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**Men and Women: Gender Relations and the History of the Owan  
Communities, Nigeria c.1320-1900.**

by

Onaiwu Wilson Ogbomo

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

at

Dalhousie University  
Halifax, Nova Scotia  
July, 1993

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by WILSON OGBOMO

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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## Dedication

This Thesis is dedicated to the Memory of:

My father Pa. Eboh Ogbomo (1904-1992),  
who though not educated was determined  
to give me the best education available.  
It is unfortunate he did not live to see me  
accomplish his goal.

and

My friend and colleague Mr. Austin O. Adeoye  
(1957-1991), who was himself at the final  
stages of completing a doctoral degree in the  
Department of History, University of Ibadan,  
Nigeria.

May their Souls Rest in Perfect Peace. Amen!

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## Abstract

Drawing upon narrative tradition and totemic observances, shrine and goddess legends as well as festivals and re-enactment ceremonies, this study examines gender relations between c.1320 and the onset of colonialism around 1900, among the Owan people of southern Nigeria. Writing the history of a people in an age without one written primary document, it has been necessary to create a chronology by the fusion of numerous genealogies cross referenced to the generations of the kings of Benin as set forth in that kingdom's royal chronicle.

The major conclusions suggest that the Owan people lived in acephalous (chiefless) possibly matrilineal communities, following matrilineal descent patterns. Goddess traditions and festivals suggest female authority figures so that the era before c.1320 may be referred to as matriarchal.

Beginning about c.1320, a migration of patriarchal-inclined settlers flowed into Owan, seeking to enhance the status of males through the introduction of titles, attempts at chieftaincy and control of historical tradition. They created male founders and community charters as if there had been no pre-existing society. These male efforts were hindered by the sustained demand for raw cotton, cotton thread and cloth all of which fell under female control.

When the cotton demand collapsed c.1700, the status of women sharply declined. The new economic asset, palm products, belonged to males. The age of patriarchy had begun and flourished with patrilocality and patrilinealism enhanced by Islamic forces in the nineteenth century and crowned by the installation of male chiefs by the colonial British about 1900.

## Acknowledgements

In the course of researching for and writing this thesis, I have benefitted from many individuals and agencies. I wish to express my gratitude to the Faculty of Graduate Studies, Dalhousie University, for granting me a graduate scholarship and research money through the Research Development Fund. Both grants enabled me to complete this study. In addition the Turbay Trust Fund, Dalhousie University advanced the writer a substantial sum towards thesis preparation. I also acknowledge a study leave from the Governing Council of the Bendel State (now Edo State) University, Ekpoma-Nigeria. To these institutions I say a hearty thank you.

Special thanks go to my supervisor, Professor J.B. Webster first for insisting that the history of acephalous societies can and should be written, second for his incisive and invaluable comments on the drafts of the thesis. More importantly I say many thanks to him for the speed with which he read the chapters when it became necessary for me to defend the thesis before the scheduled date. I am indebted to Professor J.E. Flint for not only commenting on the drafts, but also for drawing my attention to details of literary constructions. I have also gained from the comments of Professor J.L. Parpart who was of the view that men can also write gendered history.

For a thesis written almost entirely from oral data, there is no denying the fact that my informants were the

bedrock of this research. To them I will be eternally grateful for all the information they offered, entertainment and the usual African hospitality which they lavished on me. Of note are the female informants who in the face of all odds spoke to a man about their concerns. I do hope their views have been represented in the best possible way in spite of my male upbringing. Another category of people I will never forget are my interpreters/research assistants. They include Messrs Samson Arumemi ("Lecturer"), Sunday Aidelokhai, Ohiolei Obaseki, Ransome A. Atikpo, Edgar O. Ikhiboya, Sam Aigbodion, V. Ikpekhia, S.S. Elijah and Mike Agun. Without them the research would have been difficult if not impossible.

I wish to express my profound gratitude to individuals who housed me throughout the duration of the research. Mr. & Mrs. Steve Oshioke accommodated me in the course of conducting interviews in Ora community. Chief Ekeinde Aidelokhai & family of Ovbiowun, apart from offering me housing also ensured I was given hot pounded yam meals every time I stopped over at his residence. His wives demonstrated special interest in my welfare. I also wish to extend my appreciation to a close friend and former classmate, Mr. Best Aigbevbirole who provided me a permanent accommodation in his apartment to which I returned after visits to distant villages. Omion please accept my thanks. Equally Messrs V.E.A Ikpekhia and Willie Ohioke offered housing at different times. In Halifax, Mr. & Mrs Joe Hagan, Mr. & Mrs. Lewis Chiekwe, Mrs. Helen Nwauwa, Dr. Iyala



Koko and Mr. Patrick Eweka became my extended family in a foreign land. To all I say "Wa rue se".

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To my mother, brothers, sisters and parents-in-law I wish to thank them for taking care of the home since the passing away of my father whose funeral I could not attend because of distance and lack of finance. I appreciate your concern and moral support. Finally to my wife, Queen and my son Efosa, I thank both of them for enduring my constant absence from home during the research and divided attention at the writing stage. Your encouragement made a difference. Just at the time I was set to defend this thesis, my wife gave birth to a baby girl, by name, Omoruyi. What a double blessing! Finally thanks

be to the Almighty for His mercies.

## Introduction

An observable tendency in Nigerian historiography has been the concentration of studies by historians on large and famous pre-colonial kingdoms and coastal communities; and an indifference to the history of mini-states, segmentary peoples and acephalous societies. Beyond doubt there exist abundant written records and well established mechanisms for recording oral information in the centralised states. Nevertheless Nigerian historians especially of the pre-colonial period cannot be excused for the lopsided nature of existing research. As noted by J.F. Ade Ajayi, the history of non-centralised societies and social history are some of the themes neglected by Nigerian historians.<sup>1</sup> More disheartening is the fact that in societies where researches have been carried out male activities and exploits have been presented as the history of such communities. Furthermore where women's role have been explored, the traditional historiographical approach has been the deliberate attempt to focus on celebrated female personalities such as Queen Amina of Zaria, Moremi of Ife, Idia of Benin, Madam Tinubu of Lagos and Madam Efusetan Aniwura of Ibadan. In effect the contributions of the majority of the what may be called "the ordinary folks" have been obscured. Unquestionably there is a dire need to include gender as a category of historical analysis because "[u]nless

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<sup>1</sup>See J.F. Ade Ajayi, "A Critique of the Themes Preferred by Nigerian Historians", Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria, vol.x, No.3 Dec. 1980. p.139.

we understand the interrelations between women and men, we cannot fully understand the structure of a given society, its history, political and economic systems, or ideology".<sup>2</sup> The objective of this analysis becomes two-fold. One is that of reconstructing the pre-colonial history of the Owan communities who have become part of the historically "neglected lot". Two a conscious attempt will be made to highlight the contributions of both genders to the evolution of the Owan communities.<sup>3</sup> It is hoped that this two-pronged approach will lead to a balanced and fuller understanding of the pre-colonial development of the society. Consequently this study claims to be unique because it focuses upon gender relations before the advent of the Europeans and prior to documents - a topic rarely attempted - among an acephalous (or polycephalic) people - normally considered without a history - and where royal chronicles, structured traditions and anthropological literature do not exist.

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<sup>2</sup>Elizabeth Schmidt, Peasants, Traders and Wives: Shona Women in the History of Zimbabwe, 1870-1939, Portsmouth, NH, Heinemann, 1992. p.1.

<sup>3</sup>The adoption of gender as a category for historical analysis in thesis, recognises the fact that the concept of gender has been confused with the term sex. Consequently it is vital to define and clarify both concepts. While sex connotes the biological differences between male and female, gender is the socio-cultural elaboration of those differences. In societies while these differences manifest in various ways, they are apparent in social, political and economic spheres. Thus in this study the concept of gender is used to denote the "psychological, social and cultural aspects of maleness and femaleness". See S.J. Kessler & W. Mckenna, Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach, New York, John Wiley & Sons, 1978. p.7.

However there remain some advantages when combining gender and "acephalousness". Elaborate male structures of power and propaganda do not divert the researcher. Succession disputes, wars or the slave trade do not tempt the historian into detours. In short the paucity of the male tradition would make a male-only study rather simplistic and threadbare. One need only compare Owan to Benin where a full royal chronicle and detailed re-enactment ceremonies, European documents scattered conveniently over 500 years and numerous references in traditions of neighbouring societies have tended to hold researchers spellbound and narrowly focused. Nevertheless the historiography of Benin has been of considerable importance to this study even though one could have wished for some attention to gender relations in that kingdom. Since many migrants into Owan came from Benin, it would have been useful to have known something about their gender attitudes upon arrival.<sup>4</sup>

The state of historiography among neighbouring peoples directly impinges upon the quality of a research. A comment has been made about Benin. Esan historiography might be said to be in the early stages of development, quite frequently being cited, that of Etsako and the Akoko-Edo as embryonic as

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<sup>4</sup>Although Nina Mba has a section on the position of Benin women before 1900, much of the material concentrated more on royal women. The material on commoner women are so scanty to build any enduring explanation of women's position. See Nina E. Mba, Nigerian Women Mobilized: Women's Political Activity in Southern Nigeria, 1900-1965, Berkeley, University of California, 1982. pp.15-20.

Owan itself and Ondo almost non-existent prior to the nineteenth century. The imbalance contributes to a stronger Edo emphasis than one suspects occurred in reality in Owan.

The Owan people who are the subject of this study, presently inhabit two local government areas (Owan West and East Local Government Areas) of Edo State, Nigeria. Owan consist of eleven major communities: Emai, Igue, Ihievbe, Ikao, Iuleha, Ivbi-Ada-Obi, Evbo-Mion, Ora, Otuo, Ozalla and Uokha. These represent the eleven communities as the British colonial officials organised them. Nine of them conform to pre-colonial realities. However Evbo-Mion traditionally included six communities and Ivbi-Ada-Obi three, making a total of eighteen independent communities prior to colonialism. Today the two Owan local government areas are bounded to the north by Akoko-Edo Local Government Area, to the south by Ovia North, Uhunmwode and Esan West Local Government Areas; to the west Ondo State and to the east Etsako West Local Government Area. The Owan region is located between longitude  $6^{\circ}$  east of the Greenwich Meridian and latitude  $7^{\circ}$  north of the equator. The land mass is about 745 square miles or 1,840 square kilometres.

The vegetational division of the area can be said to be in three distinct zones. The first zone falls within the region named the northern tier in this study. The characteristics of this zone include thickly forested regions and a high range of wooded hills. The zone encompasses the

communities of Ikao, Igue, Otuo, Uokha and Evbo-Mion. The second zone is the central tier which features savanna vegetation. The communities in this area include Emai, Ihievbe, Iuleha and Ivbi-Ada-Obi. Lastly the third vegetational zone is conterminous with the southern tier of communities - Ora and Ozalla. "The area is thickly forested on the west, but the vegetation becomes sparser towards the east".<sup>5</sup> The average annual rainfall in the Owan region is 1.8m in the south and 1.4 in the north.<sup>6</sup> For centuries agriculture has been the primary economic activity in the area. As a consequence the major occupation of the majority of the people has been farming.

Linguistically the people speak dialects of the Edoid language which constitutes a branch of the Kwa linguistic group. In B.O. Elugbe's categorisation of the Edoid languages, he identified four groups.<sup>7</sup> These include Delta, South-western, North-central, and North-western. Owan dialects belong to the North-central group. A further classification by

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<sup>5</sup>Military Governor's Office, Benin City, Investigation into the Role of Chiefs in the Mid-Western State: Divisional Report in Respect of the Owan Division, 1971. p.9.

<sup>6</sup>Rudy I. Ohikhokhai, "Owan and the Benin Kingdom: An Analysis of a Relationship up to the Twentieth Century", M.A. Dissertation, University of Benin, Nigeria, 1986. p.7.

<sup>7</sup>B.O. Elugbe, "Some tentative Historical Inferences from Comparative Edoid Studies", Kiabara: Journal of the Humanities, University of Port-Harcourt, II: 82-101.

G.B.L Oyakhire<sup>8</sup> states that the Owan dialects could be grouped into five related categories. The categories are as follows: (A) Emai, Ihievbe, Iuleha, Ake, Ora, and Uokha (B) Errah and Ozalla (C) Ivbiaro and Warrake (Ivbi-Ada-Obi community) (D) Arokho, Ikhin and Iruoke (Evbo-Mion community); and (E) Igue, Ikao and Otuo.<sup>9</sup> Oyakhire adds that the dialects in groups A, B and C are closer to each other in terms of mutual intelligibility than D and E which also share commonality. Rudy I. Ohokhokhai also observed the difference between groups D and E and other dialects. According to him, "[t]he dialects of Ighue, Ikao, Ikhin Otuo at the extreme north are more closely linked and are at the same time relatively different from the dialect of the rest of Owan. The dialect is made up of largely of Bini words with some sprinkling of Yoruba and other corrupted words".<sup>10</sup> The majority of the communities in an official consensus trace their origins to migrations of founder heros from the Benin Kingdom.

With major exceptions, dialects of category A are located in the central tier and E in the northern. The southern communities have no linguistic unity, Ora classified in A and Ozalla in group B. Those in D had lengthy sojourns in Yorubaland which might explain their dialectical distance from

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<sup>8</sup>G.B.L. Oyakhire, "The Institution of Traditional Chieftaincy in the Owan Culture Area of Bendel State in Nigeria", Ph.D Thesis, Lincoln University, Arizona, 1981.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p.21.

<sup>10</sup>Ohikhokhai "Owan and the Benin...", p.2.



others. Since category E had some hints of a Yoruba presence in traditions and a strong indigenous plant totem element, one can assume the commonality of these two categories - D and E - arose from that shared experience. The linguistic evidence joined to a few scattered traditions might support the possibility that prior to the Edo migrations c.1500 and after, the Owan region fell more within the cultural sphere of the Yoruba than of Benin. Since the early history of Ondo has been linked to matriarchy and queenly rule<sup>11</sup>, one might postulate that the tendencies obvious in the early history of Owan had been part of that Ondo-Yoruba influence. However this possibility has not been pursued in this study because of the underdeveloped state of Ondo historiography.

Except for some assumed ties and linkages which they trace to their founder herc, all Owan communities were independent of each other in the pre-colonial era. Hence they referred to themselves in disparate names such Ora, Ozalla, Uokha, Ihievbe, Otuo, Emai, Iuleha, Ivbiaro, Warrake, Ohami, Ake, Ikhin, etc. At a point in their history the name "Ivbiosakon" meaning "the children of those who file their teeth" became synonymous with the Owan people. It has been reported that the filing of the incisor teeth was a custom formerly common amongst the Northern Edo people (Ivbiosakon,

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<sup>11</sup>See Biodun Adediran, "Women, Rituals and Politics in Pre-Colonial Yorubaland", A paper presented at Faculty/Graduate Seminar, Department of History, Dalhousie University, November 27, 1992. pp.10-11.

Etsako and Akoko-Edo).<sup>12</sup> On the other hand Oba Ozolua, the father of the founder of Ora, Uguan, was said to have adopted the nickname "Obanosakon" ("The king who files his teeth"). This name was later to be adopted by the Ora people. Because Ora became the dominant group in the area during the colonial period, other Owan groups were referred to as "Ivbiosakon".<sup>13</sup>

Following the Benin Expedition of 1897, the Owan people came under the nominal control of the District Commissioner in Benin.<sup>14</sup> But because of minimal control from Benin, a District Commissioner was subsequently stationed at Ifon. In 1905 the first "Native" Court was established at Afuze (Emai Community) and this marked the beginning of the reference to the people as Ivbiosakon. Between 1905 and 1937 the Owan people were administered as districts of the Ishan and Kukuruku Divisions. However following the Assistant District Officer, Mr. H.F. Marshall's Intelligence Report of 1937 the Owan people were ultimately united under one division, the Kukuruku division in April, 1945.<sup>15</sup> The unification was delayed by the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. In 1954 an Ivbiosakon District Council was established which became the administrative

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<sup>12</sup>See D.B. Partridge, A Report of an Inquiry into Certain Matters Connected with the Creation of a Separate Division for the Ivbiosakon Area, 1967. p.7.

<sup>13</sup>See Ohikhokhai, "Owan and the Benin Kingdom...", p.6.

<sup>14</sup>H.F. Marshall, Intelligence Report on the Ivbiosakon Clans in Ishan and Kukuruku Division Benin Province, 1937. Part I, p.12.

<sup>15</sup>Partridge, A Report of an Inquiry..., p.11.

framework until Nigeria's independence in 1960. In 1967 an inquiry was instituted by the Military Government of the then Midwestern State of Nigeria into the possibility of creating a new division for the Owan people. This gave rise to the Partridge report of 1967. During the inquiry Partridge found out that the Owan people became dissatisfied with the continuous use of the name "Ivbiosakon" because it implied they were "the children Etsako" the neighbouring division to the East.<sup>16</sup> Based on his findings a new division was created and named Owan. The name was derived from the Owan River, Owan being one of the numerous goddesses of the people of Owan.<sup>17</sup> Thus for want of a better description, the name "Owan" has been adopted to depict the people in this research. Consequently it seems appropriate that the first study of pre-colonial gender relations among the Edoid should focus upon the only sub-group to be called by the name of a female.

By the very nature of Owan's geographical location, the region was inescapably removed from the influence of early written accounts such as Arabic and European sources. This resulted from the fact that the Nupe jihadists who introduced Islamic and Arabic influences into the area did not arrive until the late nineteenth century. In the same vein the British came into the area in the first decade of the

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<sup>16</sup>Partridge, A Report of an Inquiry..., p.7.

<sup>17</sup>The name "Owan" was suggested by a majority of Owan communities because the Owan River flows through six of the Eleven communities.

twentieth century. As a result of the paucity of written sources, in order to engage in a meaningful historical reconstruction, the research had to rely largely upon oral tradition with a few supplementary documentary twentieth-century sources. These written records date back to the 1930's.

At a time in the history of Africa, there existed an intense debate as to the reliability of oral tradition as a source of historical reconstruction. Some Africanist historians did their best to ensure oral tradition became a respectable source for historical scholarship.<sup>18</sup> Today the usefulness of oral tradition is no longer in doubt. Nonetheless there are still areas of concern to historians of non-literate societies who rely on oral data for their craft. Such methodological issues as chronology and dating, origins of peoples, oral tradition and oral history as ideological tools in gender struggles are still engaging the attention of historians.<sup>19</sup> In trying to reconstruct the history of the Owan

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<sup>18</sup>Of note are such works as Jan Vansina's Oral Tradition, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965; Jan Vansina, Many & Thomas (eds.) The Historian in Tropical Africa, London, Oxford University Press, 1964.

<sup>19</sup>D.H. Jones, "Problems of African Chronology", Journal of African History, XI, 2, 1970; D.W. Cohen, "A Survey of Interlacustrine Chronology", Journal of African History, XI, 2, 1970. pp.177-199; J.B. Webster, Chronology, Migration and Drought in Interlacustrine Africa, New York, Africana Publishing Company, 1979; J.A. Atanda, "The Historian and the Problem of Origins of Peoples in Nigerian Society", Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria, vol.X, No.3, Dec. 1980. pp.63-77; C.A. Hamilton, Ideology and Oral Traditions: Listening to the Voices 'From Below'", History in Africa, 14,

people, these issues were considered in order to determine their relevance to this work. However an analysis which relies almost entirely upon oral sources even today finds itself among a small minority. Whether the reference are to intelligence reports, the author's field notes, traditional histories or student honours essays they all rely upon oral sources, almost to the exclusion of all else.

Before now no attempt has been made to systematically construct a chronological and dating framework for pre-colonial Owan history. In addition because of the problem of the concept of time, some of the oral evidence collected in the field unavoidably was presented by informants in a timeless narrative.<sup>20</sup> This in turn has also hampered the analysis of historical events. Without chronology historical writings have no meaning. So to understand a historical epoch, the events have to be discussed within a chronological structure. As already noted the Owan region lacked documentary sources before the twentieth century, in effect the history of the area also suffered from the problem of firm dates. Consequently the writer had to address this problem first, if the whole project was to serve any purpose. Since Owan

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1987, pp.67-86; Jane L. Parpart, "Listening to Women's Voices: The Retrieval and Construction of African Women's History", Journal of Women's History, vol.4, No.2, Fall 1992. pp.171-179. Sherna B. Gluck & Daphne Patai (eds.), Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History, New York, Routledge, 1991.

<sup>20</sup>In situations whereby informants could not relate events in Owan to the reign of a king in they usually declared: "this event occurred a long time ago".

communities were acephalous in nature, there were no kings to which events could be related. Hence the genealogies of informants which were collected even though dated by certain internal events, had to be related to external influences in the Benin kingdom, Yoruba and Nupe incursions into the area. While cross-references to reigns of Obas in Benin provided a few generational dates for pre-nineteenth century events, Yoruba and Nupe references helped to clarify events from the nineteenth century onward. On the whole the dating of pre-colonial Owan history relied on multiple internal and external cross-references.

Among all of the Edoid groups certain outstanding obas of Benin stand out in their traditions. The feeling persists that many informants are convinced that they enhance their own status by claiming to have left Benin or having fallen afoul of one of these famous kings. Hence the researcher must date the genealogy of informants to check whether they stretch back to the king referred to, in the narrative tradition. If it does not, one treats the evidence with considerable scepticism. On the other hand, many informants have little interest in the obas of Benin. In that case one usually dates the genealogy and checks which king was ruling in the generation, scrutinizes the events of his reign to determine whether the narrative of the reasons for migration make any sense in terms of them. As might be expected some do, some do not.

An important theme explored in this study is that of the ethnic origins of the people who comprised the Owan communities. The popular tradition in Owan has been the tendency to trace the origins to the Benin Kingdom.<sup>21</sup> Very little is said about the aboriginal population and not much reference is made to migrants from other neighbouring groups such as the Yoruba. By employing totemic evidence in conjunction with narrative traditions a conscious attempt was made to focus attention on migrants other than those from Benin. Since a Benin origin is popular, one suspects from other hints in the narrative that it has been added on especially when the reasons for departure are vague and without details. For example the Ozalla story is detailed even explaining how those events provided symbols and ceremonies which persist in modern society.<sup>22</sup> In Ikhin however the founder came from Benin went to Yoruba country, later returning to the present location.<sup>23</sup> The threadbare reasons for leaving Benin suggests Ikhin may have come from Ondo, having never seen Benin, far less having lived there. Writing pre-colonial and entirely oral history, therefore, presents

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<sup>21</sup>Virtually all communities in Owan have at least a tradition of Benin origin.

<sup>22</sup>O.H.T. #141 Group Interview with the Onotare of Ozalla, Chief Samuel Ojieriakhi, (88), and Ozalla elders, Ozalla, July 30, 1990.

<sup>23</sup>O.H.T. #129 Interview with Pa. Iboi Omoruanzoje, (87), Arokho, March 27, 1991; O.H.T. #132 Interview with T. Amu Aigbokhai, (51), Ikhin, April 5, 1991.

unique difficulties challenging the writer to decide how much and how often he interrupts his flow of ideas, to enlighten the readers about the correctness of the facts being employed. Sometimes pre-colonial history can become little more than expositions on methodology.

The conventional explanation for the exodus of migrants from Benin had been that they were fugitives who were escaping justice or injustice. In addition informants claimed many migrants from Benin left because they were opposed to the harsh and hierarchical rule of the obas of Benin. Basically these reasons have without questioning centred on political issues to the neglect of social and economic factors. In fact such narrow interpretations ignores economic considerations in the social process. In an attempt to go beyond such a restricted and sterile argument other factors such as the struggle between matriarchal and patriarchal values will be considered. This will further clarify the point that female considerations and influences did play a role in bringing about the exodus of migrants from Benin. Moreover economic factors will also be appraised. Considering the fact that the period of the major migrations into Owan (c.1504-1536, c.1568-1600 and c.1632-1664) coincided with the era of rapidly escalating trade between the Europeans and the Benin kingdom, it will be interesting to see if any link existed between the economic needs of the kingdom and the exodus of migrants. It is to be hoped that a consideration of these additional



factors will ultimately offer a better explanation for that period in the history of the Owan people. Unfortunately the people of Owan do not envisage economic and social issues as history to be remembered and passed from generation to generation. The writer therefore remains painfully wary that in this study, a great deal more rests upon theories based elsewhere, speculations from scattered hints and the historical imagination than might be considered customary in academic research.

Since one of the research goals was to give prominence to gender analysis, another problem associated with the narrative tradition became that of the control of history and historical memory. Because of the patrilineal and patrilocal structure of Owan society, the major point of reference has been the males. For instance only male genealogies are recalled and perpetuated. There appeared to be a deliberate attempt to celebrate male achievements to the neglect of female accomplishments. Without doubt women and men experience historical events differently. Nevertheless male informants insisted their perception of events was essentially reality. They seemed to think that women were not historically conscious and so could not be relied upon for purely historical facts. The situation raised the question of whose history did male informants present? Obviously they were more concerned with projecting male perspectives. In examining the role of both genders in the evolution of the Owan society, it

was extremely difficult to ascertain women's contribution from existing oral narrative. As has been noted by feminist scholars, "[i]t had become increasingly clear to all of us that traditional oral history methodology did not serve well the interests of women's ... history".<sup>24</sup> To overcome this problem it became clear that female-centred research methodology had to be adopted. First a deliberate effort was geared towards ensuring that women's voices were retrieved for it is well known that this is a vital technique of empowering women. Evidently because women had the opportunity to speak for themselves, there occurred considerable revision of the traditions put forward by male informants to explain women's lives. Of note was the determination to utilise non-conventional research tools such as totems, shrine and goddess traditions, and reenactment ceremonies. Since these were non-controversial institutions, they were less susceptible to manipulation by interested parties such as male informants who were bent on emphasising a female inferior position. Particularly the analysis of the goddess traditions revealed that women enjoyed more gender equality than the narrative traditions were prepared to concede.

Feminist scholars in trying to offer explanations for the subordinate position women occupy universally, have examined economic and socio-political relations. In this regard

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<sup>24</sup>S. B. Gluck and D. Patai, "Introduction" in Gluck and Patai (eds.) Women's Words..., p.1.

feminist writers have adopted two models of interpretation. The first group argues that women have in the past enjoyed gender equality which however faced serious patriarchal challenges and ultimately led to a gradual erosion of women's power. The opposing view sees this interpretation as a romanticization of a glorious past which never existed for women. The former celebrates the high status of women in societies, while the latter focuses on patriarchal structures which have perpetuated male dominance of women. Eleanor Leacock adopting the former paradigm argued that in pre-state societies, egalitarianism guaranteed women's exalted status.<sup>25</sup> Her analysis draws on Frederick Engels' The origin of the family, private property and the state.<sup>26</sup> Engels offered a historical explanation arguing that the beginning of women's subaltern position followed an era where they had been productive and powerful members of society. Furthermore he argued that this change was traceable to the introduction of private property. Since men became concerned with acquiring property - domestication of large animals - they were also concerned about the control of such property. Ultimately as owners of the property, the men became the rulers, thus giving

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<sup>25</sup>Eleanor B. Leacock, Myths of Male Dominance: Collected Article, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1981.

<sup>26</sup>Frederick Engels, The Origin of the family, private property and the state, Edited by Eleanor B. Leacock, New York, International Publishers, 1972 (1884).

them preeminent status vis-a-vis the women.<sup>27</sup> The opposing argument states that any attempt to postulate an earlier period of matriarchy or even equality, is tantamount to emphasising the failure of women in the past and by implication endorsing male dominance. An advocate of this point of view is Joan Bamberger. Her analysis of myths among the Yamana-Yaghan people of South America led to the conclusion that men invented them to justify women's failure.<sup>28</sup> Both paradigms were considered in this study with a view to establishing their applicability to the Owan situation. In so doing one had to focus on economic and socio-political institutions as they pertained to gender relations.

