

Three abandoned settlements (Manejo, Agayaji and Oketeofoloko), a former dyeing centre (Ikpo), and four mounds (Omadane, Atida mound and two Obatamu mounds) were located in the first archaeological survey of Ogurugu conducted by the present writer and Anozie in 1980.

We also surveyed part of the Ogurugu walls. Two walls were discernible — the inner wall which encircles Ogurugu town and the outer wall that does not encircle the town but joins the inner walls at some points and stretches into the Anambra River. A profile of a section of the inner wall shows that the height of the wall is about 1.9 metres and the width about 10 metres. The ditch from which soil used in the construction of the wall was collected is about 2.4 metres deep and 6.8 metres wide.

Test pit excavations carried out at the Atida and Obatamu mounds indicate that pottery constituted the principal cultural materials, followed by bones, lumps of baked earth and cowries shells (*Cypraea annulus*). Cowrie shells occurred only in the upper level of both sites. Radio-carbon dates are not yet obtained for these sites. However, cowrie (*Cypraea annulus*) recovered from both site serving as a Type Fossil, (York, 1972) suggests placement of the upper levels of Atida and Pits I, II and III of Obatamu mounds to a period after 1800 A.D., while the lower levels may date before 1800 A.D. Given the discontinuities in the stratigraphic sequences of the two sites, one could suggest a 15th/16th century A.D. or even an earlier date for the lower levels. The post-18th century A.D. date seems to be in agreement with the oral traditional information which maintains that Atida was one of the immigrant quarters established by Onoja Oboni and his followers/captives (a course of action likely to have occurred in the 18th/19th century A.D.), (Boston, 1960; Henderson, 1972; Shelton, 1971; Oguagha, 1981).

The Niger–Benue Confluence Region

The first archaeological excavation in Igalaland was carried out at Ojuwo Ata Ogu mound site in Idah. Although the excavation was not completed, it went long enough to reveal that the mound was man-made. Postherds, few pieces of un-retouched stones, a spindlewhord and iron slag were the main materials recovered. These materials were studied by the present writer by courtesy of the original excavator (S.G.H. Daniels).

Two dates which were obtained from this site, one from the lower and the other from the upper layers, range between the 13th and 16th centuries. However, it seems from the distribution of the cultural materials that one cultural unit is represented at this site (Okpoko, 1982).

Six other sites located at Idah in 1980 by Anozie and the present writer include: (i) Oketekakini site (ii) Ubuduapa, a purported burial place of the Jukun soldiers who invaded Idah during the Igala-Jukun war (of the 15th century), (iii) Ogbola (iv) Oketeogbe and (v) Oketeorata mounds — about 30 – 50m away from *Ata's* eastern palace wall, (vi) Opata mound, which is by the Idah–Makurdi road and about 100m west of the palace main gate.

Oketekakini is the highest of all the mounds located. It is located in a roughly triangular field (about 65 x 10 x 85m) which lies by the northern wall of the present *Ata's* palace. The field is almost bare. The mound itself is roughly elliptical in shape, about 80cm high and 20m across at the largest section. The highest part of the mound was excavated to a depth of 2m. The main cultural materials recovered include (pottery, stones, lumps of baked earth and smoking pipes) which occur throughout the sequence (layers IV). However, the European imports (China wares, pieces of gin bottles and European smoking pipes) and cowrie shells are present only in the upper layers (I – III). The distribution pattern of the cultural materials suggest two cultural units – most probably period without and period with European influences.

No radio-carbon date have so far been obtained for the

Oketekakini site but the smoking pipes, which were present in all the layers, provided a means of dating the site. Available evidence from the pipes suggests that the Oketekakini site dates between the 17th and 19th centuries A.D., at least tentatively (it could date much earlier) (Okpoko, 1984).

An archaeological survey of Alloma earthworks carried out by Alaji in 1986 shows that the principal features of the earthworks are two nearly parallel embankments and ditches'. On the average each embankment is about 7 metres high and about 5 metres wide at the base. The depth of the ditch is on the average of about 3 metres.

Only a few potsherds (227) were recovered from and around these embankments and ditches. These are one of the several embankments within the Igbo-Igala borderland (Alaji, 1986; Hartle, 1967; Okpoko, 1982). Andah and his team and Anozie at different points in time have carried out archaeological surveys of parts of Idomaland where they located many cylindrical or shaft iron smelting furnaces. But a detailed report on any of these is yet to be written.

A small initial excavation was carried out at Itaak rockshelter in the village of Iffe-Ijumu, in Oyi Local Government Area of Kogi State. This village is situated Kabba-Omuo-Oke road. The rockshelter spans from the Late Stone Age to the Iron Age. The lithic levels contain hominid remains. (Oyelaran, Alsworth-Jones, and Stringer, 1986).

The first archaeological work in Tivland was undertaken in 1951 as a result of an accidental discovery of some terra-cotta objects at a Government Secondary School in Katsina-Ala in the process of making a new hockey field. These terra-cotta objects which are similar, at least in style and technique of construction, to those from the Nok valley are a suggest that Katsina-Ala constitutes the south-eastern stretch of the Nok culture — a culture dated to about the 5th century B.C.

But the first systematic regional ethnoarchaeological survey of the middle lower Benue (especially Katsina-Ala basin) and Cross River basins started since 1975 by Andah and a team of archaeologists and field assistants with the aim of under-

standing the "natural and cultural histories of the peoples of this area, and in particular the history of settlement, land use patterns and technological and social developments, from prehistoric to recent times" (Andah, 1983). A number of sites have been located in the Benue valley from 1975 to present and these sites are divisible into two broad categories, rockshelters and open settlements (hill-tops and slopes). Test excavations have been carried out at the two large rockshelters (RS1 and RS2 and two of the open settlements (KA4S1 and 2) at Tse-Dura (near Adikpo). A detailed ethnoarchaeologically oriented study is being carried out at Ushongo. Here the prehistoric settlement and some present day settlements located at the adjoining plains have been mapped and test pits have been sunk' (Andah, 1983).

Cultural materials recovered from Tse-Dura include lithic materials, pottery, iron slag, bones and shells. Materials recovered from KA-4SI were mainly potsherds. Clay pipe fragments, iron slag, bones and lithic materials were also recovered.

Some radio-carbon dates obtained from Tse-Dura main rockshelter (RS1) suggests that the Iron Age level dates to about 2300 B.P. (350 B.C.)

Inter-group Contacts and Relations

Linguistic, oral traditional and ethnographic data suggest contacts and relations amongst the people of the Anambra valley and the Niger-Benue confluence region from the very early periods of their histories. The nature of these contacts and relations have differed from period to period in these people's histories, and in some cases the type of contact or relation cannot yet be fully determined (Okpoko and Oguagha, 1984; Forde, 1955; Obayemi 1984). But this chapter concerns itself mainly with the few possible contacts and exchange of ideas decipherable from material items recovered mostly from archaeological contexts. However, use was also made of the historical (including oral traditional) and ethnographic data where relevant, for proper interpretations and understanding.

of the material cultural items.

Archaeologists usually try to establish contacts between two culture groups by studying certain pottery attributes like decorations (decorative techniques/motifs) and surface finish (burnishing, painting etc.), vessel forms (through the study of rim forms), materials used as temper (whether obtained locally or imported) and manufacturing techniques. The present writer has done detailed studies of the Igbo and Igala present-day and excavated potteries on the above lines. The studies show strong similarities in pottery recovered from Umuekete and Ojuwo Ata Ogu sites (both belonging to the same time range) which indicate some degree of interaction between the peoples of Aguleri, Idah and related areas from about the 13th to 16th centuries A.D. There are also similarities between pottery from these two sites and pottery from Oketekakini, Atida and Obatamu sites —which suggest continuity in pottery technology in parts of Igboland and Igalaland from 13th/16th to the 19th centuries A.D. (Okpoko, 1984).

Archaeological investigations have so far revealed that the earliest evidence of iron working (smelting) in Nigeria occurred at Taruga (near Abuja) in the Nok culture area from as far back in time as 5th century B.C. Evidence of iron smelting also occurred in Daima (Bornu State) at about the 5th century A.D. and Umundu near Nsukka between 1625 and 1925 A.D. The type of furnace used at Taruga, Daima and Umundu is the cylindrical clay or shaft furnace. Many of such shaft furnaces have been located in Idomaland by Anozie and in Idomaland and Tivland by Andah and collaborators. Anozie has also located such furnaces at Abakaliki area of Anambra State and with the present writer at Ugwu-Ogu, in Okigwe Local Government Area of Imo State. However, data collected from Lejja, near Nsukka, suggest that there are at least two traditions of iron smelting in Igboland; one using the shaft furnace and the other the pit furnace. Because of this Lejja finding, Anozie implicitly suggests that we should be very cautious in making the claim that knowledge of iron smelting spread from the Nok culture area to Igboland. (Anozie, 1979).

But the fact still remains that before one can establish exchange of idea between two culture groups using similar iron working techniques, one has to study and establish some similarities between types of ores used by each of the groups (whether such ores were obtained locally or imported) and the mining and smelting processes of the ores and methods of iron smithing in the area concerned.

The presence of imported smoking pipes at Oketekakini (Idah) site suggests European trading activities (either directly or indirectly) in the hinterland of Nigeria in the 19th century A.D. — activities made possible by the river Niger.

It is not known when horses were introduced into Igboland but it is generally 'assumed that they were not common in northern Nigeria until about 1000 A.D.' (Shaw, 1970). What is well known is that in the recent past, the northern Igbo bought horses in great numbers from the Igala, Idoma and Nupe. Most of these horses were used for funeral rites or for *Ogbu emyiya* (killer of horse) title-taking ceremonies for example by the Aguleri people. Some of these horses were brought by Hausa merchants across the River Benue into Igala country, where they were sold at horse fairs at Ejule. (Counsell, 1941). Northrup (1972) also reports of Igala traders from Idah and Adamugu in the first half of the 19th century bringing their products (including horses from Igala hinterland) to sell at the Igala market near Asaba. Andah (in press) suggests that the Igbo may have obtained horses from the Igala before the 18th century A.D. The presence of horse bone/tooth at Umuekete (Aguleri) site suggests horse trading between the Igbo and their neighbours in the Niger-Benue confluence region from the 13th/16th centuries A.D. The portrayal of a horse (Horseman Hilt, IR 350 P. 193 vol. II) amongst the Igbo-Ukwu bronze object, points to northern connections and the extent of the trading activities between the Igbo and their northern neighbours to about the 9th century A.D. (Shaw, 1970).

Shaw (1970) and Afigbo have suggested that the presence of such items as glass beads, copper and bronze objects at

Igbo-Ukwu indicates far-ranging commercial contacts between Igbo-Ukwu and northern Africa. If this is true, the probable pattern of such trade could involve numerous intermediaries between the source of commodities and their destinations. We can rightly imagine that such trading activities between the Igbo and the north most probably passed through the Niger-Benue confluence region and the Anambra valley. Onwuejeogwu (1977) has, however, argued for local sources of the raw materials used for the manufacture of the Igbo-Ukwu objects. In a later review, Chikwenudu and Umueji (1979) have drawn attention to the occurrence of copper, tin, lead and zinc deposits (metallic ores necessary for the bronze/brass industry) in the Benue trough and the north-central Plateau of Nigeria; and to the exploitation of these sources in pre-historic times. Craddock and Picton (1986) have also pointed out that 'there are definite remains of pre-European lead mining in (the Benue trough) and (that) copper could also have been exploited. The analytical differences between the 13th/15th century bronze/brass objects from Ife and Benin and the 9th century Igbo-Ukwu objects is interpreted by Craddock and Picton (1986) to suggest new sources for materials (probably from across the Sahara) used for the Ife and Benin objects. Again, in this case the raw materials for the manufacture of the Igbo-Ukwu bronzes must have been traded across Niger-Benue confluence and the Anambra valley. In exchange for these items, the Igbo traders gave slaves, ivory and kolanuts (Shaw 1970). The bronze figures (calabash handle of copper comparable to that of the ritual calabash from Idah, (Shaw, 1970) and bronze pectoral masks presently worn by *Eze Nri* or *Orieri* and the *Ata* of Igala, suggest interactions between the Igbo and the Igala in the past.

Apart from the Igbo-Ukwu bronzes, a lot of other bronzes have been recovered from Ezira (Igboland), Ife, Benin, middle Niger villages of Jebba, Tada, Giragi and parts of the middle Benue River. Whereas the Igbo-Ukwu bronzes are a mixture of lead and copper those of Benin and Ife are mixture of tin, zinc and copper, and, strictly speaking, should be referred to

as 'brass'. Spectrographic analyses of all the middle Niger Benue bronzes are yet to be done. But whatever may be the differences (stylistic or metallurgical) amongst these bronzes from Igbo-Ukwu, Ife, Benin, middle Niger and Benue, the fact still remains that their techniques of manufacture is similar — *cire perdue* or lost wax technique.

Nupe traditions state that the Tsoede bronzes found in the middle Niger villages of Jebba, Tada and Giragi were brought by the legendary founder, Tsoede, from Idah. 'The bronzes are of mixed artistic styles', (Shaw, 1973) and do not have a homogeneous origin (Fraser, 1975). Shaw (1973) is of the opinion that the seated figure at Tada is in the same style as the Ife heads. But Willet (1964) and Fraser (1975) maintain that it is of Ife manufacture. Ryder (1965) draws attention to the fact that the maltese cross design, associated at Benin with the *Ogane* is only paralleled outside Benin in the large standing figure of Tada and that one of the motifs which occur twice on the Jebba-Tada group of bronzes (a bird with snakes for wings) is paralleled on a single Benin piece (an ivory double gong). Fraser (1965) in his study states that 'in the present state of knowledge, the place of origin for the Giragi group of Tsoede bronzes can only be Owo.

Whatever the differences of interpretation, the above scholars are all agreed that the Tsoede bronzes are not indigeneous to the middle Niger villages. It is of course yet to be established whether such bronzes are from Idah, Ife, Owo or Benin.

A lot of bronzes which function as attributes of leadership, with prestige weapons (spears, knives, axes) and ornaments (especially various types of bracelets), have been recovered in the middle Benue (Rubin, 1973). And on the basis of formal, stylistic and iconographical criteria, Rubin (1973) categorizes them into three broad sub-groups. According to him, the first sub-grouping shows strong affinity with bronzes from Adamawa, especially the Verre around Yola; a second seems to connect them with forms and motifs known to come from the Lower Niger and southern Nigeria — traditions quite remote from the Middle Benue; and the third sub-grouping is

attributed provisionally to the Abakpa or Abakwariga, 'a people related to the Hausa who appear to have played an important role as craftsmen and traders throughout the Benue regions prior to the nineteenth century'. He also points out that the historical and cultural complexity reflected in the diversity and richness of the bronzes from the middle Benue strongly suggest that interactions between the peoples of the Benue valley have probably been extensive during both the recent and remote past.

It is pertinent to mention that European travellers reported wide distribution of bronze working and brisk trade in manufactured objects, particularly, ornaments in the Benue valley during the second and third quarters of the 19th century. For instance, MacGregor Laird (1837) commented on the number of bronze casting workshops he encountered during his visit to Panda in 1832. Baikie (1856) saw women at O'jogo near Makurdi wearing armlets and wristlets (probably of fine brass) bought from Hausa makets or Wukari.

Apart from exchange of objects, and most probably, ideas, there were also periods of conflicts in the Anambra valley and the Niger-Benue confluence regions. Although no identifiable weapons were recovered from any of the archaeological sites studied so far in these regions, the ramparts at Umuekete-Aguleri, Nsukka, Ogurugu, Ifite-Ogwari, Umueje, (all in the Anambra valley) and Alloma in the Niger-Benue confluence region, bear testimony to a period or periods of conflicts, as mentioned by Hartle (1967) who speaks of eleven forts between Unadu and Ogurugu. War and raiding in these regions, conflicts in which the Igbo and Igala were involved, belong to the 18th and early 19th centuries A.D. — period of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Oral traditions suggest that the ancient Tiv occupied the hill-tops (e.g. Binda, Tse-Dura, and Ushongo etc.) during periods of turbulence resulting from slave trading activities in Nigeria. Archaeological investigations at the hill-tops of Tse-Dura, Ushongo and Binda (with relics of walling systems) confirm oral traditional evidence that the Tiv lived on hill-tops in ancient times.

CHAPTER 6

Contacts and Interrelations among the Peoples of the Benue Valley.

by
FOLORUNSO C.A.

Introduction

We shall attempt in this paper to evaluate some of the archaeological, historical and ethnographic evidence of the contacts and interrelations among the peoples inhabiting the Benue Valley. This is done with the view of outlining the cultural history of the Benue Valley, highlighting the role of the Benue river in the intercultural relations, contacts and exchanges among the peoples.

The Benue Valley lies in a transitional area between the wet forest region to the south and the dry open savannah to the north. There are some local ecological changes caused by variations in relief, soil, drainage and human factors. The geographical location of the valley has made possible the cultivation of both forest and savannah crops. The alluvial deposits from the river and its tributaries make the area a very fertile zone which has attracted populations in the past and present. In the Abaji district, to the southwest of the Igala country between the Niger and Anambra rivers, the vegetation consists of swamp forests. The alluvial deposits from the two rivers make this area the most fertile portion of the region (Boston, 1968).

The River Benue itself was a line of effective communication and exchange among the various groups living in its valley. The Benue river is unobstructed by severe rapids, and its course may possibly correspond to a major faultline. The val-

ley has a route-way for people coming from the east and northwest. The river may be navigated from the Niger-Benue confluence up to Makurdi between June and November, between Makurdi and Yola and Garoua in Cameroon in August and September (Harrison Church, 1974: 18). The Benue river therefore would have been important for socio-cultural and political developments and contact in the region.

It is not by accident that the Jukun who were said to have moved from south of the Lake Chad (Temple, 1965) eventually established themselves in the Benue Valley. The Tiv who also were said to have moved from somewhere in the south-east of their present country took to the direction of the Benue valley and eventually succeeded in occupying parts of the valley as well as the valleys of the tributary rivers. The Igala, the Idoma and several other ethnic groups had carved out for themselves portions of the Benue Valley. Over the centuries, there had been contacts between the various ethnic groups, the river Benue and its tributaries serving for the communication.

Cultural contacts and exchanges

On the basis of nineteenth century reports of European travellers in the Benue Valley, a wide distribution of bronze-working and trade in manufactured objects and ornaments have been attested. MacGregor Laird (1837, cited by Rubin, 1973) noted a number of bronze casting workshops at Panda in 1833 and also noted that the 'ore' reportedly came down the Benue from the eastwards. Baikie (1856) mentioned that he saw women at O'jogo, near Makurdi wearing brass ornaments bought at the Niger-Benue confluence or from Wukari.

Rubin (1973) in his study of the bronze objects of the middle Benue, opined that most of the bronzes appear to reflect a network of relationships focusing on the Benue river as a directional axis, and that these objects also appear "to offer insights into the historical processes and relationships only dimly hinted by data from other sources". He defined three broad subgroups of which the first subgroup has affinities

with bronzes from Adamawa, especially from Verre around Yola. The second subgroup is said to connect with forms and motifs known from the lower Niger and southern Nigeria, while the third is said to be seemingly relating to no tradition outside the area where they are presently found. The most important thing here is that two sub-groupings indicate interaction of populations in the Benue valley as shown by the presence of bronze objects from the upper and lower Benue in the Middle Benue. The Kukuma gaudet and the Puje bell from Wukari area appear to point down the Benue and the lower Niger area (Rubin, 1973). The Aku's 'Sword of Justice' and 'State Spear' from Wukari, the sword of Kimbi at Donga, bracelets which form part of the Gara's regalia at Donga, other bracelets at Kumbo and Nyita near Tokum, and the anklets made of large crotal bells are said to be derived from the Adamawa matrix (Rubin, 1973), that is, the upper Benue.

Apart from the mere presence of the objects, their connotations in the different societies as noted above were also important. Most of the bronzes function as attributes of leadership, with prestige weapons and ornaments being more important. The bronze objects from Yola, Gwama, Shendam, Wukari Makurdi and Panda (Fig 1) show strong affinities, particularly in their uses in the royal courts. The bronze objects therefore bear witness of the cultural interrelations in the Benue Valley as well as the importance of the Benue river in the process of the relations.

The Jukun appear to be the first group to have established an organised state machinery in the length and breadth of the Benue Valley. However, Meek (1931) states that an Hausa group known as the Abakpa or Abakwariga, had a much older association with the site of Wukari and they were craftsmen and traders throughout the Benue regions prior to the rise of the Fulani. The influence of Jukun as would be seen later in this paper, extended to the Niger Benue confluence area. The Jukun evolved a complex theocratic system of government with the Aku at the head of affairs. The Jukun in their relations to their subject chiefdoms were not a high handed sort of master but gave a lot of freedom to these semi-

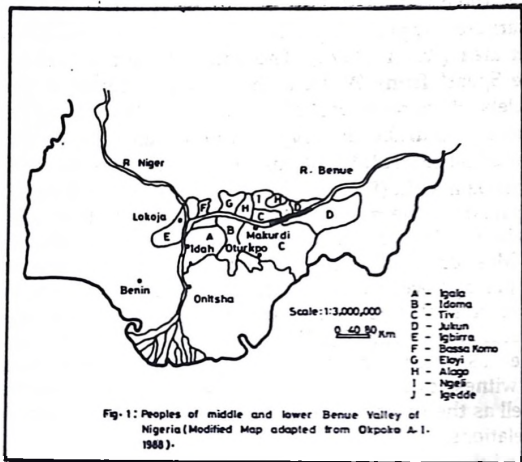


Fig 1

independent chiefdoms (Temple, 1965).

The Tiv are a group for which one could say with some certainty, never made any attempt at establishing any kingdom. This probably arose from the nature of their social organisation being a decentralised, fragmented people who are loosely organised on clan basis, having groups and villages being independent of each other. However, they had a surprisingly cohesion which arises from the belief that they all descended from one ancestor. Genealogical relationship was a virtue in time of war, uniting all the people against the invader and in peace time each genealogical sub-division represented a potential basis for dispute (Crowder, 1959). The Tiv definitely clashed with the Jukun on several occasions as they were pushing into the Benue Valley. In the oral traditions of the Tiv, there is always reference to the Ugenyi with whom they clashed. It seems that the term Ugenyi refers to the Jukun as is being suggested today by some Tiv informants. The clashes might have been as a result of the Tiv incessant quest for more lands in their rapid expansion in the Benue Valley (Folorunso, 1989).

The Tiv also had some relations with the Fulani as they pushed into the Benue Valley. In Akiga's story, it is narrated how the Tiv left their original home in the south-east after a quarrel with their neighbours called the 'bush tribe' (Akiga, 1954). Who these people were is not stated and not known. As they moved into the Benue Valley, they met with the Fulani with whom they formed a close friendship. The Fulani protected the Tiv against attacks from other groups while the Tiv in return provided labour for the Fulani farm work. However, they were not together for long before they parted company as the Tiv did not want intermarriage which was the reason of the quarrel between them and the 'bush tribe' neighbour of their original homeland. The Tiv therefore decided to part ways with the Fulani (Hodgkin, 1975). The Tiv also clashed with the Idoma and dispossessed them of their lands. Many Idoma traditions explicitly involve residence in what is now Tiv country for some period before their arrival in their

present homes (Armstrong, 1955b).

The Idoma on the other hand have become closely connected with the neighbouring groups, and are frequently found to have adopted the customs of these neighbours. Their language is variously described as closely resembling that of the Tiv and Agatu. The Idoma traditions of origin point to Apa, the Wukari area of the Old Jukun Empire. They migrated to their present location as a result of unstable political conditions in the Jukun empire probably in the fifteenth century. It is considered that the Idoma consisted of a number of petty states which may have ante-dated the rise of the Jukun, or on the other hand, the Jukun may have played a large role in organising them. Most of Agatu groups of Idoma have a tradition of having come from or having been part of 'Apa', the Jukun Empire. Some of the clans claim that they formed the Apa force ordered to take vengeance on the founder of the present Igala dynasty, who on his marriage to a daughter of the royal house, aspired to independence, threw off the Apa yoke and fled with the symbols of one of the major royal cults. This Jukun connection is manifested in the Idoma having derived many cultural traits from the Jukun. Some of the oldest masks at Oturkpo have the Jukun cloth pattern which is still in use in Wukari (Armstrong, 1955b).