As part of the exploration of pre-colonial Owan economic activities specific attention was paid to the mode of production. Considering the acephalous nature of the Owan society, it became evident that a gerontocratic lineage mode of production operated. In assessing the mode of production such questions as the control of production processes and resources were raised. Furthermore the sexual division of labour, the contributions of the genders to production were also considered. The locus of analysis of production focused

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<sup>27</sup>See also Karen Sacks, "Engels Revisited: Women, the Organisation of Production, and Private Property", in M.Z. Rosaldo & L. Lamphere (eds.) Woman, Culture and Society, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1974. pp.210-211.

<sup>28</sup>See Joan Bamberger, "The Myth of Matriarchy: Why Men Rule in Primitive Society", in M.Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere, Woman, Culture and Society, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1974.

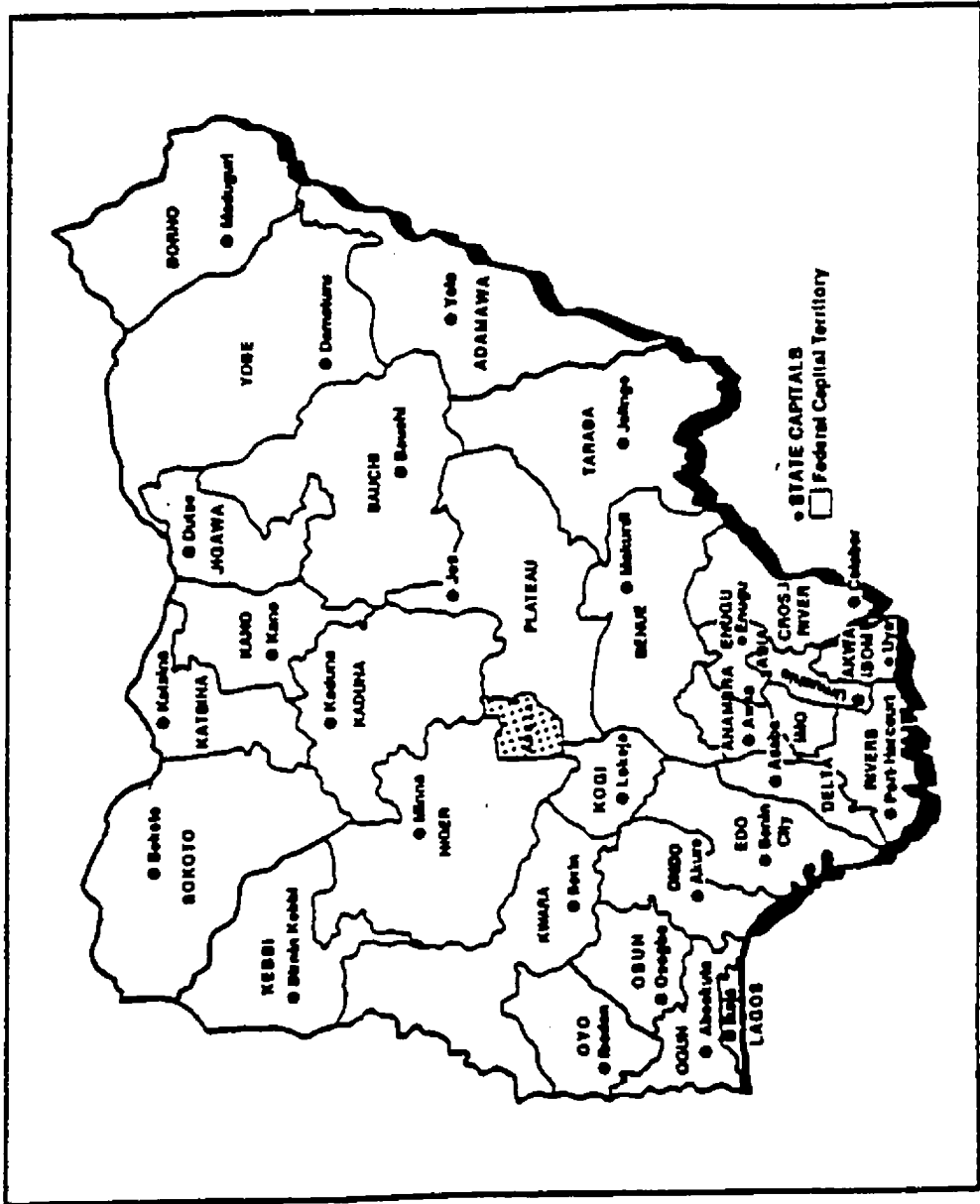
on the mainstay of the economy, agriculture. Nevertheless the manufacturing sector and exchange system were also explored. The resultant analysis revealed that there were separate male-female economic spheres in pre-colonial Owan society.

In analyzing the socio-political institutions the writer's concern had to do with the claim that there exist a dichotomy between the domestic and public domains. Attempt was made to establish or refute the claim. Also one of the subjects investigated focused upon the assumption that politics was exclusively a male pre-occupation. While the male population was divided into age grades, there also existed exclusively female organisations which catered to and furthered women's interest. This study also poses the question: Considering the prevailing patriarchal control of information, the all pervading patriarchal values and influences, is it possible to write a gendered history of pre-colonial societies? If yes, how should it be done? Attempts will be to address these thorny issues in this study.

Patriarchal values flooded into Owan from all directions over the centuries, increasing significantly as the influence of the Benin kingdom surpassed all others. Then followed the nineteenth century with a patriarchal religion backed by force and an economic export favouring males. Finally came colonialism with a heavy baggage of patriarchal values, another patriarchal religion and patriarchal economics. In a society which practices historical amnesia in economic, social

and gender issues - "it has always been this way" - it becomes difficult for modern informants - men and women - to envisage a different past. Too often oral tradition reflects the present rather than the past. It is to be hoped that the study which follows presents a fuller and more satisfactory reading experience because it has focused as equally as possible on men and women, than would have been the case had it followed a more conventional - and safer - scenario.

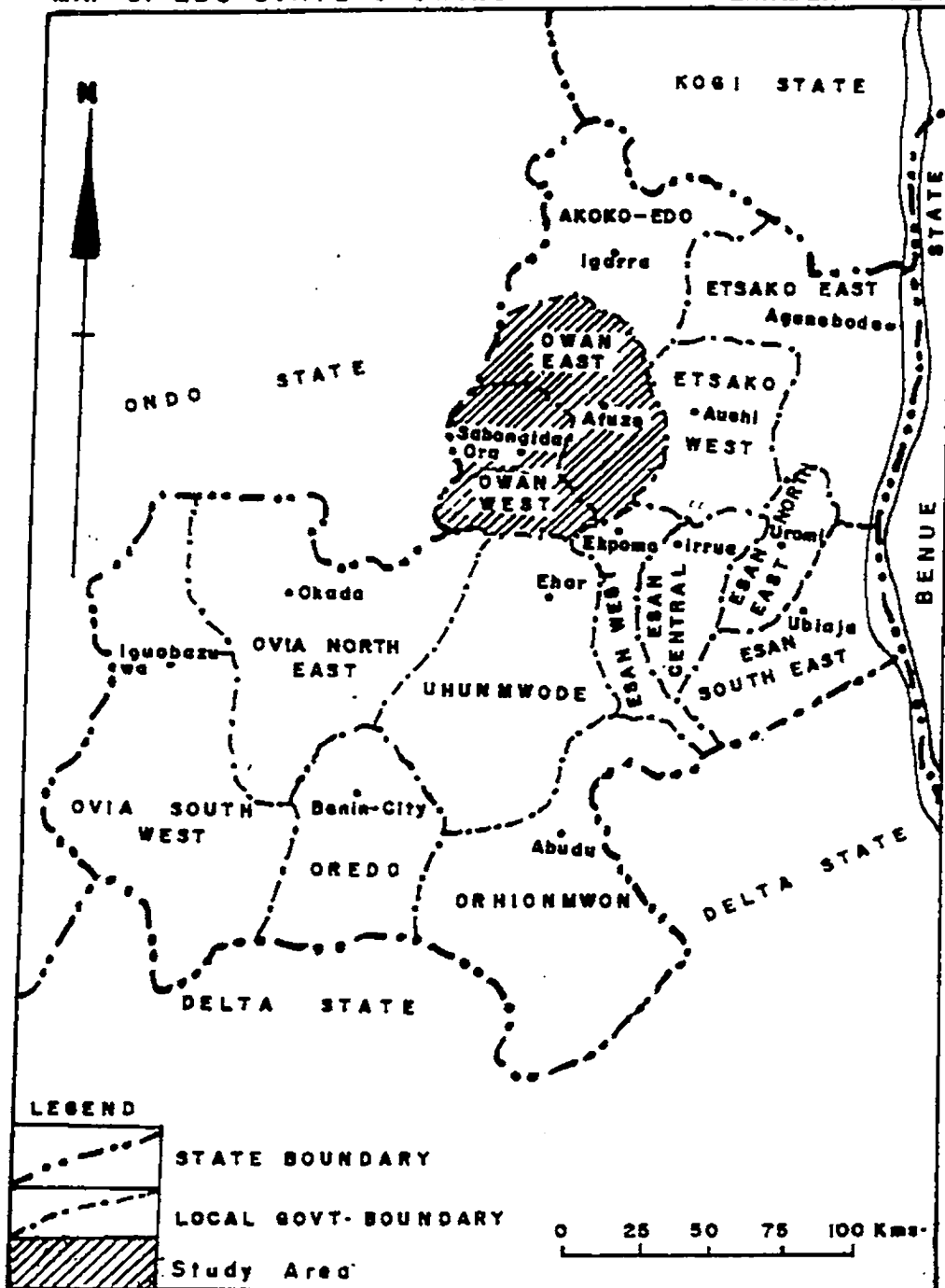
MAP I: POLITICAL MAP OF NIGERIA



source: West Africa, 18. Nov. 1991

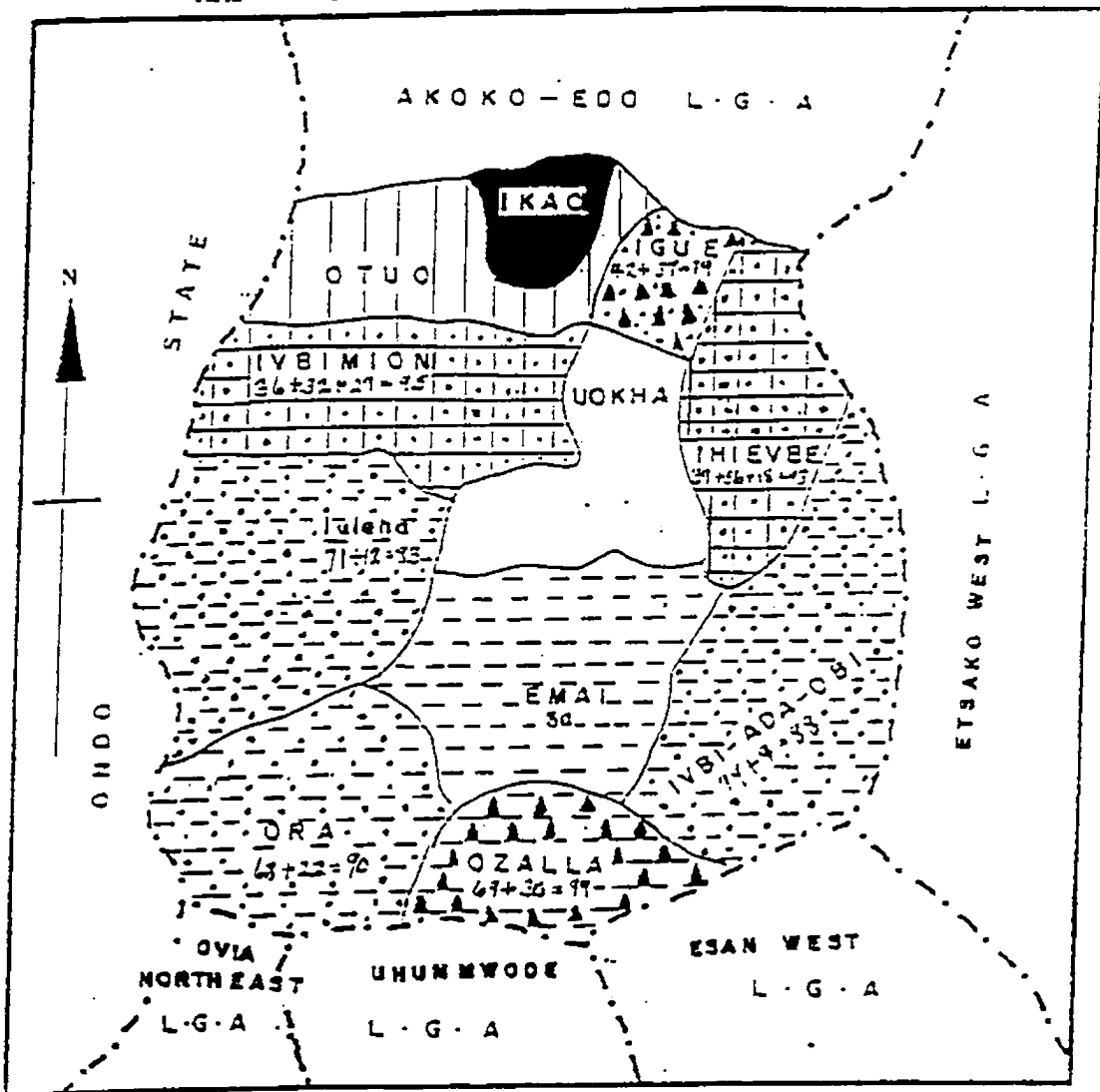
MAP II

MAP OF EDO STATE SHOWING THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS

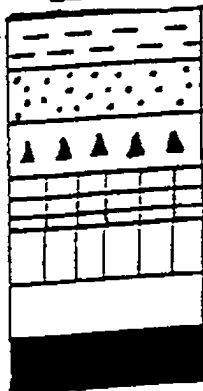




MAP III OWAN COMMUNITIES: TOTEMIC DISTRIBUTION

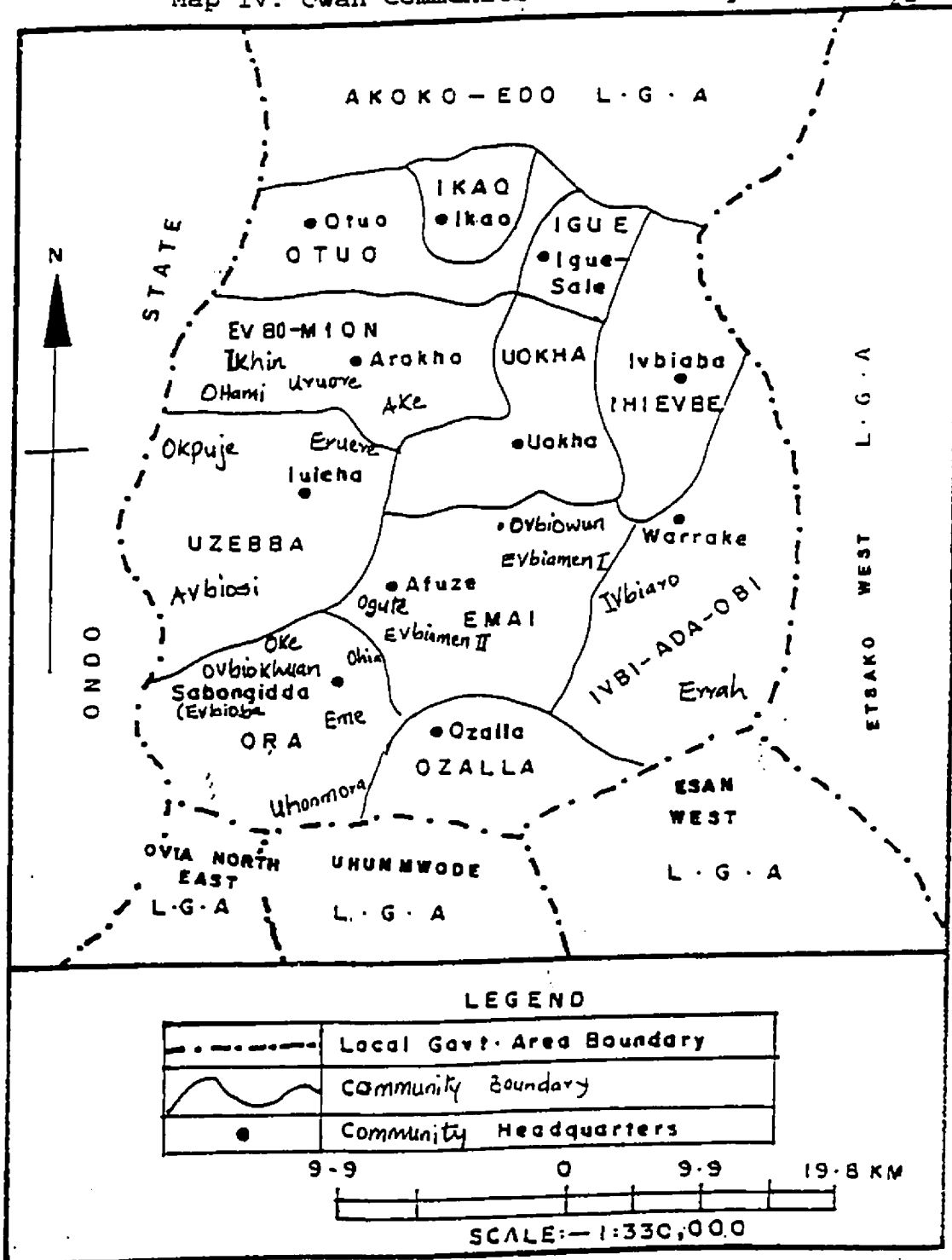


LEGEND



- Animal totem majority 68-90 (first number).
- Snake minority totem 9-17 (last number).
- Vegetation totems: Igiebe majority 42, Ozalla minority 30.
- Almost equally mixed: animals - vegetation - snakes = totals 7.
- The Fish Community, Otuo: animal 37 - vegetation 23 - fishes 23.
- The Bead Community, Uokha: vegetation 22 - snakes 26 - beads 26 = 74.
- No Information.

Map IV: Owan Communities and Villages



## Chapter One

### Research Methodology

#### The Historiographic Problems:

Undertaking research in the Owan communities involves three problems almost immediately. Researching in the pre-colonial period does not place the investigator in the mainstream of African historians especially in a region devoid of travellers' accounts or early Portuguese, Dutch and English traders' reports. The researcher must therefore rely entirely upon oral tradition, either collected personally or by colonial officials, local people or undergraduates pursuing material for honours essays. Furthermore the Owan communities were organised as acephalous societies - without chiefs and relying upon principles of kinship, gerontocracy, age grades and consensus - and as such fall outside the mainstream again, because oral methodology has been largely developed and elaborated in large centralised kingdoms or small-scale, segmentary polities with hereditary lines of rulers who have an interest in preserving the records of the past. In this latter category one may refer to the Southern Luo of Kenya, the Busoga of Uganda or the Idoma of Nigeria.<sup>1</sup> Once researchers began to work in these segmented societies, they

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<sup>1</sup>B.A. Ogot, History of the Southern Luo, vol.1 Migration and Settlement 1500-1900, Nairobi, East African Publishing House, 1967, D.W. Cohen, The Historical Tradition of Busoga: Mukama and Kintu, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1972; E.O. Erim, The Idoma Nationality, 1600-1900: Problems in Studying the Origins and Development of Ethnicity, Enugu, Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1981.

were compelled to develop a whole range of new techniques to overcome specific problems which the history of those peoples presented. However the methodology of oral tradition specific to truly acephalous peoples is threadbare, underdeveloped and almost non-existent.

The development of African historiography has moved from the concern with large empires with developed royal chronicles and substantial written records such as Songhai and Borno to those with numerous mechanisms to preserve oral history such as Buganda and Rwanda, Lunda-Luba and Oyo to eventually nationalities divided into numerous chiefdoms such as the Yoruba, Acholi and Sukuma. For peoples organised like the Owan, such as the Igbo with little documentation and few mechanisms to preserve the historical record, little has been done by historians. As international historiography has switched from a political focus to economics, then to social, environment or feminist concerns, the tendency in Africa has been to follow these trends but concentrating upon those peoples in the centralized states whose political history had been already researched by an earlier generation. In colloquial terms the same fields are being ploughed and re-ploughed. Ignored in the first political round, acephalous societies such as the Owan communities remain neglected in the second and third. Finally this research began with a resolution to give equal attention to male and female actors in history. Once again gender studies have been more common

for modern times, a little less so in the colonial period, while if they venture into the pre-colonial era, it has been to deal with unique and outstanding women hardly typical of their age. Consequently pre-colonial acephalous societies with attention to gender relations creates a triple headed problem - scarce written sources, poor oral mechanisms of preservation and little attention to women in the pre-colonial period - for any researcher daring enough to attempt it.

In an acephalous society, the researcher must inevitably be concerned with the traditions of numerous villages and their even more numerous wards. There exists virtually no central tradition in any one community. In a segmentary society such as Erim dealt with in Idoma,<sup>2</sup> the history he produced became in reality a fusion and analysis of a dozen or more fairly well presented central traditions. The same approach in Owan would require the fusion and analysis of 300 or more fragmentary traditions of the wards. Since the major reference point for the Owan people has been Benin, the history of that kingdom becomes vitally important. However the written history of Benin has a quite unique and different focus, concentrating as it does on the royal family and the palace. In other words the methodology and information which results from a focus on the royal chronicle fits ill with an Owan concentration on the community. The Owan researcher would have been significantly assisted if in Benin a study of one or

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<sup>2</sup>Erim, Idoma Nationality

a group of villages founded in the Ogiso or what is termed the pre-dynastic period, had been undertaken. Such a study would have been far more relevant to the Owan communities. Although there existed centuries of association between Owan and Benin the latter offers very little other than providing the only dating reference for the former. Except for a few cases, there was limited direct administration by the Oba's representatives in Owan.

Another neighbour was the Esan (Ishan). They too have been organised in communities but with the significant difference that over each reigned a chief who in turn paid tribute to the oba or king of Benin. The Esan were therefore segmentary like the Idoma. While the presence and influence of the oba's representatives were stronger in Esan chiefdoms and thereby possessed greater knowledge of its kings which becomes vital to chronology, Owan communities were less so. Therefore references to Benin among the latter became less precise. The founder might be a prince of Benin but if the king, his father is not recalled, the researcher has lost his bearings in time.

Benin exhibits a marked dualism. The central court resembles that of the Yoruba, while the villages govern themselves more like the Igbo. The over-attention to the activities of the royal palace which passes for the history of Benin, forms a stark contrast to the total neglect of the villages. Since the communities of Owan relate more to the Edo villages, the researcher can draw few cross-cultural

connections. Within the heartland of Benin some villages were acephalous and gerontocratic and except for the twice yearly tributes which they paid, appeared to have functioned exactly as in Owan. These villages predominated around the capital to which the Owan migrants tend to point as their region of origin. Other Benin communities sometimes with as many as twenty villages were ruled by chiefs as in the Esan manner.<sup>3</sup> However whether villages or village groups had chiefs or not, they all displayed strong acephalous and gerontocratic tendencies. Chiefs were highly restricted in their power. Consequently Benin historiography remains defective in that it has ignored the history of either type of local community. The Esan chiefdoms really form a segmentary system in which the methodology employed by Erim<sup>4</sup> should apply quite easily. Unfortunately it is defective and inadequate when applied to Owan.

Readers should understand the term "community". The British called the independent units of Owan, "clans". But this is quite misleading since it suggests all people in the present units were related sometime in the distant past. In most communities a consensus has developed that a founder arrived from Benin, his sons founded the villages and the grandsons established the wards. This forms the community

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<sup>3</sup>R.E. Bradbury, "The Kingdom of Benin", in D. Forde & P.M. Kaberry (eds.), West African Kingdoms in the Nineteenth Century, Oxford, International African Institute, 1967, p.9.

<sup>4</sup>Erim, The Idoma Nationality..

charter. The people wanted to see themselves as clans and the British obliged them.

Communities range in size from Otuo with twelve villages divided into fifty wards to Emai with three villages and fourteen wards. In pre-colonial times some communities consisted of only one village divided into four or five wards. In two cases the British brought such single villages together to form larger "communities". Normally each ward formed a kinship unit with a common totem. These are the effective units within which inter-marriage is forbidden. Nonetheless clans - that is wards throughout Owan which revere the same totem - are far more widespread. For example the Bushbuck clan is represented in nine communities and twenty three wards out of a grand total of 253. The Python clan embraces thirty six wards and the Leopard or royal clan of Benin, thirty one. The largest variety of clans exists in Iuleha, nineteen in thirty eight wards, and eighteen in Otuo in forty six wards. The smallest number is in Uokha with eight in eleven wards. Consequently an Owan community could embrace from a single village to twelve villages, from five to fifty wards and from five to nineteen different totemic clans.

Since my previous oral research experience had been on a limited scale and mostly in documentary archival research, and since the published or even written materials on Owan were extremely limited, I concentrated during the first year, upon the methodology of oral tradition in preparation for the



field. As the above discussion has indicated a great deal of that proved either marginally useful or totally irrelevant. Once in the field it became very obvious that the researcher must be prepared for the unexpected and unpredictable. References to the unanticipated in the literature became far more real in the field than they had appeared in the comfort of the university library. There had been warnings. According to David Henige "the most outstanding characteristic of oral research is its unpredictability. The need to deal constantly with living sources and with a pertinent past guarantees that no amount of forethought can anticipate fully what will happen".<sup>5</sup> R.A. Sargent and J.B. Webster had also warned:

Field work for the purpose of collecting and recording oral traditions and historical data is not like archival research, and often presents new and sometimes bewildering problems and obstacles for the uninitiated and experienced researcher alike. It is virtually impossible to anticipate every problem or potential obstacle since each research invariably presents new hazards over which even the most seasoned of field researchers, and there are very few of those, can stumble and fall.<sup>6</sup>

This is where the personal research qualities and initiatives of individuals come to play. A researcher must learn to react quickly to sudden developments in the field. Essentially the

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<sup>5</sup>David Henige, Oral Historiography, London, Longman, 1982. p.39.

<sup>6</sup>R.A. Sargent and J.B. Webster, "An Introduction to Field Work", in J.B. Webster and R.A. Sargent, (eds.) The Theory and Practice of Oral Methodology: A Practical Handbook, (in preparation), p.1.

quality of the information gathered by a researcher is very much the outcome of how well he or she responds to surprises. As the body of writing increases on the methodology of oral tradition, we may hope that the unpredictable element can ultimately be reduced. Surely it will never be eliminated. The methodology is only just beginning to form for acephalous societies. Essentially the genealogies were shorter than expected, the totemic clans did not behave as previous reading had suggested they might, the narrative traditions were unusually fragmented and the shrine and religious tradition less rational and more mythical than anticipated.

**The Written Sources:**

Part of the preparation for the fieldwork involved ensuring that previously published material on methodology had been mastered and also an understanding of the political and social structure of Owan society as it appeared in the colonial and post-colonial times. There exist three main types of written sources available on Owan history. First were Intelligence Reports<sup>7</sup> by colonial administrators and government reports carried out after independence. These documents were written by government officials, based on oral

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<sup>7</sup>H.F. Marshall, Intelligence Report on the Ivbiosakon Clans in Ishan and Kukuruku Divisions Benin Province, 1937; D.B. Partridge, A Report of an Inquiry into certain matters connected with the creation of a separate Division for the Ivbiosakon area, Benin City, Government Printers, 1967; Military Governor's Office, Benin City, Investigation into the Role of Chiefs in the Mid-Western State, Divisional Report in Respect of Owan Division, 1971.

evidence and aimed at gathering information as to how best to set up administrative units for effective governance. Basically they were not historical works subjected to the canons of historical writing. Nonetheless they focus on such issues as traditions of origin, migration, ethnic relations of the different groups and pre-colonial administrative arrangements. Such matters as pre-colonial economic activities and the role of women in society were not addressed. Despite these shortcomings the present writer employed this category of sources in determining the direction of research. This category of materials usually hints at the kind of information possible from oral sources.