The Igala is another dominant group in the Benue Valley. They also claim some connection with the Jukun. Though the Igala are said to have Nupe/Yoruba origin but the ruling group in Igala had a separate origin from that of the general population. The Igala identify their nation's history with that of the royal clan, and represent its structure and traditions of origin and development by the relationship of the royal clan with other leading descent groups that are representative of the widest divisions of Igala society (Boston, 1962). Igala traditions assert that their first king bearing the title Ata was of foreign provenance. There are three different sources for the first Ata, one traces him to Yorubaland, another to Benin and the third to the Jukun kingdom. Boston (1962) suggested that the traditions probably correspond to different phases of his-

tory in which the Yoruba link may be the most ancient, followed by the Benin connection, and most recently, the Jukun. The present dynasty is of Jukun origin and it was founded by a noble of the court at Wukari some time during the first half of the eighteenth century (Armstrong, 1955a).

The strategic location of the Igala country in the Niger-Benue confluence, accounts for their contacts with the Yoruba, Edo, Jukun, Igbo, Idoma, Igbirra and other groups within the Niger-Benue Valley area. The Igala contacts with their neighbours had been in various forms; cultural, economic and political. Culturally, oral traditions have linked the title of Ata, the king of the Igala to Yoruba, Edo and Jukun origins.

The Achadu, the head of the Igala Mela is the next highest official after the king. Igala traditions say that the first Achadu was an Igbo man. The Umueri clan of Igboland also claim that their half-brother called Idah founded the Igala capital. These traditions seem to indicate contacts between the Igbo and Igala in the distant past. From Ogurugu, an Igala town on the Anambra river, the Igala seem to have mounted military expedition into parts of Igbo and Idoma countries in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Oguagha, 1988). Relics of the ancient fortifications found at Alloma, Nsukka, Ogurugu and Okura Ofante attest to the Igbo/Igala relations in the historic time. The earthworks are mainly found within the Igbo-Igala borderlands (Alaji. 1986).

Benin traditions indicate that there was a major war with the Igala kingdom in 1517. The Nupe also affirm that Tsoede, the founder of their dynasty was an Igala prince from Idah. The dynasties of the Igbirra kingdoms of Panda and Igu are said to have been founded by Ohimi an Igala prince who was sent as governor of the area but later asserted his autonomy. Some rulers from Idomaland and Nsukka area of Igboland claim that the titles of their founders were received from the Ata of Igala. Apart from the dynastic relationships, the Igala are said to have founded a number of towns or sections of towns in Igboland. Osomari, parts of Onitsha and Illah trace their origin to Idah. Similarly, the Igbirra Tao, and some

Idoma clans in Ocheke, Adoka, and Okwoga districts are of Igala descent (Oguagha, 1988).

It is difficult to date the extension of Igala influence into the neighbouring states and societies, however the Igala Kingdom seemed to have been a power force by the end of the eighteenth century. Indeed, it was the Ata who in 1841 sold a piece of land in Lokoja to the British expedition for the establishment of a model farm. The Igala also controlled the trade in slaves from northern parts of Nigeria transported down the Niger (Oguagha, 1988).

There had been few archaeological excavations in Idah, the Igala capital, first by S.H.G. Daniels at Ojuwo Atogu mound and secondly by A.I. Okpoko at the Oketekakini mound. Ameje (1991) mentioned several other archaeological sites in Idah and traditions relate them to the early history of the Igala. The archaeological works done in Idah suggest that, by the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries A.D., there were established societies whose material culture indicates contact with the neighbours and also the European traders.

The last group to be examined are the Igbirra who occupy the area north and east of the confluence of the Niger and Benue rivers. Politically, they were the dominant group in the chiefdoms of Panda and Koton Karifi, but they were not numerically dominant. These chiefdoms were located along the northern bank of the Benue River. All Igbirra groups claim colonisation from the Igala of Idah. They also unanimously claim ultimate ancestry from Wukari, the Jukun capital, and in Panda the link with Jukun was retained, as materials for the royal ritual were imported from Wukari. The relations with the Igala was also maintained as Igbirra chiefs has to be recognised by the Ata of Idah and they sent gifts to him (Brown, 1955).

While the history of the Benue region prior to the nineteenth century is still fragmentary, broad outlines have been proposed by Rubin (1973). The Chamba who presently live in the middle Benue are said to form part of a series of migratory waves from Adamawa probably between the six-

teenth and the late eighteenth centuries. The Jukun who are presently concentrated in the Wukari area, have some of their oldest communities, Pindiga, Gwana and Kona located in the area between Gombe and Jalingo in the upper Benue regions. Their original trend during the past three or four centuries seems to have been down the Benue Valley. The Idoma and Igala who live near the Niger-Benue confluence claim long-standing connections with Wukari area (Rubin, 1973).

It could be concluded that there was a probable extensive interaction between the peoples of the Benue Valley during both the recent and remote past with Rivers Niger and Benue, and their tributaries serving as the lines of communication. These historical and cultural interactions are reflected in the relics of relations, institutions, material culture, and the oral traditions of the peoples.

CHAPTER 7

The Idoma-Alago-Yala People of Nigeria: An Historical Introduction

by
ERIM O. ERIM

Introduction

The Idoma-Alago-Yala speaking peoples of Nigeria occupy wide geographical areas of the Benue-Cross basins. For reasons of clarity, they could be grouped as the 'core' and the 'greater' Idoma. The core consists of those Idoma-Alago-Yala speaking peoples, which, although scattered over wide areas of the Benue-Cross region, speak dialects of one language of Idoma. On the other hand, the greater Idoma-Alago-Yala include these groups which, over the centuries, have been assimilated into the Idoma culture and therefore share common cultural traits.

The core of the Idoma people is today located within three different states of Benue, Plateau and Cross River. Within Benue, the groups inhabit three local Government Areas of Ado, Okpokwu and Otukpo respectively; in Gboko such groups include the Etulo which also spread into the Katsina Ala Area of Benue State. In Plateau, such group include the Doma, Keana, Alosi, Obi and Agwatashi. Within the Cross River area the Yala of Ogoja, Ikom, and Obubra Local Government Areas of the State.

Thus, the core is scattered:

Over a wide arc from Keana, east of Lafia town, through Doma and Agatu Districts of Lafia and Nassarawa Division to

Idoma Division, ending with two separate outliers (sic) the Iyala and Nkum in Ogoja province (Armstrong, 1955), p. 91

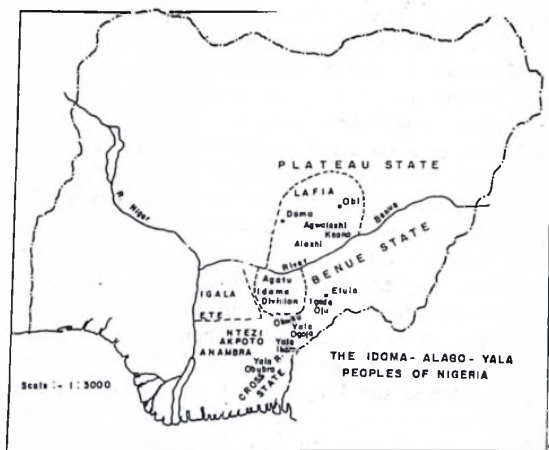
For the greater Idoma peoples, the arc widens to include the Ito and Oju of modern Igedde, Akpa, Akweya – Yatche. Indeed, the distribution of the group is continuous from Keana in Plateau to Yala (Ikom) on the Cross River. In addition, several groups in Anambra State today claim Idoma origins. These include the Ntezi and Akpoto of Abakaliki Division as well as the Ete of Nsukka who clearly belong to the 'core' Idoma group.

The following map clearly shows the spread of these groups within the Benue-Cross basins.

In spite of their modern geographical spread, however, the various groups recognise themselves as belonging together and as distinct units which are also similarly recognised by their various neighbours. They all regard themselves to be descendants of a common ancestors; speak a common language which is today characterised by several dialects. The smallest social unit refers to itself as *ayi* or *ai* meaning descendants of a common ancestor and, all worships a common, high God, *Owo* or *Owoicho*. Several *ai* – or *ayi* among the 'core' Idoma later developed state institutions such as states, kingdoms and chiefdoms which in turn incorporated several non-Idoma speaking peoples into their fold. Hence the origin of Greater Idoma. Over the years, the new members who today constitute the king-makers or *ai-anya* later acquired both the language and culture of the dominant groups. This explains in brief why such 'core' Idoma areas of Otukpo, Ugbuju, Adoka, Agila, Igumale are more territorially defined unit than the greater Idoma (Erim, 1981, pp. 90–122).

Thus, the Idoma–Alago–Yala have been defined above in terms of their language and history. Armstrong still classified that complex into a dialect cluster which remains as deeply divided as nine dialect groups whose actual intelligibility varies widely as follows:

1. The Central or Otukpo dialect, spoken in Otukpo, Oglewu, Adoka and Yangedde;



The Idoma-Alago-Yala Peoples of Nigeria

2. Igumala-Agila dialect;
3. The Western dialect, spoken in Orukpa, Otukpa, Edumoga and Orokam;
4. Agatu dialect, spoken in Agatu, Ochekwu and other Agatu settlements on the north bank of River Benue;
5. Okwoga dialect;
6. Arago (Alago) dialect, spoken in Doma, Keana, Obi, and (7-9)
The Yala dialects spoken in Yala (Ogoja), Yala (Ikom) and Yala (Obubra).

Thus, Idoma linguists agree that, in spite of their wide spread nature, there is a high degree of mutual intelligibility within the nine dialect clusters. This goes to confirm the strong feeling among the members of the group that they are descendants of a common, founding father.

Origins

The Idoma elders claim in their oral traditions that the entire lower Benue valley has been their ancestral homeland from very early times. However, the above claim is not reflected in any surviving oral traditions for the period involved would seem too ancient to be so reflected. The surest way of confirming the Idoma claim to antiquity within the lower Benue Valley would have been archaeological finds in the region. However, unlike other regions of Nigeria, no systematic archaeological work has been carried out in the area. We are therefore going to rely on evidence from linguistics.

Armstrong was the first linguist to put the idea that the Idoma-Alago-Yala ancestors have lived for a long time within the lower Benue valley as distinct from their neighbours (Armstrong 1955).

His views have been confirmed by recent research into the Idoma early history (Erim, 1985). Studies into proto-Idoma as well as Lexicostatistical comparison of other Nigerian Languages which are closely related to the Idoma-Alago-Yala peoples also confirm Armstrong's viewpoint. These groups include the Yoruba, Edo, Igbo and Igala. Comparative studies

into the past of these peoples have suggested figures of the time-depth of separation of the Idoma cluster from other groups as well as the distance between the major dialect cluster within the Idoma-Alago-Yala group. The suggestion is that the Idoma group is related to the other groups and yet distant from them as many as six thousand years ago. (Erim, 1990, p. 11).

Linguists believe that the Idoma-Alago-Yala people together with the Yoruba, Edo, Igbo, Igala all belong to the Kwa sub-family of the Benue-Congo Complex of Africa languages. It is also believed that the ancestors of the above groups of people once belonged to one social complex which broke up some six thousand years ago. With the split, the various members drifted away into other homelands giving birth to the variety of dialect of the proto-group. (Armstrong, 1955, p. 79).

On the ethnic origins of the Idoma-Alago-Yala peoples the picture is far from clear. There can be no doubt that linguists have an important role to play on the emergence of an ethnic identity called the Idoma and related groups. What is certain however is that the Idoma-Alago elders do not remember any place of origin outside the lower Benue valley while the Yala elders are emphatic that, in spite of these present geographical location within the Cross River Basin, their ancestral homeland is the lower Benue valley. (Erim, 1990).

It is possible that within the past one thousand years or so the entire areas south of Gongola to the Benue-Niger confluence was thinly populated by the Idoma-Alago-Yala speaking people, with the greatest concentration around modern Wukari Division. The area west of Wukari up to the Confluence may well have begun with a sub-stratum of the so-called Akpoto (a Yoruba related group). However, by the middle of the sixteenth century the demographic pattern of that settlement had drastically changed by the west of Niger; these being a mixture of Akpoto, Edo and possibly Gara as well. Towards the end of the same century the region was subjected to more invasions by the Bassa, Igbirra, Igbo and the

Jukun from the Cross River basin. By the seventeenth century, some of these invaders began to absorb considerable number of Tiv migrants and a few Hausa called Abakwariga. It was out of this conglomerate and around 1800 A.D. that emerged the Idoma-Alago-Yala peoples of Nigeria. (Erim, 1981).

For our purpose, the range of the oral traditions is clearly short of the time-depth suggested by linguistics. In fact, traditions provide a time range of six hundred years or less. Indeed, these traditions also tell of inter-group relations, trade, and migrations within the lower Benue Cross river basins which we shall now examine.

Migrations

The Idoma informants are firm in their conviction that their ancestral homeland which they identified as either Apa or Kwararafa broke up about thirteen generations ago. Thus, by genealogical calculations that event have occurred between 1535–1625. The actual movement from Kwararafa has been divided into four different phases. First, the migration which took place between 1535–1625; another between 1625–1655; the third between 1655–1685; and finally the fourth which occurred between 1685 and 1745 (Erim, 1981).

Admittedly, almost all the phases of migration could be regarded as internal involving dispersals from one primary centre to another with intermediate stops from one part of the lower Benue valley to another. One notable aspect of these migrations was the hiving off of the Yala scion from the mainstream of the Idoma-Alago complex by the middle of the sixteenth century into the upper reaches of the Cross River Basin where they have made their modern homeland.

The different phases of the migration which took place between 1535–1745 involved a small number of immigrants most of whom constituted the core of the Idoma-Alago-Yala peoples. This was followed later by yet another influx of immigrants, both large and small, moving at intervals of one or two generation into new homelands which have been identified as Apa I and Apa II respectively. Thus, by the opening

years of the seventeenth century, most Idoma immigrants had arrived new homelands (Erim, 1981).

Two such dispersal centres were Apa I and Apa II. The exact limits of these homelands remain uncertain. However, indications are that both banks of the Benue River starting from Ibi in the north to the Confluence in the south formed part of the new Idoma-Alago homeland. Indications are also clear that modern Abinsi and Makurdi town were regional headquarters of the Apa I homeland while the area of modern Agatu remained the Capital of Apa II.

The groups that peopled Apa I included the descendants of modern Ugboju, Adoka, Otukpo, Doma and Keana respectively, although the leader of the last two groups moved to the north bank of the Benue during the second generation of the sixteenth century following the discovery of salt wells in the hinterland of Keana. The leadership of Apa I fell on Edo who later provided land to the incoming Otukpo and Doka groups which were led by Okunte and Owasi respectively. Indications are that these immigrants maintained cordial relationship with their host, the Igbirra, all of whom were later displaced by the Tiv invasion which increased in intensity between 1685 and 1715. In other words, the Tiv push was one important factor which proved too vigorous for the politically fragmented Idoma to withstand. Thus, by the opening years of the nineteenth century most members of the core Idoma had been compressed into the modern districts of Ugboju, Adoka and Otukpo.

Apa II was founded by a non-Idoma immigrant. He was Abutu Eje, the leader of a branch of modern Igala ruling family at Idah. It is reported that he was a crown-prince within the Kwararafa ruling family. Wherever he may have been the original situation, it is clear that his movement west of Wukari was attended by continuous conflicts between him and the ruling family in Kwararafa. It is also reported that he died during one of the armed conflicts with his overlords in Wukari. It was his daughter, Ebele, who consolidated Apa II before moving further south to capture Idah political seat

from the ruling Bini dynasty between 1625–1655. (Clifford, 1936).

The ensuing tussle for power between the immigrant Igala and the ruling Bini dynasty triggered off several political upheavals which forced several branches of the Abutu Eje and Idoma groups to flee further south of Apa II and west of Idah. These movements have been aptly referred to as 'the western origins' by some core Idoma who today claim Igala as their primary dispersal centre. This is far from the truth. (Erim, 1981).

Ankpa east of Idah soon became the melting pot of the refugees from Apa II and Idah respectively. It is further reported that more dynastic fights over the Abutu Eje throne in both Idah and Ankpa forced both the losers as well as their supporters further east into western Idomaland. Thus, these refugees today settle in Agatu Ochekwu, Adoka, Ugoboku, Yangadde, Oglewu, Edumoga, Ugbokolo, Otukpa, Owukpa, Orokam, Igumale and Agila.

One thing is certain. As the core Idoma groups converged in their modern homeland from all directions in the eighteenth century, they lacked a central political identity prior to British rule in that region of Nigeria. In their hurry to introduce indirect rule, there was more concern for administrative tidiness and efficiency than for cultural identity. Consequently, Idomaland was partitioned into several tiny administrative districts which ignored the prevailing pre-colonial political units. Under a different type of administration a common political and cultural identity for all the groups could have evolved during the colonial period. That development came belatedly in 1948 with the creation of Och' Idoma, thus putting the 'core' Idoma under one political umbrella.

The Alago Complex

The Alago movement out of Apa I took place between 1625 and 1655. Their leaders were Andoma and Akeana. Some traditions connect their immigration with the civil wars while

characterising Idah political history during this period. (Clifford, 1936). Wherever the original situation might have been, the more popular traditions associated the Alago migration with rumours as to 'there being salt pits in the neighbourhood' of modern Keana. (Meek, 1969).

Thus, by 1655, two independent Alago Kingdoms of Doma and Keana had been well established. Doma was to the west of Keana and the latter to the east of modern Lafia town. Over the centuries, smaller settlements of Obi, Alosi, Agwatashi sprang. Later, both Doma and Keana developed a kind of confederal form of government. That of Keana in particular, and given its geographical proximity to Kwararafa overlords came under heavy political pressures from the Jukun. The resultant civil war within Keana confederacy destroyed the nascent dynasty of Keana Adi and his successors. The political chaos was further compounded by the eventual collapse of Kwararafa which forced more Jukun fortune seekers into the Keana confederacy. Indeed, by 1800 the Alago were in no mood to withstand the greater challenge which the revolutionary Islam led by Fodio in 1804 (Erim 1991) unleashed on what later became northern Nigeria.

The Yala of the Cross River Basin

The traditions of the three Yala settlement of Yala (Ogoja), Yala (Ikom) and Yala (Obubra) suggest clearly that their ancestors broke from the core Idoma a long time ago to settle in their present homelands within the upper reaches of the Cross River basin. From the available evidence, it is obvious that the Yala migrant groups came with institutions, language, and ways of life similar to those of the Idoma – Alago groups of the lower Benue Valley.

The Idoma elders are also convinced that they share a common ancestry with the Yala. The Idoma expression for this common ethnic identity is *Ongba lipu* which quite literally translates as people of one birth or womb. The Idoma ancestor is Idu while his first son is either Ode or Ochimode, the founder of the Yala scion. For wondering away from their an-

cestral home, the Idoma regard the Yala scion as being 'lost', i.e. moving away from one moral pale with less and less obligations towards their Idoma-Alago brothers. The Idoma expression for this apparent lapse on the part of the erring Yala 'brothers' is, *Ipachi*, which goes beyond its literal meaning of 'bush or grass'.

Furthermore, there can be no doubt that the Idoma-Alago-Yala belief in common ethnic identity is derivable from the common awareness by all concerned that they speak mutually intelligible dialects of what linguists have described as the Idoma-Alago-Yala dialect cluster. Current linguistic classification has further sub-divided the cluster into nine dialects. Thus, linguistic and historical evidence provide a more convincing manner of the ethnic relationship between the various members of the Idoma-Alago-Yala family.

Genealogical ties between some member of Idoma family and members of the far-fung Yala groups further convince us of the bond that exists between these Nigerian groups. One example will suffice. Today, some members of Idoma as well as Yala claim descent from a certain Ode. Collectively, such members refer to themselves as *ai-ode* after their illustrious founder. Among the Idoma such groups are found among the Umogidi in Adoka, the ai-ode of Orukpo, the descendants of Eje, Ona, Oguche of Ugbokpo in Ochekwu district; Adama in Agatu district; and Oglewu district respectively (Erim, 1981).

Evidence further suggests that c 1535-1625 with the break-up of the Yala from the Idoma-Alago groups, their founder, Ode, established a new settlement at Katsina and named it after his first son Ala (Origin of modern Katsina Ala). He later moved southwest went to exploit the salt wells which abound in Ogoja district. He died on one such encounter with the fierce indigenes. It was his son Ala who came down south, later consolidated a new settlement among several salt wells and accordingly named the new homeland 'Okpoma' salt wells (Erim, 1990).

Thus, the genealogical ties between the descendants of ai-ode on both side - of the divide remain a classic testimony to

the Idoma-Alago-Yala ethnicity. Among the Yala, genealogies show that about nine generations ago, Ode, their founding father broke away from the Idoma-Alago complex to found new homeland within the Cross River basin. Genealogies collected from the three Yala groups show reliable consistency of eight generations in which further dispersals took place from Okpoma to other subsequent settlements in modern Imom and Obubra areas of Cross River basin.

In their new environments, the Yala have reacted in a number of ways in an effort to adopt to new surroundings. One such way was a modification of their state institutions. Elsewhere, efforts were made to show how in their Kwaraara homeland the Idoma-Alago-Yala ancestors developed state system, kingdom and chiefdoms in response to several stimuli in that environment. (Erim, 1981). During their subsequent dispersals only four Idoma-Alago-settlements of Igunmale, Agila, Doma and Keana were able to re-establish new state systems in their new homeland. Among the Idoma, the Otukpo, Adoka and Ugboju succeeded in establishing kingdoms while the rest established chiefdoms. (Erim, 1981).

As the Yala wandered further and further away from their ancestral homeland and a response to new ecological factors only a few of their earlier political traditions survived. One was the tradition of Oche-ship. This is based upon the principle that kingship is rooted in every society and that it came out of the biological belief of the father of the family writ large. Clearly, among the Idoma-Alago-Yala, the Oche was first a family figure before he became the 'father' of the community. Furthermore, the oche-ships or kingship is deeply rooted in religion in which he became the carrier of God's will in the community. Later in their history, a general assembly Ojira emerged in which the Oche became the first among equals. Over time, the Idoma accepted the hereditary principle which is so vital to the Ocheship institution. Finally, it must also be stressed that it was while in the Kwaraara homeland that both the gerontocratic and conciliar principles of Oche-ship took root: (Erim 1981).

In their new environment several political changes took place. Among all the Yala groups, a variety of factors combined to weaken the principle of oche-ship to a point of crises. Yala (Ogoja) for example, the struggle over the ownership of salt wells between the immigrant Yala and the indogenous Igbadu split the Yala down the spine into Yala east, west and Cross River Yala; struggle over clay wells further split the ai-Imaha into sub-groups. Thus, the issue of security became far more important than other state matters. Later, when some other Yala groups moved away from Okpoma to settle on the banks of the Cross River in the seventeenth century, the oche-ship kingship paled into insignificance.

In other words, although the principles remained ingrained in the lives, the issue of survival became so paramount that the unity of the group remained cultural and historical; the use of common dialect of Idoma-Alago-Yala, historical belief in a common ancestor of the group; religion: the worship of the common sky God *Owo*, *Owoicho*, *Osowo* whose unit priests presided over new annual festivals.

Thus, each settlement had its village assembly *Ojira* or *Ipu Ogra* which was no longer presided over by the oche or oshe but by eldest member of the assembly, usually the oldest member of the founding family of the settlement. The solidarity of the settlement derived more from membership of age-grades, cult group, secret societies than from the lineage ties.

Internal and External Trade

It would appear from extant records that European merchants did not visit the lower Benue valley till late in the early eighteenth century. The British traders were the first, trading on local products such as red pepper, elephant turks, salt and so forth. Later the French and the German arrived there from the nineteenth century to the twentieth centuries. Their interest was to open up the region to international trade. Consequently and amidst opposition from the Tiv and the Bassa, European traders began to erect factories along both banks of

the Benue northwards towards Wukari. As the nineteenth drew to a close, European rivalry also increased culminating in the famous scramble between the British and French traders on the Benue. Ultimately, the British won the day and passed the region to the Royal Niger Company for exploitation (Flint, 1966).

The Idoma were little effected by the on-going event as their landlocked homelands was further away from the major theatre of war between European traders. The nearest was the systematic burning of a settlement in Agatu in 1897, a town of mixed Idoma and non-Idoma people. Otherwise, much of Idomaland remained intact until the outbreak of the First World War after which that area became part of the British colony and protectorate of Nigeria (O'kwu, 1988).

Their non-involvement in early trade contact with European merchants did not imply that internal trade did not develop in this region. Indeed, there were several trade routes which crisscrossed the region (Afigbo, 1974). One major route went through Keana salt wells north of Benue to the south through Ankpa via Yangedde and Igumale to Uburu in Anikpo Division. Articles of trade on this route included slaves, salt, red pepper tobacco, horses, palm oil, etc. Another major route east of Idah, via Ankpa and passing through Orukpo, Igedde, Okpoma to the Cross River basin.

This major route carried salt, indigenous hoes, local cloth, etc. as well as slaves. The major traders on these routes have been identified as Inokon, who, in all probability, were the ubiquitous Aro traders. Hausa traders also carried their wares and elephant tusk from the Niger through Idah to Ankpa in the east from where the Inokon took these further south up to Benue.

The Yala on their part experienced new salt wealth at Okpoma. Trade routes from Obudu region, Cameroon and the Cross River basin converged at Okpoma where salt cones were carried away either on heads, or in dug-out canoes. Yams, beni-seed, pepper, clay pots, and other local products were also conveyed to the coast at Calabar by two sets of

traders; the Inokon and those identified as Akunakuna. Thus, the Ogoja trade relay went further south into the middle Cross River Region where trade was monopolised by the Agwagwuna traders. They dictated trade terms in their region to the Efik traders who controlled trade at the coast. The salt trade was so serious among the Yala that it later cause a split in their ranks with some members moving further south into river banks in the seventeenth century to take advantage of the trade boom along the coast.

Conclusion

By the first decade of the nineteenth century the Idoma-Alago-Yala had already settled in their various homelands within the Benue-Cross basin. During this period, too, most territories within the Nigerian region had come under British colonial rule. The British by adopting the famous indirect rule system had fragmented the Idoma-Alago-Yala out of recognition. Thus, their uncomprehending neighbours began to refer to the various members of the complex by different and oftentimes irritating appellations. For example, the Cross River Yala were collectively referred to as Nkum, a name which the Yala have rejected root and branch. The Idoma, on their part, did not take on the name Idoma till late in the 1950s when they began to apply that name to themselves in preference to the irritating name of Akpoto. Later it was discovered that the Akpoto name belongs to a tiny area within modern Ankpa Division of Benue State.

Like other Nigeria groups, the Idoma-Alago-Yala people lived under the strong-arm of British colonial rule. Several attempts such as the Ogbuloko and Ojating Okoambebe wars were fought against the British but each proved fruitless in stemming the tide of imperialism in their midst.

As the twentieth century progresses, the Idoma-Alago-Yala people will continue to tap on their resources as well as accumulated historical experiences in order to build a type of image which will enable outsiders understand their proper identity.

CHAPTER 8

The Igala in the Pre-colonial Era.

by

OGUAGHA P.A. & MIACHI T.A.

The Igala inhabit a continuous and triangular piece of land located in the Niger-Benue confluence region. They are bounded to the north by the Benue River, to the west by the River Niger, to the east by the Idoma, and to the south by the Igbo. The Igala country lies approximately between latitudes $6^{\circ} 30'$ and 8° north and longitudes $6^{\circ} 30'$ and $7^{\circ} 40'$ east and covers an area of about 12,740 square kilometres. Its population in 1963 was 684,880. This gives an average density of fifty-four persons per square kilometre and makes Igala country a sparsely populated area. The population is distributed evenly throughout the kingdom with concentrations around Idah on the Niger and Ankpa in the north-east. The bulk of Igala population live in present-day Benue State, but some of them are also found in Anambra and Bendel state.

Igala country lies in a transitional vegetation area between the forest region to the south and the dry open savanna to the north. The average annual rainfall is fifty inches and is well distributed throughout the territory (Boston, 1968). To the south-west of the territory, between the Niger and Anambra Rivers in the Ibaji district, the vegetation is different, consisting of swamp forests. The alluvial deposits from the two rivers make this area the most fertile portion of the country (Armstrong, 1955). Apart from the Niger and Benue Rivers, the other principal water-ways are the Ofu and Okura which flow southwards into the Anambra a tributary of the Niger. To the north, the Onukpo and Amara Rivers flow into the Benue.

This favourable geographical location of Igalaland between the forest region to the south and the dry open savanna to the north has meant that both forest and savanna crops could flourish in the area. Thus the Igala who are predominantly farmers produce such forest crops as yams, cocoyams, maize, pumpkings, cassava, and savanna crops like millet, guineacorn, benniseed and beans. (Boston, 1968). In addition, the Igala served as middlemen in the exchange of the products of the forest and savanna regions. This situation acted as a stimulus for the state formation process in the area in ways similar to the emergence of kingdoms in the Western Sudan. The strategic location of the Igala in the Niger-Benue confluence also facilitated the evolution of a kingdom by providing opportunities for a wide range of contacts with other Nigerian groups.

From Igala oral traditions, it is evident that there was an early political system in Idah, the Igala capital, before the establishment of the present ruling dynasty. It was one in which political power and territorial administration were vested on the heads of nine patrilineal clans known as *Igala Mela* (the nine Igala). Their position in the evolution of the kingdom corresponds with those of the *Uzama* in Benin, and the *Oyo Mesi* in Oyo. The arrival of the royal clan led to the fusion of these autonomous principalities into a kingdom under a single ruler. The *Igala Mela* became the kingmakers in the new political set-up and acted as a check against royal autocracy.

The head of the *Igala Mela* is the *Achadu* who is also the head of the *Achadu* clan. The *Achadu* is the next highest official after the king. Igala traditions say that the first *Achadu* was a man called *Omeppa* who was an Igbo hunter, or in some accounts a slave who lost his way in the Igala country. He was captured and taken to the royal court where, because of his beauty, the queen (called *Ebele Jaunu*) fell in love with him and they were married. She made him the first *Achadu*. Other versions of this tradition state that *Omeppa* was an Igbo hunter who established control over the indigenous inhabitants at Idah. When the Jukun prince, *Ayegba om Idoko* arrived he

was welcomed by Omeppa and the Idah population as the ruler. (Fickett, 1928).

It is significant that among the Igbo, to whom the *Achadu* legend refers, there is also a tradition of early contact with Igala. The Umueri clan of Igboland claim that their ancestor brother called Idah founded the Igala capital (Jeffreys, 1957). The *Achadu* legend would thus seem to indicate that there were contacts between the Igbo and the Igala dating back to pre-dynastic times in Igala history. Owing to the Igbo origin of the *Achadu*, he took charge of the relationship between the Igala and the Igbo, representing the interests of Igbo rulers who visited the Igala king's court to obtain their titles.

As with the *Achadu* legend, Igala traditions assert that the first king bearing the title of *Ata* was also of foreign provenance. The difference, however, is that while there is consensus about the Igbo origin of the first *Achadu*, there are three different sources for the first *Ata*. One version traces the first king to Yorubaland. According to this account, a Yoruba king requested the King of Raba, situated on the River Niger, to locate a place for him to settle. The king of Raba then travelled to Idah and purchased a piece of land from Igala, the head of the indigenous population. Therefore the Yoruba king migrated to Idah and over time established control over the area.

A second version of this tradition states that the *Ata* came from a place called Ado to the west of the River Niger, then known as Idu by the Aboh people. He was a hunter who won the favour of the king at Idah, called Igara, by presenting him gifts of his hunt. Later on more of the hunter's kinsmen joined him from Ado and he became so powerful that he drove away the former ruler and became the new king. It is likely that this version of the origin of the ruling dynasty refers to Benin, which is called Ado by the Igala and Idu by the Igbo. It is noteworthy that the Benin people have a similar tradition which states that 'The first *Attah* of Idah was a Bini Prince who had been sent to Idah as chief by a former *Oba* (Egharevba, 1968; Talbot, 1926).

There is a third tradition which narrates that the Igala dynasty was an offshoot of the Jukun kingdom to the east. In this account a Jukun nobleman called Abutu Eje left Wukari, the Jukun capital, and settled at Amagedde to the north-east of the Igala territory. His descendants, namely, Ebele Ejaunu, Agenapoje, and Idoko also ruled after him in Amagedde. Idoko's son called Ayagba *om* (son of) Idoko later migrated further south to Idah where he founded the present ruling dynasty in the 17th century. (Clifford, 1936; Seton, 1928).

It is obvious that the various accounts pose problems of interpretation to establish the actual origin of the Igala dynasty. Consequently different writers have favoured one place or the other as the most likely source. For example, while Miles Clifford was strongly of the opinion that the ruling clan came from Jukun kingdom, G.J. Mott and J.S. Boston (1969) support a Benin origin. Boston, however, believes that all these traditions belong to the early period of Igala history. He concludes that,

Objectively, they probably correspond to different phases of history in which the Yoruba link may be the most ancient, following by the Benin connection, and most recently, some of Jukun suzerainty (Boston, 1962).

It is important to bear in mind that traditions are also subject to alterations according to prevailing circumstances. In any case, even if it is accepted that the Jukun influence was the most recent, traditions collected by the European explorers in the middle of the nineteenth century appeared to indicate that the Igala were more oriented to Benin than the Jukun kingdom.

Another aspect of the dynastic traditions that deserves some comments is the foreign origin of the royal clan. It should be noted that such stories may be devices for legitimization of royal authority. This was a common practice in many centralized Nigerian societies like Benin, Nupe and Aboh. Commenting on this feature, R. Horton wrote:

One suspects that they are as mythical as the

claims to a divine aura often made by the same rulers. It begins to look, indeed, as though claims to 'outsider' status, whether divine or human or both, are above all, means whereby rulers attempt to consolidate their positions in divided societies. (Horton, 1976).

Such observations are relevant when it is remembered that the accounts about dynastic origins from Yorubaland and Benin make reference to a pre-existing kingship institution.

Besides the problem of origin, there is also the question of the probable date of the foundation of the Igala dynasty. From the Igala kinglist, the date of the arrival of the Jukun prince, Ayegeba, at Idah has been fixed as the late 17th century (Clifford, 1936). However, it would appear that there is a basic chronological problem in the kinglist from which this date was computed. For example, the members of the 1854 expedition were told by an Igala chief that the reigning *Ata*, called Amocheje, was the twentieth on the throne (Crowther, 1970; Baikie, 1856). But in the kinglist collected in the early part of this century, Amocheje was recorded as the thirteenth ruler, showing a probable omission of seven names (Clifford, 1936; Boston, 1969).

Again, circumstantial evidence from Igala kingdom's neighbours point to an earlier date for the emergence of the kingship institution in that territory. Benin traditions indicate that there was a major war with the Igala kingdom in 1517 and that 'the *Attah*' led the Igala army (Egharevba, 1968). In addition, the Nupe affirm that Tsoede, the founder of their dynasty, came from Idah. S.F. Nadel (1942) has dated this event to 1531 A.D. — attesting to the old age of the parent dynasty at Idah. Boston has observed the tendency in Igala oral traditions to adopt a synoptic view of their dynastic chronology with particular reference to the early kings, thus creating the danger of a shortened kinglist. Boston (1968) suggests, therefore, that kingship at Idah could correspond with 'the period of the late Yoruba and early Benin kingdoms, which fall roughly between 13th and 16th centuries'. Ar-

archaeological excavation of a mound at Idah called Ojuwo Atogu, associated with the activities of the royal family, has given radio-carbon dates of 1495 and 1540 A.D (Shaw, 1967). Such dates reinforce the argument that the founding of the Igala dynasty most likely dates further back than the 17th century.

There is a general agreement in Igala traditions that Ayagba *om* Idoko was the founder of the kingdom. He fought a war of independence against Jukun overlords, and created the main political institutions of the kingdom. The *Igala Mela*, for example, were brought together as the king's advisory council and various titles were bestowed on them. Ayagba and his council introduced a religious factor in the form of the idea of divine kingship as a means of consolidating the powers of the monarchy and promoting unity in the state.

From the core area at Idah, Ayagba and his successors gradually extended their influence by colonizing the surrounding Igala settlements. This was achieved by sending out members of the royal clan as rulers of the various communities, or through the formal recognition of the incumbent heads by conferment of titles. There was also a military dimension to the expansion of the kingdom's influence. For example, Akumabe one of Ayagba's sons extended the frontiers of the state by conquering the Kakanda on the right bank of the Niger. From Ogurugu, an Igala town on the Anambra River, the Igala seem to have mounted military expeditions into parts of Igbo and Idoma countries in the 18th and 19th centuries, which further spread Igala influence into those territories. These invasions are credited to a legendary Igala warlord called Onojo Ogoni, who was related to the royal family through his mother.

The Igala kingdom also developed certain characteristics which had considerable impact on its internal development and its relations with neighbouring peoples. The *Ata* of Igala was revered as a sacred being. He lived in ritual seclusion from his subjects and was surrounded by a lot of mystery and taboo. While this type of divine kingship feature among many

West Africa kingdoms, it appears to have been highly developed in the Igala state. European visitors to Idah in the nineteenth century found the *Ata* the most inaccessible monarch along the Niger (Allen and Thornson, 1848; Baikie, 1856).

Another peculiar feature of the kingdom was the establishment by the king of non-hereditary titles which were held by special categories of palace officials. These officials' who were in charge of the king's court, ensured that the customs were observed, and provided security and privacy for the monarch. The most important of these set of titles were held by the eunuchs (*amonoji*). They served as intermediaries between the king and the district heads. Unlike the other royal officials who went out of office with the accession of a new king, the eunuchs retained their positions within the palace. In this way they provided continuity in government and were the repositories of royal customs and practices. One of the eunuchs with the title, *Ogbe*, deputized for the king in the administration of justice, and during the political crisis of the mid-nineteenth century became extremely powerful.

The other category of palace officials were called the *edibo*. These were persons who had sworn an oath of allegiance to the king and who rendered services to him in return for royal protection. Cases against the *edibo* could not be tried in the local courts but must be taken to the royal court at Idah. Initially these officials were few in number and were recruited from the king's maternal kindred. By the middle of the 19th century, they had enormously increased in number, many of them coming from outside the *Ata's* relations. Their activities also contributed to the decline of the Igala state (Boston, 1967).

From both Igala traditions and those of their neighbours, it is evident that the kingdom exercised extensive influence in pre-colonial times. As was previously mentioned, the founder of the Nupe dynasty was an Igala prince called Tsodee. He was said to have brought with him from Idah the various insignia of kingship. These included a bronze canoe, long trumpets, *kakaki*, state drums, and magical iron chains and fetters.

(Nadel, 1942). The dynasties of the Igbirra kingdoms of Panda and Igu are said to have been founded by Ohimi, an Igala prince, who was sent as a governor to the area but later asserted his autonomy (Brown, 1955; Allen and Thomson, 1848). The Kakanda, up to the middle of the nineteenth century, remained tributary to the *Ata* of Igala (Allen and Thomson 1848). Some rulers from Idoma land and the Nsukka area of Igboland claim that the titles of their founders were received from the *Ata* of Igala. (Armstrong, 1955; Meek, 1930). Apart from dynastic relationship, the Igala are reputed to have founded a number of towns or sections of towns in Igboland. Osomari, parts of Onitsha and Illah trace their origin to Idah (Oguagha 1982/83). Similarly, the Igbirra Tao, and some Idoma clans in Ocheke, Adoka, and Okwoga districts are of Igala descent (Armstrong, 1955; Brons, 1955).

Although it is difficult to date the extension of Igala influence into the neighbouring states and societies, it was apparent that by the end of the 18th century, the Igala state was at the zenith of its greatness. Early European explorers of the Niger in the 1830s described the *Ata* as 'the most powerful (king) between the sea and Funda', that is from the Niger Delta to the confluence of the Niger and Benue Rivers (Laird and Oldfield, 1971). *Ata Amocheje told the Trotter expedition in 1848:*

The river belongs to me a long way up and down on both sides, and I am King. God made me after his own image: I am all the same as God and He appointed me a King. (Allen and Thomson, 1848).

Such statements clearly echo the power and glory of the *Ata* and his domain during the first half of the 19th century. Indeed it was from *Ata Amocheje* that the 1841 British expedition purchased a piece of land in Lokoja for the establishment of a Model Farm (buttressing the *Ata's* control of the confluence at the time).

However, by the middle of the 19th century, the Igala state had begun to experience internal strain and turbulence. This development together with external pressures from the Fulani

and the Europeans contributed to its decline by the end of the century. It should be noted that both the internal and external factors were interrelated, although for clarity of presentation they would be examined separately. First the internal factors. The expansion of the kingdom had necessitated the decentralization of government for effective administration. This gave rise to the creation of more state offices held by the relatives of the monarch. These offices in turn spawned more subordinate officials. The upshot was that with time the vast increase in the number of these officials led to a reduction of the executive functions of the monarch while more emphasis was placed on his ritual role. According to Clifford (1936) 'he had ceased to be a king and had become a cult.

As a result of this development, the state officials virtually controlled the kingdom with disruptive consequences. The *Ogbe's* powers, for example, increased tremendously, and he took charge of the conferment of titles and swearing in of the *edibos* to the service of the king. There was a vast increase in the number of the *edibos*, many of whom were recruited from non-relatives of the king. Consequently, the *edibos* were widely dispersed throughout the kingdom and behaved as if they were above the laws of the land. Since they were not subject to the authority of the district heads at where they resided, they tended to behave in an unruly manner. Worse still, they abused their privileged status by engaging in extortionate practices, plundering the resources of the land and constituting themselves into a class of oppressors. In this way they became a destabilizing element in the state (Clifford, 1936).

The freedom allowed the *edibos* and other state officials to continue their disintegrative activities was further enhanced by the break-up of the *Igala Mela* — the remaining check against the abuse of authority by the ruling dynasty and other state officials. Igala traditions attribute this event to a major political crisis that occurred in the reign of the twelfth *Ata*, called Ekalaga, who died in 1835. According to a version of the account, the king's rule was oppressive, and so the king-makers conspired and assassinated him by suffocation.

Another version of the tradition claims that the king prolonged his life through the use of charms and so was frustrating the hopes of the lineage that was to assume office. They, therefore, plotted to eliminate him with the help of the kingmakers (Boston, 1967; Clifford, 1936). Ekalaga's successor, *Ata* Amocheje (1835–1856), fearing a similar fate at the hands of the kingmakers, disbanded the *Igala Mela* and replaced them with a royal council appointed by himself. The state thus came under the unbridled exploitative administration of relatives and favourites of successive rulers and its consequently, debilitating affects. Some of the officials governed their territories virtually independent of the king's control. Apart from Idah and the immediate environs, it became impossible for the *Ata* to collect tributes from his subjects because the in-subordinate officials diverted them to their own use, leading to the depletion of the state revenue. (Clifford, 1936).

Another development that contributed to the decline of the *Igala* kingdom was the destructive rivalry between the riverain clans who controlled trade on the Niger. These clans were: *Abokko Onukwu Ata*, which was in charge of trade from Idah northwards; *Agaidoko* which controlled trade from Idah southwards; and *Omogbaje* which supervised trade at the Idah waterside. Relationship between these clans was oft-times fractions (Boston 1968). By the middle of the 19th century, this situation had deteriorated to bloody clashes, especially between *Abokko* and *Agaidoko* clans.

In 1854, a serious clash occurred between these two groups at the *Asaba* market, resulting in the death of several people. This conflict continued unabated till the inhabitants of Idah were forced to flee to more secure localities, leaving parts of the town to overgrow with bush. In addition, the large *Igala* fair at *Ikiri* above Idah was discontinued because of the insecurity generated by the fightings, and new markets were set up along the banks of the Niger from *Igbegbe*, near the confluence to *Ibaji* in the *Igala-Igbo* borderland. Trade ceased at Idah and thereby deprived the *Ata* of the trade tolls that were collected from the merchants (Baikie, 1856; Crowther, 1970). It

would also appear that some members of the riverain clans having acquired substantial wealth from the Niger trade, became so powerful that they could dominate the *Ata*. The Abokko group, for example, had become so powerful that the king was afraid to offend them. They virtually controlled access to the *Ata* by the European visitors (Crowther, 1970). The political situation in the kingdom was semi-anarchic.

These internal difficulties weakened the state and made it vulnerable to external attacks. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, there was an extension of the Fulani jihad to the Niger-Benue valleys (Allen & Thomson 1848; Baikie, 1856). This resulted in an influx of refugees into the northern section of Igala territory. To worsen the situation, the refugees were not willing to submit to the *Ata's* rule. The inability of the *Ata's* army to subjugate these insubordinate Bassa-Komo refugees to his authority in the 1860s, or to assist the Oni of Ife, one of the provincial rulers, when it was besieged by the Fulani raiders, are testimonies of the extent of the state's weakness (Clifford, 1936). Other former tributary states, such as the Nupe and the Igbirra kingdoms, were either over-run and absorbed within the Fulani political hegemony or reasserted their autonomy. By the end of the 19th century, the *Ata's* influence in the confluence had disappeared with the tributes that came from that region. In effect there was both territorial contraction and economic decline for the Igala as a result of the Fulani incursion into the confluence area.

The advent of the Europeans on the Rivers Niger and Benue after the abolition of the slave trade from the 1830s, was also detrimental to the economic prosperity of the Igala kingdom. For a long time slave-raiding and slave-trading was an important aspect of the Igala economy (Allen and Thomson, 1848). Most of the slave that were assembled in the northern parts of Nigeria and transported down the Niger passed through the Igala middlemen traders. The three main markets for the slave trade in the Lower Niger, namely Ikiri, Idah and Adamugu, were controlled by the Igala. The British in the 19th century were against the slave trade and were deter-

mined to stop its continuation on the Niger. To this end the *Ata* was made to sign a treaty in 1841 forbidding the slave trade and human sacrifice in his domain (Allen and Thomson, 1844). This marked the beginning of the end of an important source of revenue for the state.

Furthermore, the activities of the European trading companies on the Niger squeezed out the Igala traders from their former lucrative business. It was in these circumstances that the Igala increasingly resorted to river piracy in the later half of the 19th century. This often resulted in punitive bombardment of Idah by the Royal Niger Company. By 1889, when MacDonalld visited the *Ata*, the *Ata* complained that initially he had hoped that the advent of the Europeans would bring prosperity to the kingdom but instead it had led to economic collapse.

The political organization in Igalaland centres on the office of the *Ata*, the 'father' of the Igala people (which the word, '*ata*' literally mean) The *Ata* is not just a ruler or a leader; he is meant to be the father of the people and in his daily dealings with the people and in his daily communication with the collective ancestors on their behalf, he is seen to play this fatherly role. The *Ata* is the embodiment and earthly representation of the ancestors and plays the role of an intermediary between the living and the dead through daily prayers, offerings and sacrifices, employing the media of *Okwute*, *ajibo* and *ane* royal cults symbols located in the palace (Miachi, 1982).

The *Ata* has a number of important officials that aid him in the administration of the kingdom. The prime official next to him is the *Achadu* whose position and function is similar to that of the prime minister in a parliamentary system of government. The *Achadu* can be described as the chief administrator of the kingdom or the head of government, doing most of the actual jobs for and on behalf of the *Ata*, whose position can be likened to that of the Head of State. The position of the *Achadu* does not, however, overshadow that of the *Ata*; indeed, the latter is pre-eminent in the structure and function of the monarchical set-up. The *Ata* has the final say in al-

most all matters of dispute. Another view, however, equates the position of the *Achadu* described as 'the Great Commoner' with that of the *Ata* at a certain remote period in Igala political history. This view, expressed by Dike (1977) argues that the *Ata* used the economic privileges attained through contact with Europeans to suppress the position of the *Achadu* to his (*Ata's*) advantage. Dike's presentation strongly criticizes Boston's for what he calls playing down on the position and role of the *Achadu* in the power structure of the Igala kingdom. But Dike himself seems to have gone to the other extreme to defend the position of the *Achadu* and relegating the prime position of the *Ata*. The correct and unbiased presentation of the Igala political history on the subject of *Ata-Achadu* relationships is yet to be given. Perhaps anyone attempting to do this must strike a balance between the *Ata*-influenced Bostonian views and the *Achadu*-influenced rather strong Marxian views of Dike. Be that as it may, today, the *Achadu* remains a subordinate to the *Ata*, who, traditionally, is regarded as the 'wife' of the former. The husband-wife relationship which had been a factor of unity between the *ataate* and *achaduate* over the years, has been disregarded by most writers on this subject. Our recent investigation makes us identify and lay premium on this factor as a means of forging unity between the two apparently antagonizing ruling houses.