The second category consists of those who might be called local historians of Owan.<sup>8</sup> They may not enjoy the popularity and prominent status of Samuel Johnson, the Yoruba historian, Jacob Egharevba of Benin, Nyakatura of Bunyoro or Apolo Kagwa

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<sup>8</sup>The works of Owan chroniclers include J.W. Amu, The Ora History Book, Lagos Asaoku Press, 1934; J.W. Amu, The Rise of Christianity in Midwestern Nigeria, Yaba-Lagos, Pacific Printers, 1965; S.I. Lawani (Imevbore Edeki), The History of Otuo, Ibadan, Advent Press, 1947; G.B.L. Oyakhire, The First History of Emai Clan, Ibadan, 1965; J.A. Omo. Enahoro, The Groundwork of Iuleha History, Ifon, Fatma Printers, 1965; J.O. Afeninkhena, The First History of Uokha, Ifon, Ajipadola Press, 1966; V.E.A. Ikpekhia, A Short History of Ozalla, Benin City, Pantographic Printers, 1985; V.E.A. Ikpekhia, The Historical Background & Cultural Heritage of Ozalla, Igarra, Onaivi Enterprises Ltd., 1990; E.T.O. Orhewere, A History of Ora: Origin, Growth & Development, 1470-1970, Benin City, Okoyo Enterprises, 1988.

of Buganda.<sup>9</sup> Not one of them even comes close to providing the wealth of information provided by what might be called a second level historian or chronicler such as C.G. Okojie on the Esan.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless they have made significant contributions to the historical knowledge of Owan society. Predictably because they wrote about their individual communities in Owan they succumbed to the temptation of glorifying their people's past with little attention to neighbours. Without doubt these publications do contain background information a researcher requires to create a research agenda. Such published traditional chronicles exist for six of the eleven communities with two each for Ora and Ozalla. It must also be stated that all of these local historians put together do not come close in length or quality to any one of the "classics" noted above.

The third group of sources and secondary in nature consist of undergraduate research essays written in the departments of history of the University of Ibadan and Bendel

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<sup>9</sup>Samuel Johnson, The History of the Yorubas, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1969; Jacob U. Egharevba, A Short History of Benin, Ibadan, Ibadan University Press, 1968; John W. Nyakatura, Abakama ba Bunyoro-Kitara, Canada, St. Justin, 1947; Apolo Kagawa, The Kings of Buganda, Translated into English by M.S.M. Kiwanuka, Nairobi, East African Publishing House, 1971.

<sup>10</sup>C.G. Okojie, Ishan Native Laws and Customs, Yaba, John Okwesa & Co., 1960.

(now Edo) State University.<sup>11</sup> These essays which centre on different aspects of Owan history, range from economy to politics and intergroup relations. Again as with the works of local historians they are micro-studies which do not address Owan-wide issues. Additionally the essays are all limited to the use of an extremely limited academic community without any effect on the people they were written about or for. Since this writer was involved in the supervision of the undergraduates at the Bendel State University, he had the advantage of being familiar with available sources, as well as knowing in advance those to contact in the field. In fact the

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<sup>11</sup>A sample include J. Oruame Agbi, "History of Ora: From the Earliest Times to 1900", Research Essay, Department of History University of Ibadan, Ibadan, 1976; Edeh Izirien, "The History of Emai: From the Earliest Times to 1950", Research Essay, Department of History, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, 1976; Ohiro O. Eseleh, "Ora and Her Neighbours in Pre-colonial and Colonial Times: A Study in Inter-group Relations", Research Essay, Department of History, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, 1983; Jacob O. Adeoye, "The Agangan Festival Emai Bendel State", Research Essay, Department of Sociology & Anthropology, University of Benin, Benin City, 1980; Bernard O. Adedeji, "The Origin and History of the Ora Gerontocracy", Research Essay, Department of History, Bendel State University, Ekpoma, 1986; Edwin O. Edionweme, "The Origin and Early History of Ozalla Clan up 1900", Research Essay, Department of History, Bendel State University, Ekpoma, 1987; F.I. Aikhoje, "Inter-Group Relations Between Ora and Emai Chiefdoms in Pre-colonial Times", Research Essay, Department of History, Bendel State University, Ekpoma, 1987; C.F. Okun, "Traditional Rulers in Iuleha Politics", Research Essay, Department of History, Bendel State University, Ekpoma, 1987; Francis A. Ebohon, "Pre-Colonial Economic Activities of Iuleha Clan Up to 1900", Research Essay, Department of History, Bendel State University, Ekpoma, 1987. The only Owan-wide historical research known to the present writer is R.I. Ohikhokhai's "Owan and the Benin Kingdom: An Analysis of a Relationship up to the Twentieth Century", M.A. Dissertation, Department of History, University of Benin, 1986.

research topic was informed by my involvement with students' essays at the university. On a number of occasions I had followed my students to the field to assist them in conducting their interviews. From this experience I became aware of the paucity of systematically researched history on Owan. Of these undergraduate essays four concentrated upon Ora, three upon Emai, two on Iuleha and one on Ozalla, where there were published chronicles. Thus the student researchers relied heavily upon the chronicles and Intelligence Reports supplemented by a few interviews. On the whole the existing literature provided information on such topics as "how [the] society preserved the memory of the past; their geographical location, language and religious belief; control over their economic assets such as land; and their traditional socio-political organisation"<sup>12</sup>.

All three categories of published materials, from the Intelligence Reports through the local historians to the student writers, were normally more ethnographic than historiographic. Basically they state, "here was the social system, here was the political system" implying that it had always been so for 500 years. They reflect the way the oral informants report it and believe it, emphasizing continuity and denying change. The picture painted shows a static society. Dating events was almost non-existent until the mid-

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<sup>12</sup>E.O. Erim, "Field Techniques for Recording the History of Segmentary Societies", in Kiabara, vol. 4:2, Harmattan, 1981. p.29.

to - late nineteenth century. The community charter of a community founder, his children creating the villages and grandchildren the wards was never critically analyzed, always accepted as valid and employed as the basic organising principle. By distilling the material, a historian finds substantial repetition and only a small residue of usable evidence.

**Fitting the Research into a Doctoral Programme:**

For an African student intending research of this nature at an overseas university it becomes essential that all the published sources directly related to the people under scrutiny should be brought to the university when one first enters the institution. Most of the material noted for Owan cannot be found nor even procured in North America. It is vital that while overseas and before proceeding to the field, the material is available for study by student and supervising professor. This means that ideally one should have selected a research topic before flying overseas, have had it tentatively approved by whoever is expected to supervise, and carry with you the bulk of published materials. If all of this has been left until the fieldwork period, it steals time from oral interviewing. Few researchers can afford the luxury of more than one year devoted full-time to field research. Given that one can average about one interview each day and that a topic, mostly oral-based, will require between 300 and 400 interviews, it becomes essential that the research year should

not be reduced by the search for documents. Thus seeking out written material before the doctoral programme begins, assists one in preparation for the field as well as concentration upon the collection of oral traditions. Further, without the material, one prepares for the field almost blindly. If possible a student intending to travel overseas for graduate work should conduct a few interviews in the selected area. Theories of oral methodology make much more sense when a researcher has gained some - even a little - field experience.

Fitting the research agenda into a doctoral programme requires pre-planning and organisation. The Dalhousie programme for doctoral candidates in history is targeted for four years duration, the first year given over to study in three fields examined in both written and oral form. One of those fields focuses specifically on methodology and secondary reading surrounding the intended research topic. The second year is devoted to archival and fieldwork, the third and fourth returning to the university to collate and analyze research material and write up and defend the thesis. During the second year, this researcher conducted fieldwork between July 1990 and April 1991 in ten of the eleven communities of Owan in a total of 234 interviews. Following the completion of the collection process, it became obvious that there could have been a Ph.D-type research in each of the communities and that possibly it might have been better to focus on one to three of them rather than seek to examine them all.



### Approaching the Field:

As a Nigerian I did not have to secure research clearance but was advised to carry a letter from the local government council. As a stranger to Owan in that my vernacular is different from theirs, there were advantages in that like an expatriate, neither I nor my family had been involved in local politics. But then, also like an expatriate there was the linguistic problem. Furthermore having been a lecturer for seven years at the Bendel State University (now Edo State) there were connections to the Owan community through students. I also possessed a car for travel purposes without major expenditure from extremely limited research funds.

Generally the letter from the local government was not required. Nevertheless there was a curious situation in which the letter became helpful. I had set up an interview session with a group of elders<sup>13</sup> and on the appointed date the interview had proceeded for about an hour before it ran into a temporary hitch. An indigene of the community, a son of one of the informants, entered and demanded to know the object of the research. This I explained in detail. He was not satisfied and demanded a letter authorizing the research. When he read the letter he apologised for disrupting the interview. Later it became obvious that the man was educated and a local school principal who regarded himself as one of the "eyes" of the

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<sup>13</sup>Here and elsewhere such people will not be identified so as not to jeopardize future research of my own or others.

community. As such he sought to prove to the elders of the community that he was determined in speaking for them. Clearly no matter how confident a researcher might be about gaining the trust of informants, it is important to obtain research clearance. If anything it helps to prevent potential disruptions by self-proclaimed community and opinion leaders. Letters should make clear that the research is not in any way sponsored by the government or any of its agencies. Moreover one should not rely solely upon it. A good researcher constantly informs opinion makers of all kinds in the community about the nature of the research. The message should spread by word of mouth such that a community expects a visit rather than being surprised by it.

Continuously spreading the word about the nature of the research readily accompanies the search for informants. Owan is an acephalous society. As such there exists no professional class of historians, rather the traditions of the people are kept by all or no one. Nevertheless there are people who have a special personal interest in keeping the community's traditions and history. The researcher relied upon friends, former classmates and former students to identify informants. Having identified some, many were prepared to point out other people who knew aspects of Owan history and culture. Furthermore in each community it was vital to see the village head or any prominent member of the community before embarking on interviewing. In some cases the fact that the researcher

mentioned the names of prominent sons and daughters of the village aided in convincing informants to grant interviews. Since some prominent Owan indigenes were not always popular in their communities, their names could not be used in every circumstance. It was best never to use the name of a prominent but controversial indigene. To avoid this one must become conversant with local politics in each village. Retired school teachers, serving teachers, church ministers, and local politicians and historians were very helpful. Since they were educated and knew the value of history and historical inquiry they were very willing to provide as much information as they had in their possession. Where they could not assist as informants they referred the researcher to those who were knowledgeable in the history and culture of the area. The most important role they played during the course of the fieldwork was in helping to explain to informants the significance of the research project. As a consequence spreading knowledge about the research proceeded hand-in-hand with the search for knowledgeable elders and informants. It further became important to fit the propaganda about the value of the research in terms which were clearly understood. Propaganda should also be spread by research assistants.

In talking to elders, community opinion leaders and at the beginning of every interview the value of the research was explained. I pointed out the fact that all the major ethnic groups in Nigeria have had their history recorded in books for

posterity, whereas the reality of the situation is that little had been written about Owan. I emphasized what they already knew, that since elders pass away every day, it was their duty to leave a legacy for the young generation - a record of their history. Such a passionate plea more often than not, helped to pave way for rewarding interviews, co-operative informants and ready hospitality. Some rare informants demanded gratification even before supplying any data, but I politely declined to offer any. Usually the blackmail took the following form: "Young man! you are writing a book which will fetch you a lot of money in the future. It is only fair you pay me for my services". I often explained I was only a student, and as such did not have money. For a researcher hungry for information it is very easy to fall prey to this kind of extortion. Researchers should be wary of such informants in that they may not be in possession of any particular information. Usually the louder the demand for money, the less the informant knows. Furthermore once the researcher falls victim, there is no end to it. Never give in. The community knows such behaviour is against its social norms. Many will secretly be ashamed of the behaviour on the part of a few. Be polite. Be firm. Never agree.

However if a researcher intends to benefit from social norms, he or she should also follow them. It becomes important for researchers to show appreciation to informants, particularly when they have been unusually helpful. On

occasions when informants willingly grant interviews, show gratitude by offering kola nuts, local gin, beer and wraps of tobacco. During local festivals which affords an opportunity to observe reenactment ceremonies, visit informants. Carry gifts according to custom. Seek advice from an assistant or interpreter about local custom. Participate in festivals and learn by so doing. In a number of cases informants cooked for and entertained me. If African hospitality fails to live up to its reputation, then consider that as a stranger you have isolated yourself, possibly to the detriment of your research project and certainly to your personal enjoyment. Eat. Dance. Participate. Overcome the barriers of language, culture and ethnicity. Gift giving involves an integral part of the process. Do not become trapped by the idea that the size and cost of gift has importance. Follow the idea that the act matters. On the whole it is very important that researchers treat their sources, the elders with respect, which may mean in some cultures prostration, in others shaking with two hands or touching the chest. Since gestures of respect are understood in all cultures, the form becomes less important than the spirit. As Jane Martin noted:

Historians who work only in archives have no responsibilities to paper documents except to use them honestly, but oral traditions are gathered from people who are not to be reduced to tools... As the urge to collect traditions which are disappearing increases, respect for these holders of the traditions seems

particularly appropriate.<sup>14</sup>

Selecting accommodation involves considerations of accessibility and finance. Research in African societies often reflected the problem of accommodation. Societies near universities, rest house or hotels have normally been more intensely studied than those far away from such amenities. Although Owan had hotel accommodations, this researcher could not afford the cost, as a result of a limited research grant. The first consideration was to find a room in Afuze the headquarters of Owan West Local Government. The choice of Afuze was determined because of its strategic location in Owan. From Afuze the remotest part of the study area involves about an hour's drive. Since I had a car I found it easy to commute to interview sessions. A more compelling reason was the offer of free accommodation in the home of a former classmate who taught in a grammar school in Afuze. He readily offered me a room in his home throughout the duration of the research. However as the research progressed it became necessary to stay in some of the villages with my research assistants and occasionally we were offered accommodation by hospitable informants. One picks up a great deal by staying with informants. It helps to build confidence, smothers the stereotype of the elite African and draws out events and

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<sup>14</sup>Jane Martin, "Oral Tradition and African Historical Reconstruction", in Erim O. Erim and Okon E. Uya, (eds.) Perspectives and Methods of Studying African History, Enugu, Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1984. p.72.

material which might not be forthcoming in a formal interview. All researchers - especially expatriates - should try it.

It is certainly worthwhile for a researcher to understand the culture of the study area. Experience however shows that in spite of determined efforts certain events in the field can create confusion even when the cultural norms were understood. In Igue community an interview had been arranged with an elder who had lost a grandchild just before the interview. By cultural norms the interview should have been cancelled. However since he had consented, the elder was determined to go ahead with it feeling honoured to be interviewed by a "university lecturer". In addition his son, whose child they were mourning, was engaged as a history teacher in one of the secondary schools in the area. Since he understood the importance of our mission he helped to convince his father to go ahead with the interview. As the interview progressed the old man sent for alcoholic drinks and kola nuts without our knowledge. When they arrived, I was confused as to how to behave in the circumstance. He insisted we accept the hospitality even though he was bereaved. Clearly the situation did not permit drinking. On the other hand the old man was very concerned that traditional hospitality should be extended to a stranger. My assistant and I accepted the gifts and offered prayers for the repose of the soul of the departed boy. The interview session lasted for about two hours. At the end my informant thanked us for visiting him during his period

of distress. He specifically noted that the interview session temporarily took his mind off his grandson's death and expressed the hope that he has been a good host. Ordinarily the situation was not the best for any interview. The old man's major concern was that he did not want us to leave disappointed. Consequently the researcher must understand cultural behaviour but at the same time accept the lead of the community as to whether norms should or should not be followed.

#### **Collection of Oral Data:**

Effective interviewing commenced as soon as problems of settling-in and settling-down were solved. Since Owan is divided into eleven independent communities, I planned to conduct my interviews in one community before moving to the next. As the research progressed, the format would not work. For example in collecting narrative traditions, informants continued to refer to similar migration stories and perceived brotherly relations between one community and another. In order to verify such claims interviews became necessary in other communities earlier than planned. Most interviews were conducted in the Owan language except in a few cases where informants spoke English. Where informants spoke English they did so without any prompting. Two methods were adopted - group and individual interviews. Experience revealed they had to be balanced for best results. In Emai and Ozalla initial interviews were conducted in groups of fifteen to twenty



informants. Responses to questions were difficult to control. The less forceful informants were dominated by the more domineering. In Ozalla in particular, because there existed three versions of the traditions of origin, each group of informants defended its version without much regard for the views of others. The session became chaotic. At a point the elders resolved to listen to all the versions before the interpreter was allowed to report the acceptable one. In a discussion later with the interpreter it was discovered that there appeared to be little differences in the versions. But to the elders any little variation was construed as an attempt to create the impression that they were divided before a stranger and were determined not to create such a notion. The community determination to create consensus becomes the researcher's worst enemy. After this incident the maximum number of informants was limited to five or six. There is no doubt that it worked well. On the disadvantages of group interviews Godfrey Muriuki argues that:

A forceful and respected personality can dominate the whole proceedings to the exclusion of all the others; he can play a far greater role in choosing a particular variant of a tradition than his knowledge warrants, especially where vested interests are at stake. But a more serious drawback is that in a group interview the participants have dual function: they are the source of the data as well as its analysts. There is the danger here that they might decide to tell only what they think one should

know.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the flaws inherent in a group interview, there is much to be said in its favour. It unravels contending version of narrative traditions, probably exposes more than it hides and alerts the researcher to details of reasoning which might not - surely would not - be revealed in the privacy of a home. Gerontocracies governed themselves by consensus and it should create little surprise that the elders applied the same rules to history. In all types of interviews participants will have a "dual function". If elders are interviewed alone they will still be "the source of the data as well as its analysts". In constantly asking "why" the researcher pushes and encourages informants to be analysts. Normally informants struggle to justify their points of view. The trick comes in balancing between fostering the debate and the chaos of losing control of it. Methodology frequently stresses the dangers of becoming a victim of royal propaganda in centralised states. It has paid less attention to the over-riding desire for consensus with or without a chief. Controversial details in Owan appear to have been dropped over the centuries until the small core of consensual residue remains bare and lifeless. The consensual narrative tradition reduces fact to a threadbare remnant. Given the power of this reductionist tendency in acephalous societies, it can be seen how easily a royal family

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<sup>15</sup>Godfrey Muriuki, A History of the Kikuyu, 1500-1900, Nairobi, Oxford University Press, 1974. p.12.

might manipulate that social instinct to its own advantage. The researcher should seek to stimulate debate, not stifle it, as a way of distinguishing contending views and versions. Also group interviews aid in identifying knowledgeable informants who should be questioned individually. If an informant is hesitant or disagrees with a particular view point during a group session, it becomes important for a researcher to arrange an individual meeting. New facts and interpretations should be discovered if the lead is followed.

Following the Ozalla episode, individual interviews revealed that the elders were seriously concerned about consensus and unanimity. The group interview quickly established what the community debates were about and who the major protagonists were. John Lamphear's experience among the Jie of Uganda illuminates this point. According to him:

The group interview was often useful when working in a given area for the first time with unknown informants: there was more likelihood of getting at least some useful information from the group as a whole than only one poor informant on his own. It was also good method to use when interviewing very old men who were often too feeble to speak for very long periods on their own.<sup>16</sup>

Becoming conversant with Owan society and the "who's who" in each community, individual interviews became more common. It seemed easier to win the confidence of single informants. Moreover they were freer to speak on controversial and

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<sup>16</sup>John Lamphear, The Traditional History of the Jie of Uganda, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1976. pp.58-59.

confidential issues in their homes as against open sessions with many people in attendance. Once the informant knows that the researcher has been exposed to the community debates and that he or she presumably cannot be blamed for revealing such "secrets" he or she willingly pursues them in private. As a result the academic debate should not be about which format to employ, but rather when to employ one, then the other, how many of one and the other. These decisions appear to be unique to each research experience.

Historians of oral sources have written for and against the use of research assistants as interpreters.<sup>17</sup> With a restricted knowledge of the Owan language, I had to rely on the aid of research assistants as interpreters. Since the language dictated interpreters, the decision was taken to follow the example of Sargent who used individuals from each community unlike Webster who believes in a single interpreter who becomes so involved in the overall research that his mind almost becomes one with that of the researcher himself. While it is ideal for a researcher to be competent in the language of the society he or she is studying, it is clear that "inadequate time, lack of funds, or unsuitable instruction may, one or all, prevent the historian from meeting the most desirable standards".<sup>18</sup> Lack of suitable instruction in the

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<sup>17</sup>See G. Muriuki, A History of the Kikuyu, p.13; J. Lamphear, The Jie of Uganda, pp.56-57; D. Henige, Oral Historiography, p.28-29.

<sup>18</sup>D. Henige, Oral Historiography, pp.28-29.

Owan language compelled the use of interpreters. Learning the language involved problems because there is no definite orthography and there are about five to six dialects. As a consequence a knowledge of one, is not sufficient. To get the best out of assistants it was vital to ensure they were fluent in both English and the local dialect. Before engaging them in the interviewing process they clearly understood the objectives of the research and were given orientation on the interview techniques. Although the researcher guided questioning, there were occasions when interpreters asked follow up questions to clarify confusion. As the research proceeded the interpreters became involved personally. Consequently when interviews failed assistants occasionally took responsibility for what I regarded as my failures. As noted above dialectical differences in Owan determined the choice of assistants from each community. By this arrangement the services of "sons of the soil" who were partly conversant with the traditions of their people, were employed. In addition their presence at each interview session made the work of confidence-building easier. Another benefit from using aides from the locality was that they did not seek pay for their services. To them their involvement in the project was another way of making contributions to the community.

**Consensus and Totemic Analysis:**

One of the themes of pre-colonial African history is that of tracing the origins and migration of peoples. The narrative

traditions of most Owan communities point to Benin as the place of origin of its peoples. There are a couple of communities, segments of which trace their origin to Ife. In one case, Ivbiaro, the narrative tradition reported the existence of an aboriginal population before the coming of the Benin migrants. Nonetheless the most common tradition indicates a theory of Benin origin. As R.I. Ohikhokhai noted: "The traditions of origin of Owan people are many. In general, it would appear that the people are of three types - the migrants from Benin who constitute the largest group...; the migrants from Yorubaland and the aboriginal people of whom little is known".<sup>19</sup> Of the eleven Owan communities nine, namely Uokha, Igue, Ora, Ihievbe, Ivbi-Ada-Obi, Ozalla, Otuo, Evbo-Mion and Emai trace their origin to the Benin kingdom. On the other hand a few wards of Uokha, Otuo, Iuleha, and Ikao have traditions which claim migration from Ife. As expected each narrative tradition emphasises a common origin for the whole community. All the villages in Ora, for instance are presented as the descendants of the sons and grandsons of Prince Uguan the founder hero. By the very nature of Ora narrative tradition, and because the community was founded by a prince from the royal family invariably what the tradition is suggesting is that all Ora people descended from royal blood. This becomes the community charter of Ora. Each community has its founder, his children established the

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<sup>19</sup>Ohikhokhai, "Owan and the Benin Kingdom...", pp.13-14.

villages while the grandchildren created the wards. With minor variations all community charters possess a remarkable similarity. Experience from other African societies reveal that this could not be true. It is inconceivable for one individual to give rise to as large a community as Ora with six villages. All over Owan the consensus of common origin becomes a fundamental problem. By narrative tradition alone, the myth cannot be broken. A new approach becomes necessary.

An analysis of the totems reveals that all the six Ora villages revere the leopard. It is the community totem. Of the thirty-three wards in Ora, thirteen have no totem other than the leopard and others have one or more animal and snake totems in combination with the leopard. This almost certainly points to the fact that the leopard was adopted as a political totem rather than a kinship one. However it confirms the myth that all of the people descended from a prince of Benin whose royal totem was the leopard. Biologically, possibly the thirteen wards with no other totem do descend from the royal leopard. It is only in Eme-Ora village that a ward called Ivbiojekpen meaning "the children of the leopard" exist. This hints clearly that this village and six of its wards without any totem other than the leopard might form the core and major concentration of the descendants of Prince Uguan. Seventeen other wards have such totems as bushbuck, antelope, goat, grasshopper, dog, tortoise, queen termite and female sheep which indicates that while these groups may have migrated from

Benin undeniably, they did not descend from the royal family. While totems might be dropped or added they do not appear to have been the object of manipulation for political reasons of consensus, with two possible exceptions. The leopard totem of Prince Uguan the founder, has become the proud symbol of Ora. That does not mean that all the people of Ora belong to the Leopard clan. Rather thirteen wards of Ora might actually belong to the Leopard clan, just as five belong to the Bushbuck clan and three to the Tortoise. Fortunately the people do not look upon totems as having anything to do with history except that since everyone in Ora revere the leopard, it follows logically in their thinking that all descend from the founder prince. No evidence was uncovered to show that there was pressure to drop unique totems and become leopard only.

The problem involves the indigenous people who appear to have been non-totemic. Possibly some of their descendants today live in one or more of the thirteen wards which have no totem except the leopard which applies to everyone. In the Ora community if there are descendants of the autochthones, they have been swept into the totemic system by the organisation of community-wide, as well as village-wide totems. Since the settlers possessed totems, one can assume there were pressures on the indigenous people to adopt them. To locate the autochthones one must look at the community of Emai where there were neither community nor village totems. Out of



fourteen wards in Emai, six possessed no totems of any kind and one revered the boa. Thus half the wards of Emai community rate as indigenous by totemic evidence, if it can be assumed that the boa/python originated as a cult rather than kinship totem and had therefore arisen among the autochthones.

The problem in Ora is that while the community totem is the leopard each of the six villages also possesses its own unique totem. This would suggest that none of them descended from the sons of Prince Uguan as the community charter suggests. His descendants might therefore be confined to that one ward called "children of the Leopard". For example all ten wards in Eme-Ora revere the goat. It is the emblem of the village. Of the ten wards, one reveres the bushbuck and three the tortoise. Six wards therefore possess no totem except the community leopard and village goat. Some wards must be segments of the Goat clan, others might be of the Leopard clan. Once again since all villages have village-wide totems, in theory all clans in Ora are totemic. This would leave only the village of Ohia with its four wards as segments of the Boa clan as representative of the indigenous population. Totemic evidence is less than clear in Ora. What it suggests is that of the many "founders" of Ora, Prince Uguan had been only one but because of his royal connections, his role has been elevated to create the so-much-desired community consensus.

It appears clearer in Igue. The community totem is a bean and one village with three wards has no other totem. That

village seems to be descendants of the community founder. The three other villages of the community each possess a village-wide totem, leopard, boa and porcupine. As in Ora, the Boa clan dominate one village divided into five wards. The Boa clan normally remains segmented in this fashion all over Owan. Usually it is not found in combination nor do other totems exist in Boa villages. The Leopard village has two wards with no unique totems which means they represent the descendants of the village founder. The other four wards of the Leopard village possess their own totems suggesting that they did not descend from the village founder. Rather they might have been stranger groups permitted to settle by the Leopard. It should be kept in mind that consensus in Igue involves a founder of the Bean clan whose children form the villages and grandchildren the wards. The totemic evidence suggests he founded one village while strangers of the Leopard, Boa and Porcupine clans founded the other three villages. If the Boa represents indigenous people, then possibly their village might even have preceded the founder. Unfortunately because genealogical evidence is so weak, this cannot be proven.