Masquerades have played a vital role in the political set-up of the Igala kingdom. The place of the *Ata*, the primal figure in the polity and administration of the kingdom and his relationship with the masquerades raises a number of questions. Among such questions, one may ask: could the *Ata* (his image) have been a masquerade in the past? Consider the following:

- a. his strong attachment to and interest in the concept and practice of masquerades as highlighted briefly above;
- b. that all masquerades are said to belong to him. Male ancestors (only) come in the masquerade. Male ances-

- tors were the fathers of the people; the *Ata* is the father of all Igala people;
- c. that *Ekwe* is *Ata* in masquerade form.
 - d. that the *Ata* owns and wears a pectoral bronze mask. This mask, the *Ejubeju ailo* (the eye that frightens other eyes or, the eyes with frightening or scaring countenance) is an important item of the royal regalia, still being carried nowadays by the *Ata* on all important outings. It seems *Ejubeju ailo* has lost its proper meaning, though one could suggest that since the mask has two slits at the position of the eyes, it may have been won on the face to 'masqueradize the *Ata* in the past.

It is true that the the politics and administration of the Igala kingdom centres on the person and office of the *Ata*. In the same way, masquerades play important roles as monarchical functionaries for the *Ata*. It is therefore difficult to divorce masquerades from the *Ata* anymore than we can separate the *Ata* from politics and administration of his kingdom.

Functions of the Royal Masquerades

The royal masquerades collectively perform functions that contribute to the legitimization and consolidation of the power and authority of the *Ata*. That they collectively represent the royal dead as well as the reigning monarchs, goes a long way to reinforcing the people's regard and devotion to the incumbent. The masquerades also serve to physically and spiritually protect the *Ata*. In the physical sense, they carry canes in their own hands or in the hands of their followers and drive off people that may constitute a threat to the *Ata*. *Ikelekwu Afuma* leads them in the task of effecting discipline, whether on other masquerades or on human spectators, during outings involving the *Ata*. In spiritual terms, as representatives of the royal dead, the masquerades perform the roles of the ancestors, that is, to protect the *Ata* from all evil forces and to bring blessings upon him and his people. Thus, when *Ekwe* publicly hits the *Ata* three times, it is believed that he is driving off evil forces around him with the spiritually

potent cane. Finally by the arrangements whereby the *Ata* gives the royal masquerades to royal or sub-royal clans for custodianship, unity and understanding, and consequently, loyalty is enhanced.

There are original masquerades which represent the nine past *Atas* in the manner that the *Okwute Mela* numbering nine represent them. There is no direct equation of specific dead *Ata* with a specific royal masquerade except for *Ekwe* who is identified with *Ayegba Oma Idoko*, the most famous and most cherished *Ata*, credited with being the founder of the present quadrilinear dynasty. Today, *Ekwe* is *Ayegba* and is also the *Ata*-incumbent. He is the chief of all masquerades and his position in the hierarchy of masquerades is akin to that of the *Ata* amongst his people. Furthermore, *Ekwe* is given the treatment and regard due to an *Ata*; for instance, he is dressed in expensive kingly regalia, wears the *eka* sandals which the *Ata* also has. He is the only masquerade that has a large parasol similar in size and value to the *Ata*'s. Indeed, spiritually, *Ekwe* is regarded as being superior to the *Ata*, first because he is an ancestor, and secondly, as demonstrated in his ability to purify the monarch, employing his spiritually potent cane.

CHAPTER 9

Peoples and History in the Benue-Chad Corridor.

by
FOLORUNSO C.A.

Introduction

The Benue-Chad corridor is a vast area which for a long time had been the stage of human cultural developments, and what we intend to do in this paper is to attempt the identification of the peoples responsible for the cultural developments. We shall provide a summary of the archaeological evidence for the peopling of the area during the prehistoric period and concentrate more on the historic activities in the corridor. The area under consideration lies generally between the Benue river and the Lake Chad. It occupies approximately between longitudes 7° and 14°E , and latitudes 7° and 13°N .

The Benue-Chad corridor falls within the tropical climatic zone of West Africa, however the area is vast, and there are several variants of the tropical climate represented (Fig. 1).

About two-thirds of the area has southern savannah climate. This type largely coincides with the "Middle Belt" of West Africa, between latitudes 8° and 11°N , around the rivers Niger and Benue in Nigeria. This climatic zone is roughly coincident with the Guinea savannah vegetation. There is a seven to eight months rainy season with lower temperatures. Within the southern savannah climatic zone is found a highland variant on the Jos Plateau, and temperatures are much lower (Harrison Church, 1974).

To the north of the Southern Savannah zone is the savannah climatic zone which extends approximately between

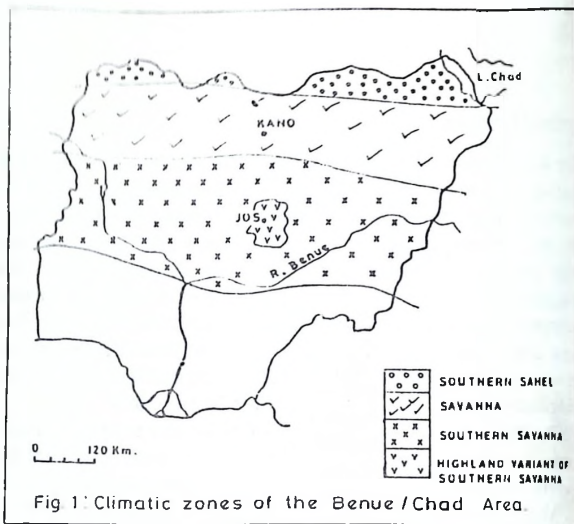


Fig. 1

latitudes 10° and 12°N. Compared with the southern savannah, rainfall is less and the rainy season is only five to six months in length.

The last climatic zone is the southern sahel which is found in the northern fringes around Lake Chad. The rainy season is about three to five months in length but is often erratic, and there is a high range of temperature. This corresponds with the Sahel Savannah vegetation zone. It is the most northerly zone for regular cultivation without irrigation or use of groundwater (Harrison Church, 1974).

With regard to the palaeoclimate of the corridor, the general trends in the late Quaternary could be outlined as follows: More than 40,000 years B.P. there was an arid phase during which there was the deposition of the dead erg of Hausaland in the southwest of the Lake Chad (Sowunmi, 1987). There was a wet phase between 40–20,000 years B.P. and a complex episode of lake development began in Chad from about 40,000 years B.P. and continued for more than 10,000 years (Servant et al, 1969; cited by Burke et al, 1971). There followed an arid phase 20–12,000 years B.P. with the deposition of ergs. The lake rose again in a transgression phase which started about 12,000 years ago and continued until later than 6500 B.P. When it was very wet a large lake formed in the Chad basin and water flowed over the Bongor spillway to join the Benue (Pias and Guichard, 1957; cited by Burke et al, 1971). When it was very dry, dunes occupied the floors of the basin. Under intermediate conditions, as at present, a lake without an outlet occupies the basin. Before the Bongor spillway stopped flowing, lesser dunes were formed in the Chad basin and these were gullied during a 5000 B.P. wet phase. Conditions from then were arid to semiarid and lake levels fluctuated but were generally lower (Faure, 1966; cited by Burke et al, 1971).

Peoples of the prehistoric period.

Evidence abound on the early peopling of the Benue-Chad corridor. The evidence date to the Early Stone Age, however,

they are more artifactual than being direct human fossils. There is no evidence that would permit the identification of the forms of the early human population of the area. There are evidence for Early Stone Age populations in the Upland country of the Jos Plateau. These are Acheulian sites including Mai Idon, Tonok, Nok, Kalban Hill in the Yankari Game Reserve, Lake Tilla in the Biu Plateau and Dadin Kowa. A radiocarbon date for the site at Nok produced an estimate of older than 37,000 B.C. (Daniels, 1969). It should be noted that the earliest manifestation of peopling in Nigeria seems to be confined to the Benue-Chad corridor. The area also seems to be the only to produce evidence for peopling during the Middle Stone Age. Alworld Jones (1981) produced a map showing the distribution of Middle Stone Age sites in Nigeria and they are confined to the area north of the Jos Plateau.

The Late Stone Age populations had a wider spread in the Benue-Chad corridor. Evidence of the Late Stone Age populations are found in rockshelters (Kariya Wuro, Rop, Dutse, Kongba) and open settlement mounds (Bama, Daima, Kusakata, Shilma). The open settlement mound at Daima has produced evidence relating to the activities and cultural behaviour of the occupants of the site. The mound has a long stratigraphic succession which was formed between sixth century B.C. and the eleventh century A.D. At the earlier phase of the settlement, that is, the Late Stone Age, the people used polished stone axes and made tools and weapons with animal bones. They carved and polished the bones into harpoon, plain points, spatulate tools and pointed tools. They are probably predominantly pastoralists keeping cattle, and sheep or goats. They made good pottery and small fired clay models of animals some of which clearly depict humpless cows. They buried their dead in and around the settlement, in a crouched position, lying on their sides as if asleep. Two dates have placed this phase to between 570 B.C. \pm 110 and 450 B.C. \pm 95 (Conah, 1969; 1971; 1981). The Daima materials adequately represent the nature of human activities in the Chad Basin during the Late Stone Age.

At the Iron Age stage, evidence for human populations in the Benue-Chad corridor becomes more and more widely spread. With the exception of the Bama site, the other open settlement mound sites in the Chad Basin show a transition from the Late Stone Age to Iron Age. Other Iron Age sites (Samun Dukiya, Taruga, Nok) have been identified in the Jos Plateau area, and they predate the Chad Basin sites. The Daima evidence again illustrate very well the activities and the cultural behaviour of the peoples of the Iron Age in the Chad Basin. The second phase of the Daima occupation had evidence for the use of iron and the people began to build circular huts of mud some of which had floors made of potsherd pavement. As iron became more common it completely replaced stone and bone for making tools and weapons. The making of fired models persisted. There were child burials with burial gifts in the form of penannular iron ornament and a large clear quartz bead close to the neck, penannular iron bracelet at the forearm, and a mass of iron beads and iron chain with small links around the waist. Other cultural material of this phase included grooved stones, grinders/pounders, stone balls, harpoons, spear head, fired clay figures of cow, clay beads, spindle whorls, smoking pipe stem and ornaments. The obtained dates for this phase range between A.D. 480 \pm 270 and A.D. 630 \pm 190 (Connah, 1969; 1971; 1981). The cultural materials from this phase show a well advanced society in the Chad Basin at this period.

Towards the end of the time the mound was occupied, the clay models included a humped cow, sheep or goats, wild animals and human beings. By this time, it appears that the people had ceased to be mainly dependent on pastoralism and now cultivated guinea corn. Carbonised grains of guinea corn were recovered. The pottery now included fragments of the enormous pots known in the oral traditions of Bornu as "So pots". This final phase dates from A.D. 810 \pm 90 to 1060 \pm 90 (Connah, 1969; 1971). The identity of the prehistoric peoples is not clear and what is known so far is that the Kanuri oral traditions refer to the people of the final phase of the prehis-

toric period as the "So" who they encountered on their arrival in the region. We shall later inquire more about who the "So" were, as there are no peoples presently bearing that name in the Chad Basin and there seems to be the impression that they have disappeared from the surface of the earth or they have been culturally assimilated into the Kanuri population.

People of the historic period

The Benue-Chad corridor had experienced some important geo-political developments during the historic past. These include attempts at state formations, wars, population movements and inter-group relations.

The Kanuri:

The story of state formation is much clearer in the Lake Chad Basin than to its south toward the River Benue. The state of Kanem-Bornu is the best known, best studied, and best documented in the Chad Basin. The early history of the Kanem-Bornu is obscure, but its roots is said to go back to the early Berber migrations from North Africa to the Sudan. This migrations are believed to have taken place probably in the seventh and eleventh centuries. The first state to emerge was Kanem which was situated north-east of Lake Chad. (Johnston and Muffett, 1973).

It seems to us that the identity of the founders of the Kanem, though stated with some certainties by Bornu historians, is not very clear. Johnston and Muffett (1973) referred to them as the Kanembu who possessed the Sefawa dynasty of Kanem. And that there had been the migration of the Kanembu into west of Lake Chad where they mingled with the indigenous populations to produce a new and distinctive race, the Kanuri. In other words, the Kanuri are a hybrid of the Kanembu and the indigenous populations of the region to the west of Lake Chad. Raymond Hickey (1985) on the other hand described the same process as a "migration of the Kanuri" and also associated them with the Sefawa dynasty

Thus, the Kanuri existed right from the Kanem. It is important for historians to clarify this point to better understand the peopling of this region during the early historic period. The theory of a new and distinct race is difficult to understand bearing in mind that the early migrations from Kanem made it easier for the later transfer of the Sefawa dynasty to west of Lake Chad. In other words the earlier migrants were still attached to the Kanem state and would not consider themselves distinct from the later arrivals with the Sefawa dynasty.

The Sefawa dynasty had to move from Kanem because of disputes which which weakened it and led to its defeat at the hands of the Bulala. The transfer of the dynasty and power from east to west was not as sudden or categorical as such a statement seems to imply'. The impetus for such a migration was already in existence through geographical and climatic factors. The land west of Lake Chad was more fertile than in Kanem, water was more plentiful and the Yobe river flowed throughout the year. Therefore there had been a gradual migration of Kanuri to the area long before their defeat by the Bulala and the early settlers had established a *modus vivendi* with the autochthonous inhabitants (Raymond Hickey, 1985). The Sefawa dynasty rebuilt their fortunes and established the Bornu state, west of the Chad (Johnston & Muffett, 1973). Although there had been settlements of Kanuri along the River Yobe from the early fourteenth century, it was not until Ngazargamu was established in late fifteenth century that the Kanuri gained effective control over the area (Raymond Hickey, 1985).

In about 1440 A.D. the Kanuri conquered the Hausa states and Kanem became tributary to Bornu in early sixteenth century. This notwithstanding, they still had problems with other neighbours. The Kanuri had to contend with the dissident state of Gaoga, established by opponents to the Sefawa dynasty, Bagbirmi and Wadai, all in the east. In the west, the Songhai empire contested Kanuri's control over the Hausa states and annexed them in the early sixteenth century. Later on the Kanuri had to face the threat of the Hausa soldier of fortune,

Muhammed Kanta, who fought and defeated the armies of both Songhai and Bornu, and carved out an empire of his own at their expense. As Kanta's empire began to crumble, a new threat appeared in the south, from the Jukun of Kwararafa located in the Benue Valley. For the whole of the seventeenth century, the Jukun disputed with Bornu the suzerainty of the Hausa states (Johnston & Muffett, 1973, 63).

With the fall of the Songhai empire, the political centre of gravity swung from the Niger to the Chad, from Timbuctu to Ngazargamu, the capital of Bornu Empire. The Kanuri state remained stable throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The last and the main threat to Bornu was the Fulani who on March 12 1808 defeated Bornu and occupied Ngazargamu which they eventually destroyed (Johnston & Muffett, 1973).

The most conspicuous of the remains left by the Kanuri from earlier times are the ruins of red brick buildings. The Bornu ruins are found at Ngazargamu, Gamburu and Nguru in Nigeria, Gaaroumele in Republic of Niger and Tie in Republic of Chad. Ngazargamu is the best known as it is the largest of the sites and its history, or at least the dates at which it was first occupied and finally abandoned are certain. The site consists of an enormous rampart enclosing a rough circle. Inside the vast enclosure are reported a number of red brick ruins which in most places the walls stand only one course high, presumably having been destroyed in the first place by the Fulani invaders of 1811 and subsequently robbed for building material (Bivar and Shinnie, 1962).

Gamburu which is only five kilometres to the east of Ngazargamu is clearly a site of a later period. It is claimed that tradition described it as having been built by Queen Amsa, mother of Idris Alooma, in an attempt to separate him from the court and thus protect his moral character. Gamburu is said to be in a much better state of repair than the older site of Ngazargamu (Bivar and Shinnie, 1962).

The Fulani and Shuwa Arab:

The Fulani are another group that had played an important role in the socio-political and cultural developments of the Benue-Chad corridor. They first came to Bornu from the west, from Katsina and Kano where they had settled in the early fifteenth century. They settled and roamed with their flocks in the forest to the south west of the Kanuri heartland, as they still do today. During the Fulani Jihad, the Bornu Fulani joined hands with their brethren to capture Ngazargamu. When events later turned and they were driven out of Bornu, they moved southward to Adamawa where the jihad under Madibbo Adama had been successful and the emirate of Yola or Adamawa was established (Raymond Hickey, 1985). The Fulani also overran the Hausa states, and in the south the lands in the bend of the Gongola, which had hitherto been within Bornu's sphere of influence, were annexed and converted into the emirate of Gombe (Johnston and Muffett, 1973).

The Shuwa Arabs are another great pastoral people in Bornu, they too are comparatively late arrivals. Although some Arabs were said to have arrived Bornu as early as the later fourteenth century, it was not until the sixteenth century that a constant Arab migration took place. Thus the Kanuri, Fulani and Shuwa Arabs have a well documented history which shows that they effectively established themselves in the Bornu region only during the past five hundred years (Raymond Hickey, 1985).

The Pre-Kanuri people

There had hitherto been a very simplistic description of the pre-Kanuri peoples of Borno area of the Lake Chad Basin. This is a subject that had not been properly researched into. The pre-Kanuri people had been variously described as the 'So', a term derived from the Kanuri oral traditions. As stated earlier in this paper the impression is created that the 'So' have disappeared as there is no population known presently by that name in the Chad Basin.

It has been established that the Kanuri gave the word 'So'

to all the autochthonous groups they encountered in their settlement in, and conquest of Borno. It is also claimed that these 'So' offered strenuous resistance to the Kanuri encroachment and the resistance persisted until the reign of Mai Idris Alooma (1571-1603). In fact the inability of the early Kanuri settlers along the Yobe River to subdue the 'So' led to the conciliatory approach. However, the *modus vivendi* thus established was broken when there were more influx of the Kanuri as a result of the abandonment of Kanem and the transfer of Sefawa power to west of Lake Chad. This time around the 'So' could not hope to resist successfully the superior arms and organisation of the Kanuri (Raymond Hickey, 1985).

Explanations have been offered for the total disappearance of the 'So' as a distinct ethnic group. It is sometimes asserted that, following their conquest, they were absorbed into the Kanuri nation through intermarriage and so lost all sense of a separate identity. As Raymond Hickey (1985) stated, the 'So' never existed as a separate ethnic group and their total 'disappearance' from Borno is to be explained by the fact that they were never there in the first place. The name 'So' was given to all indigenous inhabitants of the region conquered by the Kanuri and as such it is a generic term. The continued use of this term only tends to perpetuate the impression that the 'So' once existed as a people but have disappeared. It is claimed that the communities whom the Kanuri disposed in Borno and referred to as the 'So' were related Chadic groups which had sprang from an earlier Proto-Chadic nation. This is said to be the "only satisfactory explanation of the 'disappearance' of the 'So' and the present mosaic of Chadic-speaking peoples on the fringes of Borno" (Raymond Hickey, 1985).

The Jukun

The Jukun are another important group in the Benue-Chad corridor but his time located to the south of the region, in the Benue Valley and they seem to be linked to the Lake Chad Basin in the past. Their migration to the Benue Valley thus

seem to represent the early contacts and relations in the zone between Lake Chad and the Benue River.

In the case of the Jukun state, as against the Kanuri state, it is difficult to form any clear idea of developments in the fifteenth century in the region to the south of the Hausa states (Hodgkin, 1975: 29). The Jukun are in legend stated originally to have inhabited the country of Yemil, to the east of Mecca. They left their country and marched westward until they arrived in the region west of the Lake Chad, where a number of them stopped, founding the city of Kukawa. They travelled on to the Benue, where they made their capital at Kwararafa which was situated to the north-east of Wukari. Their influence, became paramount amongst the former inhabitants who paid tribute to them. However the Jukun were not keen Colonists, and the only trace of their occupation to be found at present is at Maru, amongst the Bolewa (Temple, 1965).

It is also claimed that the parent stock of the Jukun, the kwararofawa, came from Sango, south of Lake Chad. The Jukun are said to have lived in Bornu where there was constant intercourse between them and the Kanuri. It is equally claimed that the Jukun laid siege to the capital of Bornu at the end of the eleventh century. The earliest reference to Jukun in the Kano chronicle is reported to be in the late fourteenth century, 1384 or 1385 when Yaji, Chief of Kano carried war into the Jukun country (Temple, 1965). In the course of fourteenth century the Jukun are reported to have carried war into Bauchi and Zaria (Hodgkin, 1975). They appeared to have reached the height of their power at the end of the sixteenth century, when they were reported to have marched on Kano, and laid waste the country round. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, the Jukun again marched on Kano, penetrating this time into the town itself, and ravaging Hausaland. About the same time they invaded Bornu, but were repulsed (Temple, 1965).

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the Jukun were described as one of the seven greatest kingdoms of the Sudan. While it seems that the Jukun originated from an area south of

the Lake Chad, and advanced through Ibi and Bauchi, overflowed and conquered all Hausaland, it is curious that they left little trace of this occupation, either on the customs or racial characteristics of the inhabitants of the territories they conquered. When the Fulani advanced into their country at the time of the jihad, 1815, the Jukun fled only for a remnant of them to later return to build Wukari, a walled town, for their capital of Kwararofa was destroyed, the ruins now being barely traceable (Temple, 1965). The Jukun influence was however more felt, and left evidence amongst certain groups in the Benue Valley (see Folorunso, this volume).

It seems very highly probable that the Jukun were one of the earliest settlers of the zone between the Lake Chad Basin and the Benue River. They could as well be one of the pre-Kanuri peoples to occupy Borno before the arrival of the Kanuri. However the southward migration of the Jukun, most probably predated the influx of the Kanuri into the region west of Lake Chad. It might be explained by the factors of geography as the lands to the south, toward the Benue River are more fertile, better watered and enjoy better climatic and vegetational conditions, providing much wider opportunities in terms of human occupation.

CHAPTER 10

A Profile of Urhobo

by
OTITE O.

Introduction

The Urhobo inhabit a territory in the Delta State of Nigeria located between latitudes 6° and $5^{\circ} 15'$ north and longitudes $5^{\circ} 40'$ east. The 1963 census numbered them more than half of a million. There are socio-cultural continuities and discontinuities, as well as territorial shading off between them and their neighbours — the Bini to the north, the Izon to the south, the Isoko to the south-east, the Itsekiri to the west and the Ukwani to the north-east. The urhobo are among the first ten (Awolowo 1968: 241–242) of what is now known to be the 373 ethnic groups in Nigeria (Otite 1989). The Urhobo landscape consists of evergreen forests, swamps and networks of streams and rivers; an environment which provides diverse opportunities for occupational specializations and local technologies.

Traditions of Origin

A historical account of the Urhobo has been hampered by the absence of archaeological and palynological works based on the excavation of those old socio-political and socio-economic sites recurrent in oral traditions. Giving a social content to recollected and comparative events as well as to excavated materials is often one viable component in the reconstruction of the histories of peoples who depended on oral tradition.

I have shown elsewhere (Otite 1982: 10–25) that the Urhobo traditions of their origin indicate two main levels of historical

reconstruction and four main traditions of origin. These have to do with the identity of the Urhobo as one group, and with the exclusiveness of the various sub-groups. Naturally it is the more recent sub-group boundary that make activities that are better remembered. There are twenty-two such sub-groups, preferably referred to as polities.

This level of historical reconstruction links many Urhobo polities with some place of ancient importance in Edo history especially with the current Bini capital called *Aka* (Benin City), and with the socio-political and socio-economic ancient city of Udo. At the end of the Ogiso dynasty many Urhobo and other Edo-groups left Udo in different directions, each at its own pace, in search of more peaceful territories. It is possible that many of the Edo-groups moved to the region of Udo from a northern direction where the wan people now occupy. The traditions tell of cruelty, animosity, and tyranny as the characteristic push factors for emigrants from the original Edo land. It was natural that in those compelling circumstances peace-loving and less powerful Edo groups had to leave the territory to seek fortunes in less populated but more economically resourceful territories' (Otitte 1982, 10).

The centrifugal movements of peoples with separate micro-symbolic systems of politics and kinship as well as lineage and claim corporateness were not confined to the Urhobo. It affected several Edo-speaking peoples — later described as Edoid (Elugbe 1979) — who migrated from familiar communal lands more recently located around Udo. Every one of the twenty-two Urhobo polities has its own story of migration at its own time, through its own route and under its own leader — who was not necessarily its own eponymous ancestor. But each group shared close kinship and 'clan' ties and lineage group membership. Partly because the group movements were at different times and phases, each group which settled at its point of destination was also socio-culturally plural to some extent, since it incorporated earlier settlers into its system. Egharevba (1960, 14) suggests that some of these earlier settlers could also be Edo-speaking peoples.

Through the normal processes of fission and fusion, peoples who were concentrated in local capitals later founded towns and villages reflecting smaller descent and kinship associations. Each polity was a governmental as well as a sovereign society with the towns and villages as its component units. It should be emphasized that 'in general, this level of traditions consists essentially of boundary-making and boundary-maintaining stories and myths which are currently strengthened by the manipulation of various historical symbols and totemic observances. Although the twenty-two Urhobo social units now maintain their identity and exclusiveness, many trace their ritual language as well as their genealogies, especially of their ruling class or senior descent groups to some of their neighbours, particularly the Bini, Ijo and Isoko. This reveals their migratory history and route, and their temporary passage or stay amongst these neighbours (Oтите 1982, 10–11).

Notwithstanding the separate traditions of migration, there are four main theories about the origin of the Urhobo as one people. First, there is oral tradition of the Urhobo as an autochthonous people in their present territory. Following this view, the Urhobo came from nowhere else but have always inhabited their own part of what is now Nigeria, and 'have successfully incorporated and absorbed all other cultures and peoples. Thus their contemporary language and cultures contain amalgams of incoming symbols of language and cultural practices and an already established indigenous social system.

Second, there is the theory of an Urhobo origin from a common territory of the Edo-speaking peoples — a linguistic classification devised by Northcote Thomas (1910) to describe a distantly homogenous peoples who have evolved their heterogeneous social and cultural organizations over centuries of migrations, fusion and fission, and ecological adaptations. The difficulty of assigning a date to such a migration is complicated by the suggestion that the masses and some of the ruling or super-imposed elite moved at different times.

The generality of the Urhobo who give a 'stock' response that they are Edo, and came from or through Aka (Benin) imply not only a spatial concept but also a socio-cultural distinction for themselves. Intergroup hostilities, an atmosphere of cruelty, tyranny and insecurity, the desire for political freedom and for socio-economic independence, combined as push factors to instrumentalize the socio-cultural exclusivity of internally homogeneous groups in their search for more congenial territories richly endowed with food and other economic resources.

Third, there is a tradition of origin from an Ife territory. There is a spatial distinction between the present Ife in Oyo State and the ancient Ife often located somewhere near the Niger-Benue confluence (Ryder points to an even more distant social and cultural connection between the Edo-speaking peoples and the Yoruba, both socio-linguistic groups of which are regarded as separate components of a Kwa-group of languages).

Fourth, there is the tradition of an Urhobo origin, which forms part of the traditions of several Nigerians, especially the Yoruba and Edo, speaking peoples, from the Sudan and Egypt. This tradition has neither been confirmed nor rejected by archaeological findings and pre-historical and other evidence. And Arawore (1940s) linked this tradition with the previous ones when he argued that 'The Urhobo for the first time came from Egypt, left some of their people on the shore of Lake Chad, halted for a time at Ile-Ife, had a permanent abode at Benin and finally were driven to the swamp of the Niger Delta'.

This statement is strengthened by the linguistic principle by which we can integrate all the four traditions of the origin of the Urhobo. On arrival in their settlements, the Urhobo, as already indicated, met some earlier settlers who spoke Edo-type language (Hubbard 1948; Bradbury 1957, 129), and whom they subsequently absorbed or with whom they lived as near or distant kinsmen. It has been inferred through lexico-statistics that the various units of the Kwa linguistic family group,

that is, Baule, Edo, Ewe, Igbo, Izon, Yoruba, etc. were separated between 3,000 and 6,000 years ago (Alagoa 1966, 282; Armstrong 1964, 12-13; Bradbury 1973, 7; Ryder 1969, 1), implying that although these groups of languages and their sub-divisions are now mutually unintelligible, they in fact constituted a formidable part of the culture of one society long before they were broken up. In the absence of new evidence to the contrary, we may conclude that the theories and traditions of the origin of peoples who speak languages classified under the Kwa-group must go together following a thread that links all the people together from some common central area in or around Egypt and the Sudan to their present territories.

There is, however, a problem dating the arrival of the Urhobo in their present territories. After considering several factors which affect the identities and separation of the Kwa, and Edo-speaking peoples, we may speculate that 'whereas we can say that the Urhobo traditions of autochthony involves a timeless settlement, and the date of the migration from the Sudan or Egypt lost to memory, ...the migration of Urhobo progenitors from the region of Ile-Ife occurred more than 5,000 years ago. This date allows for settlement and for social and spatial identity before the Edo linguistic group separation from the Yoruba and other Kwa language groups. Similarly, we speculate that the predecessors of the Urhobo started to migrate from their Edo territory some 1,000 to 2,000 years ago, a period which allows for

- (a) the separation of the Edo (or Edoid) languages spoken by the already separated though related socio-cultural and socio-political groups, and
- (b) the period of republican and gerontocratic rule as well as the societal structural transition that led to the Ogiso regime which, according to Egharevba's (1960: 1) calculation occurred in about 900 A.D. Finally, we speculate that the various Urhobo groups settled in their various territories at different times ranging widely between 200 years and 2,000 years ago.' (Otitte 1982, 23).

The political structure of a society derives to a large extent from its history and ecology. Each of the Urhobo polities has a peculiar historical experience, designed strategies of relating to their neighbours, acquired new concepts and dialects, and developed ties of descent and kinship with their hosts as they migrated through foreign territories and as they settled finally. Each group was organized separately to maintain its own sovereignty, and there is no record of a super-imposed political leader or king over all the Urhobo as in the case of the neighbouring Itsekiri or Benin kingdoms, in other words, the Urhobo as an ethnic group did not form a centralized society as in the case of the two kingdoms referred to above. Rather like the Yoruba or Hausa ethnic groups, centralization as a form of political organization occur at a lower level, that is, at the level of each of the migrating groups which identified itself as consisting descendants of an eponymous ancestor and of those of his matrilineal and patrilineal kinsmen and other followers.

There are twenty-two such identifiable and exclusive social political organizations among the Urhobo. These are Agbarha, Agbarho, Agbon, Arhavwarien, Avwraka, Ephron-of-Evwreni, Eghwu, Idjerhe, Oghara, Ogo, Okparabe, Okpe, Olomu, Orogun, Udu, Ughele, Ughienvwen, Uvwie, Uwerun, Agbarha-Ame and Okere. Generally, each polity has three main categories of political titles and offices. These are king e.g. (*Ovie, Orodje*), a spokesman (*Otota*) and the chief (*Ohovwore Okakuro*).

The king is the top political functionary at the apex of the social pyramid. His eligibility to the position derives from descent and patrikinship. In some cases, such as Ughele, succession is by primogeniture, while rotatory succession among specified descent groups occurs in others such as Agbon and Okpe. In Agbarho, the most senior *Ohovwore* by title-age becomes the king, called *Osuivie*. And while some polities, such as Orogun, may have a gerontocratic-political ruler, called *Opara-Uku*, the highest institutions in some others depend

maturity in age and leadership potentials, such as the *Okobaro* of Ughienvwen, *Ohworode* of Olomu, the *Odio* of Ughwerun and the *Okpako* of Agbarha-Ame or Okere. None of these kings and leaders rules alone.

They are assisted by the *Otota* and *Ehovwore* (chiefs). The spokesman must usually have already been a chief. He is chosen on the basis of his good personality, wisdom, eloquence, knowledge of the local culture and history and patriotism. He is the mouthpiece of the society. The king may also have his own spokesman such as in Ughela and in this case, his office ends when the *Ovie* dies.

The *Ehovwore* and the *Ekakuro* constitute the third category of chiefs. In such kingdoms as Agbon, where both titles exist, the higher title of *Okakuro* is preceded by that of *Ohovwore* — both from the king's council; but the *Ohovwore* title must also normally have been taken first at the ward and then town levels. Otherwise, it is only one of the two titles that exists, for example, the *Ohovwore* in Agbarha Avwra, Eghwu, Ogo and Ughela, and the *Okakuro* in Idjerhe, Oghara and Okpe. Apart from exemplary character, a candidate for the title of *Ohovwore* or *Okakuro* must be reasonably old, usually above fifty years, and must be relatively wealthy, enough to afford the fees, and expenses for entertainment, mass feeding etc. I have shown elsewhere (Otite 1982, 215) that the processes and procedures involved in title-taking are very complex, elaborate and exceedingly expensive. A chief is expected to refrain from hard work and hazardous labour and occupations, such as oil palm production and block-molding. He must thus have prepared himself to occupy a high political and social status where he is expected to feed well, behave in a dignified way, and maintain exemplary character and dress in dignifying attire.

This is of course a plutocratic set-up, at the highest level of which the king sits in-council. The chiefs are not selected from or zoned to specific families or sections of the polity. The positions are generally not hereditary and any local citizen who is also a patrikinsman is eligible in his own right, provided he

has the acceptable qualities.

A fairly detailed account of the chieftaincy institution has been given in the case of Okpe kingdom (Otitte 1973: 37-49). As in other Urhobo polities, a chief here has many privileges. Apart from general respect, 'nobody may hit a chief or his wife. Any adultery or seduction involving her was, and is even now, regarded as a serious offence, a state matter ... A chief should not be insulted and presentations to him of kola and drinks must include money, a chief is given precedence over the untitled people in public contributions and sharing of money. He sits in a special place during state meetings and relinquishes his seat only to the king. Lastly the death and burial of a chief are state matters, involving various ritual acts by the chiefs... A chief is a noble in the state. The taboos help to maintain his status and lessen the likelihood of accidents; his privileges give him and his patrilineage a special status and protection in the kingdom' (Otitte 1973: 43-44).

More recently, women have been conferred with chieftaincy titles. There are no exceptions to the rules and expectations, and they do not constitute a special category of chiefs. Nowadays, some Urhobo kings also honour reputable people from within the outside their territories with chieftaincy titles.

There is often the second level of structures of government and politics. This relates to the town units. The local government of each town is gerontocratic, and only consists of the town *Ehovore* and elders. The government derives from the age-grade organization found in every Urhobo polity (Otitte 1971 a; 1973, 35-37). The men are generally organized into four grades, that is the *Ekpako* (elders), who are the chief governors, the trustees of their local culture and history; the *invwraghwa*, men of between thirty and sixty years, who form the largest work-force, and are of the age required of pre-colonial warrior and executors of orders from the elders council; the *Otuorere* consisting of men between 15 and 30 who assist the older grades in clearing bushes, cleaning the towns and building communal and shrine houses; and lastly, the *Im-itete* who are generally between the age of circumcision (6-8

years) and 15. They do minor jobs such as sweeping the streets and compounds.

The oldest patrikinsman is also the head of the gerontocratic government. He is generally a very old man of over eighty years, but he is ably supported by the ward leaders and local tiltemen.

The women are also organized into age-grades. These are three: the *Ekwokweya* made up of women above fifty years including widows, divorcees, old married women etc. with leaders and spokesman; the most powerful and largest group made up of women between twenty and fifty years, married from within and outside the town and villages, organizes to protect farm crops from damage by roaming pigs, goats etc. and worship or propitiate to enhance fertility of women and crops, and organizes to avoid pollution of any of their deities; and *emete*, young unmarried and uncircumcised girls who assist in domestic work.

The age-grades have specific names in some of the polities, and the movement from one grade to another is affected by one's maturity. The age delimitation also varies.

Other important position-holders in the social structure include the *Olotu*, age-grade leader, *Iko* or messenger and *Aghwoghwo* or announcer. There are also positions peculiar to certain polities, such as the *Izomo*, the king's full brother in Agbarha, Ogo and Ughele.

Government among the Urhobo

The above social and political structure provides the personnel and the framework of government. Government among the Urhobo has been described in detail by Otite (1973) and Ikime (1965). It is diffuse but democratic. It is also complicated at the highest level in the polity as the Urhobo are often difficult to rule because of their republican attitudes, despite the traditions and enjoyments of kingship.

Two main levels of government are recognizable in any Urhobo polity: the town and the polity or kingdom as a whole. The town government is gerontocratic, and the age-

grade organizations as outlined, provide the basis and context for this. The eldest patrikinsman presides over a council of elders from different sections of the town constituted to handle government functions with known procedures. The council, which operates under the principle of family-hood with the eldest man generally called *Okarorho* attributed with a father-role complex, performs judicial, administrative and executive functions of government. Government at the town level is not explicitly differentiated in practical terms and both elders and age-grade leaders as well as ritual and religious functionaries share in the process of government.

The bulk of a town's government duties consists of judicial matters handled at the town shrine hall or at the residence of the eldest patrikinsman, usually on every market day. In making or administering laws, the town council is mainly concerned with social control and the maintenance of social order and equilibrium through adjudication and restitution of materials misappropriated or stolen, reconciliation of individuals and groups of peoples, and the reconstitution of the total society. Society has priority over the individual, and extreme individualism is not encouraged by town customs and traditions. A sense of social responsibility and accountability pervades government structure and the roles of office holders, although towns are autonomous in many respects, for example in local legal matters, rituals, economic organization, festivals etc.

An analysis of the government of the total polity shows that power and authority derives from several sources: age and gerontocratic system, titles and chieftaincy in plutocratic systems, and the kingship. Small polities, such as Ephronoto and Arhavwarien, which are more or less one-town societies, rather than 'city-states', are essentially gerontocratic in government structure and processes. There is another specific combination of age and title such as is found in Agbarho where the ruler achieves his position as the oldest *Ohovworen* title-holder. Most other polities such as Ogo, Ckpe and Ughele are kingdom-states. Here the role of the king is politi-

cal, have control over religious, military, economic and other functionaries.

The central government is controlled by one key functionary, the central leader, generally known as the king. The republican inclination of the Urhobo does not normally tolerate tyranny, or even self-centredness. Neither the king nor the chiefs can govern the people alone. In order to have a successful government in any of the polities, the plutocratic characteristics and values inherent in the kingship and chieftaincy institutions must combine and interact with government procedures and processes enjoined by gerontocracy in appropriate spheres and at different points in the social structure. Thus, before taking vital decisions affecting the people, consultations are made at different levels and with different interest groups. There are built-in checks in this arrangement, and where critical issues of the state and society are involved, some strongly organized polities such as the Okpe, provide for mass meeting of the people. This tripartite socio-political arrangement sheds some light, not only on the indigenous conceptual distinction between society, government and the state, but also on the provision of opportunity structures that cater for several spheral interests and mass participation of the people in their own government.

The key functionaries in any Urhobo polity are found in the government. The different arms of government, the political, administrative, judicial and executive, are not explicitly separate; they are only analytically distinct and are performed by the same personnel, as already indicated. The key and central government actor today, the king, symbolizes his kingdom and his predecessors, and rules in council unless he commits some unpardonable atrocity as regarding his culturally defined roles. Secondly, the polity spokesman, the *Otota*, 'chosen as a result of his wisdom, convincing and fearless arguments, alert mind, logical reasoning, influence and prestige' (Otite 1982:214), can combine with the other chiefs, the *Ekakuro* and *Ehwore* to 'affect opinion in the kingdom, and change/correct/sanction behaviour by depositing their

staffs of office in particular places. It is taboo for anyone else to touch or remove these staffs'. (Oтите 1982:215).

To the outside analyst, the Urhobo system of government is a complex and complicated management of activities and responses to various interacting sources of power, authority, symbols and sentiments. Yet, it is simple and non-baffling to the urhobo, mainly because government and governance are open systems with the councils and courts having sessions before spectators who care to listen, watch and react with open comments or even shouts of approval or disapproval of speeches and decisions. Government entails open participation, sometimes with committee work involving the king, the spokesman, the chiefs, the elders, and the age-grade leaders and their organizations. Thus decisions reached on criminal and civil cases must have been an affair of everybody in one way or the other; hence there is often a check on judicial excesses and the miscarriage of justice. This issue is facilitated by the principle and practice of decentralization, ensuring that power is not concentrated in one person or institution.

Power sharing thus becomes a mechanism for retaining power, and as Roscoe (in Beattie 1971, 117) puts it, even the king retains his power only by giving some of it away.

Marriage, Family and Kinship

The Urhobo are a strongly patrilineal people. Although descent is accordingly reckoned through the male line, and because kinship is bilateral as in most societies, both male and female predecessors are recognized and are worshipped on separate occasions. During festivals, for instance, the Urhobo normally set aside different days or occasions for worshipping their male ancestors called *esemo* (literally fathers of children), and the female predecessors called *iniemo* (literally mothers of children). Thus, although the emphasis is on patriliney and the patrilineage group, both patrilateral and matrilineal kinsmen are recognized. Complementary matrifiliation adequately captures the notion that the patrilineage does not exhaust the whole of kinship among the Urhobo.

Family and kinship are created through marital and non-marital conditions. Some details of the processes of family formation have been given elsewhere (Otite 1971b). Non-marital methods of family and kinship formation involves the *ose*, a non-marriage relationship between a man and a woman usually living separately but meeting in the man's house as frequently as desired. Such a woman has no other male friend but the man may have, and often has a wife or wives already. It is the man who proposes to the girl's parents, especially the mother, giving gifts of gin and money but without elaborate rituals. Once accepted the *ose* relationship lasts as long as both remain compatible, and the *ose* position may be transformed into marriage particularly if both have a child or children from their cordial relationship. Otherwise the *Ose* relationship is terminated simply by one of the parties failing to show up.

The second non-marital method is the *Obevwemikpo* (literally meaning if I am tired I will return home), which is like the *ose* but the woman resides with the man and can return to her natal family whenever she is fed up! An *obevwemikpo* is like a wife but without the legal status joined through formal marriage. Her status may be difficult to differentiate from that of a wife, except when there are crises and quarrels, particularly if she has lived for a long time with the man and both of them have children.

Marriage (*orovwe*) provides the ideal means of family formation and the creation of kinship ties. 'Marriage is legal when the bride-wealth, *mur'aye*, has been paid by the suitor or his deputy, and also, and more importantly, when the girl's father or his deputy pours libation (gin) to their ancestors' (Otite 1971 (b), 4). The Urhobo practise three main forms of marriage: marriage by normal choice, gift marriage, and widow inheritance. All three forms of marriage, particularly the first type, involve the two patrilineage and the matrilineal kinsmen of both the man and the woman in complex and prolonged rituals, as well as in-law services and marriage-long, or even life-long, expectations of mutual help and

goodwill. Marriages are not expected to be contracted between people who are known to be related, however distant in descent and kinship terms.

Children are critical factors in marriage and every child is a legal child of the parents and their descent groups. 'He or she is regarded as a blessing from God. There are no illegitimate children or bastards among the Urhobo, not even those born through adulterous acts (See Odje 1965, 360-365). The legality of marriage is not correlated with the legality or legitimacy of children. A child born through adulterous acts is a legal child and belongs to the adulterer whether or not he pays compensatory damages to the woman's husband' (Otite 1971 b, 10).

Traditionally, every Urhobo marriage is, at least potentially, polygynous. And correspondingly, the Urhobo have both polygynous and extended families. This suggests that the circle of kinship can be quite wide and family heads, especially those with high social, political and economic status, are normally also managers of large groups of matricentric families. The Urhobo concept of *Eklū* stands for family generally, but the point of reference, such as the *eklu* of *xy*, indicates the size and whether is a nuclear, or extended family or even a descent group or patrilineage. Marriage and family are socially, politically and economically desirable and are expected to be formed by all adults. Kinship provides the context for various kinds of social, political and economic relationships and organizations.

Aspects of Urhobo Economy

Land and commercial trees are vital in the economic survival of the Urhobo. But during the last two or three centuries, these resources have become scarce, and many Urhobo have had to emigrate, particularly to Ondo State, around Okitipupa Ekitiland and Ikale land, and to Oyo State around Oshogbo and Ilesa. Here they utilize their technological preserve in exploiting the oil palm trees for oil and kernel, and in engaging in farm work. The income from the produce sometimes enable the Urhobo immigrants to live beyond subsistence level and ac-

cumulate some capital for investment in either their host territories or their natal homes. Other areas of economic activities are the rubber industry and trade.

The unit of economic activity is the household constituted either by the family alone or together with dependent relatives and other family assistants. In polygynous organizations, matricentric families are the most effective production and consumption units. Whereas there was plentiful land for farming some centuries ago, that factor of production later became scarce and thus limited farming activities. By the turn of this century, the traditional shifting cultivation involved shorter periods of fallow of less than four years.

The Urhobo make their farms during two periods of the year; January to April, and June to August, and grow such crops as cassava, maize, yam, beans, pepper, groundnuts etc. The two main harvests occur in August/September and November/December. The income from sales of surplus crops is very negligible.

Rubber is owned in personal plantations on family or leased land. Between 5 a.m. and 2 p.m. daily, tappers (men, women and grown up children) collect latex from the trees and process them into sheets through special machines before drying them in the sun and oven. Tappers obtain between one and six – sheets daily, and each sheet weighs roughly one kilogram and was sold for about two naira in 1988. Tappers also make money from the roughly processed or congealed 'knobs' and scraps and sell at lower rates of about one naira per kilogram. Like palm produce, the rubber trade involves series of middlemen between the tapper in the rural areas and the main buyers exporters in the urban areas.

The Urhobo are also keen traders, such as in fish obtained locally or from distant Ijo coastal markets, different food items such as garri, cassava, starch, yam etc. clothes, palm produce, and rubber. They also keep shops in rural and urban areas, and engage effectively in ring movements following periodic markets. These markets are also social occasions for meeting friends and relatives, for announcements of political and legal

requirements, gossip, communications and message delivery, and for leisure and the reduction of boredom and monotony in rural life.

In all, members of an Urhobo family or household engage in a number of economic activities simultaneously as no one of these can sustain the unit adequately. The combine income from these activities is essential, not only for survival and contracting marriages, but also for the monetary sources for upgrading ones social and political status through the chieftaincy title and, or political campaigns and positions in a new state government.

Different Sections of One Identity

As already stated, the Urhobo consists of twenty-two polities, each with its exclusive micro-symbolism. Each is an exclusive governmental society with centralized structures and political organization within a specified territory. There are also variations in dialects, some of which are slight such as the Agbarha, Agbarho, Agbon and Ughelli, which can be understood by all others. Some others are very exclusive such as the Okpe and Iwvie which are sometimes treated as separate languages, although people from these polities also speak and understand the common Urhobo language. Thus Urhobo of Okpe and Uvwie are bilingual in some respects. The boarder-line groups, for example the Orogun people, are also bilingual in the sense that they speak both Ukwani and Urhobo. Indeed, the Urhobo they speak contains vocabulary from both Ukwani and Urhobo languages. The central Urhobo language is the Agbarho/Agbon and the rest can be identified through their accents and dialects. Each polity also has a sub-ethnic association, (descendants) union, etc. with headquarters and branches in urban areas throughout Nigeria, to monitor and contribute to the development of their home territory and people.

Yet, the Urhobo are one people with their own identity (Oтите 1982: 253-261). The twenty-two units share belief in a common ancestor, although this is distant and is often not

well defined genealogical. The Urhobo also have a separate culture and life style acquired through their pattern of socialization, and characterized by hardwork, mutual trust and assistance, sharedness, search for justice through their courts, male and female circumcision, and premarital virginity and fidelity in marriage life. They have a common system of marriage and of kinship symbols, common governmental practices, common architecture and residential arrangements, common naming system and a common system of rite of passage which mark key stages in their developmental cycle.