In Ake village of Evbo-Mion community a version of the tradition of origin recorded by Marshall stated that when the people migrated from Benin they first settled in Uokha before they left for their present site. But during the current research the Ake people denied ever having settled in Uokha. Owing to the contemporary political situation the people of

Ake do not want to create the impression that they are, or ever were, subordinate to Uokha. Nonetheless an analysis of totemic observances in the two communities shows kinship relations. Both communities have the boa and ihie (a kind of bean) as community totems in addition to similar community shrines called Oisa and Oron.<sup>20</sup> Whereas contemporary narrative tradition denies any link between Ake and Uokha, totemic and shrine evidence point to a distinct kinship affiliation. But as the Ora and Ake instances illustrate there is need for researchers to adopt non-conventional research methods if they are to carry out any meaningful historical inquiry. One of the advantages of utilizing totems as research tools is, because they are less controversial in nature, they have been less open to distortions than narratives. Since most informants do not know why historians desire such information, they are not under pressure to mislead or conform. Food taboos remain strong and durable. The totems do not now, and apparently did not in the past, come under social pressure to conform to a community consensus. Thus it is important for researchers to employ such sources to complement oral narratives and act as correctives. Hopefully they will also unearth facts that oral narratives have been unable to reveal.

The major drawback of assessing totemic data in Owan has been that the researcher operates in a vacuum. No totemic

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<sup>20</sup>In each community the Oron shrine was established in honour of women they regard as their mothers.

information has been reported from the Yoruba neighbours, little from Esan and Benin. One article published on Edo totems listed them without reference to village locations and made no effort to employ them for historical purposes.<sup>21</sup> The author mixed totems and taboos, was worried over how frequently mothers' totems had been adopted by sons and whether it was a new or dying phenomenon among the Edo. Since Thomas wrote before the publication of Egharevba's royal chronicle,<sup>22</sup> he had no understanding of the periodization of Benin history such as the early, the Ogiso and the dynastic eras. In the Benue valley research project where seven or eight historians correlated their methodology in narrative traditions with totems and genealogies for dating, the multi-ethnic origins of each ethnic group could readily be traced and dated.<sup>23</sup> The crucial link missing in the chain between Igala (researched within the Benue project) and Owan has been the Kingdom of Benin.

Finally a major advantage of totemic data seems to be stability over time. In Owan it does not appear to have been subjected to the social pressures to conform to the consensus that everyone descended from settlers from Benin. If such

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<sup>21</sup>N.W. Thomas, "Totemism in Southern Nigeria", Anthropos X-XI, 1915-1916, pp.234-248.

<sup>22</sup>J.U. Egharevba, A Short History of Benin, Ibadan, Ibadan University Press, 1968.

<sup>23</sup>See J.B. Webster, "The Mechanics of Cooperative Research: The Benue Valley", A paper presented to the African Studies Seminar, Dalhousie University, November, 1974.

pressure had existed one might expect that it would apply to the royal leopard, the totem of the ruling house of Benin. It has been shown above that the leopard has been adopted as the community or political totem of Ora because it had been the kinship totem of the royal prince who founded the settlement. At most the kinship descendants of that prince might now dominate thirteen of the thirty wards in Ora, but more likely only about half that number. The consensus narrative tradition of the Otuo community claims that all of its twelve villages were founded by migrants from Benin who settled for some generations in Ora. The leopard totem in Otuo is clear and uncomplicated. One village and its six wards claim the leopard and four other wards scattered in other villages also revere it. Overall ten wards out of a total of forty seven claim to belong to the Leopard clan, yet all the migrants who came from Ora should have revered the leopard if the consensus of a Benin origin was so prestigious that kinship totems were dropped in its favour. Furthermore the leopard was not among the community totems of Otuo. If manipulation of totems had been a part of the consensus, surely at least, the leopard would have been elevated to a community totem. What the evidence strongly suggests is that political totems might easily be adopted or dropped but that kinship totems remained fairly stable over time.

#### **Genealogies and Dating:**

Dating is very crucial to historical reconstruction.

However establishing a reliable chronology for pre-colonial African societies has been problematic. It is for this reason that historians of Africa have made conscious efforts to address the issue.<sup>24</sup> The difficulty in dating historical events in pre-colonial Africa has been associated with the differences in the African concept of time and the European calendar. For instance informants describe historical occurrences in relation to reign of kings, wars, droughts, eclipses, age grades and age sets. In Owan the narrative texts often refer to events in connection with the reigns of kings in Benin, wars, Yoruba and Nupe invasions, age grades and generations of individuals. For dating purposes I specifically focused on the nature of Owan age grades and individual genealogies. As a consequence I collected information on the age grade to which informants belonged and personal genealogies. Each genealogy collected was matched with such information as wars fought during the life time of an ancestor, causes of the war and the notable warriors who

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<sup>24</sup>In 1966 the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London organised a conference on African Chronology. As well historians have in the past written series of articles focusing on the problem. A sample include David P. Henige, "Oral Tradition and Chronology", Journal of African History, vol. XII, 3 (1971), pp.371-389; R.E. Bradbury, "Chronological Problems in the Study of Benin History", Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria, vol. 1 No. 4, Dec. 1959, pp.262-287; Alan H. Jacobs, "A Chronology of the Pastoral Maasai", HADITH I : Proceedings of the annual Conference of the Historical Association of Kenya 1967, edited by B.A. Ogot, 1968, pp.10-31; D.W. Cohen, "A survey of Interlacustrine Chronology", Journal of African History, vol. XI, 2, 1970; I.A. Akinjogbin, "A Chronology of Yoruba History", Odu, 1, 2, 1966.

fought in it. Likewise each genealogy was related to the kings ruling in Benin and other external events such as the invasion of Owan by Nupe and Yoruba forces. As much as possible relevant information was collected which might aid in the construction of a reliable dating framework. Thus the gathering of information on internal tie-ins and external cross references was vital to a dependable dating organisation. Despite the existence of age grade organisations in Owan, they lacked one essential ingredient, the sequence in which they were formed. There was no fixed order, they occurred every three or four years and stretched back only to the nineteenth century where dates were fairly easy to determine by many other means. It became a useless dating tool. The only option left was the collection of personal genealogies. In combination with each community charter personal genealogies formed the basis on which an Owan chronology was constructed. Both long and short genealogies were collected. While the lengthy ones aided in the dating of the generation of hero or heroine founders, the shorter ones provided information on internal migrations within Owan and the foundation of villages and wards.

Initially and naively, the research began with the view and assumption that the community charters reported an accurate description of the foundation. Having left Benin in the reign of a named oba or king, the founder and a fairly large following arrived to establish the community, his sons

creating the villages. Lengthy genealogies which stretched back to the named oba were received and recorded happily. Genealogies which did not were recorded but believed to be defective. The short genealogies, it turned out, were making an important statement, one possibly even more vital than those which confirmed the assumption. They demonstrated that some villages were founded a full two centuries after the initial founder and the first village. Ultimately that appeared so eminently sensible that one began to wonder how the initial assumption could have been accepted in the first place.

In hindsight it appears ridiculous to suppose that around 1500 Prince Uguan settled in Ora while six villages were populated by descendants of his sons and its thirty wards by his grandsons. Did the community not grow in five hundred years? Did no stranger groups settle in Ora in all that time? Are we to assume an isolated kinship group with no outside contact, as the older generation of researchers - victims of community charters - had believed? Scattered narratives challenge this assumption. And what of the totems? If only 500 years ago there had been a massive adoption of totems by villages and wards surely some traditions would have survived. Ora represents an aggressive egalitarian society and the community charter has been designed to give all villages and all wards an equal status. A stranger group is welcomed 300 years after the initial founding and a new village emerges. By



the community charter it is equal to all the older villages and its founder becomes a "son" of Prince Uguan. The modern informant provides a personal genealogy stretching back to about 1800 and the ward founder, who is a son of the village founder who in turn is a son of Prince Uguan c.1500. It is absurd but it has the function of locating every individual in the group in an equal manner. It has an important social purpose quite at odds with historical truth. Thus one of the major dangers involves becoming a prisoner of, or convert to, the narrative tradition within the community.

In Owan each community possesses its own charter with scant reference to those of the other ten. A few cross references are possible usually involving the founders or, as in the case of Otuo, its relation to Ora. There is no national charter as among the Tiv. All Tiv believe they descend from one man and the sixteen clans all claim to stretch back to him in a very complex genealogy.<sup>25</sup> The sixteen do not all claim descent from his sons. It is incumbent upon every Tiv to be able to recall this national charter in detail and be able to fit his personal genealogy into it. First published in the early decades of the twentieth century, historians may still find it today in the exact same detail among a vast array of elderly and illiterate informants. Like all nationalities the Tiv have absorbed strangers but fitted them into the national

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<sup>25</sup>For an elaboration of the complexity of the Tiv charter see J.N. Orkar, "A Pre-Colonial History of the Tiv, Central Nigeria, c.1500-1850, Dalhousie University, Ph.D Thesis, 1979.

charter. Thus the main claim of the Tiv to be called an ethnic group revolves around being part of the national charter. The Owan have no such claim. There is no national charter but rather eleven community charters.

Naturally not every genealogy can be accepted as accurate. Thus many should be collected. Collecting an informant's genealogy puts the individual at ease and caters to family pride. However some rules can be guidelines in analyzing genealogies. In a Leopard village, genealogies from individuals of that clan should more likely stretch back to the founder who has a leopard as totem than those from a Bushbuck ward. The ward might easily derive from a late arrival. Thus a rule emerges. Collect genealogies from every informant and as far as possible from every ward in a village. In Owan every individual will recount his own personal genealogy, and then link it to the ward founder who, of course, was the son of the village founder and grandson of the community founder. If the latter lived fifteen generations ago by a selection of genealogies, while the informant goes back only seven generations, the disparity and interpretation become obvious. Never point out the disparity. That is part of the "tricks of the trade". However since the researcher can never know for sure which genealogy is defective and which is not, the foundation of a community, village or ward must be calculated on the basis of probability, using as many genealogies as possible. For example if one genealogy

stretches back four generations to the founder, four go to eight and one goes to ten, probability would suggest the researcher should accept eight generations ago as the most probable date. Consequently data collection involves a massive recording of genealogies.

Within the parameters of probability, cross references must be taken into account. If the genealogy of one informant - or hopefully more - dated by generations stretched back to c.1600 which linked to a named oba of Benin as noted in narrative tradition, one might assume a degree of reliability. The village from which that informant came might therefore be assumed to be the first settled. Informants from a second village may offer a genealogy to about c.1700, and others from a third village to around c.1800. Unfortunately no genealogies have been recorded which stretch so far before the founder that a researcher can reliably claim to have found indigenous people who lived there before the first settlers. Thus the earliest village probably was founded c.1600, the second c.1700 and the third a century later. However the researcher has broken the myth or community charter which states, "the sons of the founder established the three villages of the community". Average genealogies do not support the contention that members of a community are always related. The totemic data does not either, if the founder's and community totem was leopard and the village totems were goat, boa and antelope. Hence three forms of data - genealogies, totems and narrative

- come together to offer a substantial degree of confidence.

**Female Informants:**

A major methodological difficulty encountered in the field involved balancing the number of male and female informants. While the research agenda required a reconstruction of the pre-colonial history of the Owan people, I was determined to give a strong voice to women. The objective involved producing a history which accorded each gender its due. Just as the silent aboriginals had to be found and listened to, despite the domination of the settlers, so the silent gender had to be heard among the clamour of the men. The balancing act was not an easy task. In terms of numbers it was a dismal failure. Out of 262 informants interviewed in 234 interview sessions, 220 were males and only forty-two females. The factor responsible involved the uncooperative attitude of male informants who would not allow their wives to be interviewed. Their argument was that "men are the custodians of history". However interaction with the limited number of women proved the assertion dubious. Experience demonstrated the extent to which men were concerned about information control in Owan society. Initially no justification was forthcoming but presumably males felt that a man did not have to offer any explanation. Numerous hints abound in tradition, of the past importance of women but males now control history. Details were fast slipping away. History had come under the exclusive control of the patriarchs and no

outsider should be permitted - or so it seemed - to undermine the male victory in the gender struggle.

Realising the determination of the male folk to exclude their wives from the research process, an alternative method was pursued of listening to women's voices no matter how limited they might be. Interviewing older women especially widows - no longer under the influence of husbands - became an option. In Uokha community a female teacher in the area arranged interviews with a few young female informants. However a number of men specifically invited their wives and mothers to participate in interview sessions.<sup>26</sup> All the invitations were clearly based on the conviction that the women knew a lot about the subject of investigation. In addition the women spoke on both male and female issues. Predictably women acted as sources of information on crucial female political, economic and social roles in society which ordinarily some men would have neglected. In some cases the issues were embedded in popular local traditions, about which no well informed man could have feigned ignorance. For instance in Ivbiaro the founder of the community, Aro was said

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<sup>26</sup>The following interview sessions were specifically arranged by male informants: O. H. T. #10 Interview with Madam I. Usidame, (71), Eme-Ora, September 7, 1990; O. H. T. #51 & #52 Interview with Mrs Ogoigbe, (62), March 3, 1991; O. H. T. #88 Interview with Madam Abouvbo Akhareghemen, (86), Ogute-Evbiamen, October 5, 1990; O. H. T. #217 Interview with Madam Asimawo Isunuoya, (83), Madam Mamuna Gbadamosi, (74), Ihievbe, September 15, 1990; O. H. T. #218 Interview with Madam Abibat Sadoh, (72), Madam Abibat Atubazi, (73), Ihievbe, September 15, 1990.

to have been a woman who married a supernatural being, Ada-Obi. The name Ivbiaro was derived from hers which means "the children of Aro". While Aro is the mother of the Ivbiaro people, the community shrine was named after her supposed husband, Ada-Obi. People from, in and around Ivbiaro in pre-colonial times visited the shrine to consult the oracle. It operated in the same fashion (as a long juju) as with the Arochukwu oracle in Igboland. Since individuals came to the shrine for such reasons as to prove their innocence of theft and witchcraft accusations, there was every likelihood that it was used for the enslavement of the people. However there was no confirmation of this fact during the writer's field work.

Another popular tradition in Owan involves the story of a woman called Omouwa (in Uhonmora, Ora community) who married a man in Otuo. Following her death, her husband's family failed to return her corpse to her place of birth as Owan custom demanded.<sup>27</sup> As a consequence when her corpse decomposed it turned into a river and flowed to Uhonmora. Tradition has it that from then on, the elders of Uhonmora decided to deify her by naming the river after her. The citizens of Uhonmora were forbidden from eating any fish from the river and

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<sup>27</sup>O. H. T. #16 Interview with Chief Okpaise Idornijie, (88), Uhonmora, October 2, 1990. By Owan tradition a woman's corpse was returned to her paternal home at death. Any man who dared to keep his wife's corpse was seen as treating his wife as a slave. The tradition grew out of the belief that when a man marries a woman, he by custom did not buy her. Rather the woman's family only loaned her to the man to help him raise a family. And to treat her as a slave involved breaking the marriage contract.

annually they worship at it.<sup>28</sup> A similar story is told in Ozalla of another woman called Orhueren who was married to a man in neighbouring Egoro-Amede, Esanland. Her corpse suffered the same fate as Omouwa's. In Ozalla, shrines were established and annual festivals celebrated in her honour. Since both women are heroines in their communities they must have stood for more than the myths tell us. Possibly their stories represent a rejection of patriarchal oppression. Owing to what they represent in their communities it became impossible for any man to pretend that they never existed. According to Okpaise Idornijie: "In the past when we used to fight wars, we worshipped at the Owan River before proceeding to the war front. Once we have done this we were sure of protection against our enemies".<sup>29</sup> In the case of women both deities were consulted for female-related problems. As Idornijie stated: "If a woman is unable to give birth she can go to the Owan River to give her a child. Usually a woman's prayer is sure to be answered".<sup>30</sup> From the above it becomes clear that the female deities in Owan meant different things to both genders. Since the male population believes in the deification of the heroines, there was no need to hide any information on

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<sup>28</sup>The name Owan was said to be the corrupted version of Omouwa and this was later adopted as the name of the district. The explanation was that the river runs through a majority of the communities of Owan.

<sup>29</sup>O. H. T. #16.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid..

them. Even though they might be fearful of empowering their wives, they could not deny the significance of the heroic past of female personalities. Rather they have "mythologized" the events.

In a situation where the majority of informants were men, questions had to be designed to which they could easily respond without offending their sensibilities. For instance such questions as "What powers did women exercise in pre-colonial times?" or "How powerful were women in the past?" elicited negative reactions from male informants. One informant argued: "Women do not have powers in this society". "Have you not read from the Bible that women were made by God from men's ribs?". Whereas most men recognise that women wield power, they are always reluctant to acknowledge this fact in public let alone to a stranger because - or so it seems - the perception prevails that accepting that women once were powerful indirectly means that the men were weak. When such questions were reframed as "What ritual roles did women play in your society?" responses were frank and sincere such as: "They played very significant roles. There were a number of things women did for the good of our community which men could not do". They then proceed to enumerate the notable social, economic and political activities of women in the past and in some cases drawing examples from the present. When questions began with preambles like: "I heard your mother was a famous and a rich cloth weaver", a male informant becomes obliged and



happy to tell you everything about the cloth industry. Under such circumstances a male might become lyrical about the achievements of the women of the clan. Always male informants are forthcoming if they shared in the popularity of a female relative or if the information boosted the positive image of the clan, village or community. Thus does chauvinism disguise itself? Only when the situation seemed to indicate competition between males and females can the disguises be thrown off. Chauvinism then becomes brutal and direct. After all Owan forms a community where age organisation teaches manly virtues and male bonding. There is no doubting the fact that the manner in which a researcher structures a question affects the kind of response which he or she will receive. It is therefore advisable for researchers of oral tradition always to restate questions if it appears they are not making any headway with the original form. On the art of questioning Henige counsels:

The content of the questions is of course the substance of interviewing but the *form* of the questions is also important because the way they are phrased will affect the validity of the answers to them. After all, answers are far more than simply the results of questions. Sometimes certain answers are the *inevitable* result of certain kinds of questions, so that to ask the question practically guarantees a specific answer.<sup>31</sup>

To ask a question which suggests, in the least way, gender competition or manly weakness "guarantees a specific answer"

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<sup>31</sup>Henige, Oral Historiography, p.34.

of outright chauvinism. A researcher should not be seen by an informant to be siding with one of the genders. As with local politics a researcher must be wary of becoming involved.

It should also be evident that the major traditions about women, of marrying a supernatural figure or turning into a river partake of the supernatural. Presumably the traditions have survived precisely because they call upon the supernatural. Even what these supernatural women accomplished has been obliterated from the record. Male informants do not know, neither do women. What becomes apparent is that they all relate to the dawn of history in place at the time of the founder or brought by him from Benin. They point to a more powerful female position in the past than presently exists. One wonders if male touchiness has been derived from the feeling of a past which was vastly at odds with the present.

#### The Archival Legacy:

Researchers should preserve a record of their interviews. Many have expressed concern about what ultimately happens to oral information collected by historians and archivists.<sup>32</sup> While many historians have favoured the use of tape recorders, this research was carried out by the note taking method because of chieftaincy and land disputes which were before the courts. In a delicate situation where trust must be created

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<sup>32</sup>See E.J. Alagoa, "Oral Data as Archives in Africa", Kiabara, vol. 4:2, Harmattan, 1981, pp.193-202; Henige, Oral Historiography, Chapter Seven, "Sharing Primary Sources", pp.119-127.

rather quickly, where the suspicion always lies near the surface that the researcher might have been commissioned by the government and where factions might be looking for outside support, the appearance of a tape recorder can strike potential informants dumb. When a researcher takes notes, informants can always deny what they supposedly said or claim they had been misinterpreted. A tape recording of their voice seems to leave no avenue for escape. This researcher expects to type and bind field notes to be deposited in a library for others to consult.

This chapter draws the attention of other researchers to some of the present writer's field experiences. The uniqueness of this endeavour lies in the attempt to focus on specific guidelines dealing with research problems in acephalous societies. Basically I have argued here that prior and extensive preparation before embarking on fieldwork is very essential. However researchers must be aware that prior immersion in the written and published material might create assumptions which guide and direct questioning to the exclusion of more useful inquiry, which might lead to ignoring hints informants offer which do not fall within the chosen framework and which makes the researcher a victim rather than master of the data. It was also noted that in spite of a researcher's preparedness, it is vital to look out for the unexpected, the unpredictable and the unanticipated.

With the underdeveloped nature of oral tradition

methodology in acephalous polities, the researcher had to rely on instinct and personal initiatives in the field. Furthermore the concern for female voices also required unusual research methods. Where the researcher could not reach some female informants, the assistance of a woman was enlisted. The examination of shrine traditions revealed that women exercised considerable power in the past. This no doubt proved that non-conventional research methods are extremely important in trying to uncover issues which narrative traditions gloss over, ignore or have been selectively and conveniently forgotten. Dating is a crucial theme in pre-colonial research. Previous researchers have identified a variety of ways of developing an acceptable dating framework, especially where, as in Owan, community consensus dominates narrative tradition. Correctives such as totemic data, genealogies, shrine traditions and myth must be brought to bear. Most previous writers on Owan have been primarily chroniclers. Complete consensus reduces the historian to a chronicler.

In the historiography of Africa truly acephalous societies such as Owan have rarely had their histories attempted, far less written. Thus far Igbo history has been confined to the chiefdoms c the periphery of the acephalous heartland. This research, therefore has been truly a pioneer one, especially in its attempt to apply methods designed for people divided into small chieflets. Erim's method<sup>33</sup> among the

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<sup>33</sup>See Erim, Idoma Nationality...

Idoma chiefdoms may with few adaptations be applied to the Acholi or Esan chiefdoms but with considerable difficulty to the communities of Owan which consist of a polyglot people attempting to force their history into a kinship paradigm. Unfortunately this research failed to uncover any specific method of recording the historical development of such communities. It proceeds on the basis of estimates and probabilities to far greater degree than the author had hoped when he began the field research.

## Chapter Two

### Owan Chronology and Dating

Oral tradition has been recognised by historians as a vital source for historical reconstruction of non-literate societies. However one of its "deficiency is an inability to establish and maintain an accurate assessment of the duration of the past [it] seeks to reconstruct".<sup>1</sup> As a result of its timelessness it has been declared ahistorical.<sup>2</sup> In the same vein R.A. Sargent argues that:

Chronology is the framework for the reconstruction of the past, and is vital to the correlation of evidence, assessment of data, and the analysis of historical sources. Any construction of history [which] fails to consider or employ dating and the matrix of time to examine the order and nature of events in human experience can probably be labelled ahistorical.<sup>3</sup>

Basically the concern of sceptics of oral traditions is that while they are veritable sources of history, the researcher "must work and rework them with an increasing sophistication and critical sense".<sup>4</sup> Because dating is very critical to the historian's craft, different techniques have been adopted

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<sup>1</sup>D.P. Henige, The Chronology of Oral Tradition: Quest for a Chimera, London, Oxford University Press, 1974. p.2.

<sup>2</sup>See M.I. Finley, "Myth, Memory and History", History and Theory, 4, 1965. pp-285-6.

<sup>3</sup>R.A. Sargent, "Chronology", in J.B. Webster and R.A. Sargent, (eds.), The Theory and Practice Methodology: A Practical Handbook, (in preparation) Chapter Two, p.55.

<sup>4</sup>Henige, The Chronology of Oral Tradition, p.3.

alone or in combination to create a relative chronology. In pre-colonial African history, the most commonly used have been genealogical data which include dynastic generations, genealogical generations (father to son succession) and the age-set generation. Also systematically charted comets, solar eclipses and droughts have been employed by historians in dating historical events,<sup>5</sup> or in calculating the various generational lengths.

A dynastic generation is determined by "the time elapsing between the accession of the first member of a given generation to hold office, and the accession of the representative of the next".<sup>6</sup> The length of the dynastic generation could be derived from royal genealogies and regnal lists correlated with genealogical generations of titled officials. It can be determined by calculating the earliest fixed date in the king list and the latest or most modern documented date, subtracting them and dividing by the number of generations between them. The dynastic generation technique

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<sup>5</sup>D.J. Schove, "Eclipse, Comet and the Spectrum of Time in Africa", Journal of the British Astronomical Association, 1968; See Richard Gray, "Eclipse Maps" Journal of African History, VI, 3, (1965), pp.251-262; Richard Gray, "Annular Eclipse Maps", Journal of African History, IX, (1968), pp.147-157; J.B. Webster, "Noi! Noi! Famines as an Aid to Interlacustrine Chronology", & R.S. Herring, "Hydrology and Chronology: The Rodah Nilometer as an Aid in Dating Interlacustrine History", in J.B. Webster (ed.), Chronology, Migration and Drought in Interlacustrine Africa, New York, Africana Publishing Company & Dalhousie University Press, 1979.

<sup>6</sup>D.H. Jones, "Problems of African Chronology", Journal of African History, XI, 2, 1970. p.166.

has been used in most centralised states, such as Benin and Idah, Buganda and Kwararafa. It works very well in segmentary societies where one ethno-linguistic community is divided into numerous chiefdoms while narrative traditions link events in one to those in another using royal names as dating markers as among the Idoma.<sup>7</sup> The genealogical generation is most suitable for acephalous societies where power and authority is not centralised. Essentially amongst acephalous societies the historian has to rely on genealogical generations and/or age-set generations. A genealogical generation has been defined as "the time which elapses from the birth of an individual to the birth of the first offspring".<sup>8</sup> The periods vary from one society to another.

Generally twenty seven to thirty years has been adopted as the appropriate dynastic generation length in tropical Africa. However since generation length is determined by different factors from one society to another, there have been variations in the number of years chosen by researchers. For instance J.N. Orkar<sup>9</sup> working on the Tiv used thirty years,

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<sup>7</sup>See E.O. Erim, The Idoma Nationality 1600-1900: Problems of Studying the Origin and Development of Ethnicity, Enugu, Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1981.

<sup>8</sup>E.J. Alagoa, "Dating and Oral Tradition", African Notes, 4, 1, 1954. p.12.

<sup>9</sup>J.N. Orkar, "A Pre-colonial History of the Tiv, Central Nigeria, c.1500-1850", Dalhousie University, Ph.D Thesis, 1979.



E.O. Erim<sup>10</sup> used thirty years for the Idoma, R.A. Sargent<sup>11</sup> thirty years for Igala, and F.B. Ataba<sup>12</sup> used twenty-seven years for Benin and Itsekiri.

Another important dating tool is the age set generation. It has been defined as "the period of time between the inauguration of one age set and the opening of the next".<sup>13</sup> As with genealogical and dynastic generations, an age-set generation is determined by specific factors in each society. Age organisations exist in both acephalous societies and centralised states. Because centralised states often incorporate different groups of people, dynastic genealogies, commoner genealogies, age set organisations and regnal lists have been utilized in the construction of chronological frameworks. The results are most convincing where all of the systems have been employed and correlated in one community. In societies where age set generations have been used for dating purposes, the reason has normally been the lack of or unreliable nature of dynastic and genealogical generations existing in such societies. As A.H. Jacobs noted in the case

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<sup>10</sup>E.O. Erim, The Idoma Nationality., p.159.

<sup>11</sup>R.A. Sargent, "On the Methodology of Chronology: The Igala Core Dating Progression", History in Africa, 11, 1984, pp.269-289.

<sup>12</sup>F.B. Ataba, "Recent Developments in the use of non-documentary evidence in African historiography with special reference to Totemism and Chronology", Dalhousie University M.A. Thesis, 1976.

<sup>13</sup>R.A. Sargent, "Chronology", p.65.

of the pastoral Masai:

...Knowledge of the precise genealogical links in common descent between members of groups larger than two- or three-generation lineages is systematically forgotten, so that it becomes difficult (if not impossible) to use genealogical modes of reckoning time to recount past events, especially clan histories.<sup>14</sup>

For similar reasons, John Lamphear adopted age set generation in the construction of Jie chronology. According to him: "...with their shallow genealogical memories and their strongly egalitarian society, [the Jie] can provide the investigator with neither the genealogies nor the king lists necessary for the reconstruction of a chronology in any depth".<sup>15</sup>

Since Owan is segmentary in nature and possessed no kings the use of the dynastic generation does not arise. Although age organisations exist, there are a number of problems associated with the application of age grades generations for developing a chronological progression. One of the principles guiding the adoption of age grades generations is the establishment of "firm ideas about the operation of the system before deciding on how to date from it".<sup>16</sup> In Owan there are eleven communities which the British styled as clans and the

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<sup>14</sup>A.H. Jacobs, "A Chronology of the Pastoral Masai", in Hadith 1, Nairobi, 1968. p.11.