The Urhobo are classified as Edo-speaking. But this group separated into Bini, Esan, Urhobo etc. some 2,000 to 3,000 years ago. Thus although there are some common words and language correspondences, the Urhobo have developed a language distinct from the other Edo-speaking people. This means that while the Urhobo language maintains continuities with others in the Edoid and Kwa language groups, and hence similarities in form and sound correspondences between them, it also shows discontinuities by which it has evolved to assert its identity. In addition to this historical aspect of linguistic discontinuities, there is what may be referred to as synchronic or functional discontinuities by which the Urhobo language, like other languages, becomes a boundary-making mechanism. In this case, the Urhobo language differentiates not only peoples but also territories which shade off to marginal (mixed-language) socio-territories, these being boundaries between Urhobo and non-Urhobo'. (Oтите 1982, 256-257).

Urhobo identity is also shown through body marks, facial incisions, generally known as *esa* or *Ibrebru*, and cut (three short lines) on the forehead, and by the side of the two eyes (i.e. four short lines called *amiero/ibiesarero*) and one long line called *akpusi* or *usuwe/usiuwe* on the nose. These incisions are ancient group makers and practices some of which are found today, especially among the elderly Urhobo in the rural areas.

Lastly the Urhobo are distinguished by their mode of dressing. Their dress style is sex-based. Generally the women wear

two wrappers with a bluse on top and head tie, while the men wear long wrapper with a big shirt on top, often with a hat and a walking stick. The title-holders wear beads in addition, while working attire called *echibe* or *ukpaghwa* is lighter. The women and girls wear various forms of additional attractions such as beads, and use a form of black powder called *itiro* around the eyes and a red pomade called *isele* on their face and body. The Urhobo share some of these dress forms with the neighbouring Itsekiri people with whom they have inter-married for generations. Also, other Nigerians have adopted some of the Urhobo dresses, especially the women styles.

As one people, the interests of the Urhobo under a new form of inter-ethnic relations during the colonial and new system of government and politics, are articulated by an all-Urhobo modern association. This association which was inaugurated as Urhobo Brotherly Society on November 3, 1931, changed its name and became known as Urhobo Progress Union (UPU) in 1935 (See Otite 1982, 262-267). The Union's motto which was 'Higher Thoughts, Higher Aims' was changed to 'Unity is Strength' by 1956, that is in the third, UPU constitution. The UPU has always been a non-political cultural organization functioning as an instrument for fostering mutual understanding, love, brotherhood and Urhobo ethnic patriotism. It also functions as a means of promoting Urhobo culture and traditions as one people.

Conclusion

The Urhobo society and culture provide a rich and virgin academic and professional terrain for archaeologists, pre-historians, and anthropologists. For instance no professional archaeological work has been done in any part of Urhoboland. Yet such works would produce new contents to shed light on the history and socio-cultural systems of the Urhobo people and their relations with neighbouring ethnic groups. This is the context within which we may find the limitations of the above ethnic profile of the Urhobo.

CHAPTER 11

Edo Traditions of Origin

by

OKPOKO A.I. and AGBONTAEN K.A.

Introduction

Except specifically defined, the term Edo-speaking people can be equally as ambiguous as describing the same group of people as 'Benin people. While Benin serves as a territorial label (e.g. Benin City, Benin Kingdom, Benin Empire, or Benin Division), both Bini and Edo serve as linguistic and ethnic labels for the inhabitants of the Benin territory.

The word 'Edo' has its origin in historical accounts of Benin's past. Egbarevba (1960) claims Edo as the indigenous name for Benin City. In this account, Edo was said to be slave, who save Oba Ewuare (1440 – 1473) from being killed. To immortalize his name for the services rendered, Oba Ewuare changed the name of the city to Edo.

As for the word Benin, its usage pre-dates Edo. According to Egharevba (1956) the kingdom was initially known as Igodomigodo and later known as 'Ile', until Oranmiyan changed it to 'Ile-Ibinu' and from which Oba Ewedo around 1255 derived the word Ubini (Benin).

While Edo serves also as the indigenous name of the city, it is much more known as a linguistic label. In this respect, it is used as the designation for the group of historically related languages and dialects spoken in various communities within and around Benin. These include the Bini, the Esan, the Etsako, the Ivbiokan (Owan) and the Akoko-Edo, Urhobo, Isoko and their related dialects. On the other hand, it can also refer exclusively to the language spoken by the Bini who historical-

ly are the Edo people as distinct from other named above (Omoregie, 1988).

To avoid the confusion of describing groups of people as Edo-speaking peoples, in both its broadest and narrowest sense, linguists (Agheyesi, 1986) have now designed the expression: 'The Edo language group'. The phrase is used to describe the genetically related languages as distinct from Edo language proper. In solving the nomenclatural problem, 'Edoid languages' refers to the group, while the term Edo is solely for the Bini (Agheyesi, 1986).

In this chapter therefore, Edo refers to the people generally known as the Bini who occupied the area, which in the past was the capital city of the Benin kingdom. Today, the Edo speaking people occupy the Oredo, Orhionwon and Ovia Local Government Areas of Bendel State. (Fig. 1).

Benin city (present-day capital of Bendel State of Nigeria) is on latitude $6^{\circ} 33'N$ and longitude $5^{\circ} 37'E$. It lies on a low plain west of Ikpoba river. It has no prominent physical features and no solid rocks at the surface. (Connah, 1975). The soil, known as the 'Benin sand,' is reddish in colour, porous and acidic. The natural vegetation is high tropical rainforest with swampy vegetation to the south and west. A greater part of the city is now under secondary growth due to generations of farming and years of timber exploitation. (Aseola, 1975). However, there is still an abundance of timber in Benin environs.

Hunting is an important traditional occupation in Benin and its environs, and the flesh of wild animals accounted for a great proportion of protein supply in the people's diet. However, due to an excessive exploitation of forest resources and urbanization, the game population has now been drastically reduced in Benin areas.

The size of the Benin kingdom varied according to different periods as a result of conquests, dynastic connections, trade contacts and sentimental ties. (Igbafe, 1977). During the Oyo period, for instance, various Benin settlements were established in the direction of present-day Ika, Urhobo and Etsako areas of Bendel State. (Igbafe, 1977). At the height of its power

in the 15th and the 16th centuries, the influence of the Benin kingdom 'extended as far as the river Niger in the East; along the coast westwards to Lagos and beyond, north-westward to the Ekiti and north-eastern Yoruba districts and south-wards to the sea' (Connah, 1969). (Fig 2). However, in 1897 the Benin kingdom fell into the hands of the British.

Like several traditions of origins of various Nigerian peoples, the origins of the people of Benin is by no means certain. Benin history is an amalgamation of oral traditional accounts, ethnography and archaeology. On the origins of the Benin people, several oral accounts have been examined by historians. However, the oral tradition is usually derived in this respect from an extraction of folk history, which is a blend of history and mythology in folktales. It usually requires a considerable sifting of history from mythology in order to reconstruct the processes of development among the Bini during these early periods.

The rest of this chapter is divided into two sections as follows: the various versions of the Edo traditions of origin, and the interpretations of these various traditions making special use of archaeological data.

Traditions of Origin

Several hypotheses have been offered as to the origins of the Edo people. It has been suggested that the people migrated from Egypt 'many years ago' (Egharevba, 1960). Some informants and sources speak of migrations from the east including Ife. Another account of origin of the Edo people in Benin mythology refers to Benin as being founded by the youngest child of *Osanobua*, the high God. The founder of Benin was sent to live in a world with his elder brothers including the first kings of Ife and other Yoruba chiefdoms. These children of the high God were allowed to take into the world whatever they wished. While others chose wealth, magical skills and material well-beings, the youngest chose a snail shell. They all arrived in a world filled with water. A bird told the youngest son to turn down the snail shell. When he did, sand fell out of

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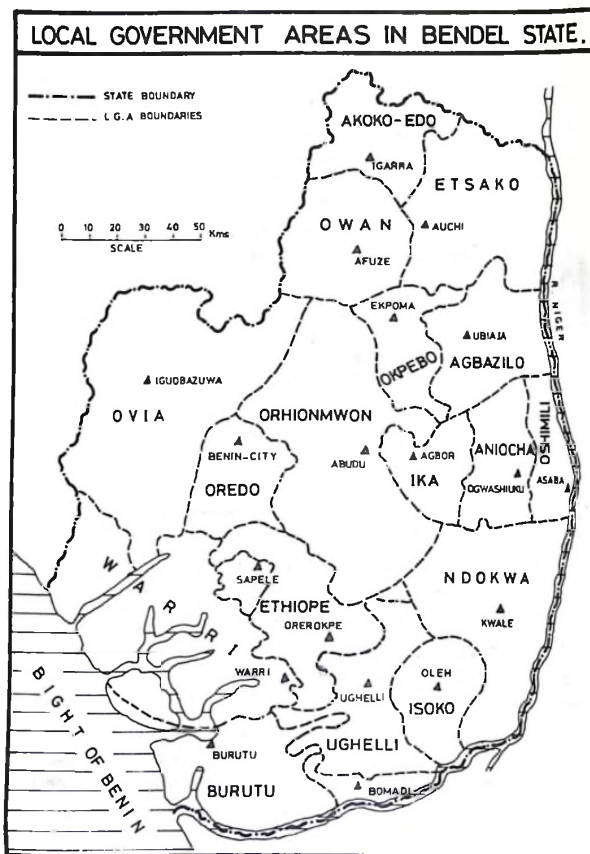


Fig. 1 Local government areas in Bendel State

it and covered large parts of the water to form land. Hence the first *Oba* of Benin became the owner of the land and had to spare portions of it to his elder brothers. (Igbafe, 1977).

There are also several wards and areas in Benin whose inhabitants have no tradition that their ancestors migrated from any where else. (Omoregie, 1982). Such people claim that they have been on the spot from the very beginning.

Analysis of the Traditions of Origin

The first version which claims that the people originated from Egypt can be seen in some ways as an echo of the now discredited Hamitic hypothesis which attributes the origin of the Negroes to that of the Hamites, north of the Sahara, and any cultural development and civilization among Africans as due to contact with the Hamites. Though the idea was first popularized by colonial writers, later some African writers, such as Egharevba, took it as a doctrinal refuge to explain the origins of their peoples. Although some evidences suggest that Africa south of the Sahara was not completely cut off from ancient Egypt, very often, like in the Benin case, the emotional attraction of this link has been allowed to outweigh critical evaluation.

The second version, which placed the origins in connection with the east and Ife, can be seen as simply following from the fact that Ife is the accepted origin of the present ruling dynasty. This account of origin may be seen as thus confusing the people with the dynasty. (Igbafé, 1977).

Portuguese sources have also claimed (Ryder, 1965) that the king of Benin was not a complete sovereign in his country, but owed allegiance to an outside country known as *Ogane*, usually identified with the Benin term *Oghene*, meaning Lord. When any *Oba* died, the successor had to send messengers to *Oghene*, in order to receive investiture from him. The journey to *Ogane* who lived east of Benin, took three months to accomplish. The symbol of office for messenger were a cross and a staff. In all earlier records, there is no reference to Ife till after the British conquest. And no brass cross had been found

westward, unless it is argued that the present home of Ife is a shift from its original base (Ryder, 1965).

With regard to cultural materials, spectographic analyses show that Ife and Benin 'bronze' objects are a mixture of tin, zinc and copper, and strictly speaking should be referred to as 'brass'. The technique of manufacture of the Ife and Benin bronzes is similar – *cire perdue* technique. There are also elements of similarities between Ife and Benin art (especially the court styles). But the above similarities do not throw much light on the origins of the Edo people. The bronze and art objects date only to 12th/13th century A.D. when the settlement of Benin and the environs were already very much in existence. The excavation of the Orun Oba Ado site in Ife (a purported burial place of the head of the late *Obas* of Benin), date to about the 9th/10th century A.D. (one date points to 6th century A.D.) did not yield much useful result. Due to the soil conditions, no human bone was recovered (Connah, 1969). Even if bones were recovered, the site dates to Benin dynastic period, when the settlement of Benin and the nearby areas had very long been occupied.

The mythological version seems to be in agreement with the theory of separate evolutionary existence of the people as distinct groups in their locality (Igbafe, 1977). This is also supported by the fourth version, which claims autochthony in the Benin areas. Connah's archaeological studies suggest that before the establishment of the Benin kingdom, the Edo people were made up of numerous independent communities: the city came into being through a process of slow fusion of scattered villages (Cannah, 1972). It should be noted also that the basic political unit in Benin is the village. This then lends support to the fact that Benin city may therefore be a product of the collection of contiguous villages.

In line with the above, Omoregie (1982) identified different independent communities as areas and streets in present-day Benin city. He further claims that the *Odionwere* system (the

rule of the oldest man in a given community) underlay the political practice of these communities. The *Odionwere* held his position by age and he was the supreme authority in his village — combining the spiritual, political and judicial powers in his hands. He ruled with a council of village elders, *Ilo Edionvbo*. The closely juxtaposed villages formed a common council, *Iko Edionwere*, for the purpose of solving inter-village problems. As the *Edionwere* (plural of *Odionwere*) in the village communities formed the council of *Edionwere* (*Iko Edionwere*), they established a medium for unifying all the thirty-one village communities of *Ubin*. It was a council of equals. Though the measures and directives were not usually very effective, when they got back to their own individual communities, they at least laid the foundation for administering the village-through councils. The oldest of them all known as the *Oka-Edionwere* was the head of the council. Assisting him was another *Odionwere* known as *Okaiko*. The *Oka-Edionwere* was usually very old and senile, so the *Okaiko* was left to take proper charge of the council. When this opportunity came to *Igodo*, a prominent *Odionwere* leader in one of the communities called *Idunmwunvbioto*, transformed this leaderships into the Benin monarchy.

Igodo, according to traditions, (Omorieg, 1982) was known to be very vocal and domineering. He claimed that his power and authority came from the sky, not from the people. He therefore began the *Ogiso* monarchy in pre-colonial Benin. Under him, Benin monarchy embodying the various communities was known as *Igodomigodo* meaning town of towns, as well as the land of *Igodo*. He was claimed to have removed political authority from the *Edionwere* and retained the system as a subordinate authority. The pre-*Ogiso* era is claimed to be before 900 A.D. and the *Ogiso* era and the establishment of the kingdom is placed at around 900 – 1130 A.D. (Egharevba, 1960).

Omorieg's (Pers. Comm.) recent research findings have thrown much light on early Benin history. He derived his information from the recitations which were based on the *Ogiso*

era. These recitations were chanted by the descendants of the *Ughoron*, the class of royal ancestor worshippers and reciters, created during the *Ogiso* era (Egharevba, 1960; Omoregie, 1982). They became a compact hereditary group for the purpose of recording events. They were also known to have computed the reigns of *Ogiso* in years and generations through their recitations and by using clay model figurines. Those reciters were made on regular basis to recite these events from generation to generation, recounting the doughty deeds and achievements of each individual *Ogiso* with the help of these clay figurines. (Omoregie, Pers. Comm.).

Archaeological findings of Benin have corroborated some of the oral traditional accounts. In the mid 1950s, Goodwin became the first man to excavate in Benin. He also searched for but failed to locate the palace of *Ogiso*, (Connah, 1977) an archaeological study of which would have thrown much light on early Benin history. After Goodwin, both Frank Willet and Liman Ciroma worked briefly in Benin, the former in 1959, and the latter in 1960, but in both cases, their efforts were limited to rescue excavations.

In the 1970's Patrick Darling studied the wall complexes in the Benin environs. However, Graham Connah, 'who worked through the 60s has conducted the most extensive archaeological investigations of Benin city and environs to date. Even though Connah's work in Benin was meant clearly to be salvage, it is very much a testimony to his ingenuity and ability that it turned out to be more than salvage in both conceptualization and scope of execution' (Andah, 1982).

Connah (1972) excavated four main sites in Benin: the Benin Museum site dated by radio-carbon to A.D. 1305 \pm 105; Clerks Quarters site dated to A.D. 1180 \pm 105 and A.D. 1310 \pm 90 (Daniels statistical calculations gave a maximum likelihood estimate of A.D. 1255); two places in the innermost of the earthworks (charcoal from beneath the wall has a radio-carbon date of A.D. 1340 \pm 105) and the Usama site (traditionally a palace site of the early Obas of Benin) with a radio-carbon date of A.D. 1500 \pm 105.

Apart from the excavations, Connah identified walls ('found to comprise a complex network of linear earthworks') which he believed to be older than the innermost wall. He is of the opinion that the walls suggest a manner in which the city came into being; 'a process of slow fusion of scattered villages having allegiance to a central authority, till Oba Ewuare in the 15th century constructed a true urban unit with a formal urban defence' (Andah, 1982). Connah (1972) further inferred from the essentially meandering character of the outer-walls that they must have been agricultural boundaries rather than military defences as is the case with the innermost wall. The defensive wall, according to him, required a considerable labour force organized under a centralized government — Oba Ewuare the great (Egharevba, 1960). Egharevba estimated from oral tradition that this inner city wall was constructed at about A.D. 1460. Interestingly, as mentioned earlier, a charcoal sample from beneath the wall gave a radio-carbon date of 1340 ± 150 years (14th century A.D.) (Connah, 1975). This agreement of the radio-carbon date with the dating arrived independently from oral tradition and historical sources makes the middle 15th century date for the construction of 'this huge earthwork' very plausible (Connah, 1975). Also, tradition has it that Oba Ewedo moved the palace from Usama to an area in the centre of Benin city, now generally known as Clerks' Quarters, in about 1255. And in apparent agreement, four radio-carbon dates from earliest deposits in the Clerks' Quarters site point to around middle of the 13th century A.D. (Connah, 1972; Andah and Okpoko, 1979).

Connah in his work in Benin has been able to outline a sequence of Benin culture history from about the 13th century A.D. onwards. His work, however, has not thrown much light on the evolution of settlements in Benin and the related areas. Although we do not know presently when iron was first used in Benin area, evidence from Taruga suggests that iron was used in the savanna areas of Nigeria as far back in time as 5th century B.C. It should be noted that 'the material cultures of ancient Igbo-Ukwu, Ife and Benin development represent

high points of Iron Age development. Given iron tools and weapons, the forest would be made to yield great wealth' (Connah, 1975). Although the skill of the metal workers of ancient Benin is well known, excavation revealed elegant bronze bracelets made possibly as early as 13th century A.D. and iron knives most probably of similar date with 'a distinctive Benin shape'. The versatility of Benin's metal craftsmanship was revealed by the presence of such objects as nails, tack and staples (Connah, 1975). The archaeological evidence also suggests the use of oil palm nuts possibly as early as the 13th century A.D. Also by 13th century A.D. there is evidence that a similar iron saw capable of cutting timber as hard as iroko was in use. The information also derived from the charcoals suggest that hardwood in general were exploited from an early period. Also important are the implications of the possibly 13th century cloth fragments that were excavated from the Clerks' Quarters site and identified by a leading textile research institute in Britain. The report of the institute as quoted by Connah maintains that 'from the accuracy and precision with which the yarns and fabrics were made, and the intricacies of the patterns, it seems certain that they were made by skilled craftsmen of a fairly advanced civilization' (Connah, 1975). Therefore it seems that by the 13th century A.D. Benin was already at a very high level of technology — the incipient stage of this technology may date to antiquity. The development of complex society in Benin with its attendant growth of urbanization, technological, social and religious organization suggests that the first occupation of Benin environs dates to ancient times. As correctly noted by Connah (1972; 1975) 'the emergence of Benin, however, resulted basically from a highly successful exploitation of their environment by an iron-using people.'

Finally, 'the survival of ground stone axes in Benin ritual, and their copying by Benin "bronze-casters" suggest that the area may well have been inhabited since Late Stone Age times' (Connah, 1972). It should be noted however, that Shaw's findings at Iwo Eleru near Akure (about 170 kms from

Benin), has demonstrated that about 11,000 years ago (Late Stone Age period), man was already living in the rain forest of southern Nigeria. (Shaw and Daniels, 1984). Ground stone axes are relatively common in this zone. Connah (1975) therefore maintained that ground stone axes used in Benin rituals should be studied against this background. He has also rightly suggested that man was living in the Benin area during the Late Stone Age period — by at least 3000 years B.C. (Connah, 1975).

There is still much need for detailed archaeological and anthropological studies to be done in Benin and related areas before one can begin to get a proper idea about the early peopling of Benin and its environs.

CHAPTER 12

The Yoruba

by
OGUNTOMISIN G.O.

Introduction

The Yoruba people inhabit Oyo, Ondo, Ogun, Lagos and parts of Kwara and Bendel States of Nigeria. They are also found in some parts of the Republics of Benin and Togo. They organized themselves into many kingdoms in the historical past, the most prominent among which were: Oyo (which grew into an empire comprising a number of Yoruba speaking and non-Yoruba-speaking tributary vassals), Ekiti, Ondo, Ife, Egba, Ijebu, Igbomina and Awori kingdoms (Smith, 1976) The people of each of these kingdoms constituted a sub-group of the Yoruba. Until the 19th century, not all the sub-groups of the Yoruba called themselves or knew themselves as the Yoruba. The name 'Yoruba' was derived from 'Yar'ba,' originally used by the Hausa to refer to the Oyo, their southern neighbours. The name was, however, popularized in the 19th century by the C.M.S. missionaries and European travellers who penetrated the hinterland of the Yoruba country at that period. It had since then gained currency and acceptance among the Yoruba sub-groups. (Law, 1971). Though they had in the past neither been constituted into a single political entity nor effectively been controlled by a single political authority, the Yoruba are generally united in their tradition of common origin and in their culture.

Origin

The Origin of the Yoruba has been a subject of controversy

among writers on Yoruba history, tradition and culture. In explaining the Yoruba's rich culture and, especially, their skill in bronze work, Amoury Talbot (1926) an anthropologist, suggested that the Yoruba migrated from the north-east, particularly Egypt. In the same vein, Olumide Lucas (1948), a renowned Egyptologist, drew several similarities between the Yoruba and the Egyptian ways of life and concluded that the Yoruba migrated from Egypt passing through Sudan to their present location. Saburi Biobaku, for his part suggested Meroe in eastern Sudan as the place of origin of the Yoruba. In the opinion of Samuel Johnson, whose book, *The History of the Yorubas* was predominantly based on oral sources, Nubia was the ultimate origin of the Yoruba, where they were brought to Arabia by Nimrod, their Egyptian conqueror. They then migrated to Ile-Ife, having been driven from Arabia because of religious dispute (Johnson 1973). Although these writers differ remarkably in their suggestions about the ultimate origin of the Yoruba, they however agree that Ile-Ife was their secondary point of dispersal.

The Yoruba themselves have two main traditions of their origin. The first can be called the tradition of autochthony because it claims that the Yoruba originated at Ile-Ife; they did not migrate from anywhere. This tradition stated that *Olodumare* (Almighty God) sent Oduduwa to create the solid earth and the human race when the whole world was full of primordial water. Armed with a piece of earth, a snail shell and a hen with five toes, Oduduwa performed the job by sprinkling the sand over the water and releasing the hen to scatter it. Having thus created the solid earth, Oduduwa and sixteen elders descended with a chain at Ile-Ife. Another version of this story of creation stated that Obatala was first sent by *Olodumare* to create the solid earth. On his way to the world, Obatala drank palm wine and became drunk. Consequently Oduduwa was then sent by *Olodumare* to accomplish the task originally given to Obatala. According to this version, though Obatala was initially commissioned to create the solid earth, it was Oduduwa who actually performed the job. It

stated further that when Obatala got over his drunkenness, he discovered that the job given to him by *Olodumare* had been done, he therefore came to the world and claimed it as his own. He was challenged by Oduduwa. Other divinities took sides with either of the two. Then *Olodumare* summoned them and settled the matter. To Oduduwa, the creator of the earth, he gave the right to own and rule it. He reassigned Obatala the special task of molding human bodies. Thus Oduduwa became the ruler of Ile-Ife while Obatala became the creator of mankind. According to this tradition, Ile-Ife was not just the cradle of the Yoruba, it was the origin of the world — the Yoruba's garden of Eden.

The second tradition, that of migration, was recorded by Samuel Johnson. It states that the Yoruba were led to Ile-Ife by Oduduwa, the son of Lamurudu, king of Mecca, after a religious clash between the adherents of traditional religion and those of Islam. Oduduwa and his followers travelled for 90 days passing through Gobir in Husaland until they reached Ile-Ife (Johnson, 1973).

These two traditions of origin agree in spite of their remarkable differences, that Oduduwa was the progenitor of the Yoruba, and on the primacy of Ile-Ife in Yorubaland. The town has been traditionally referred to as '*Ife oo daiye*' (Ife the primeval). It was here that the sixteen or so children of Oduduwa took a resolution to disperse to other parts of Yorubaland. Tradition states that this resolution was taken at a place called Ita Ajero (place of resolution) in Ile-Ife (Smith, 1976). It was the dispersed children of Oduduwa and their descendants who founded the different kingdoms of Yorubaland.

An explanation of the origin of the Yoruba and their spread from Ile-Ife in this manner appears simplistic. A number of historians who have critically examined the myths of the origin of the Yoruba have indeed concluded that in spite of their mutually intelligible dialects and similarities in culture, the Yoruba were not as homogenous as the traditions seem to portray. Atanda has opined that Oduduwa cannot be the

same historical personage in both the traditions of creation and migration. He argues that the events referred to in the story of creation predated those mentioned in the story of migration which must have taken place in the 7th century A.D., after the death of prophet Mohammed, the founder of Islamic religion. Employing linguistic evidence to buttress his argument, he explains that the Yoruba language which is among the Kwa group of the Niger-Congo language family, emerged as a distinct language about two or three thousand years ago. Consequently, the Yoruba had been existing as a linguistic group before the advent of Oduduwa and his followers referred to in the migration story (Atanda, 1980).

This being so, it is plausible that people had been living in Yorubaland before the advent of the Oduduwa migrants. Samuel Johnson (1973) seems to have confirmed the existence of a pre-Oduduwa group when he wrote that Oduduwa met Agboniregun in Ile-Ife. Ulli Beier has drawn evidence from oral traditions collected in Ile-Ife, Idanre, Oba Ile (near Akure), Ire-Ekiti, Ado-Ekiti and Ijero-Ekiti to prove the existence of pre-Oduduwa elements and settlements in Yorubaland. Oba Ile, one of these settlements, is claimed to be older than Ile-Ife. Beier also showed that the indigenous people were later conquered by migrants. For instance, at Ile-Ife, the Oduduwa migrants struggled with and conquered the Igbo through the efforts of Moremi who sacrificed Oluorogbo, her only son, to the goddess of Esinmirin River to ensure victory for her group. The aborigines in Ibokun, Ire-Ekiti, Ado-Ekiti, Idanre and other parts of Yorubaland were said to have been subdued by the migrants (Beier, 1957). The struggle between Obatala and Oduduwa referred to in the story of creation can therefore be explained as the mythical way of expressing the contest between the autochthones and the migrants. Perhaps the most convincing evidence of the existence of a pre-Oduduwa group in Yorubaland is provided by the skeleton of a man discovered by Thurstan Shaw at Iwo Eleru, a rock shelter near Akure, in 1965. A radio-carbon date of the skeleton suggests that the man lived in the 9th millen-

nium B.C., that is several thousands of years before the advent of Oduduwa migrants (Shaw, 1969).

From the foregoing, it is reasonable to state that the people referred to today as the Yoruba consist of migrants and indigenous elements. Through several years of symbiotic relations, the two elements have become fused into one. The result of this fusion is that all the Yoruba people basically have broadly similar cultural traits discernible in their political social and economic organizations.

Aspects of their Socio-Political Culture

Political Organization

The political system of the Yoruba clearly manifests their basic cultural unity. Though, traditionally, governments in different parts of Yorubaland differed slightly in form, they had certain basic similarities. Firstly, these governments were town-based. Each town or village seems to have developed initially from a settlement which was an aggregate of lineages of which one must have been the first to settle in the town or village. The leader of the founding lineage usually assumed the political and spiritual headship of the settlement. The leaders of other lineages, ranked in seniority to the founder in order of settlement of their lineages, acquired a title which became hereditary to their lineages. The political leadership of the settlement was also hereditary in the founder's lineage. As the settlement gradually developed in size, a formalized system of government by which the ruler was surrounded by hereditary lineage chiefs, whom he consulted regularly on administrative matters, seems to have evolved. The existence of several of these settlements, apparently independent of one another, appears to have been a feature of pre-Oduduwa Yorubaland. Indeed, Ade Obayemi has indicated that a few of such settlements, which he has described as mini-states, existed in Ile-Ife area before the advent of Oduduwa. They were headed by such legendary personages as Obameri, Obatala, Obawinrin etc. (Obayemi 1976). Replicas of these early self-

that he would receive the sacred powers of his predecessors. After the end of the three-month grooming exercise, the *Oba*-elect was believed to have been adequately tutored in the art of government, so that when he assumed duty, he would not resort to arbitrary, oppressive or autocratic actions (Falola and Oguntomisin, 1984)

There existed certain machineries in the Yoruba traditional system of government to ensure that the *Oba* did not take actions arbitrarily. As mentioned earlier, he must commune regularly with his council of advisers consisting of senior hereditary chiefs who headed important wards in each town. They were known as the *Oyomesi* in Oyo, the *Iwarefa* in Ekiti, Ondo and the *Ilamuren* in Ijebu. Traditionally, the *Oba* was not expected to brush aside the views of the members of his council of advisers. If he did, he could be deposed or asked to commit suicide.

In Oyo, for example, an erring *Oba* could be rejected and told to commit suicide by the *Oyomesi* chiefs. In parts of Yorubaland, like Ekiti and Ondo where the chiefs had no constitutional power to formally reject the *Oba* and force him to commit suicide, an *Oba* could be removed by a general insurrection of the town's people, usually begun by the chiefs' boycott of the offending *Oba's* palace. In this way, the councils of advisers to the *Oba* acted as checks on his activities.

Fourthly, government in Yoruba towns was not the concern of the *Oba* or the chiefs only. Commoners, that is adult male members and prominent women in the society, were also involved. Each town was divided into wards (*adugbo* or *itun*) headed by ward chiefs (*Ijoye adugbo* or *olori itun*). The ward chiefs were title-holders and members of the *Oba's* council. Each ward was divided into compounds (*Agbo ile*) each under the headship of its most elderly man. He was known as the compound head (*baale* or *baba ile*). People in the compounds held meetings at regular intervals in the house of their heads to discuss issues affecting them. Similar meetings were held in the wards by the adults and the elderly men and women in all the compounds that made up each wards. Such meetings

were presided over by the ward chiefs. People in the compounds expressed their wishes through their compound heads to the ward chiefs who in turn carried them to the council and hence to the *Oba*. When the chiefs returned from council meetings, they briefed their people through the compound heads, about their deliberations and decisions. The junior chief, who did not sit in the *Oba's* council, held their meetings and communicated their own views on government policy to the senior chiefs. In some parts of Yorubaland, such as Ondo, Ekiti and Ijebu where the chiefs belonged to associations and cults, they gave accounts of government activities to their associations and cults. In Ekiti and Ijebu, where age-grade associations featured prominently in town administration, young men expressed their opinion on the affairs of the town in their age-grade meetings. Their views were communicated to the senior chiefs who carried them to the *Oba*. In the town's council, itself, the *Oba* was always in the background. Though council meetings were usually held in the veranda of his palace, the *Oba* was not often physically present in the midst of the chiefs at these meetings. Decisions were usually communicated to him for ratification. All these indigenous machineries in the constitution of the government of Yoruba towns ensured that not only were ordinary men involved in government, but also that the *Oba* was, in practice, a constitutional monarch. There is therefore, no room for autocracy or unfettered despotism in the system of government in Yoruba towns.

The ward chiefs and compound heads were involved in law-making and the administration of justice. All matters requiring law making were discussed and debated in the council and the decisions reached were promulgated as law in the name of the *Oba*. Administrations of justice and execution of laws were the joint responsibility of the chiefs and *Oba*, and the compound heads. To facilitate administration of justice, there existed three types of courts: the court of the *Oba*. The compound head was responsible for settling disputes between members of his compound. He took no fee and settled cases:

by arbitration. Appeal could be made to the court of the ward chief, who settled various disputes involving people from different compounds within his wards; but, it could not give judgement in criminal cases, such as murder. These had to be taken to the *Oba's* court. The *Oba's* court was the final court of appeal, except in Egba and Ijebu, where the *Ogboni* or *Osugbo* courts were the highest courts of appeal. It was in these latter courts only that capital punishments could be imposed.

Furthermore, the *Oba* was regarded as the father of his people. As a father, he was expected to cater for and not to tyrannize his children, so also was he expected to see to the welfare of his people. The *Oba* derived wealth from various sources to perform his political and social functions. He derived revenue from the proceeds of his farms. He had many servants, slaves and pawns who worked in his farms. He could also call on able-bodied adults or age-grades in his town to work for him. This is known as *Ebese* (requested free labour). When such free labour was given, the *Oba* normally provided food and drinks for the workers. As a result of free labours and the work done by servants, slaves and others, the *Oba* usually had large farms from which he derived substantial income. Other sources of the *Oba's* income included fines, gifts, market tolls and war booties. Like the head of a large family, the *Oba* spent a substantial part of his income on the services of his town and on the welfare of his people. He performed rituals to the gods and feasted his chiefs on major festivals of the town. He entertained important visitors and catered for his palace officials. These officials were his personal servants and were called *Ilari* in Oyo, *Odi* in Ijebu and *Emese* in Ife, Ekiti and Ijesa. They were mostly of slave origin, but in Ekiti and Ijesa, they included free men. Some of their duties included running petty errands for the *Oba*. Some of them acted as town criers and promulgated government's laws and orders. They also carried diplomatic messages between kingdoms and acted as royal escorts for important visitors. While performing their duties, they were highly respected. As emissaries of their sovereign to other kingdoms,

they enjoyed a measure of diplomatic immunity, especially when their sovereign enjoyed cordial relations with such other kingdoms.

But for differences in the names of certain functionaries and the functions of some institutions like the *Ogboni* or the *Osugbo*, there were no spectacular dissimilarities among the major groups of the Yoruba in the system of government described above. However, as towns expanded in the course of historical development, there emerged larger political units, such as kingdoms with many subordinate towns. The Yoruba modified their system of government to suit the increasing administrative complexity brought about in consequence of these territorial expansions. In the process of modification, the various Yoruba groups evolved varying degrees of central administrations. While the Oyo/Yoruba emerged as an empire whose base of administration, that is capital city, was Oyo-Ile and its sovereign, the *Alaafin*, other Yoruba groups, such as the Ife, the Egba, the Ekiti and the Awori, evolved systems ranging from provincial, confederal, loose federal or semi-centralized structures of government. Despite these structural differences, these forms of administration had the following underlying similarities:

- a. They were all town-based. The metropolitan city of each of the kingdom or empire was the capital and seat of central government.
- b. The *Oba* of the central governments made laws that were binding throughout the kingdoms or empire. Though the ruler or *baale* of the subordinate towns could make local laws, such laws must not conflict with those of the *Oba* of the metropolitan towns.
- c. The rulers of the subordinate towns had no power to judge cases of treason or those involving capital offences.
- d. Contacts between the ruler of the subordinate towns and the *Oba* of the metropolitan town were made through the senior chiefs of the capital. These senior chiefs, who were mainly members of the *Oba's* council

- of advisers, were made patrons of the subordinate towns. Matters affecting the subordinate towns were taken to the council patrons.
- e. The subordinate towns paid regular annual or periodic tributes to the *Oba* of the metropolitan towns.
 - f. The subordinate towns contributed soldiers to the army of the metropolitan towns in the times of war. In return the *Oba* of the metropolitan towns were responsible for the defence of all their subordinate territories from external attacks.
 - g. External relations of the subordinate towns were conducted by the *Oba* of the metropolitan towns.

Art, Culture and Religion

Archaeological findings have corroborated oral evidence that Ile-Ife was the fountain-head of Yoruba culture and religion (Wright, 1967). Attention was drawn to the rich cultural heritage of the Yoruba manifested in ancient Ife art works by Leo Frobenius, a German ethnographer in 1910-1911. Since then archaeological excavations in the town have revealed brass objects, terra cotta and bronze heads which are very naturalistic in form. Other findings are carved figures, monoliths, stools in granite and quartz. A typical example of the handwork of the ancient Yoruba at Ife is *Opa Oranyan*, a six metre high granite column traditionally believed to have marked the grave of *Oranyan*, who is regarded in one of the Yoruba myths of origin as the youngest son of *Oduduwa*. All these archaeological discoveries clearly depict the highly sophisticated artistic style and the high standard of ancient Yoruba civilization which developed at Ife-Ife. A standard which has been favourably compared with those of ancient Egypt, classical Greece, Rome and Europe during the age of Renaissance (Smith, 1973; Crook, 1963). That works of art similar in style of the Ife terra cottas and bronze works have been found in other parts of Yorubaland, particularly in Owo, Ondo etc., and stone monoliths similar to the Ife ones were

discovered in Iwo, Telemu and Esie, (Lloyd, 1952) are clear demonstrations that the discoveries at Ife are authentic expressions of the culture of the ancient Yoruba people. The works of art discovered at Ife and other places in Yorubaland are said to be similar in style and technology to those of the Nok culture. In particular, Ife terra cotta heads have been found to be similar to the Igbo and Ibibio masks in the eastern and south-eastern Nigeria, the Baluba mask in Congo and the Dan masks of the Ivory Coast. Indeed traditions among the Yoruba have stressed that the *cire perdue* method of bronze-casting was introduced to Benin from Ile-Ife. These similarities do not only indicate that in the past the Yoruba were not cultural isolates, but also portray some degree of cultural diffusion in pre-colonial Nigeria in particular and in the West African sub-region in general.

Archaeologists working at Ife made their findings mainly at the shrines or grooves of deities. This fact suggests that the art works were probably used for religious purposes, particularly the worship of deified ancestors and other gods or goddesses. Prominent among the deified ancestors worshipped in Ile-Ife are *Oodua* (Oduduwa) *Obatala* or *Orisanla*, *Ogun*, *Obalufon*, *Yemoo*, *Oluorogbo*, *Oranyan* and *Orunmila*. It is estimated that there were about 201 such deities worshipped at Ile-Ife in the ancient period and that only 25 days of the year were free from the performance of religious rituals in the town. During the periods of propitiation of these deities, prayers were generally said for the well-being of the Yoruba. It seems therefore, that in ancient time,⁵ Ife was not only the political headquarters of the Yoruba but also the repository of their religion. While accepting that other Yoruba towns had their own local gods and goddesses, it is obvious that many of the deities worshipped at Ile-Ife were also worshipped in these towns from very early times. Among such deities are *Ogun* (god of Iron) *Obatala* or *Orisanla*, *Obalufon* and *Orunmila*.

The Yoruba were an intensely religious people. Religion featured in almost all the spheres of their activities. They consulted *Ifa* oracle and propitiated appropriate gods or goddesses.

ses when embarking on important projects or engaging in an important business. For example, they propitiated the god of fertility when clearing bush for cultivation; they sacrificed to *Ori* (head of one's spiritual double) when getting married; they appeased *Ogun* (the god of iron or war) when going to war, and when installing new *Oba*, the various gods of their towns were appeased to ensure the welfare of the people and a peaceful reign for the new rulers. Above all the various gods and goddesses which they worshipped, the Yoruba believed in the existence of a Supreme Being ruling the universe, whom they called *Olodumare* (the almighty one) (Lloyd, 1952). He was worshipped in some Yoruba communities as *Orisa Agbaye* (the God of the Universe). The Yoruba believed that all the gods and goddesses that they propitiated were the emissaries of *Olodumare* and that they carried their prayers and supplications to Him. Indeed *Esu* or *Elegbara* was regarded as the divine messenger who delivered offerings made by man to *Olodumare*.

Like other peoples in Africa and elsewhere, they believed that the gods and goddesses and even, the departed ancestors were capable of warding off natural disasters, repelling the forces of evil, providing children and ensuring the general well-being of the society. It is equally believed that their neglect and even failure to propitiate them adequately might incur their wrath and bring disaster. Thus such disasters and untoward occurrences, like epidemics, childlessness, sudden death, draught, earthquakes etc. were often, ascribed to the wrath of the gods. Consequently, the fear of death, diseases, natural disasters and the need to ensure the general welfare of the members of their communities make religious observances compelling to the Yoruba. Each of the gods and goddesses they worshipped had its own priests and devotees. However, in a typical Yoruba town or village, the *Oba* or the *baale* was usually the chief priest, that is, the *Pontifex maximus*, and coordinated the activities of the priests of all the gods and goddesses and the organization of the various religious festivals (Lloyd, 1955). His palace was a centre for political, and

religious activities. It contained shrines to the town's important deities.

Lineage and other Socio-Economic Ties

A Yoruba town was an aggregate of lineages, some of which must have accompanied the founder while others would have settled after the town had been founded. Each lineage constituted a social unit and its members claimed descent from a single ancestor. They lived in a compound built in a rectangular form with an open enclosure in the middle. The head of the compound, that is the *baale*, was usually the eldest man. Apart from settling disputes as mentioned earlier, his other duties was to propitiate the departed ancestors and other deities as well as ensure the general well-being of the members of the lineage.

When a compound became over-populated, either as a result of births or additions of people from other communities, a new compound might be built to accommodate the surplus populations. Consequently, a large lineage might live in more than one compound. It was in the compounds that individuals developed their personalities and received their early childhood education. It was here they learnt to respect elders and behave with decorum in the society, for the Yoruba highly valued deference to age and respect for authority. The children respected and obeyed their parents and all the elderly men and women in the compound who, in turn, paid similar deference to their immediate seniors. The compound or the lineage head was the most respected.

Whether the members of a lineage lived in a compound or many compounds, they maintained close ties and assisted one another whenever the need arose. They came together on important festive occasions, such as the annual propitiation of their departed ancestors. They supported one another materially and psychologically during marriage, chieftaincy, birth and even funeral ceremonies. The lineage was the core of the extended family system in Yorubaland, though its members might come from different parents, they did not forget

that they were chips of the same block. Fraternal feelings among its members were always kept alive by their link with the same great ancestor. This ancestral link constituted them into one *ebi* (family) whose members were largely exogamous (Lloyd, 1955).

Apart from the lineage, the Yoruba maintained strong ties with their age-grade associations. (Fadipe, 1970). Known as *Egbe* or *Otu* in Ekiti, Ijesa and Ondo or *Regberegbe* among the Ijebu, age-grade association can be explained as associations of people of relatively the same age. Members of these associations provided assistance for one another in various spheres of human endeavours, such as farming, marriage, religious festivals and burial. In some parts of Yorubaland, such as Ekiti, Ondo, Ijesa and Ijebu, age-grade associations were so elaborately developed that they performed both social and political functions in the society. Here each age-grade association had a president and performed such definite functions as clearing the roads, building or repairing palaces or engaging in some other public works. Age-grade associations held meetings at regular intervals and took decisions on matters affecting their towns. Such decisions were often communicated to the senior chiefs through their leaders. Where, as in Ekiti, some members of the associations took chieftaincy titles, these usually voiced out the opinion of their associations in the council of chiefs. Thus, age-grade associations were not only a social organization providing succour for their members, they were also organs for political articulation.

Besides the age-grade, there were certain socio-economic associations or societies whose members maintained close ties and rendered useful services to one another. Prominent among these are the *Aaro* and *Esusu* mutual help societies. Others are the professional guilds. The *Aaro* and *Esusu* probably originated from the desire by the Yoruba to derive succour from outside ones lineage or to supplement and augment the assistance provided by one's extended family and age-grade. The members of the *Aaro* provided labour for themselves in rotational form. While the *Aaro* was organized

for providing free rotational labour services among its members, the *Esusu* was an association organized for the economic benefit of its members. *Esusu* members contributed certain fixed sums of money to their president periodically. The total contribution collected each period was given to a member. This was done in rotation till all the members of the association had their turns in the collection. In another form, members might contribute various sums of money, each according to his or her means, to their president for a given period, usually a year. At the end of the year, each member collected the total of his or her contribution. This is one of the means by which the Yoruba saved money for diverse purposes, such as building, marriage, burial ceremonies and settling debts.

The professional guilds were organized by members of the same profession for the purpose of protecting their profession and ensuring fraternity among them. Prominent among such associations were the hunters' association, the association of the *Adani* (a kind of hermits) and the guild of *Orishan* (a kind of *Orisha*).

Awori, whose kings were unable to exercise authority over wide areas owing to geographical constraints, the nature of their political culture (Falola and Oguntomisin, 1984) and other restraining factors, the latter group, organized themselves either in small separate autonomous kingdoms or, as in the case of the Egba, a confederation of semi-autonomous principalities. The most spectacular internal developments which made for change in the traditional political system of the Yoruba were the internecine wars which ravaged Yorubaland in the 19th century. Prominent among these were the wars that attended the decline and collapse of the Old Oyo empire, the largest and the most powerful Yoruba polity, and the Owu, the Egba, Ijaye and the Ekiti *Parapo* wars. They were caused, *inter alia*, by the collapse of the Old Oyo empire, which by virtue of its military might and territorial extent, had maintained peace over a wide area of Yorubaland containing power rivalry among the successor states and the struggle among states to control the trade routes to the coast.

While the Old Oyo empire was at the peak of its power, its authority covered a large part of Yorubaland. Though its power did not extend to the Ekiti, Ijebu, Ondo, Ijesa and Ife territories, it maintained a cordial relationship with these kingdoms. The relationship was based on the *ebi* system, (membership of the 'House of Oduduwa;') and ensured relative peace among the different states and kingdoms of the Yoruba. However, the existing state of equilibrium broke down after the collapse of the empire. Not only did the wars which attended the collapse of the empire destabilize a large part of the northern Yorubaland, but also the inability of the *Alaafin* ruler of the empire to maintain peace over his domain led to the Owu war which opened the floodgate of the internecine wars. A series of other wars followed and Yorubaland did not witness peace until 1893.

The wars resulted in political chaos, insecurity of life and property, upsurge of refugees and the rise of professional warriors, some of whom played leading roles in politics. In many of the refugee settlements which emerged at this period,

refugees found the traditional Yoruba constitution with its emphasis on the monarchical system of government and hereditary chieftaincy unacceptable and inadequate for their security. Thus, in such refugee towns as Ibadan, Ijaye and Abeokuta, constitutional alternatives leading to the evolution of new forms of government were adopted. Ibadan evolved a military republicanism, Ijaye a military autocracy while the Egba at Abeokuta federated under a military cadre led by Sodeke. In none of these new forms of government were monarchy and hereditary system of assumption of title recognized (Ogutomisin, 1982).

Furthermore, Yoruba towns became more cosmopolitan in their ethnic composition as Oyo refugees moved into non-Oyo towns. In Osogbo, originally an Ijesa town, the population of its Ijesa indigenes was swamped by that of the Oyo refugees. Other towns, like Ipetumodu, Edunabon and Apomu in Ife territory, were almost swamped by Oyo refugee population. The consequence of this ethnic admixture was that the Yoruba became more culturally diffused than hitherto. Aspects of Oyo-Yoruba culture, like the use of the *Gangan* talking drums, the long loom used in the weaving industry by Oyo men, the clothed masquerade and the use of Oyo military and civil titles were diffused into non-Oyo areas of Yorubaland, such as Ekiti, Ijesa and Ife.

Since in some refugee towns as Ijaye and Ibadan, ascription yielded place to achievement as a criterion for social mobility and political upliftment, emphasis on lineage ties began to wane gradually. Indeed, in Ibadan, a military town which contained a motley of refugees, warriors and adventurers from other Yoruba towns, became highly more detached from traditional lineage ties than in traditional Yoruba towns. Each leading warrior or war chief had his own war boys who looked up to him for leadership, training, economic and political rewards for services rendered. It was to him, rather than to any lineage head, that their loyalties were drawn. In some other towns which hosted refugees, patronage system closely rivalled the traditional lineage system. The refugees who had

become detached from their homes and attached to their patrons looked up to them for protection and for socio-economic and political right, such as the right to farm lands and chieftaincy. These developments are preludes to the 20th century phenomenon in urban towns where traditional social ties are drastically less accentuated.

A number of external factors also contributed to social changes in Yorubaland. The first was the introduction of foreign religions – Islam and Christianity. Islam was introduced to Yorubaland in the 17th century, first through Mali and Songhai by itinerant muslim preachers and traders, and later by the Fulani and Hausa muslim elements from Borno and Hausaland. It spread rapidly in the 19th century as a result of the involvement of Malam Alimi and his Ilorin based muslim supporters during the political crisis which led to the fall of the Old Oyo empire. The wars that followed the fall of the empire, as well as the expansion of Ibadan further aided the spread of the religion beyond Oyo–Yoruba territory. As Oyo muslim soldiers and refugees found their ways to other parts of Yorubaland, they carried the religion with them. Ibadan's *Ajele* and soldiers took the religion to Ekiti and other parts of eastern Yorubaland. The religion spread to north-eastern Yorubaland — the territories of the Akoko and the O-kun Yoruba (Iyagba, Bunu and Owe) through Ibadan and Nupe soldiers and *Ajele*. By the end of the 19th century, the religion had spread to the coastal areas, particularly among the Ijebu whose country was opened to trade after the British conquest of Ijebu-Ode in 1892 (Gbadamosi, 1979).