<sup>15</sup>J. Lamphear, The Traditional History of the Jie of Uganda, London, Oxford University Press, 1976. p.32.

<sup>16</sup>R.A. Sargent, "Chronology", p.65.

structure of age-grades and differed in each "clan". Moreover initiation and promotion cycles are different. As reported by R.E. Bradbury:

In most of the tribes new age-sets (otu) are formed every three years, but in Iuleha and Arokho the interval is five years, in Urole and Ikhin four years, in Ihievbe two years, while in Era a new set is said to be formed whenever enough youths reach the right age.<sup>17</sup>

Otuo had twelve age grades out of which six were formed every five years, four every ten years, one every two to three years and membership of the last one was for life. Another principle of age grades is that they function in linear or cyclical forms. While age grades are linear in Otuo, Igue and Ikao, they are cyclical in Iuleha, Emai, Ozalla and Ora. During the writer's fieldwork, attempts were made to collect a list of the age grades in those communities where they are cyclical. Informants had difficulty recounting how and in what order the age grades were established. In addition there was also the rule that until all the members of an age set dies its name cannot be adopted by a new age set. In some instances new age grades decided not to use the name of older age sets either because the name was not elegant or the age grade was not famous in the history of the community. Owing to these complex problems, the choice of age grades for dating purposes was abandoned. As a result genealogical generation dating

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<sup>17</sup>R.E. Bradbury, The Benin Kingdom and the Edo-Speaking Peoples of South-Western Nigeria, London, International African Institute, 1964. p.89.

became the only alternative.

The real problem is that nowhere in Africa have age grades been employed for dating purposes. Rather Lamphear<sup>18</sup> and Jacobs<sup>19</sup> were working with societies with age sets; a system whereby a man became initiated into a set - say the Zebras - in which he remained all his life. His son initiated into a new set, "the gallant ones". These societies perpetuated in tradition the order of these sets. Thus an informant in modern times would say, "the famine occurred in the time of the Zebras, "whereas in a centralized society they tended to say "in the reign of king so-and-so". There are no age sets in Owan, but rather age grades. A boy is initiated into a junior set and then promoted through a series of grades until he reaches the most senior. The people do not date by them and unfortunately neither can the historian. They appeared to have no precise dating system. What many informants knew were their genealogies. Some were able to recall their genealogies which stretched back to founders of communities, of villages and of wards.

The first step was the collection of genealogies of all informants interviewed. Expectedly the genealogies of some of the informants were so short that they could not be relied upon. In some cases informants who recalled short genealogies also lacked knowledge of important historical events and as

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<sup>18</sup>Lamphear, The Traditional History of the Jie...

<sup>19</sup>Jacobs, "A Chronology of the Pastoral Masai"

such could not relate their genealogies to internal or external events. Similar problems were encountered by Orkar during his research among the Tiv. In his words: "Occasionally it was discovered that informants who provided short genealogies had a poor grasp of history in general. Such informants were not just poor at recalling the genealogies but they did not have detailed information on any other subject either".<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless the informants whose genealogies were longer in Owan were not the most knowledgeable either. There were cases of informants who remembered numerous ancestors in their genealogy but did not know much about the general history.

In determining a genealogical generation for this research many factors were considered. The reliability of each genealogy was checked against internal and external historical events, such as wars and reigns of kings in the Benin Kingdom. Unfortunately most informants were unable to correlate their genealogies with eclipses or comets and the region is not drought prone. For this study the generation length has been fixed at thirty two-years. In arriving at a uniform generation length for all Owan communities, the writer took into consideration the average age when informants had their first offspring. In pre-colonial Owan, adult males married very late because of the years it took in accumulating bride price and long periods of agricultural service to prospective in-laws.

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<sup>20</sup>J.N. Orkar, "A Pre-colonial History of the Tiv..." p.61.

Considering these factors the generation length of thirty-two years for Owan was adopted. Furthermore lengths varied among neighbouring societies from twenty-seven years for dynastic Benin, thirty years for the acephalous Tiv, for Igala commoners and the segmentary Idoma and thirty-three for Esan chiefdoms. Benin and Esan chiefdoms are the closest to the Owan but unfortunately commoner genealogies have never been collected or dated in Benin. It has also been established that historians have to devise generation lengths for each society they investigate as long as the averages are within acceptable statistical probability. As Sargent argues, "It would be erroneous to assume that a single mean generation length would be suitable for every African social formation, and each new society demands consideration on its own merits".<sup>21</sup> One of the important factors to consider is that the generation length "be plotted within a statistically acceptable set of averages".<sup>22</sup> A further confirmation is a study by D.P. Henige which analyzed generation lengths of 737 dynasties around the world. The investigation proved "sixty-five percent of the dynasties had generation lengths averaging between 25 and 35 years, and ninety-three percent fall in the range of 20 and 39 years".<sup>23</sup> Judging by this finding and the criteria outlined by Sargent, the figure chosen for the present study seems

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<sup>21</sup>R.A. Sargent, "Chronology", p.67.

<sup>22</sup>.Ibid...

<sup>23</sup>Henige, Chronology of Oral Tradition..., p.123.

dependable.

Another vital step in the construction of a chronological framework is the determination of a baseline date. It is usually the foundation on which a chronological progression functions. A baseline date could be "the year of birth of the informants, or a suitable dated event known by the community or informant and dated in documentary records".<sup>24</sup> In this study, the year of birth of informants whose genealogies were utilized in constructing the Owan dating progression, were between 1901 and 1922. Apart from two informants all others were born before 1920 and as such the writer chose 1920 as the baseline date. For example the two Ihievbe informants were born in 1918, that of Otuo 1915 and that of Ozalla 1922. Each genealogy might therefore have been calculated using that specific date as base. The result is a bewildering variety of dates in which the writer can rarely refer to, for example, the generation of c.1710 to 1742 because that is not the precise generation for more than one community. Furthermore birth dates are occasionally approximations. Thus a common base date of 1920 may sacrifice a slight degree of precision for ease of description and discussion. Most pre-colonial historians and certainly when researching in Owan, one is concerned with events within a generation. Given present

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<sup>24</sup>R.A. Sargent, "Dating", in J.B. Webster and R.A. Sargent, (eds.), The Theory and Practice of Oral Methodology.., Chapter Three, p.112.

methods of dating one cannot hope for more. In a centralised state the monarchy provides the main pole of the dating structure to which all other events are related. Owan has no such central pillar. What follows is a discussion of ten genealogies which claim to stretch back to the "founders" of ten communities. Each represents one of the Owan communities. Since it was not possible to conduct interviews in Ikao, the eleventh community, there is no genealogy for it.

Two observations should be made before turning to the genealogies of the Owan communities. The first is that most external references of Owan informants were to events and kings in the neighbouring kingdom of Benin whose regnal list has been fairly accurately dated because of the large number of European documentary references to its kings as far back as just before 1500. Benin therefore became the southern anchor of R.A. Sargent's regional network of dates.<sup>25</sup> Borno with even earlier Arabic dates developed as his northern anchor. Secondly the ten key genealogies of the Owan communities - that is those which claim to stretch back to founders - will be combined to create a dating progression for all of Owan. By calculating all of the Owan dates over and over again using generation lengths from twenty-seven to thirty-three years, it has been found that the greatest number of correlations with Benin occur when calculated at thirty-two years.

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<sup>25</sup>R.A. Sargent, "A Benue Basin Regional Chronology", The Journal of General Studies, Kano, Nigeria, Vols. 5 & 6, Nos. 1, 1984/85. pp.1-38.



Throughout this dating exercise, reference will be repeatedly made to community charters. Each of the Owan communities possesses one. The charters were designed to give historical equality to all the villages and wards of the community. For example the founder of Uokha, called Odion had three sons who gave their names to the three villages of the community. [See chart one]. Therefore the village founders' names and village names are the same. Thereafter the three sons had male children who gave their names to the various wards of each village. Thus the village called Ekheremi and named after its founder, is divided into three wards each called after a son of Ekheremi. Similarly Amiekhon village has four wards and Evburuye three. In other words the founder established the community. his sons created and lent their names to the villages and the grandsons founded and named the wards. Thus the comfortable narrative becomes created that the community is one great family, while the villages and wards are of equal age and priority. They also enjoy equal status.<sup>26</sup> Personal genealogies are maintained back to the founder of the ward. Thus in theory everyone can be linked genealogically to the community. On the Uokha genealogy (chart one) the first three generations represent the community charter, while the personal genealogies stretch back to Ojaro and Akhimien who were sons of Okhilogba the founder of the ward. Obviously the

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<sup>26</sup>The great family account is enhanced because everyone in the community is expected to revere the same three totems, the three B's, the boa, beads and beans.

historian becomes highly suspicious of such perfect regularity.

Turning to the Igue chart (number five) we see the founder, his four sons and the villages they established, the wards has been ignored on the chart to prevent clutter. The longest genealogy collected, stretched back to the founder of Oviosa village. Let us consider the village of Onegah. A genealogy there demonstrates that the village of Onegah was founded four generations after the date where the community charter placed it. Similarly two personal genealogies show that Ugbekpe village was established five generations later than the charter would have it. However note that the Onegah genealogy will show Anamah as the father of Onegah. If the historian wished to trace the growth of a community, then genealogies from all wards would have to be collected because just as villages were not all founded in the same generation neither were the wards. Rather they multiplied over the generations. This research has not focused on the growth of the various communities and therefore such a massive collection of genealogies has not been undertaken. The Igue situation merely demonstrates the relationship of personal genealogies to the charter. The charter of the community represents the ideal that all who live in the village belong to one great extended family. Presumably this was why the British referred to these communities of mixed kinships as "clans". As the following will demonstrate the totemic

information might lead to the same conclusion.

The oldest village of Igue was Ovbiosa. Totemic evidence supports this contention. Neither the village nor its three wards revere individual totems. Their only totemic observance focuses on the bean, the totem of the founder which has become the totem of the entire community. That the whole four villages which make up the Igue community recognised the same totem could lead to the conclusion which the British drew, that they all formed one clan. The people of Onegah were Leopard people who settled and adopted for political purposes the community symbol of identity, respect for the bean. For Ovbiosa the bean is a biological totem but for Onegah it is political. People of the Leopard cannot inter-marry and they form one conventional clan. Another village - Ugbekpe - also shown on chart five revere the boa as their biological totem and like everyone else in Igue the bean as their political totem demonstrating their membership in the larger community. People of the Boa should not inter-marry but may, of course do so with people of the Leopard.

Frequently the founder's name is only part of the village or ward name. Of the eighteen village and ward names, only seven fail to follow one or the other of the following patterns:

Ugbekpe ----- The domain of Ekpe  
 Imokhuoh ----- The children of Okhuoh  
 Afozo ----- The family of Ozo

Other names of settlements can be more creative as "place of

wealth", "children of the Gorilla" with that animal as totem, "the lord has done it", "we are many", land of happiness", "Ipe" named for the Nupe invasion, Elephant Killers" in a community with no elephant totem, "a town of chalk", "A town of Okha trees", "Pig's family"(totem, the bushpig), "Ihiere the Parrot" and Iuleha, "the three legged community".

**Uokha:**

Uokha was the first Owan community to be inhabited by Benin migrants. Its tradition claims the people are descendants of Odion, son of Oba Eweka. Odion moved out of Benin because he had been deprived of the throne. The royal chronicler of Benin, Egharevba stated:

Omorodion, popularly known as Odion by the people of Uwokha [Uokha] was one of the older sons of Oba Eweka I, the son of Oni Oranmiyan of Ife. He ranked next to the eldest son Omonuza of Use. Omorodion's claim to the crown after the death of their father was passed over. He, in consequence, left Benin City in anger, with his family and followers, and became the founder of Uwokha in Ivbiosakon [Owan]. He said 'I am going to find abode in Uwoha (or bush) rather than be called a prince of Benin'. The name Uwohawas afterwards corrupted to Uwokha.<sup>27</sup>

It is universally believed in Owan, within Uokha itself and among all other communities that it was the original and earliest settlement. Another tradition says that Egbuvie, a village in Uokha, was founded by a Yoruba priest or "native

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<sup>27</sup>J.U. Egharevba, A Short History of Benin, Ibadan, Ibadan University Press, 1968. p.85.

doctor", Akpwewuma who migrated to Benin and subsequently was expelled from there, sought refuge with Odion whom he already had known in Benin. Unfortunately no corroborative genealogy could be secured from the descendants of Akpwewuma or the village of Evuvbie. Uokha's dating progression has been constructed from genealogies, the longest supplied by Akharume Amaize<sup>28</sup> and Ogbeide Jegede,<sup>29</sup> both of whom are indigenes of Okhilogba ward. They are blood relations, descending from two brothers and sons of Okhilogba eight generations ago. Their genealogy thereafter links into the community charter and stretches back to Odion. [See chart One.]

There are eleven generations in the Uokha genealogy stretching back to Odion, meaning eight personal generations are linked to three in the community charter. Eleven generations multiplied by thirty-two years gives 352 years. When 352 years are subtracted from 1920, the baseline year, the beginning date for Uokha becomes c.1568. Thus it places Odion's generation at c.1568-1600 which is very far away from Oba Eweka's generation of c.1320-1347. Certainly there is telescoping in the Uokha genealogy. Odion could not have left Benin in c.1568-1600 since oral tradition remembers clearly that he left Benin in Eweka's generation. It is instructive to note that Igue's tradition claims their founder, Anamah was

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<sup>28</sup>O.H.T #94 Interview with Pa. Akharumen Amaize, (85), Uokha, November 8, 1990.

<sup>29</sup>O.H.T #95 Interview with Mr. Ogbeide J. Jegede, (76), Uokha, November 8, 1990.

Odion's brother. Expectedly Anamah's generation is also dated at c.1568-1600 from a personal genealogy collected at Igue. [See chart five.] Igue informants reported that Anamah settled with Odion in Uokha after he left Benin. But Anamah left Uokha to found Igue following a quarrel with Odion. The quarrel resulted from Anamah's attempt to seduce one of Odion's wives, probably meaning an attempt to undermine or even usurp him.<sup>30</sup>

Although Uokha's genealogical tree does not go far back to Eweka's era, oral tradition recognises the fact that the first migration from Benin into Uokha took place during Eweka's time. Numerous other neighbouring societies and the royal chronicle of Benin both claim an out-migration from Benin during the era of Oba Eweka. On the basis that oral traditions are better harmonized rather than choosing one version over the other, the following seeks to reconcile apparent contradictions. In no community in Owan does the genealogy stretch back to the beginning of settlement. There is always indigenous clans who claim to have always lived there. Generally their historical traditions have been lost. Thus in Uokha it may be assumed that the region had been inhabited long before Oba Eweka c.1320-1347. However during his reign there is every possibility that migrants from Benin (and possibly the first) joined the indigenous people. Their genealogy has been lost. New migrants arrived c.1568-1600 and,

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<sup>30</sup>O.H.T. #109 Interview with Mr. J. Ohiomolomo Ajayi, (57), Mr. S. Ohiolei Idika, (55), Igue-Sale, November 30 1990.

let us assume Odion and his brother Anamah as reported in Igue were among them. It is obvious when considering all of Owan, that a new genealogical consciousness appears shortly after 1500 in all groups coming out of Benin.

The name "Odion" can mean village elder, or eldest and most important man in a gerontocratic society. As a title of respect it was often more important than the personal name of a man. It might thereby be assumed that new migrants arrived to find a pre-existing "Odion" leadership. Anamah's brother rose to that position and has become known by the title ever since. In fact Anamah's dissatisfaction and departure might have been motivated by jealousy of his brother's success within the new settlement. After all the royal chronicler of Benin says his name originally had been Omorodion which the Uokha of people corrupted to Odion. Finally sleeping with a brother's or leader's wife as Anamah did symbolized disrespect and disloyalty. Either it took place as such, or tradition has symbolized Anamah's disloyalty by reporting it so. Similar cases and traditions in Benin and Owan were common. Whether real or symbolic, disrespect and disloyalty - or a serious challenge to authority - can be assumed and a break inevitably followed.

**Ora:**

The Ora dating progression [See chart two] is a combination of the Ora community charter and genealogies of three informants, namely Jegede Agbebaku born in 1911, Alfred

Orhewere 1918 and Omozuanvbo Oarhe 1920. Oral tradition claims Uguan, Oba Ozolua's son was the founder of Ora. The Ora community charter contends that Oba Ozolua, the king of Benin gave birth to Owulare and Uguan. Uguan in turn gave birth to Ora-Ekpen who begat twelve sons from six women. His children were Umale, Ejomi, Ohela, Obe, Ibiaro, Odu, Akhuaize, Uguanroba, Ofeba, Ahiedu, Agba and Owato. The twelve brothers founded the six villages of Ora as follows:

<u>Brothers Names</u>	<u>Villages Founded</u>
Ejomi & Ohela	Uhonmora
Obe & Ibiaro	Evbiobe
Odu & Akhuaize	Ovbiokhuain
Uguanroba & Ofeba	Eme
Ahiedu & Agba	Ohia
Owato	Oke
Umale (murdered by his brothers)	

From Ora and elsewhere we knew it was common for villages to follow the mothers and occasionally even adopt the mother's totem. Sons of one mother were therefore likely to settle together and neither challenge each other through wife seduction nor be characterized as such in narrative tradition.

Genealogies were collected from three of the six villages, Uhonmora, Evbiobe and Eme. In constructing the Ora dating progression, personal genealogies were integrated with the national charter. Jegede Agbebaku recalled four of his ancestors whom he said were indigenes of Afoga quarter in Uhonmora village. Alfred Orhewere recalled nine of his ancestors who belonged to Eme village, while Omozuanvbo Oarhe remembered five of his who lived in Idumu quarter of Eviobe village. Since Alfred Orhewere's genealogy is longer and



possibly the most reliable, it was used for the evaluation of Jegede Agbebaku's and Omozuanvbo Oarhe's. In doing this it was discovered that three ancestors were missing from Jegede's genealogy and two from Omozuanvbo's. The missing link was established based on the beginning date obtained from the Ora national charter which showed the position of Jegede's and Omozuanvbo's quarters in Uhonmora and Evbiobe villages respectively. It might be suspected that the informants are less at fault than the community charter. It shows the village of Uhonmora founded in one generation and its five quarters founded in the next. Without any reference to a large migration and influx of settlers it appears unlikely that a population explosion could have occurred which created five wards in one generation. The objective of a community charter aims at destroying quarrels over seniority by creating all the villages in one generation and all the wards in the next. The Jegede tree goes back to Oga the founder of Afoga (the family of Oga) ward and it seems likely Oga lived c.1728-1760 not in c.1632-1664 as the community charter shows. [See chart two.] Using 1920 as the baseline date and thirty-two years per generation, fourteen generations multiplied by thirty-two years equals 448 years. Subtracting 448 years from 1920 gives a beginning date of c.1472 for Ozolua; By this Ora calculation Ozolua's reign should have been c.1472-1504. By the calculation from the Benin regnal list Oba Ozolua reigned c.1482-1509. This is called a perfect correlation, or one

where the generation dates overlap. We cannot tell whether Prince Uguan had been an older or younger son of the Oba. But for necessary corroboration the genealogy of Ora confirms the tradition that their founder was a son of the king of Benin, just as the genealogy of Uokha suggests Odion was not. Furthermore this correlation induces the researcher to believe that two genealogies in Ora were defective while one was not, defective in the sense that they merely claimed to stretch back to the ward founder only. As in Igue the Leopard and Boa villages were founded later than the community charter suggested, so here in Ora, the wards of Afoga and Idumu were established later than the charter indicates. The accuracy of the Eme village genealogy might be attributed to the fact that the settlement has no ward system.

The Ora genealogy places Uguan, the founder of Ora at c.1504-1536. Developments in Benin history during the reigns of Obas Ewuare and Ozolua may have prepared grounds for Uguan and his followers' migration to Owan. For example their reigns witnessed the height of Benin expansionism. As a result Benin was at war with different neighbouring peoples. Furthermore Ewuare's reign has been characterised as very harsh. Following the death of two of his sons, he "made a strict law forbidding anyone in the land of either sex to wash and dress up, or have carnal intercourse for three years. This law, however caused great confusion. A large number of the citizens migrated to

various places".<sup>31</sup> This was when Esan and Urhobo speakers migrated from Benin. Ewuare was also said to have:

...fought against and captured 201 towns and villages in Ekiti, Ikare, Kukuruku [Owan included], Eka and the Ibo country on this side of the Niger. He took their petty rulers captive and caused the people to pay tribute to him.<sup>32</sup>

In the above, the phrase "He took their petty rulers captive" might explain why the record of the early leaders of Uokha have been lost in oral tradition. It could be that some Benin warriors were left behind in Owan during Ewuare's military campaign. Furthermore before Ozolua became Oba, he murdered Owere, the heir apparent and his mother in order to ascend the throne. For this he was banished from the kingdom and sought sanctuary in Ora. During his stay in exile in Ora he left his son, Uguan there. According to Egharevba, "The Ora people are descendants of Uguan, one of the sons of Ozolua whom he left behind when he returned from exile".<sup>33</sup> Uguan's generation c.1504-1536 overlaps with that of his brother Oba Esigie c.1509-1536 in Benin. This period in Benin history witnessed the consolidation of the territorial gains of Ewuare and Ozolua's era. It was also the period when Esigie waged a war against Idah from 1515-1517. This date is documented in that some Portuguese priests witnessed the war. Possibly some Ora

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<sup>31</sup>J.U. Egharevba, A Short History of Benin..., p.15.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p.13.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p.26.

immigrants may have been Benin warriors who took part in the Idah campaign. Later in this chapter it will be shown that the tradition in the community of Otuo notes migration of age grade regiments from Ora to Otuo as the founders of that settlement. This gives credence to the military as a factor in the history of Ora. Certainly Uguan's generation c.1504-1536 was a turbulent period in Benin history which could have led to an exodus of people from the kingdom.

Another crucial check on the Ora dating progression is the tradition relating to the introduction of the Ejere (title) institution into Owan. According to the tradition Ora, Iuleha and Emai people sent delegates to the Oni of Ife to procure medicine with which to prevent the Binis from plundering their communities.<sup>34</sup> The Ora representative was called Agba. One Ora chronicler, E.T.O. Orhewere stated the journey was made in 1620.<sup>35</sup> The Ora genealogy places Agba's generation at c.1568-1600 (see the Ora dating chart number two for Agba, son of Ora-Epken). There is no known dating method by which Orhewere could have calculated the precise date of 1620. At least it should have involved a generation span and might therefore have overlapped with the one suggested here. However the introduction of the Ejere title into Ora can be dated c.1568-1620.

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<sup>34</sup>G.B.L Oyakhire, The First History of Emai Clan, Ibadan, The Starlight Press, 1965. pp.45-46.

<sup>35</sup>E.T.O. Orhewere, A History of Ora, Benin City, Okoyo Enterprises, 1988. p.108.

The Ora chronology can also be corroborated by external invasions and intra-societal wars in Owan. All informants recall the Ogedengbe invasions from Ilesha, the Nupe invasion and wars fought among Owan groups. While some informants could not say exactly when the wars were fought, documentary sources provide specific dates. For example the following battles occurred: Emai-Ora 1810, Ora-Imereke 1813, Ora-Ozalla 1830, the Ogedengbe invasions 1878-79 and the Nupe attacks in 1884. Jegede Agbebaku recalled that his grandfather, Akhihiero was a prominent actor in the events which led to the Ogedengbe invasion of 1878-1879. He claimed Akhihiero's wife, Abehi, was harassed by Uduagele, a man from Iuleha, on her way to the market.<sup>36</sup> For this Ora declared war on Iuleha. But O.A.J. Enahoro recounting the events leading to the war reported Abehi was Uduagele's wife who was seduced by Akhihiero<sup>37</sup> who boasted he would enslave Uduagele to serve Abehi. Whatever the truth of the story, what we do know is that the struggle for a woman by two men caused inter-community strife between Ora and Iuleha which coincided with the period when Ogedengbe of Ilesha invaded Owan communities to conscript able-bodied men for his army. Ora was quick to enter into an alliance with him against Iuleha. However Ora failed to honour the terms of agreement to supply Ogedengbe with able bodied men. Instead

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<sup>36</sup>O.H.T. #38 Interview with chief J. Jegede Agbebaku, (79), Uhonmora, October 26, 1990.

<sup>37</sup>See Omo.A.J. Enahoro, The Groundwork of Iuleha History, Ifon, Fatma Printers, 1965. p.31.

Ora gave him "sickly, hunger-ridden and haggard looking people".<sup>38</sup> Ogedengbe was infuriated. He switched camps. He humiliated Ora. At the close of the war many Ora men were taken captive by Ogedengbe's forces.

The Ora genealogy dates Akhihero's generation at c.1824-1856 instead of c.1856-1888. Clearly the fixed date of 1879 and Ogedengbe does not correlate with Akhihero's generation. However in the case of Agbebaku, Akhihero's son, the Ora genealogy places his generation at c.1856-1888. It is known that he died an old man in 1929. If it is true he was born in c.1856 as the genealogy shows, he died at the age of seventy-three which presumably qualifies as old age. Even if he had been born twenty years earlier, his death is not outside the realm of probability. The problem is complicated because Akhihero lived only three generations before the baseline date of 1920. Given that the whole dating theory has been built on the law of averages the accuracy increases with larger numbers of generations and decreases with fewer. Three generations do not guarantee a high degree of accuracy.

**Ihievbe:**

Ihievbe community was founded by Ohiobo or Obo who was driven away from Benin.<sup>39</sup> However we do not know why he was forced out. Obo was said to be a contemporary of Uguan of Ora

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid..

<sup>39</sup>R.E. Bradbury, The Benin Kingdom, p.87; H.F. Marshall, Intelligence Report on the Ivbiosakon Clans in Ishan and Kukuruku Divisions Benin Province, 1937. Part IX, p.4.

and a relative of Uzuani of Emai who settled first in the Owan region. Ihievbe's genealogical tree [chart three] has been derived from the community charter and the genealogies of two informants, Momoh Obokhuai<sup>40</sup> and Jamah Imonikhe<sup>41</sup> who are from Afifah (the family of Ifah) ward in Ogienkpekhale village. Both were born in 1918. The Ihievbe genealogy and charter stretches back thirteen generations. The calculation of the beginning date is presented thus: (13 generations X 32 years per generation = 416; 1920 - 416 = 1504). This places Obo's generation at c.1504-1536 exactly the same generation as Prince Uguan [chart two] and Ima [chart four] suggesting they were contemporaries as the tradition claims. The link between Uguan, Ima and Obo suggests the Ihievbe dating structure has some dependability.

**Emai:**

The Emai genealogy has been constructed from the community charter and G.B.L. Oyakhire's family genealogy as recorded in his book The First History of Emai Clan. A diagrammatic representation of the genealogy can be seen in chart four. Emai traditions has it that its founder was Ima a migrant from Benin. He was said to have committed murder in Benin and therefore fled the kingdom. Oyakhire on the other hand reports that Ima had been troubled because his father

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<sup>40</sup>O.H.T. #222 Interview with Alhaji Momoh Obokhuai, (72), Ihievbe, December 10 1990.

<sup>41</sup>O.H.T. 220 Interview with Chief Jamah A.J. Imonikhe, (73), Ihievbe, December 6, 1990.

Kuoboyuwa died while his grand father Oba Ewuare was still alive. According to him, Ima "subsequently found life in his father's house unbearable and decided to emigrate with his followers' households".<sup>42</sup> Upon reaching Owan, Ima and his followers discovered people were already living in Uokha. They settled close to Uokha. Ima later had a son, Uzuanbi (Oyaibi) by his wife who came with him from Benin. Uzuanbi's two wives Odidi and Oron in turn gave birth to Owuno, Urule, Ivbiame and Uanhumi who founded the four villages of Emai.

The community charter of Emai follows the expected pattern. Ima lived close to Uokha and his son Uzuanbi founded Emai. His four sons founded the four villages and the grandsons founded the ten quarters into which they became divided. The community charter becomes anxious to demonstrate that all the people of Emai belong to one great family. Clearly this is not true as the totemic evidence proves. All of the communities of Owan, including Emai have absorbed or embraced stranger villages over the centuries. Since Uzuanbi had two wives mentioned specifically it seems likely only two villages emerged from his sons. Given that he led a migration of people other than his own family and clan, one may assume that more than one village was created by his followers. However once again there is no evidence to suggest ten wards all developed in the generation of the grandsons. Finally informants' genealogies normally stretch back to the ward

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<sup>42</sup>Oyakhire, The First History of Emai Clan, p.11.



founder. Consequently it can be assumed that any defect will likely fall between the village and ward founder. Urule the son of Uzuani founded the village of Urule, then following a skipped generation and the ward of Okpokhumi was probably founded by a great grandson. If this skipped generation is inserted the Emai genealogy fits smoothly into the Benin dynastic generations. Oba Ozolua falls correctly in his generation as does Prince Uguan. Ima becomes a cousin to Uguan whose relationship to Uzuani becomes readily seen as follows:

Oba Ewuare of Benin c.1455-1482

Oba Ozolua            Kuoboyuwa c.1482-1509

Prince Uguan            Ima in Uokha c.1504-1536  
[founder of Ora]

Uzuani c.1536-1568

Ima becomes therefore thirteen generations back from 1920 [13 generations X 32 years per generation = 416; 1920 - 416 = 1504]. Therefore Ima c.1504-1536 becomes a contemporary of Uguan by Ora calculations and a son of Kuoboyuwa by Benin dynastic generations.

#### Igue:

Anamah was the founder of Igue community. Tradition has it that he was a messenger of an Oba of Benin who sent him "to collect sacrificial victims for his annual sacrifices".<sup>43</sup> Anamah was said to have fathered four children namely Onegah,

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<sup>43</sup>Military Governor's Office Benin City, Investigation into the Roles of Chiefs in the Mid-Western State: Divisional Report in respect of the Owan Division, 1971. p.49.

Ugbekpe, Oviosa and Orefa. However as we already noted Uokha tradition claims Odion and Igue left Benin at the same time. They separated after Anamah seduced one of Odion's wives. The Igue dating progression in chart five is an amalgamation of the Igue community charter and a personal genealogy of Uwaifo Adidi. This merger adds up to eleven generations for the Igue genealogical tree, the same as Uokha's. Eleven generations multiplied by 32 years gives 352 years. The baseline year of 1920 minus 352 years establishes the beginning year at c.1568. Thus Anamah's generation is fixed at c.1568-1600. This ties-in with Odion of Uokha's generation as shown in chart one. As already stated Odion and Anamah were said to be brothers who separated because the latter tried to seduce one of the former's wives.

#### Ozalla:

There are three versions of the community of Ozalla's tradition.<sup>44</sup> The first which is very common outside Ozalla, claims the mother of Ozalla was a follower of Uguan. She was said to be pregnant at the time they left Benin and when they arrived in Ozalla she began labour. At delivery the child came out feet first, which was regarded as an abomination.<sup>45</sup> As a

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<sup>44</sup>Although the three versions have been recorded earlier by other research reports, the present writer discovered in the field that informants still recall all the versions depending on whom you talk to. Each informant recalls the version which had handed down to him. It had nothing to do with their status in Ozalla or ideological beliefs.

<sup>45</sup>J.W. Amu, The Ora History Book, Lagos, Asaoku Press, 1934. p.6.

result the child was named "Uzalakhi" shortened to Uza or Ozalla. If one generation was allowed for the mother - and this is legitimate since princes of an older generation frequently slept with girls of the younger generation - then this tradition would be confirmed by the genealogy of Ozalla. On the other hand the second version popular in Ozalla points to the fact that the genealogy falls short by two generations. However again the community shows villages founded in the generation of the sons, and quarters just as regularly laid out in the grandson's generation. One could assume that two generations had been skipped between the foundation of the village and that of its wards.

The second version maintains that the founder of Ozalla was Oba Ozolua's son called Iyelolo. He was said to have committed adultery with one of the Oba's wives.<sup>46</sup> For this he was condemned to death. However his mother was able to persuade the executioners to spare his life and banish him from Benin. The executioners were able to cover the fact that Iyelolo had not paid the supreme price. As V.E.A. Ikpekhia pointed out:

...the people [executioners] then took a small goat and certain cocoyam leaves called "AKHATITI" in Ozalla and spread them on the ground and killed the goat on top and rubbed their cutlasses and hands with the blood of the goat and they came home to tell the Oba and the chiefs that Prince Okpame [Iyelolo] had been

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<sup>46</sup>Marshall, Part VI, p.3.

executed.<sup>47</sup>

Consequently Ozalla adopted the goat and Akhatiti ( a type of cocoyam) as community totems. When Iyelolo left Benin his wife gave birth to a son named Uza from which Ozalla got its name. The suspicion that the Ozalla people would prefer a founder-son directly from the great king, Oba Ozolua must remain strong. Furthermore V.E.A. Ikpekhia greatly weakens his tradition by his reference to Prince Okpame, the name of Ozolua before he ascended the throne of Benin and not the name of his son. However the adoption of the totems is believable in terms of general knowledge of how such things happen. On the other hand since the communities, villages and wards often adopted the totem of the mother, the goat and cocoyam might easily have been the totems of the un-named woman who bore the son of Uguan. Nonetheless goat and cocoyam are major food items in Owan and elsewhere in the region. They are unusual totems unlikely to have been adopted unless under the peculiar circumstances which the second tradition reports. Furthermore if as the majority of totems suggest, they were designed to preserve the fauna and flora, domesticated plants and animals did not perform this traditional function. Thus the totemic evidence appears powerful and convincing.

Finally, there are many hints of matrilineality and

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<sup>47</sup>V.E.A. Ikpekhia, The Historical Background and Cultural Heritage of Ozalla, Igarra, Onaivi Enterprises Ltd., p.2. If Ozolua's son was the one involved, then the name of the prince could not have been "Okpame" as Ikpekhia wants us to believe, since this was the nickname of Oba Ozolua.

matrilocality in early Owan and presumably some centuries ago, a mother founder would have been fashionable, but with the modern predominance of patriarchalism, a male founder possibly appears more respectable. It has been noted above and the phenomenon sometimes occurs that village totems appear to represent those of a mother, not of the father. Founders, normally migration leaders, often give their totems to the entire community but frequently none of the villages which claim to descend from their sons recognise that totem as their own. It has been shown that not all villages descend from sons, but usually it would be expected that at least one would be. Otherwise many founders were either sterile or had daughters only. In practice sterility did not exist because there were customary practices which permitted a man's wife to become pregnant and bear his sons even if he were not biologically potent. Moreover it becomes rare to find traditions purely invented. Rather they tend to emphasize different aspects of a single tradition to suit changing conditions. Adjustments might be possible, pure invention unlikely.

The third version is same as the second except that it claims the first child born to the woman impregnated by Iyelolo was named Esan (one of the forefathers of the neighbouring Esan people).<sup>48</sup> The second child was Uza. Chart

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<sup>48</sup>Investigation into the Roles of Chiefs in the Mid-western State... pp.101-102.

number six has been constructed on the assumption that the mother of Ozalla lived in the generation after Prince Uguan, her son was Iyelolo and his son was Uza, the abomination. It would mean Uguan impregnated the mother in Benin while Iyelolo committed adultery and avoided death. The totems emerged. Iyelolo migrated and his wife bore Uza. Thereafter the community charter took over. Uza's seven sons found the villages of Ozalla and his grandchildren the wards. The collected genealogy of Avbiose stretches back to the founder of one ward in Atuekhor village.

The Ozalla genealogical tree has twelve generations. Twelve generations multiplied by thirty-two years generation length gives 384 years. The baseline - year 1920 minus 384 years equals 1536. This places the mother of Ozalla's generation at c.1536-1568 which correlates with the Benin dating progression which places Uguan's c.1509-1536 and Ozolua's generation at c.1482-1509. In any case from the dating organisation the foundation of Ozalla is put at c.1600-1632, the generation of Uza (see chart six). Another possible means of checking the Ozalla dating framework is the tradition recorded by Marshall which stated that "About four generations ago [from 1937 when Marshall wrote] a man called Ayuhe, went to Benin, and was given an "Ada", a ceremonial sword, and was appointed an Enogie of Ozalla by the Oba of Benin".<sup>49</sup> Ayuhe was followed by Usifo, Omoluwa and Aideloje who in 1937 was

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<sup>49</sup>See Marshall, Part VI, pp.3-4.

trying to lay claim to the Enogie-ship. Using thirty-two years as the generation length, four generations multiplied by thirty-two years gives 128 years. And 128 years subtracted from 1937 equals c.1809. Thus Ayuhe's generation is put at c.1809-1841, Usifo c.1841-1873, Omoluwa c.1873-1905 and Aidelojie c.1905-1937. These four generations correlate with the last four generations at the bottom of the Ozalla dating progression which are Enamon c.1792-1824, Ikpekhia c.1824-1856, Izekor c.1856-1888 and Avbiose c.1888-1920.

**Ivbi-Ada-Obi:**

As with Evbo-Mion, Ivbi-Ada-Obi community forms a confederation of village groups, namely Ivbi-Aro, Warrake and Errah. Again it was not possible to secure any dependable genealogies from Warrake and Errah. As a result the Ivbi-Ada-Obi dating structure (chart seven) has been based on a genealogy collected from Ivbiaro. Warrake traces its origin to a Benin man named Ake. He fled from Benin in company of a woman called Uwaren, whom he later married. Warrake tradition reports that they both fled Benin because of war. The tradition maintains that the founders of Ivbiaro and Errah left Benin at the same time as Ake and his wife. Errah tradition on the other hand claims that its people left Ovbiowun, Emai with their migration leader, Eleme after a quarrel. The four Errah villages claim descent from Eleme.

The four Ivbiaro villages of Ebese, Iyokuoto (Ubuneke), Oshogben and Usu are offspring of a union between Aro, a

mortal and Ada-Obi, a supernatural being. The Ivbiaro genealogical chart is founded on a personal genealogy. Usman Udevbure from Ikpotoi quarter in Ubuneke village of Ivbiaro, recalled seven of his ancestors. His genealogy integrated with the Ivbiaro community charter gave rise to twelve generations. (12 generations X 32 years per generation = 384; 1920 - 384 = 1536). Thus Aro's generation is placed at c.1536-1568. Since the community of Ivbi-Ada-Obi was artificially pieced together by the British, it did not possess a community charter. Rather each of the village clusters possessed its own charter. The British creation was founded on the basis that all the villages consulted the shrine of Ada-Obi.<sup>50</sup> In fact many people living in other communities beyond Ivbi-Ada-Obi also consulted the shrine.

The dates for Aro c.1536-1568 and her village cluster Ivbiaro, cannot be confirmed by reference to Benin because no oba has been noted. Furthermore the supernatural element - unique to this community - suggests that large chunks of the oral history have been forgotten. Research seems to suggest that the present generation is telling what it knows. Present informants do not appear to be hiding anything. Rather the amnesia seems to have occurred somewhere back in history. Thus the following is speculation and a guessestimate only. In the

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<sup>50</sup>Marshall, Part IX, p.4. Marshall in his report asserted thus: "Although these clans [Ivbi-Ada-Obi] are of similar origin and have similar custom to the other Ivbiosakon clans, they themselves are further united by worship of a common juju, the Ada-Obi juju".



dispersal from Benin of which the settlement founders of Owan were a part, there was also numerous migrations eastward which founded ruling families over Igbo communities west of, and along the Niger River. Originally these migrations were thought of as Bini people who lost their language and adopted that of the Igbo communities over which they ruled. This is less certain now. It is very likely that the region around Benin City was long ago inhabited by a multi-cultural community of which the Igbo were one element. For instance Egharevba reported that Oba Ewedo c.1374-1401, "had been placed under the care of Ugbo (Igbo), and on the death of his father was invited home and crowned Oba at Usama, with the title of Ewedo".<sup>51</sup>

Later Igbo communities were famous for their oracle shrines, of which Arochukwu, the most celebrated, was only one. The Ada-Obi shrine in Owan appears more like an Igbo oracle than it does any institution of origin in Benin. Furthermore the generation of Aro c.1536-1568 witnessed an out-migration eastward from Benin. As part of the eastward migration, it has been reported that "Both Onitsha and Aboh emerged from Benin empire in c.1563-1590, at a time when Benin was at the peak of political and economic power".<sup>52</sup> Is it not possible that Aro was related to this group but moved

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<sup>51</sup>J.U. Egharevba, A Short History of Benin, Ibadan, Ibadan University Press, 1968. p.9.

<sup>52</sup>R.A. Sargent, "Politics and Economics in the Benue Basin, c.1300-1700, Ph.D Thesis, Dalhousie University, 1984. p.184.

northward, to a pre-existing oracle? Egharevba the Benin historian noted the presence of two Igbo priests, Osa and Osuan in Benin City during the reign of Oba Ewuare.<sup>53</sup> Finally the name of the oracle carries the name "Obi" a title referring to a king or chief among the western and riverain Igbo. Given the Edoid (Bini) nature of the society of which Ivbi-Ada-Obi became a part in Owan, it appears logical to assume that these early alien connections were quietly dropped from the historical record of oral tradition. After all Aro like other founders of Owan migrated from Benin. That was sufficient to remember as a story of origin. But the extremely threadbare nature of that tradition arouses suspicion. Thus on the basis of the names "Aro" and "Obi" the coincidence of the other migrations of the generation c.1536-1568, the nature of the oracle and references in the Benin chronicle one might surmise a multi-cultural origin of Ivbi-Ada-Obi in which Igbo-type people or influence had been one element.

**Iuleha:**

Irimo was said to have been the founder of Iuleha community. He had been a follower of Akpwewuma, a priest and founder of Evbuvbie village in Uokha. Irimo and Evbuvbie were said to have settled first in Ife and then migrated to Benin. It was from Benin they moved to Uokha. Irimo "married a wife called Otoi and had three sons Eluele [Eruere village], Auma [Aoma] and Okoji [Okpuje]. For some reasons, which are not

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<sup>53</sup>Egharevba, A Short History of Benin, pp.15-16.

remembered, Irimo left Usokha [Uokha] with his three sons and settled down in the territory now occupied by the Iuleha clan".<sup>54</sup> Iuleha chronicler, O.A.J. Enahoro claims Irimo came from Ife. According to him, "Some words in Iuleha are synonymous with some Yoruba words and these facts, as those of place names, help to ascertain the truth that Iuleha originated from Ife..."<sup>55</sup> Contrary to Marshall and Enahoro's contention that Irimo founded Iuleha, J.W. Amu claims Obazu or Obazua did. As Amu stated: "...my readers should not be astonished to know that the children of the "Three Corners of Uzebba" ... called Iuleha, are the descendants of Obazu the great hunter and a beloved companion of Prince Uguan of Benin".<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless Marshall and Enahoro are of the view that Obazu and Uguan met Irimo at Uokha while they were on a hunting expedition.<sup>57</sup> From then on Irimo and Obazu became friends. Soon after Irimo left Uokha to found Iuleha. Traditions collected in the field by the present writer point to Irimo as the founder of Iuleha and Obazu his friend whom he met at Uokha.<sup>58</sup> Enahoro explained further that:

Before long Irimo's sons grew up to know  
Obazua as the intimate friend of their

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<sup>54</sup>Marshall, Part III, pp.2-3.

<sup>55</sup>Enahoro, The Groundwork of Iuleha History, p.7.

<sup>56</sup>Amu, The Ora History Book, p.12.

<sup>57</sup>See Marshall, Part III, p.3 and Enahoro, Groundwork of Iuleha History, p.7.

<sup>58</sup>All informants in Iuleha point to Irimo as its founder.

father. When later their father died and Obazu was still at Isokhai [Uokha] suffering, Aoma, the second son of Irimo, asked him to come and live with them. He was with them for many years before he died.<sup>59</sup>

Obazua, according to tradition in Iuleha, died without a wife and child. As a result Irimo's children performed the funeral rites and Aoma "decided that something should be done to commemorate the life of a man, one time faithful friend of their father".<sup>60</sup> In his memory a shrine and an annual festival were established which today is celebrated in Aoma village group in Iuleha. The Iuleha chronology is a product of its community charter and personal genealogies of two informants, Oghuan Aitalegbe (b.1913)<sup>61</sup> and Eduke Ogedengbe (b.1911)<sup>62</sup>. Both of them recalled six ancestors each. Their genealogies integrated with the Iuleha community charter gave nine generations. (9 generations X 32 years per generation = 288; 1920 - 288 = 1632). Thus Irimo's generation could be placed at c.1632-1664. Although tradition has it that Uguan and Irimo were contemporaries, Irimo and Uguan generations do not correlate as Iuleha and Ora dating structures show. As in Ora,

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<sup>59</sup>Enahoro, Groundwork of Iuleha History, p.30. Enahoro repeated this in an interview with him (O.H.T. #151 Interview with Omo. A.J. Enahoro, (68), Uzebba, February 28, 1991).

<sup>60</sup>Ibid..

<sup>61</sup>O.H.T. #160 Interview with Chief Oghuan Aitalegbe, (78), and Mr. Ideho Omege, (75), Avbioghola-Okpuje, April 8, 1991.

<sup>62</sup>O.H.T. #155 Interview with Chief Eduke Ogedengbe, (80), Avbiosi, March 18, 1991.

Iuleha informants recalled the Ora-Iuleha clashes which culminated in the Ogedengbe invasion of 1879. For instance Eduke Ogedengbe recounts that his father was named in remembrance of the war. His father, Ogedengbe Ologbo's generation is c.1856-1888 which demonstrates that the dating structure at least that far back is credible.

It would appear that Iuleha oral tradition has suffered from the same kind of amnesia and adjustment as Ivbi-Ada-Obi. But the original Yoruba foundations have been forgotten as the Igbo had been in Ivbi-Ada-Obi. The tradition that Irimo left Ife for Benin is a tacit acceptance of Yoruba elements in Owan. In addition Enahoro's evidence of Yoruba wards and place names is strong. In spite of these indications very little is said by way of oral tradition about the Yoruba migrants in Iuleha. In order to down play their Yoruba origins and conform to the popular notion of originating in Benin, the people of Iuleha have had to drop Obazua entirely. However by doing so they create a discrepancy in their genealogies; Irimo c.1632-1664 and his friend Prince Uguan c.1504-1536. Furthermore the Iuleha tradition claims Obazua had no children yet in the neighbouring Uruore in Evbo-Mion community, it is said his son Omo-emi had three children namely Oraza, Orue and Okema. These three formed the wards in Uruore. If these three generations are placed above Irimo, Obazua dates to c.1536-1568 or in the generation directly following Prince Uguan. Shrines and festivals normally were created to honour founders. Had Irimo

been the founder as the tradition wants us to believe, there seems little doubt the festival would have been created in his honour. Consequent upon a quarrel between Irimo's children and Obazua's descendants, the latter moved away from Iuleha to Uruore in Evbo-mion community.<sup>63</sup> This made it convenient to cast Irimo in the role of a founder. However it was not possible obviously to cancel the traditional, annual festival.

It needs stressing that dating becomes crucial in validating the veracity of oral narrative. In the case of Iuleha, religious rituals and the linguistic origin of words tended in turn to confirm the accuracy of the dating as well as draw out from the three versions of the tradition, which elements of each suggested greater reliability. In this case it was the failure of the dates to correlate which triggered the initial suspicion.

**Evbo-Mion:**

Evbo-Mion is a confederation of six distinct communities, again artificially brought together by the British for administrative convenience. Except for Ikhin and Arokho which have the same traditions of origin others such as Ake, Iru-Oke, Ohami and Uruore (Urole) trace their origin to different places and circumstances. Their merger into a community was the result of a nineteenth-century military alliance between the different groups to stave off invasions from Nupe jihadists and the Ogedengbe warriors of the Yoruba. As a

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<sup>63</sup>Marshall, Part VII, p.3.

consequence of long pre-colonial relations it was not difficult for them to enter into such a defence pact when it became necessary. Ake tradition claims the settlement was named after a woman the wife of Iyewa, a Bini. It said their son committed adultery with the wife of an unnamed Oba of Benin.<sup>64</sup> As a result of this adultery, mother, father and son fled the kingdom to sojourn at Uokha before settling at their present site. As noted earlier "adultery" may be a short form or a method of referring to treason such that the generations of chroniclers need not remember the complexities of the politics of Benin. For a chronicler charged with recounting the history of his Owan community, the origins in Benin remain important but the details of the politics of that state are not. Adultery may serve other gender politics. It tends to suggest the virility of the founder, his audacity and even bravery. Finally of course it gives at least a whiff of royalty since the mother of the community had been a royal wife in the great and prestigious Kingdom of Benin. All told the reference to adultery offers a boost to the machismo of the males of the community. The totems of Ake which are identical to those of Uokha suggests that in the early period it might have been considered a part of that community. However in the nineteenth century Ake joined the confederacy to halt the Nupe and thus became part of it by British decree.

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<sup>64</sup>Marshall, Part VII, p.4.

Iru-Oke also has a tradition of migration from Benin.<sup>65</sup> Oke was said to have been the founder. However there is no reason given for his departure from Benin. Ohami village tradition argue that its founder, Ofahin migrated from Ugo in Benin with his two sons, Ugwan and Ozeluwa.<sup>66</sup> The people insist their tradition has nothing to do with Ugwan of Ora and Obazu of Iuleha. The founder of Uruore was said to have been Omo-emi a son of Obazua (Obazu) of Iuleha.<sup>67</sup> Uruore tradition has it that Omo-emi married a wife from Ora who bore him three sons, namely Orazu, Orue and Okema, who after the usual charter pattern founded three wards. This is the Obazua who in Iuleha was said to have had no wife or child. Given the customary procedures to cover male infertility noted earlier, the researcher must always be suspicious of traditions which claim that a famous male died without an heir. These traditions are indicative of the diverse nature of the origins of the settlements in Evbo-Mion community. During the present writer's field research it was not possible to secure reliable genealogies from Ake, Iru-oke, Ohami and Uruore. So in constructing a dating progression for Evbo-Mion, we must rely on Arokho and Ikhin genealogy.

The Arokho and Ikhin dating framework has been based in the usual manner on a combination of community charter and a

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p.5.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p.3.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid..



personal genealogy. Tradition has it that Arokho and Ikhin were sons of an unnamed Oba of Benin.<sup>68</sup> Ikhin was said to be very proud and because of this he was not liked by the Oba. Consequently he was driven out of the kingdom and Arokho, his brother went with him.<sup>69</sup> While Ikhin settled in Ifon, Arokho situated at Ukaro. Ikhin was accused of selling certain Ifon people (Yoruba) into slavery and as such was expelled. Arokho and Ikhin arrived at their present sites after settling in different places. Ikhin begat eight children Imagana, Amuge, Ikhaze, Erete, Ewai, Evbo-ogua, Ibiaitie and Iyarebe; and Arokho three children, namely Ukpe, Oare and Umasi. Iboi Omoruanzoje's genealogy which forms the basis on which the Ikhin-Arokho dating structure has been constructed recalled six ancestors which were merged with the community charter (see chart nine). This added up to nine generations. (9 X 32 - 228; 1920 - 228 = 1632). This places the Ikhin-Arokho generation at c.1632-1664. In Evbo-Mion the Nupe invasion of Owan in the nineteenth century (c.1884) is easily remembered by the people. This was the event which prompted the alliance of Evbo-Mion communities. Before the Nupe invasion, the warriors of Ogedengbe had attacked the area. As with other Owan communities Evbo-Mion was affected by the chaotic situation in that century.

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<sup>68</sup>O.H.T #127 Interview with Mr. Edgars Ohiomaje Ikhiboya, (43), Afuze March 26, 1991 & O.H.T #129 Interview with Pa. Iboi Omoruanzoje, (87), Arokho, March 28, 1991.

<sup>69</sup>Marshall, Part VII, p.4.

**Otuo:**

Oral tradition claims that the people of the Otuo community descended from the twelve age-grades (Otu ni'egbeva) who were followers of Ugwan, the founder of Ora. Owing to a quarrel the age-grades left Ora and settled in present-day Otuo.<sup>70</sup> Today the age-grades make up the twelve villages in Otuo, namely Olumah, Amohon, Olila, Orake, Ohigba, Amoya, Uzawa, Iyeu, Ishiokhai, Ighera, Obo and Imafun. However an Otuo historian S.I. Lawani (Imevbore Edeki), recorded another version which claims an Ife origin for the Otuo people.<sup>71</sup> But today the Otuo genealogical tree does not reflect the Ife connection. As such what is presented in chart ten is the result of Otuo community charter based on Ora origins and commoner genealogies. Uadia Unuekhai and Igiehoi Igaga whose genealogies have been utilised for the Otuo dating framework, could only recall six of their ancestors. Their genealogies when integrated with the Otuo community charter counted nine generations. See chart ten. (9 generations X 32 years per generation = 288; 1920 - 288 = 1632). Thus the generation for the age-grades becomes c.1632-1664. Judging by Marshall's assertion that "these companies [the twelve age grades] lived at Ora and served Ugwan [Ugwan], his son Ora-ekpen and his

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<sup>70</sup>Marshall, Part VIII. p.3. and O. H. T. #172 Interview with Chief Ilaebor Ikhiafe, (71), Chief T. Udue Ekhenerua, (70), Oluma-Otuo, Febuary 15, 1991. O. H. T. #176 Interview with Chief s. Uadia Unuekhai, (76), Iyeu-Otuo, Febuary 17, 1991.

<sup>71</sup>S.I. Lawani (Rev. Imevbore Edeki), A History of Otuo, Ibadan, Advent Press, 1947.

descendants, but later they quarrelled with the Oras and left and established an independent community among the inaccessible hills [Otuo hills] which they now occupy",<sup>72</sup> it is reasonable to think that Otuo people left during the period of Ora-Ekpen's descendants (c.1632-1664) as the Otuo genealogical tree demonstrates (chart ten). This correlation is indicative of the reliability of the dating structure.

Two speculations might arise from the evidence. Why did the Ora people travel to Ife in company of Emai and Iuleha representatives to secure the Ejere title? Why did they ignore Benin when their founder had been a prince of that kingdom and when their community totem was the royal leopard of Benin? There must have been considerable fear of Benin. Possibly they sought confirmation from Ife, a higher authority even to the royal house of Benin and possibly as a warning to Benin not to attempt to assert any type of pressure to come under her influence. The other question involves Otuo. The Ejere title were brought into Ora c.1568-1620 and the Otuo migration away from Ora occurred shortly after from c.1632-1664. It suggests that the founders of Otuo had opposed the titles from Ife, titles which were completely contrary to the acephalous ideology of the communities in Owan and/or traditions to their historical roots in Benin. This might explain the lack a title system till date in Otuo. There is no narrative tradition to support the idea that initially under Prince Uguan and his

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<sup>72</sup>Marshall, Part VIII, pp.3-4.

immediate successors, Ora attempted to create a chiefdom organisation as occurred in the Esan chiefdoms, also founded by emigrants from Benin. Since Ugwan was a prince of Benin, he set up a shrine to the leopard, the only one of such a nature in Owan suggesting reverence to the ancestors of the royal house rather than to the prince himself. Possibly the founders of Otuo who descended from the age grades soldiers supporting the oba of Benin had been royalists who favoured creation of a chiefdom. With the Ejere titles from Ife and the collapse of the embryonic chiefdom, the Otuo rebels left for the north. On the other hand the community totem of Otuo - the python - might suggest an anti-royal and matriarchal ideology. Thus the evidence remains contradictory.