Christianity was introduced in the 19th century by liberated slaves of Yoruba origin who returned to their homes from Sierra-Leone. They were followed by foreign missionaries particularly of the Church Missionary Society (the C.M.S.), the Methodist, the Baptist and the Roman Catholic Missions from 1845 onwards.

Their proselytizing activities began in Badagry in the 1840s and later spread gradually to Abeokuta, Ijaye, Ogbomosho, Oyo, Ibadan, Lagos and other parts of the Yoruba. Apart from

the initial efforts of the liberated Yoruba slaves popularly known as the *Saro*, the British intervention in the Yoruba wars the late 19th century and their subsequent take-over of the authority in Yorubaland greatly facilitated the expansion of Christianity in Yorubaland. The British forcibly removed opposition to the opening up of Ijebuland to trade and Christianity in 1892. Their stoppage of the wars in the Yoruba hinterland and their take-over of political authority there provided conducive atmosphere for Christian missionaries to spread their religion peacefully. Thus, by the end of the 19th century the Christian religion had spread from the coast to the northernmost part of Yorubaland (Atanda, 1980; Oduyoye, 1969)

These two religions introduced new faiths entirely different from those of the African traditional religions. They regarded African traditional religions as paganism and the gods and goddesses worshipped by the Yoruba as lifeless, worthless and incapable of saving their souls. While Muslim priests inculcated in their converts, the belief in Allah and Mohammed, His prophet, Christian missionaries imbued their proselytes with faith in God and Jesus Christ, His only Son. By so doing, Islamic and Christian missionaries were able to produce a set of people with new loyalties and new ideas about religion. Islamic and Christian converts abhorred the worship of the traditional deities. They looked towards the leaders of their religion, rather than the priests of the traditional deities and their lineage or compound head whom they regarded as pagan, for spiritual guidance. Muslims and Christians became distinct classes of people distinguishable from the traditional Yoruba, not only in their faith, but also in their style of dresses and their ways of life. The – two religions were rooted in foreign cultures. While Islamic religions had its basis in Arabic culture, Christianity was deeply rooted in the western culture. The resultant cultural change is manifested in other spheres of Yoruba life. One of these was marriage. Muslims and Christians married, not in the traditional way, but in compliance with the injunctions of their religions. Muslims kept

women in purdah; Christians engaged in holy wedlock and married only one wife. As Islam and Christianity began to have grips on people in many Yoruba towns, new social ties began to emerge. The age-grade association started to yield place to religious associations and guilds in some areas. In the Muslim communities for example, people belonged to the Ansar-u-deen, Hammadiyya and Insabatuddeen societies, to mention a few. Today, many Muslim youth leagues and associations are sprigging up. Among the Christians, different church associations, such as the Young Men Christians Association (Y.M.C.A.), Young Women Christian Association (Y.W.C.A.), the Diocesan Women's League, the Boys Brigade and various clubs within the churches have made people to develop new and more universal social ties different from the parochial traditional social ties based on localized organizations, such as the lineage, the compound and the age-grade associations. In some Yoruba communities nowadays, the age-grade associations have metamorphosed into some of these organizations (Fadipe, 1970).

Islam and Christianity introduced literacy. By establishing schools, muslims introduced literacy in Arabic while Christian missionaries introduced western education and were able to reduce Yoruba to writing. The proliferation of schools in Yorubaland from the late 19th century to the present-day has led to the mass production of western oriented educated elite with little or no respect for the traditional culture and usages of the Yoruba.

The second external factor that had tremendous effect on the socio-political, as well as the economic, life of the Yoruba was British colonization. With the aid of European missionaries and traders, the British began to intervene in the internal affairs of the Yoruba from the mid-19th century. In 1851, they successfully intervened in the chieftaincy dispute in Lagos between Oba Akintoye and Kosoko, his nephew. They took sides with Akintoye and drove away Kosoko whom they branded as a notorious slave trader (Ajayi, 1961; Oguntomisin 1980). In addition to installing Akintoye as their puppet king

of Lagos, they established a consulate there as a symbol of their informal political presence. Ten years after this, they annexed Lagos as their colony. The annexation of Lagos marked the beginning of the British colonial authority in Yorubaland. From here the British penetrated into the hinterland, firstly as peace-makers in the protracted internecine wars among the Yoruba, and secondly as forces of political subversion. Between 1883 and 1893, they succeeded not only in making peace in Yorubaland, but also in concomitantly making different Yoruba kings and chiefs sign treaties, part of whose clauses undermined the sovereignties of the different Yoruba kingdoms and states. The signing of the treaties was followed by bombardments of the kingdoms whose rulers showed the least resistance to the British political hegemony. For example, in 1892 the kingdom of Ijebu-Ode, whose people had for a long time resented the opening up of their domain for commerce to the British, was bombarded. In 1895, Oyo was attacked and subdued by the British colonial forces. By 1900 Yorubaland had virtually come under the British government.

The consequence of the British colonial administration was great. Firstly, the various Yoruba kingdoms and states lost their sovereignty to a colonial government. Secondly Yorubaland witnessed socio-economic change which had its roots in the colonial government actions. Prominent among these were the development of some towns as centres of political authority. Such towns as Lagos, Ibadan, Abeokuta, Ado-Ekiti, Ijebu-Ode etc. which were developed as provincial and district headquarters also developed as centres of economic activities pulling towards themselves people from their immediate surroundings and village in the interior. The construction of motor roads and railways from the coast to the interior to link these major towns facilitated the movement of people into the political centres and the coastal regions. The results of these developments were increasing urbanization in Yorubaland and the intensification of rural-urban migration as people streamed into the political centres to trade and look for jobs. The population of some Yoruba towns became mo

diversified than hitherto. Ibadan for example, has now become a mini-Nigeria because people from all parts of the country can be found there. In addition, the movement of people from the rural areas in search of such jobs as bricklaying, bicycle repairing, watch-repairing, petty trading etc. in the cities made the young and verile people to neglect agriculture.

In the emergent cities and urban areas, people became only marginally associated with their compounds and lineages in the villages which they visited occasionally. Attachment to social club, religious organizations and economic associations tended to supersede traditional ties. That the Yoruba underwent all these changes without shattering effects on their societies is due to their inherent ability to adapt themselves fairly rapidly to changing situations.

CHAPTER 13

The People of Lokoja

by
OKPOKO P.U.

Introduction:**Geographical Background**

Lokoja is the administrative headquarter of Kogi State. It is located on the intersecting point of longitude $7^{\circ} 49'N$ and latitude $6^{\circ} 44'E$ on a map of Nigeria (Edah, 1987). The town is sandwiched between a slope of range of hills called Mount Patti and the confluence of rivers Niger and Benue. The highest point of Mount Patti has a flat-table-top and it is about 458.3 metres above sea level (Ali, 1971). The entire town and the surrounding environs can be viewed from this mountain which currently houses Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) Lokoja. With an area of about twenty square kilometres Lokoja lies on the right hand side off kilometre 76 on Okenne Abuja road. This road links Abuja to other northern towns including Kaduna, Zaria, Kano, Jos and Minna.

Located broadly within the transition zone between rain forest in the south and the savannah to the north, Lokoja is bounded on the North and East by rivers Niger and Benue, the West by Mouth Patti and South by Ajaokuta. It is essentially within the savannah woodland with very tall grasses and such trees as oil bean, shea butter, locust bean, ironwood, mahogany and doka (Ali, 1991).

There is no doubt that its strategic location, first, as a refuge for those fleeing for safety which Mount Patti offered, and second, as navigable waterways provided by rivers Niger and Benue; contributed in no small way to the peopling of the

town. That it became an area of interest to European explorers and missionaries in the early 19th century, for instance, is consequent upon its location. It must be remembered that river valleys have had considerable influences on many phases of human activity including the growth of settlements, transportation and hydro-power. River valleys like Nile, Euphrates, Tigris, Hwano-Hos Indu etc. are known to hold dense populations due to their fertile soil, smooth terrains and inherent capacity for transportation (Edah, 1987).

In spite of its strategic location, Lokoja was not thickly populated prior to its upliftment as the capital of Kogi state in August, 1991. The reasons are attributable to its disadvantaged topography and hazardous climate. Like most towns in the Niger- Benue confluence area, Lokoja is dominated by undulating landscape. The weather is generally humid between the months of October and April each year, though the intervening harmattan from late November to early February normally cushions its ugly effects. This uncompromising weather condition along with the disadvantaged topography explain in part why Lord Lugard moved his administrative Headquarter from Lokoja, first to Zungeru and later to Kaduna. Additionally, the prevalence of such diseases as sleeping sickness and malaria is also a contributory factor to the general low densities of populations in Nigeria's Middle Belt within which Lokoja is located (Ologe, 1987).

Before we proceed further, let us take a cursory look at European intervention in the affairs of Lokoja. This is because European activities culminated in the creation of an atmosphere conducive for a peaceful co-existence among the diverse ethnic groups which now inhabit the town.

European Advent

European penetration into Lokoja in the early nineteenth century represents a significant landmark in the history of the town. Inspired by the exploratory journeys of Mungo Park who in 1775 undertook to explore the Niger on behalf of the African Association, British explorers embarked on various

exploratory journeys which aimed primarily at exploiting the rich confluence resources as well as finding viable outlets for the then growing European industries. Thus the 1832 expedition led by Mcgroggor Laird and Richard Lander; the 1841 expedition commanded by Captain Trotter and Commander William and Bird Allen; and the 1854 and 1857 expedition under Dr. Balfour Baikie were variously undertaken to achieve these objectives.

Consequently, Lokoja was catapulted from a transit trading point to a viable commercial centre for European firms. By 1860, for instance, a permanent British settlement had been established in the town under Dr. Balfour Baikie and the machineries for the smooth exploitation of local trade were set up. They built warehouses, stores, and factories along the Niger and steamers made fortune through the shipment of trade goods. Traders came from diverse regions including Kebbi, Kano, Lagos, Abeokuta and Sokoto to exploit the benefits accruing from European trade. Some of these traders eventually settled permanently to make Lokoja their home. And to ensure the protection and safety of British commercial interest in Lokoja, a consulate was established in 1865. To further ensure the protection of lives and property, Jacob Meau was appointed the first chief of Lokoja on the 12th of September, 1870. Thus by 1875, four European firms — Mill Brothers, the West African Company, the Central African Company and James Pinnock — were operating up the Niger. These companies, among others were amalgamated in 1882 by George Taubman Goldie into a strong monopoly company and called it United African Company (U.A.C.). This development enabled the company later reconstituted under a new name of National African Company (N.A.C.) to dominate the confluence trade and eventually bought all rival French companies that had earlier established their footholds on the Niger and Benue and the hinterland. And by 1886, N.A.C. was granted a charter by the British government to administer the region north of the confluence on its behalf. Thereafter, it came known as the Royal Niger Company (R.N.C.).

The activities of R.N.C. culminated in the declaration of the Northern Protectorate by the British Government which at last realised that it must assume direct responsibility for her new colony. Sir Fredrick Lugard, then Colonel and Commissioner and Commandant, was sworn in January 1, 1900, as the first Governor of the protectorate. The ceremony took place at Lokoja and Union Jack was hoisted thus ending R.N.C. rule. Although Lokoja lost its headquarter status in 1904 to Zungeru and which was subsequently taken over by Kaduna, history will not forget its place as the first British settlement in Nigeria as well as an important centre for the exchange of international goods between the later half of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Early Settlers

Prior to European advent in the early 19th century, the geographical area we call Lokoja attracted peoples from different regions. They individually and/or collectively came to exploit the various opportunities which the town had to offer. The Oworos, for instance, came for defense reasons. Along with the Bassa-Nges, they also exploited the place for farming and hunting. The Nupes and Kakandas traded along the banks of the Niger. On their part, the Hausas used Lokoja as a transits station enroute Yorubaland where they purchased Kolanuts. While the Igbirra-Koto and Igala peoples exploited the rivers for the sake of fishing. These peoples, along with some liberated slaves from Liberia, Sierra-Leone, Gold Coast (now Ghana) and Lagos that came to exploit the benefits accruing from European activities, eventually settled permanently and made Lokoja their first homes.

The earliest of these settlers were the Oworo people. They were said to have migrated from Ile-Ife and settled at Agbaja from where they moved to Mount Patti circa 1825 to forestall the incessant raids of Massaba, Etsu Nupe. On Mount Patti, the Oworos established different settlements, the first of which was founded by one Ondakiselu (he that multiplies) and named it Okenka. By the time Dr. William Balfour Baikie

arrived Lokoja, first, in 1854 and, later in 1857, he encouraged chief Meneha (the last Oworo chief on Mount Patti) to descend the hill and form a settlement with other settlers.

The Oworos claim to Lokoja hinges on two main premises. The first is that they settled on Mount Patti before other settlers arrived Lokoja. And the second is based on their claim that Lokoja derived its name from an Oworo word *Lukoja* which means "the fine place that attracts man to it". While there is a consensus of opinions in regard to their first claim, the second does not go down well with other settlers who, interestingly, have their individual versions as regards the origin of the place-name and the ownership of the town.

To the Nupes, the name Lokoja was derived from *Patti Lukongi* meaning the "hill of doves". It is noteworthy that the Nupes and Kakandas (Kanda is classified in a wider linguistic sense under Nupe) had traded along the banks of river Niger but they did not establish any settlement in Lokoja until Massaba's forces captured and occupied the area. Apart from the above argument, the fact that Nupe word *Patti* (Pati is Nupe word for hill) was used to name where the earliest inhabitants of Lokoja settled as well as the appointment of the first chief of Lokoja by the Massaba of Nupe in September, 1870 lend support to their claim over the town.

For the Hausa (who used Lokoja as a transit station) Lokoja derived its name from an iroko tree with a red bark. In Hausa language the word *Luko* means tree while *ja* refers to red. This tree was on Mount Patti where Hausa traders met to exchange trade goods. To them, therefore, Lokoja simply means a settlement founded around a red iroko tree. The second category of Hausa that arrived Lokoja is made up of those who tended towards promoting Islamic scholarship (Mohammed, 1987). Some of these scholars settled permanently and established schools for the study of the Quran. The last category constitutes of those who came to Lokoja to pay respect to their departed Emirs and Islamic leaders.

It suffices to point out that Lord Lugard deposed and sent to exile all the Emires and Islamic leaders that were incompar-

tible with his administration. Many of them were deported to Lokoja to be under his strict surveillance. Notable among them were the late Emirs of Zaria, Bida, Kano and Gumel. Their tombs constitute significant landmarks in Lokoja today. The presence of these leaders in Lokoja at that time attracted their subjects and admirers some of who settled permanently. Others came on occasional homage paying visits.

In his support to Yoruba claim over Lokoja, Izard (not dated) asserted rather simplistically, that "the name Lokoja was derived from a corruption of Yoruba phrase *Ilu-Oke-Oja* "the country of scattered villages ...". Even his interpretation of this phrase has long been faulted. Like other settlers, however, Yorubas argue that the word Lokoja is derived from *Ilu* meaning town and *Oja* which means market. To them, therefore Lokoja means a market town where they met with other traders to exchange commercial items. Yoruba settlers in Lokoja, says Ali, (1991), "began to increase with the increase in the volume of Kolanut trade which was brought by steamship from Lagos. Hence Lagos and Abeokuta Yorubas dominate other groups of Yorubas ...". Other Yorubas that are easily noticeable in Lokoja today are the Okun, Ondo and Ogbomosho Yorubas. They engage in different occupations including civil service, trading and taxi driving.

For the Igalas, Lokoja derived its name from *Lia-ka-jeja* which means "let us go and eat fish". They also claim Lokoja on the basis of the suzerainty exercised by the Attah of Igala over the area before the coming of the Europeans. For it was his representative in the east bank of river Niger called Chief Anaja Ame Abokko, that negotiated a treaty with the whitemen for the cession of an area within the present old market for the model farm which was established in 1841. The area was valued for 700,000 cowries, about forty five pounds sterling at that time.

The Igbirra on their part claim that they migrated from Kwararafa and settled along the banks of the Niger in the early part of the 19th century. They later diverged with one group moving southwards in search of antelopes and later es-

tablishing Igbirra Tao (Okene) while the other group (Igbirra Koto) remained for the sake of fishing (Ali, 1988).

The Bassa-Nge people (Bassa-Nge is also classified under Nupe in a wider linguistic sense) are very prominent in Lokoja today. They were said to have settled at the foot of Mount Patti in early 19th century (Panaki 1987). Some of them crossed to the east of river Niger where they setup different settlements, the largest of which is Gboloko.

Interesting as the above claims are, their authenticity cannot easily be determined especially when it is realised that the various ethnic groups want to assert their individual rights on the town to which they all lay claims. But the following inferences could be made from their claims. The first is that the place-name may have been derived from a local language or a collection of them. It is certain however, that "Lukoja Confluence" was first mentioned officially on the 10th of October 1860 in a dispatch sent by Dr. William Balfour Bikie to the British Foreign Office (Pedraza, 1960; Amihere, 1987). Secondly, the claimants seem not to individually assert ownership over the entire geographical area within which Lokoja is located. They are individually and/or collectively exercising authority over the various quarters into which the town is divided. Apart from the Oworos who first inhabited the top of Mount Patti as earlier mentioned, the chronological sequence of the arrival of other groups is not easily determinable since the inadequacy of relevant data makes concrete statement difficult. But it may not be unreasonable to say that they could not have arrived in piecemeal fashion. This is because the various attractions which Lokoja provided, when combined with the peaceful atmosphere which followed European intervention, might have triggered off a mass movement of peoples from regions in and outside the Niger Benue confluence area.

Though inferences from archaeology, physical anthropology and historical linguistics suggest the peopling of the Niger-Benue confluence area from the late stone age times (Gundu, 1987); they will be more relevant to us when specific

reference is made of the habitation of Lokoja itself. The peoples of Lokoja are therefore classified here to include those culture groups who settled therein between the early and later half of the 19th century for one or more of the reasons earlier outlined and who today, claim a portion and/or portions within its present geographical boundary. These groups have all been identified above. This classification excludes all the transit and/or temporary visitors prominent among whom are the Igbos, Tivs, Ijos and Igbirra-Okenes. These peoples were classed as non indigens by my informants.

Ethnographic Viewpoint

Lokoja is essentially a meeting point of cultures or as G.W. Izard (n.d) puts it, "a heterogeneous collection of numerous "tribes". Such culture groups as the Hausa, Yoruba, Oworo, Nupe, Kakanda, Bassa-Nge, Igala and Igbirra met here to form a single socio-political unit. These cultural groups are sub-cultures of the respective macro-cultures in some parts of the country as the case may be. The Hausa, for instance, form a sub-culture of the macro-Hausa culture in parts of the north. The Yoruba and Oworo are sub-cultures of the macro-Yoruba culture in the west. The Nupe, Kakanda and Bassa-Nge are classed here as sub-cultures of the macro-Nupe culture in Kogi and Niger states. The Igala has its mother culture in the eastern part of Kogi state. While the Igbirra is a sub-culture of the macro-Igbirra Okene and Koto cultures in Kogi State.

These culture groups lived (and still live) mainly in the respective Angwas or quarters acquired and/or allocated to them during the early stages of habitation. These groups and their angwas are listed below:

Hausa

— Angwa Rimi, Agwa Kura, Angwa Madabo, Angwa Yashi, Sarikinuma and Angwa Sariki.

Nupe

— Angwa Nupawa and Cantoment.

Oworo

— Karaworo

- Bassa-Nge
- Adankolo and Lokongoma
- Kakanda
- Kabawa
- Igala
- Kporoka
- Igbirra Koto
- Patankoto
- Yoruba
- Shaba Yagi

It is noteworthy that none of these groups live in isolation, but side by side with pockets of other constituent ethnic groups. Even within each quarter, ethnic groups cluster as they are cognatically related. This explains in part why none is powerful enough to influence the others. In other words, none of the culture groups could dominate the remaining groups put together.

It suffices to say that these culture groups have been under one political leadership since the appointment of Jacob Meaux, the first chief of Lokoja, by Massaba, Etsu Nupe. Though he ruled as a representative of Massaba, his appointment formed the basis from which a single political authority emerged. Prior to what appointment, the constituent ethnic groups maintained their individual group autonomy. Today, Lokoja is under the control of a chief generally referred to as Maigari. The maigari is assisted by a Waziri and twenty one other cabinet chiefs. The appointment of these chiefs reflect the multi-ethnic composition of the town.

It becomes necessary to point out that any meaningful ethnographic survey of Lokoja must start by identifying the individual culture groups that form the town. These groups, when identified, should be studied singularly. To lump them together as a holistic unit is to do a disservice to the cultural identities of the constituent ethnic groups. The only exception to this rule is probably the political institution which unite the various ethnic groups.

An ethnographic study of Lokoja becomes more meaningful if the constituent cultures are put side by side with the

respective macro-cultures earlier identified. In this way, the cultural traits acquired in their new home can be identified and properly studied. In other words, Lokoja cannot be studied as a culture area, but as sub-cultures of the respective macro-cultures in parts of the country. A culture area as Onwuejeogwu rightly puts it "is a geographical delimitation of areas that have the same dominant and significant culture traits, complexes and patterns. A culture area may have culture centres where the highest frequency of the significant culture traits occur as well as culture margins where these traits tend to thin out or overlap with culture traits of another neighbouring culture area" (Okpoko P.U. 1988).

Multi-Lingualism

A striking feature of Lokoja is the prevalence of diverse languages each of which is spoken by individual native speakers. Prominent among them (all of which correspond with the constituent culture groups) are Hausa, Igala, Igbirra, Oworo, Bassa-Nge, Kakanda and Nupe. Used in a wider linguistic sense, Nupe comprises, Kakanda, Bassa-Nge, Ebe, Kyede, Gbedegi and Dibo (Obayemi, 1980). The last four are none Lokoja native languages and would not be treated in this study. The Oworo on their part were believed to be an offshoot of the Yoruba. While the remaining languages viz: Hausa, Yoruba, Igbirra and Igala are sub-languages of the respective macro-languages in some parts of the country as delineated in cultural spheres.

Apart from the Hausa language which is classified under the Chadic language family, all the other languages under discussion have been broadly classified by Bendor-Samuel as the Benue-Congo languages. This language family comprises many of the languages of Nigeria, including such large ones as Yoruba, Igala, Edo, Igbo, Nupe, Ebira (Igbirra), Idoma, Kambari, Jukun, Tiv, Ibibio and Efik (Kay Williamson, 1987). Also striking is the concentration of individual speakers of many of the constituent languages. Underlying this development is the fact that there is an inter-habitation of ethnic

groups in the various quarters into which Lokoja is divided even if in each quarters, a given ethnic group predominates.

It is no exaggeration to say, therefore, that the highest concentration of multi-lingual speakers in any of Nigerian towns are to be found in Lokoja. This is especially so when none of the constituent languages is so powerful as to alienate the others. While individual speakers learn to speak other neighbouring languages, for instance, they do not dismember their native languages. Even Dr. Baikie's persuasion in the mid 19th century that people should converse in Hausa language (which he liked so much) did not help to influence the development of a lingua franca in Lokoja. Though a significant majority could speak Hausa and Nupe languages, pidgin English is universally used in day to day conversation.

Summary and Conclusion

1. Lokoja (as a unified entity) is largely a European creation.
2. European intervention culminated in the creation of the socio-political atmosphere conducive for a peaceful co-existence among the diverse ethnic groups which now inhabit the town.
3. The constituent ethnic groups are sub-cultures of the respective macro-cultures in some parts of the country as the case may be.
4. These culture groups came together to form a single political unit while jealously guarding their individual socio-cultural identities.
5. The peoples of Lokoja are classified here to include those culture groups who settled therein between the early and later half of the nineteenth century and who today, claim a portion and/or portions within its present geographical boundary.

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