Otuo fought a series of wars in pre-colonial times. From available dates most of them occurred in the nineteenth century. The most notable ones include the Otuo-Okpe war of c.1870, the Alufa war of c.1879, the Ilorin-Tapa (Nupe) invasion of 1884 and Otuo-Ikao war of c.1896. While the Otuo-Okpe and Otuo-Ikao wars were dated by Imevore Edeki, the reference to Ogedengbe and Ilorin enabled the present writer to date the Alufa war and Ilorin-Nupe invasions. These wars certainly provide a reliable dating progression for Otuo in the late period. If anything they could sustain an intelligible analysis of Otuo relations with her neighbours in a chronological order.

What is quite unusual about the tradition in Otuo was

that their villages descended from the twelve age grades or military companies which followed Prince Uguan. Their tradition departs from the usual Owan narrative that the villages were founded by sons. The Otuo tradition appears logical and seems to be confirmed by the tradition in Ora that Ora-Epken the son of Uguan had twelve sons who founded the six villages of Ora. The repetition of twelve in each tradition suggests some kind of relatedness between them. Notwithstanding if the villages were age grades, they would be not be related and therefore not kin and not all descended from one family. The Otuo totemic data seems to reflect this because only two of the twelve villages possess village totems. While the villages are non-totemic, the wards are so. In other words villages of non-related kin as in an age grade, could not have a common biological totem. Thus the totemic data at Otuo seems to support the narrative tradition.

The Ora evidence does not. In Ora the majority (four) of the villages have totems. Two do not. Among those villages in both communities which revere totems there is no overlap. The grasscutter, boa and goat in Ora appear to have no relation to the leopard and mudfish in Otuo. It might be argued that in Ora the age grade leader imposed his personal totem upon the entire village. In a number of respects Ora with its strong royal connections seems to have been one of the most centralized of the Owan communities. Its community totem for example was the leopard, the totem of the royal family in

Benin. The trip to Ife to secure royal blessing and regalia indicates this trend. It might have been these eager efforts to centralize which caused the revolt among those groups which later migrated and founded Otuo.

There is some hint that among the migrants from Benin there were two rather distinct people, those with the usual game animals as totems and those who revered plants, snakes and other objects. The Ora population belonged 58% to the former category while Otuo were 69% in the second. While they overlapped in snake totems, Ora had no plant totems whatsoever. Even among the snakes, the Boa people existed in every one of the communities except Otuo. Thus even the Otuo snakes were unique. Considering the ten Owan communities from the perspective of totems, no two are further apart than Ora and Otuo. If the two distinct groups did follow Prince Uguan from Benin and were organised in age grades, then the revolt in Ora which produced the Otuo settlers clearly seems to have been the result primarily of friction between animal and plant clans.

In conclusion what we have are genealogical trees for ten of the eleven communities stretching back to generations of migration leaders. In order to produce an Owan chronology the ten supergenealogies have to be fused into a core dating structure. Consequently chart eleven shows the generations of Owan migration leaders against the dates for the Benin regnal list. Understandably they also represent the foundation date

of each community. Thus what we have in chart eleven is the Owan core dating structure. An analysis of the chart indicates that the earliest exodus of Benin migrants to the Owan area occurred c.1320-1347 during the reign of Oba Eweka. It was followed by another one between c.1504-1536 which saw the foundation of Ora, Ihievbe and Emai communities. Another mass migration led to the foundation of Igue and Ozalla between c.1568-1600. However tradition has it that the founders of Igue had a stopover in Uokha in the generation of c.1320-1347. Clearly the Igue migration is basically more of internal migration within Owan. It is also possible that the migration out of Benin in c.1568-1600 may have included migrants who settled with others from Uokha and subsequently founded Igue, even though oral tradition is silent on this. The migration out of Benin of the ancestors of Arokho/Ikhin took place in the generation of c.1632-1664. Otuo and Iuleha migrants left Ora and Uokha respectively in the same generation c.1632-1664.

A major problem with the Owan core dating structure is its inability to go far back to the period before the arrival of the Benin migrants. Unfortunately no archaeological excavations have been carried out in the area. Hence the difficulty in dating the pre-Benin era in Owan history. Nonetheless archaeological research in Benin and Esan communities indicate phases of moat (Iya) and wall construction which corresponds with political developments in Benin which had direct influence on activities in neighbouring

societies such as Owan. According to P.J. Darling<sup>73</sup> the primary phase of wall construction lasted from 780-1075 A.D. which also coincided with the growth of acephalous political organisation. The secondary phase of building 1130-1175 A.D. represented the era of Ogiso multiple mini-kingdoms, and the tertiary phase 1200-1325 A.D. fits with the foundation of the Eweka dynasty. This period also witnessed the ascendency of Udo a rival state to Benin and the consolidation of Benin's power. The fourth and final phase was from 1333-1344 A.D. which saw external additions to the Benin Empire. It represented the age of Benin expansionism. For a meaningful analysis of Owan's chronology Darling's data suggests that the periods 780-1074 A.D and 1130-1175 depicts the growth and development of acephalous political structure by the aboriginal groups in Owan. Darling's archeological findings reveal that the beginning of Benin's expansionism, the twelfth century, was clearly the period when oral tradition also claim Benin migrants started their intrusion into the Owan area. Of note is that Darling's contention proves there existed an aboriginal population in Owan before Benin migrants moved into the area, which totemic observances in the region also indicate. As stated by Darling "...the iya represent a settlement distribution of pre-dynastic Edo-Esan culture

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<sup>73</sup>P.J. Darling, Archaeology and History in Southern Nigeria: The ancient linear earthworks of Benin and Ishan, Oxford, Cambridge Monographs in African Archaeology 11, Part I, 1984. p.112.



covering an area which was geographically similar but overlapped by much of the later Benin and Ishan [Esan] kingdoms".<sup>74</sup> What this signifies therefore is that although Darling's survey was limited to Benin and Esan communities, his conclusions for the two regions are also applicable to nearby districts such as Owan. Thus a consideration of oral tradition, totemic observances and archaeological data reveals that there is a strong basis to the reliability of the present Owan chronology.

The history of Owan begins with dating and the narrative traditions c.1500 when the so-called founders emerged from Benin. However myths and legends stretch back before 1500. These become the subject of discussion in the next chapter stretch back into the core period of the wall and moat construction as mapped by aerial photographs and ground-level surveys by Darling and his team, a project cut short by funding problems. Owan does not fall within the wall-building region as far as Darling shows. But the walls and moats covered hundreds of square miles over the heartland of Benin and much of Esan. Thus we must see the founders of the Owan communities as coming out of and leaving the protected regions inside the network of walls and moat. Similar migrations, around the same period, heading to Esan were remaining within the wall system. They created chieftaincies, thus remaining as well within the culture inside the walls. Owan migrants not

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p.37.

only left the walls but an essential element of the culture behind.

What Darling suggests is that the walls began in the north and spread south as if northern migrants slowly expanded their areas of settlement, that villages were located on ridges avoiding the lower riverine regions which became fearful places of evil. This could possibly be interpreted as hostile indigenous people were being gradually surrounded by the upland peoples. Unfortunately no historian has researched the pre-dynastic history of Benin and no one has attempted to integrate the archaeological findings of Darling into the dynastic period. This study operates on the assumption that the animal totems, ultimately the two groups patriarchy and even chieftaincy predominated among the highlanders while plant and snake totems "matriarchy" and acephalous organisation prevailed among lowlanders. The indigenous people of Owan probably more closely resembled the lowlanders, their matriarchal tendencies reinforced by those of the Ondo Yoruba. Furthermore many lowlanders from the Benin heartland joined the migration into Owan. The topography of most of the Owan does not consist of uplands and lowlands and therefore the dichotomy between the two groups became far less sharply defined. Chiefs as arbiters between conflicting groups were less a necessity than in Benin and Esan. As noted in this chapter the multiplicity of ethnic groups and languages in the heartland of Benin created greater complexity than the

division into highlander and lowlander might suggest. As the history becomes developed in the Ediod sub-group - one of them being Owan - the need for a revisionist re-evaluation of the Benin heartland becomes an urgent necessity.

#### Owan Relative Chronology

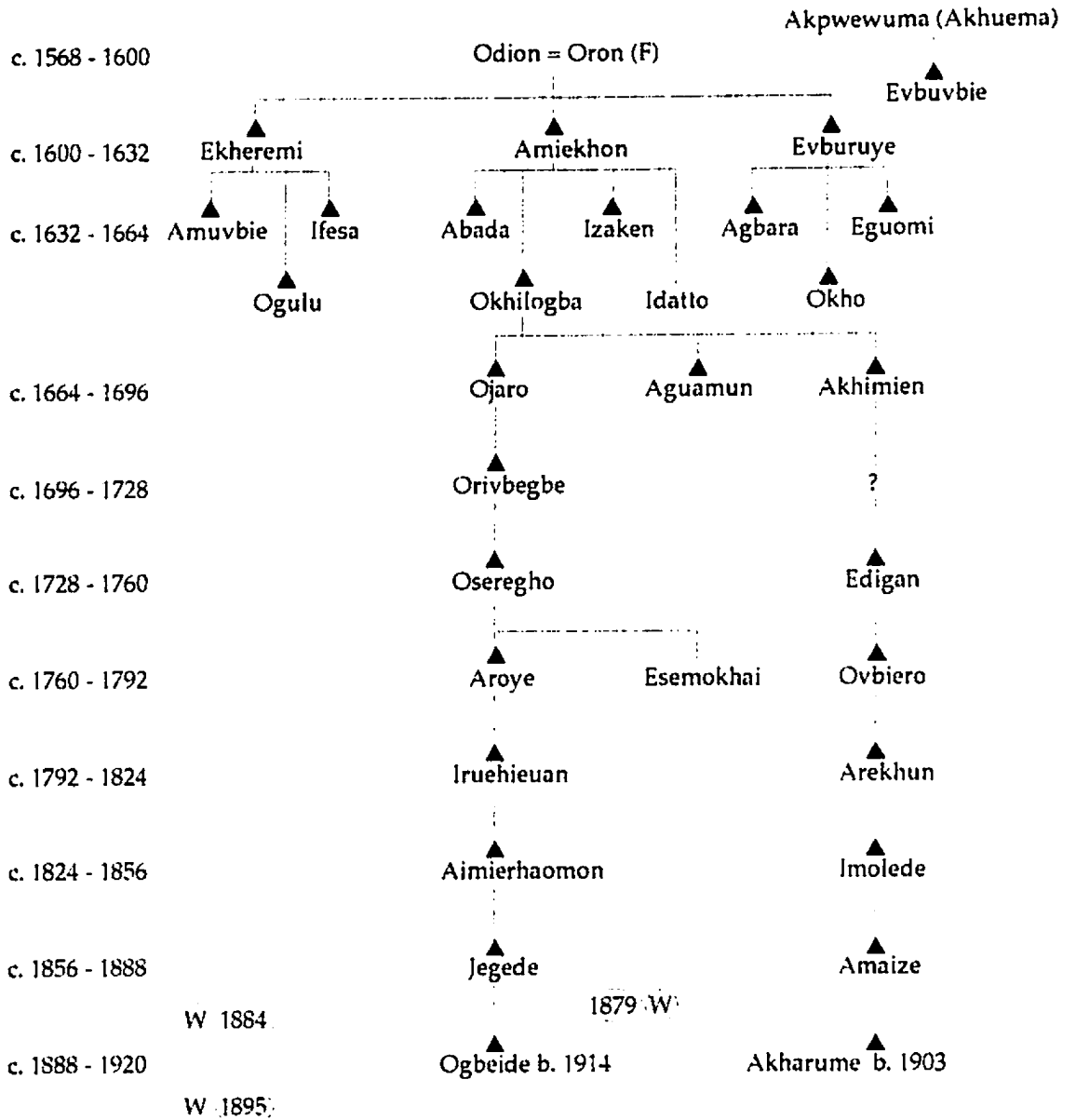
- c.1320-1347 The earliest migration from Benin occurred. Oba Eweka's son led the migration which resulted in the foundation of Uokha.
- c.1504-1536 Royal exodus from Benin. Uguan the founder of Ora left Benin with his followers. This migration culminated in the foundation of Ora. In the same generation Ohiobo (Obo) left Benin to Owan to found Ihievbe. Also Emai ancestors led by Ima left Benin and founded Emai community.
- c.1568-1600 Separation of Odion of Uokha and Anamah his brother. Consequently, Anamah and his followers founded a new settlement, Igue. Iyelolo son of Oba Ozolua founded Ozalla in the same generation. Ora, Iuleha and Emai went to Ife for Ejere titles.
- c.1632-1664 Internal migrations in Owan occurred. Irimo and his followers left Uokha to establish a new settlement - Iuleha. Arokho and Ikhin led a migration which resulted in the founding of two settlements which bear their names. Otuo ni'gbeva (the twelve Otuo age grades) left Ora after a quarrel for the Otuo hills where they founded the twelve Otuo villages.
- c.1792-1824 c.1810 Emai-Ora War; c.1813 Ora-Imereke war.
- c.1824-1856 c.1824 Ayuhe was appointed the Enogie of Ozalla by Oba of Benin; c.1830 Ora-Ozalla war; c.1856 Usifo succeeded Ayuhe as the Enogie of Ozalla.
- c.1856-1888 c.1870 Otuo-Okpe war; c.1871 Ilorin jihadists declared war on Ora; c.1873 Omoluwa succeeded Usifo as the Enogie of Ozalla; c.1878 Ogedengde of Ilesha invaded Ora; c.1879 Ogedengbe of Ilesha declared war on other Owan communities; c.1879 Ilorin-Tapa (Nupe)

invasion of Otuo; c.1884 Imaku (Nupe)  
invasion of other Owan communities.

c.1888-1920

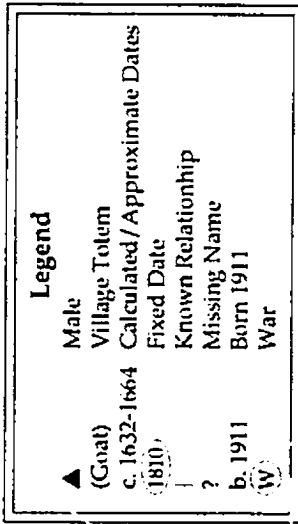
c.1894 Ogbetta and his associates returned to Ora from captivity in Ilesha and Ihievbe left Ihievbe-Iddo to their present site; c.1895 Mr. Moore first surveyed Owan, Usiokhae and his associates who had been in captivity for about twelve years in Ilesha returned to Ora, Uokha-Ihievbe war, C.M.S. introduced Christianity to Eme-Ora; c.1896 Otuo-Ikao war; c.1897 Evbiobe renamed Sabongidda.

# Chart One Uokha Dating Chart



Legend			
▲	Male	1895	Fixed Date
(F)	Female	b. 1914	Born 1914
-	Known Relationship	c. 1632 -1664	Calculated / Approximate Dates
?	Missing Name	=	Marriage
W	War		

## Chart Two Ora Dating Chart



c. 1440 - 1472

c. 1472 - 1504

c. 1504 - 1536

c. 1536 - 1568

c. 1568 - 1600

c. 1600 - 1632

c. 1632 - 1664

c. 1664 - 1690

c. 1690 - 1728

c. 1728 - 1760

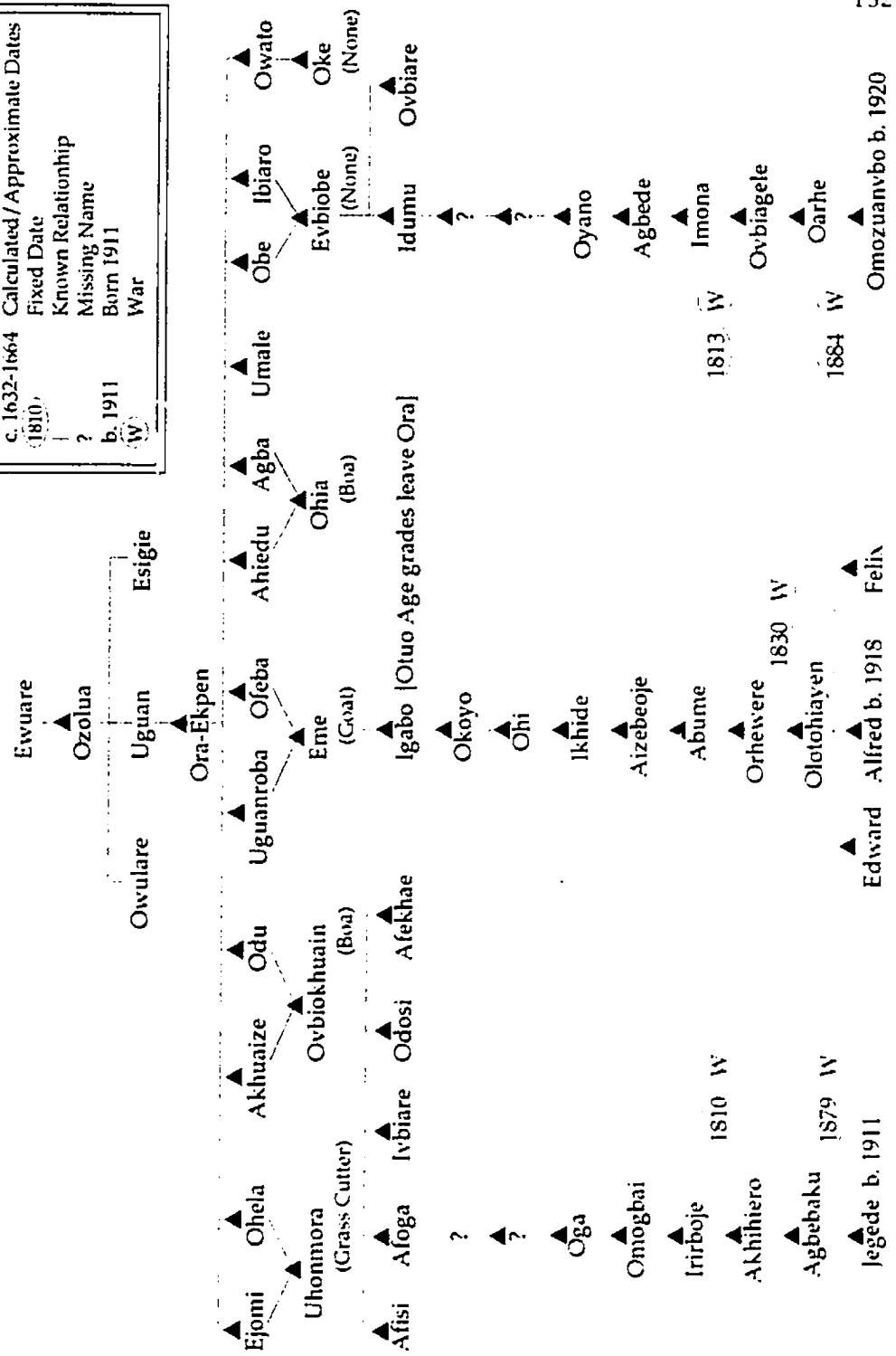
c. 1760 - 1792

c. 1792 - 1824

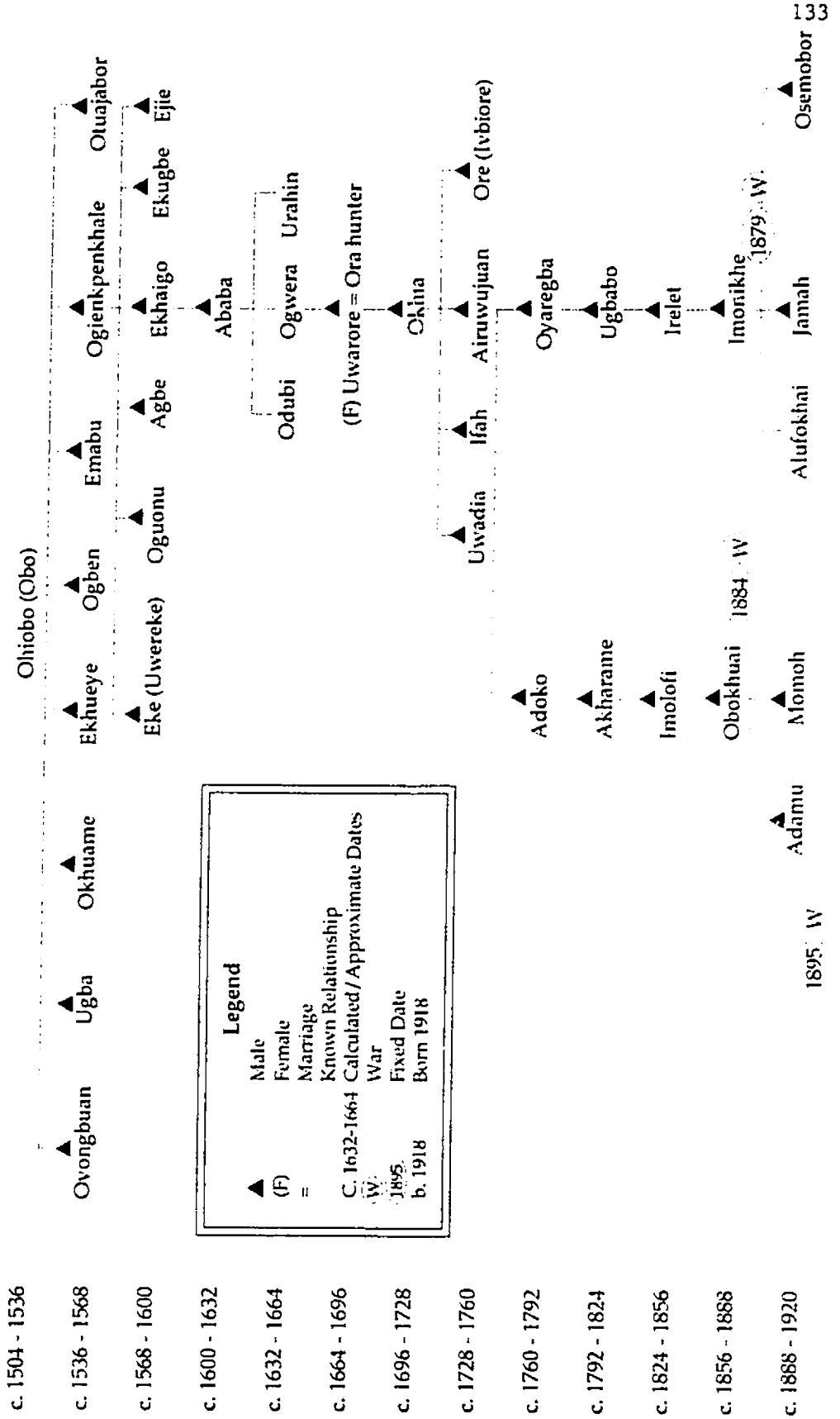
c. 1824 - 1856

c. 1856 - 1888

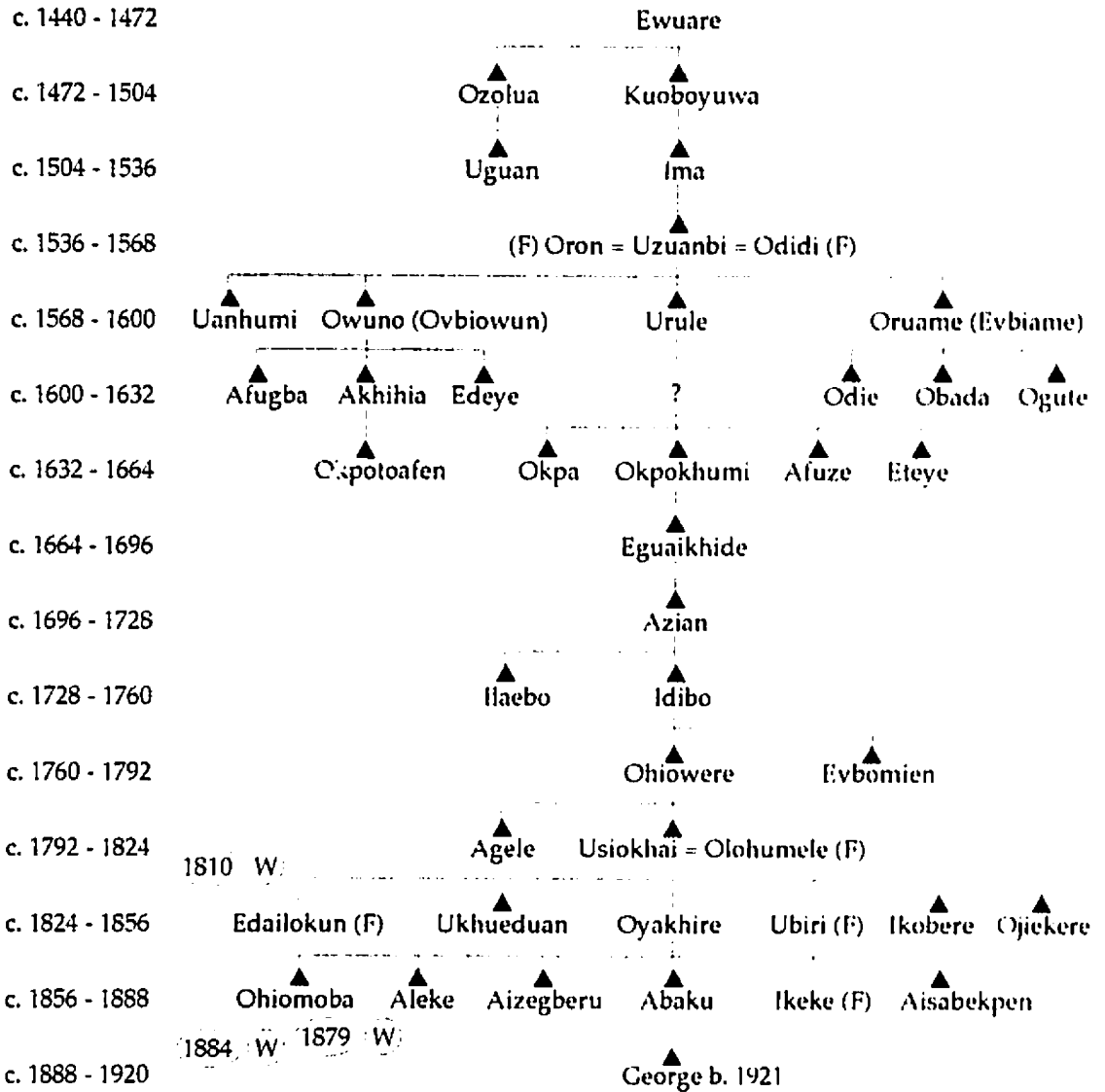
c. 1888 - 1920



# Chart Three Ihievbe Dating Chart



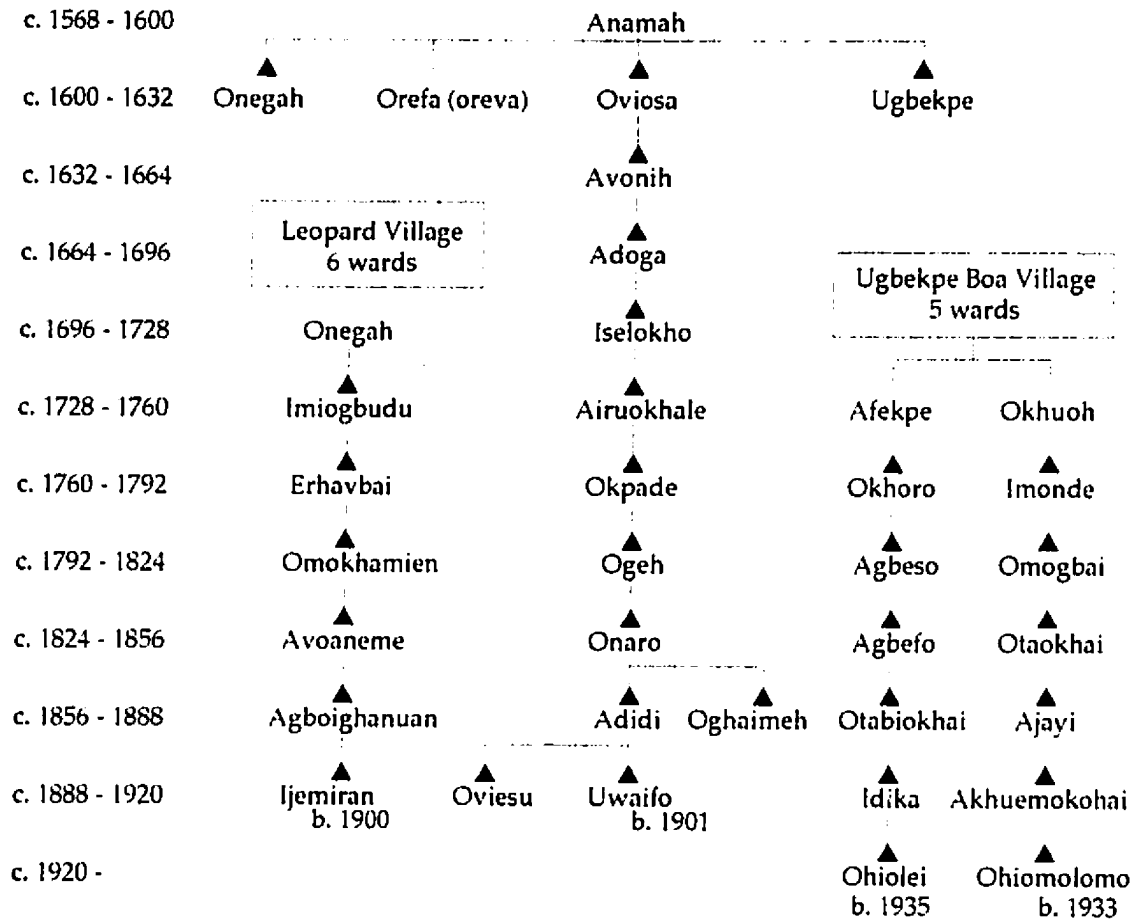
### Chart Four Emai Dating Chart



Legend	
▲	Male
(F)	Female
=	Marriage
W	War
1879	Fixed Date
	Known Relationship
c. 1632-1664	Calculated / Approximate Dates
b. 1921	Born 1921
?	Missing Name

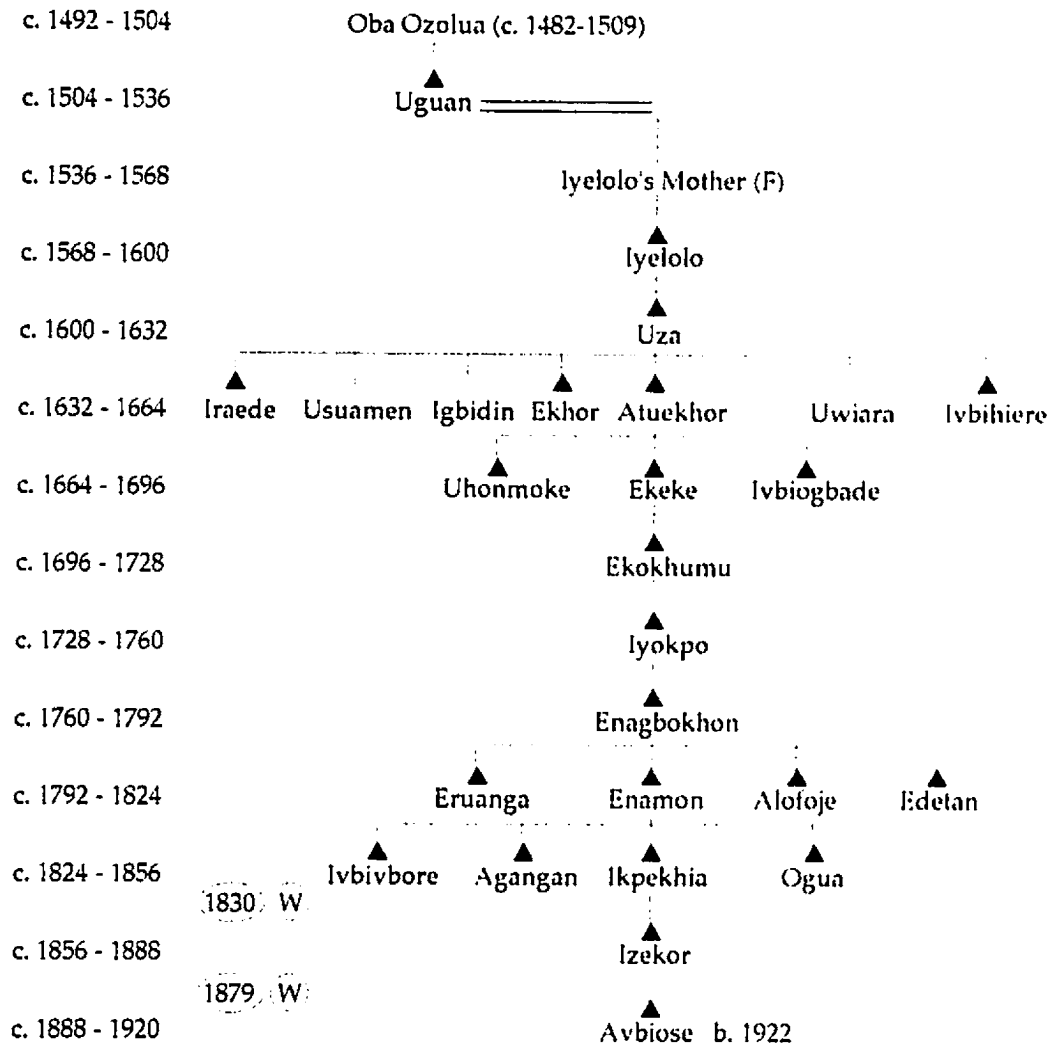


# Chart Five Igue Dating Chart



Legend	
▲	Male
—	Known Relationship
---	Relationship Unsure
c. 1632 - 1664	Calculated/Approximate Dates
b. 1901	Born 1901

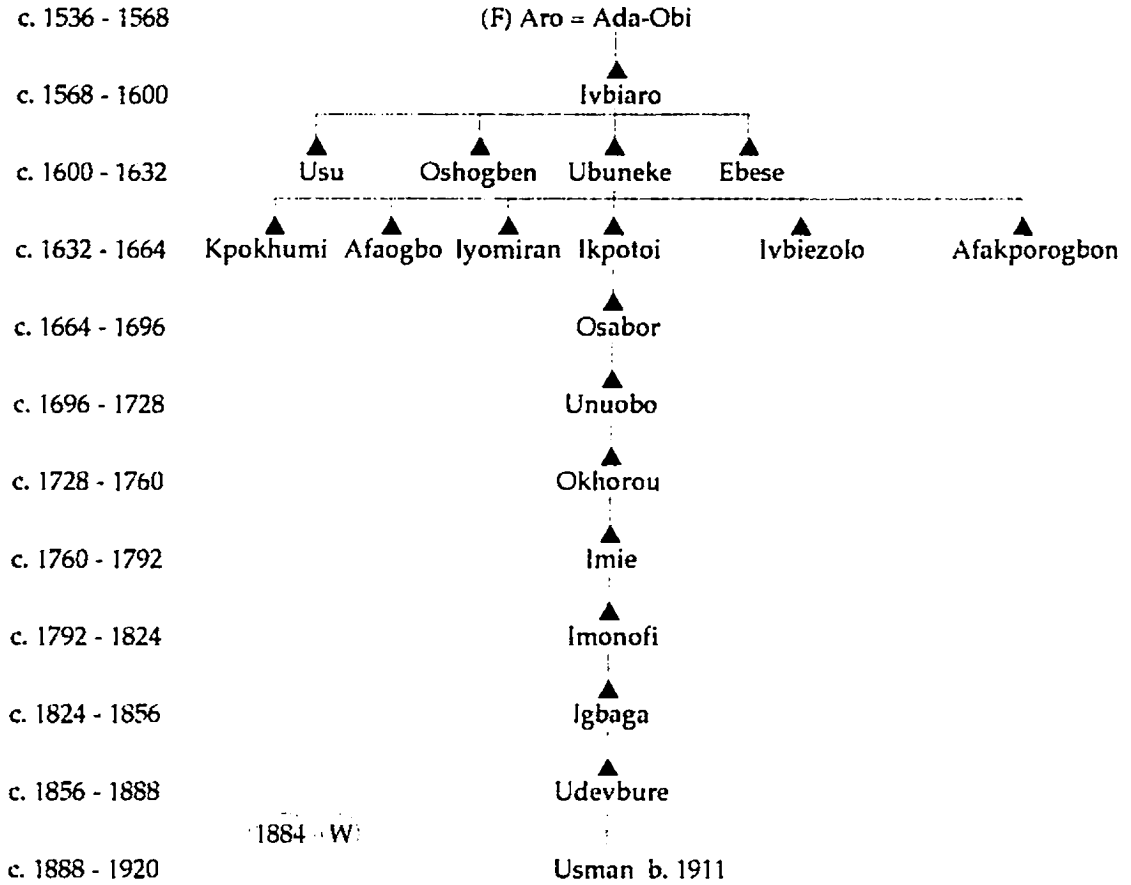
# Chart Six Ozalla Dating Chart



1830 W  
1879 W

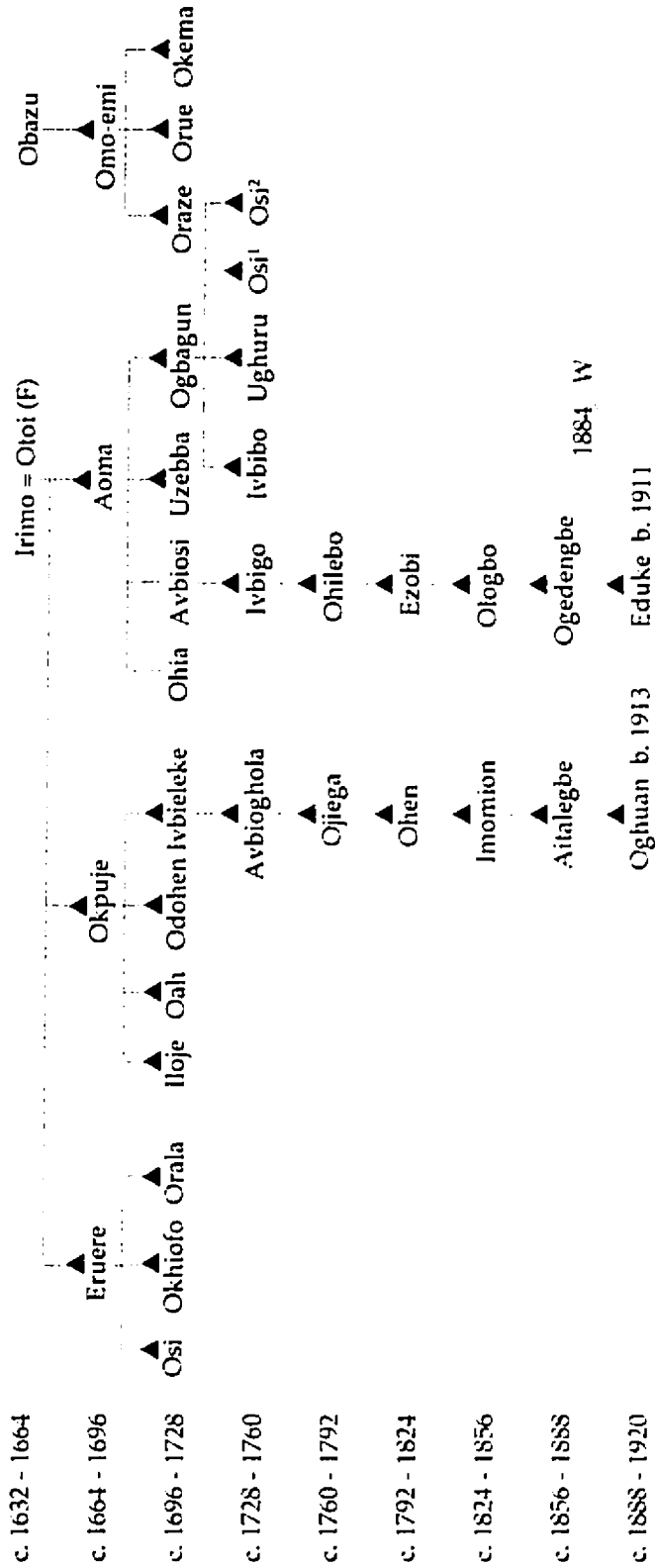
Legend	
▲	Male
(F)	Female
—	Known Relationship
c. 1632-1664	Calculated / Approximate Dates
1830	Fixed Date
W	War
==	Marriage
b. 1922	Born 1922

### Chart Seven Ivbiaro Dating Chart (Ivbi -ADa - Obi)



Legend	
▲	Male
(F)	Female
==	Marriage
-	Known Relationship
c. 1632-1664	Calculated / Approximate Dates
1884	Fixed Date
W	War
b. 1911	Born 1911

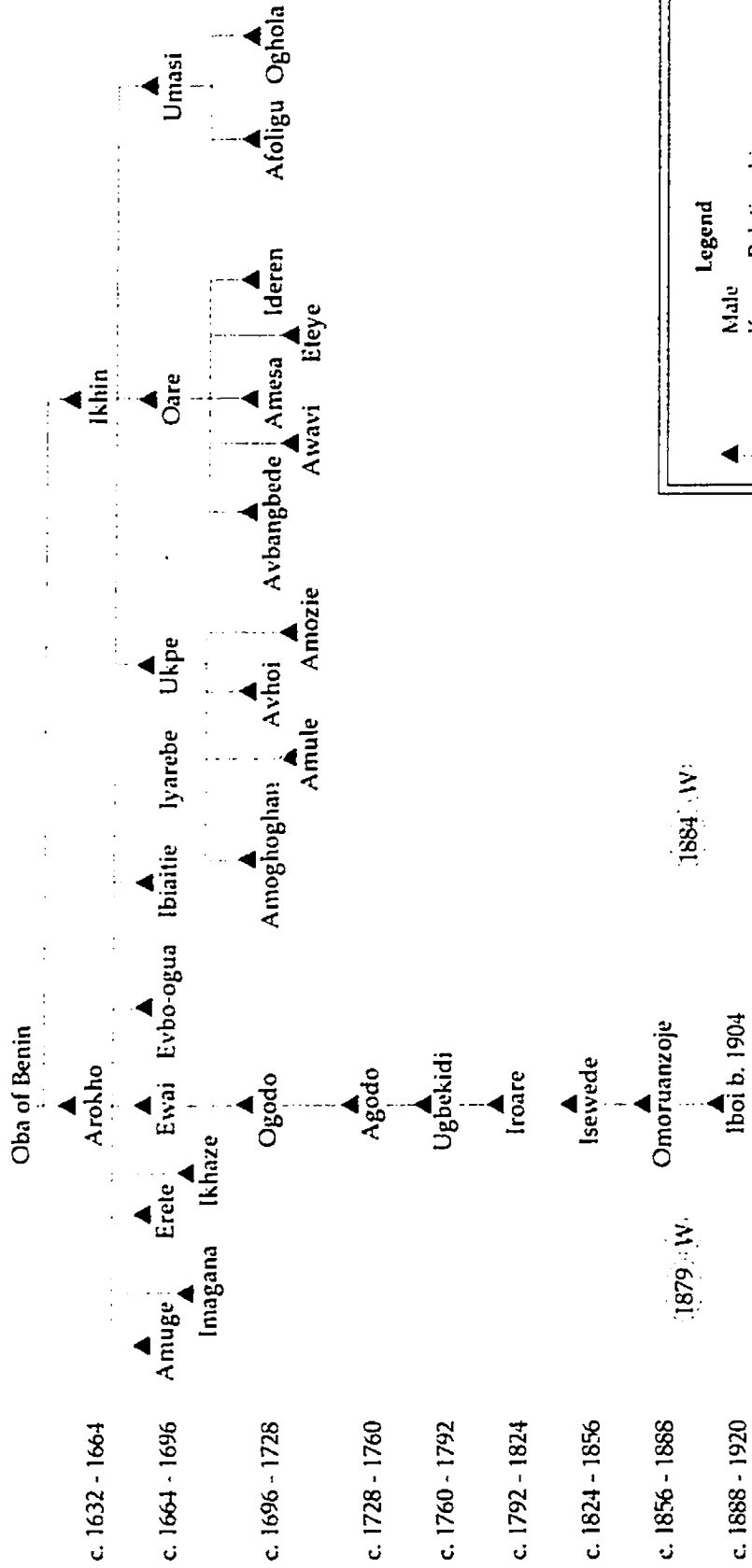
### Chart Eight Iuleha Dating Chart



**Legend**

- ▲ Male
- (F) Female
- Marriage
- W War
- 1884 Fixed Date
- c. 1632-1664 Calculated / Approximate Dates
- Known Relationship

## Chart Nine Arokho/Ikhin Dating Chart

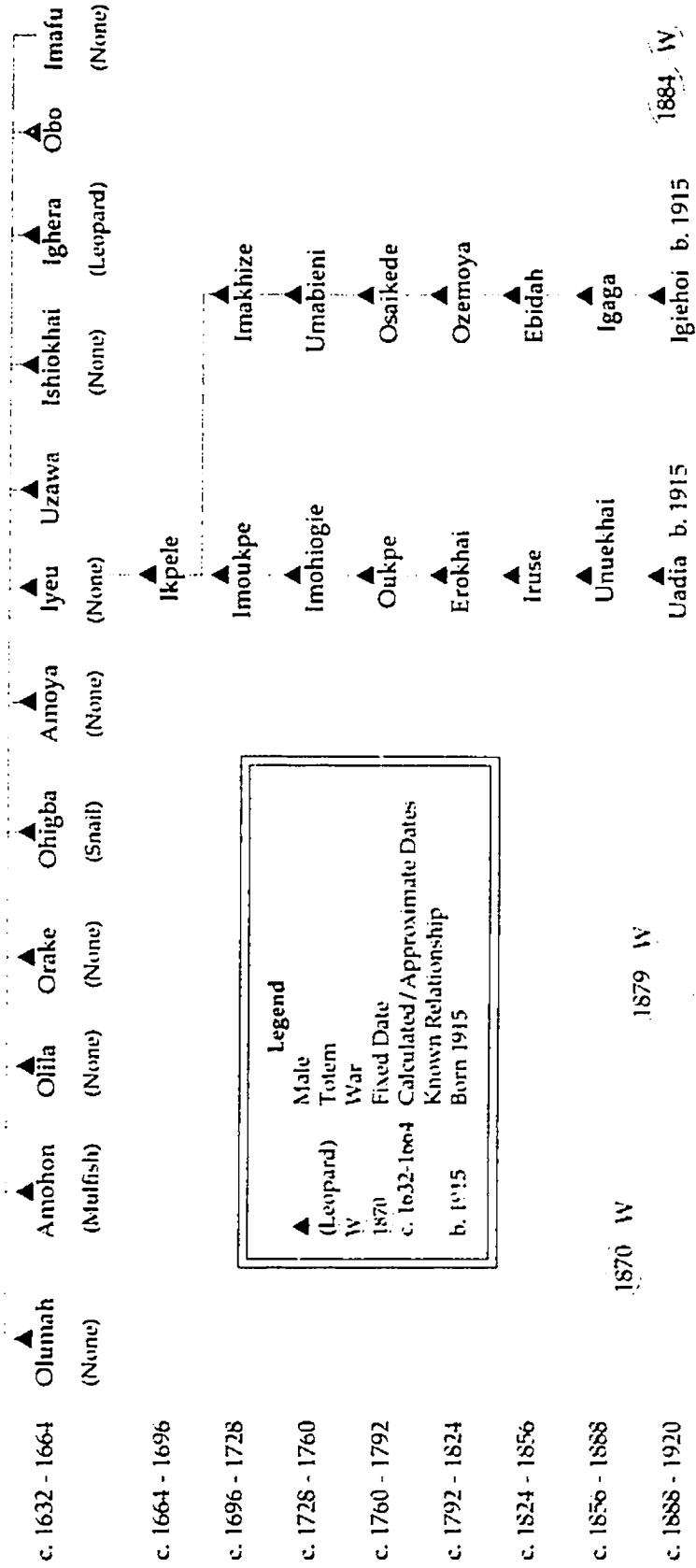


**Legend**

▲	Male
—	Known Relationship
---	Fixed Date
-.-	War
c.	Calculated / Approximate Dates
b.	Born

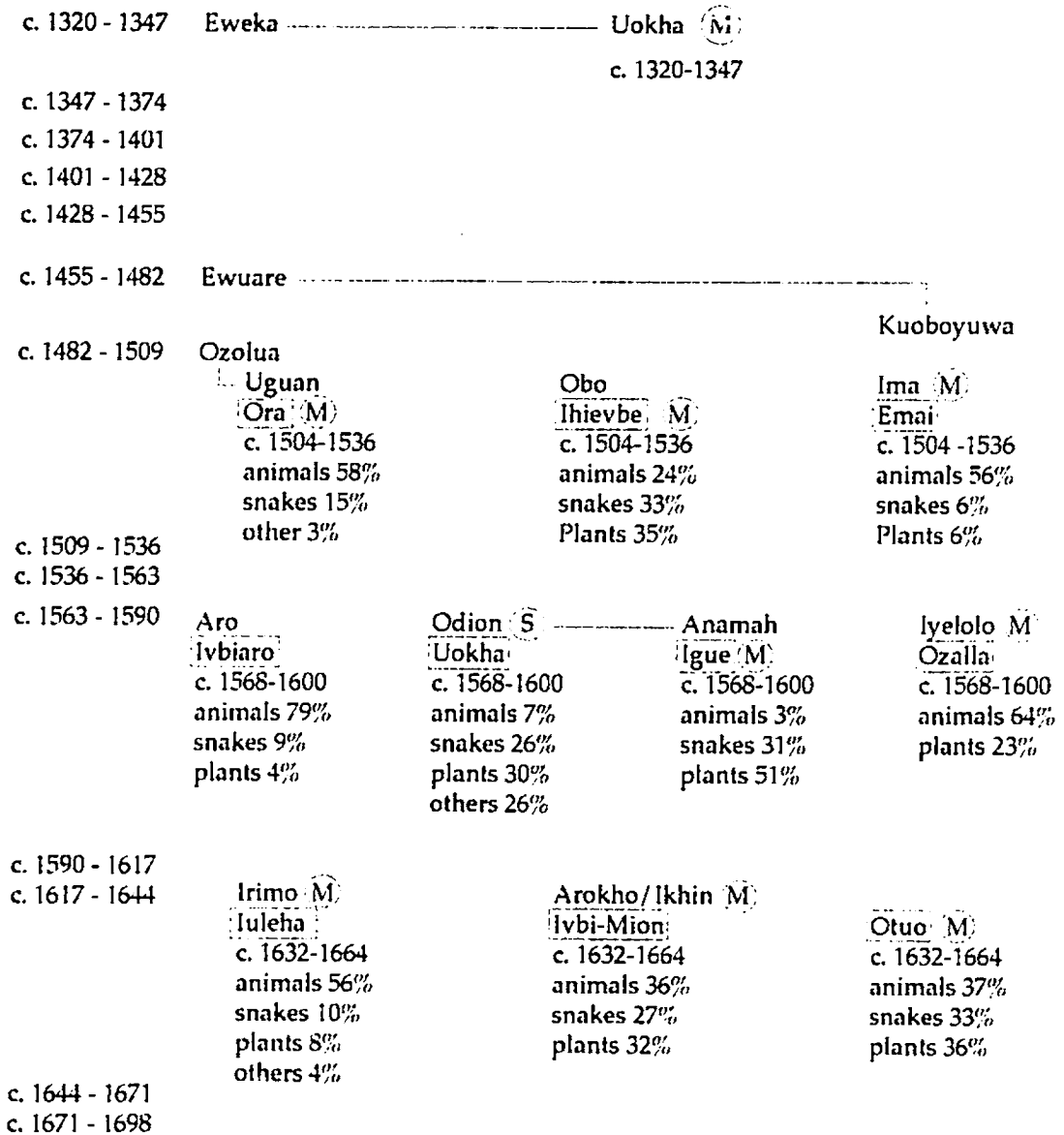
## Chart Ten Otuo Dating Chart

Left Benin settled at Ora before leaving for present site.



## Chart Eleven Owan Dating Progression

### Benin Regnal Generations



Legend	
Uokha	Community Name
(M)	Migration
(S)	Separation
Animals 7%	Percentage of Totems
c. 1632-1664	Calculated / Approximate Dates

## Chapter Three

### The Origins of the Owan People.

With the long historical relationships between the Benin kingdom and the Owan, today most average Owan indigenes point to Benin as their original home. As a result very little is said about the existence of an aboriginal population before Benin migrants moved into the area. Furthermore the traditions of origin which indicate migration from places other than Benin are currently not very popular. In order to test the more popular unilinear traditions of origin it is pertinent to employ the evolving methodology of totemism alongside narrative traditions.

According to Claude Levi-Strauss the word "totem" "is taken from the Ojibwa, an Algonquin language of the region to the north of the Great Lakes of northern America".<sup>1</sup> Specifically the word was derived from the expression ototeman which means "he is a relative of mine". Anthropologists and ethnographers of Africa have in the past collected totemic data in the continent. However D.W. Cohen became the first historian of Africa to use totems for historical analysis.<sup>2</sup> Drawing on Cohen's work in the interlacustrine region in East Africa, a number of historians have employed totems to reconstruct relationships in West African historiography,

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<sup>1</sup>Claude Levi-Strauss, Totemism, Boston, Beacon Press, 1963. p.18.

<sup>2</sup>D.W. Cohen, The Historical Tradition of Busoga: Mukama and Kintu, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1972.



particularly in the Benue Valley research scheme.<sup>3</sup> The most outstanding of these is Erim's work on Idoma nationality.<sup>4</sup> In the Benue Valley the leopard totem of Benin was employed as a marker and the only one for rule by Benin princes and trading settlements whether originated or latter dominated by Benin settlers.

Since a totem "is an animal, plant, or natural object which serves as an emblem of a clan or family by virtue of an asserted ancestral relationship",<sup>5</sup> it aids historical evaluation of kinship relations between groups. Additionally it helps to uncover political divisions and compromises which narrative traditions gloss over. The Benue Valley research added political totems to the original idea of totems as markers of biological relationships beyond the recall of oral narratives. The political totem often began as a royal totem to which all citizens gave reverence as a symbol of loyalty to the state. In Owan there were no states or royal families but nevertheless some communities or villages within the community possessed totems to which all citizens gave reverence. Normally the kinship unit in which inter-marriage is frowned upon is the village ward or quarter. Thus ward totems have been considered biological, while village and community totems

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<sup>3</sup>The historians include Ade Adefuye, E.O. Erim, R.A. Sargent, J. Orkar, J. Morrison, A.C. Unomah, and J.B. Webster.

<sup>4</sup>E.O. Erim, The Idoma Nationality 1600-1900...

<sup>5</sup>O.W. Ogbomo, "Precolonial History of the Owan People: A Research Agenda", in History in Africa, 18 (1991), p.317.

appear to be political. However what functions as a political totem for people in an entire village or community must be a biological or kinship totem for one ward at least. It is fascinating that while rejecting the structure of a state, many Owan communities sought their unity in the symbolism of totemism. They seem to possess royal totems without royal families. Community-wide totems contribute to the myth of a distant relationship of all the people living in the community. By this device political relations are converted into kinship terms, kinship, real or mythical being, the foundation of many acephalous communities.

An analysis of a restricted number of totems in Benin and Owan suggests three possible stages in totemic development. The earliest period (c.780-1075 A.D.) suggests an age of nature reverence where rocks, rivers and other natural phenomenon were believed to be the residence of perhaps unnamed spirits.<sup>6</sup> That age might have been contemporary with or earlier than the reverence for snakes and cults formed around them. Kinship totems did not exist. Cult totems such as boa, python and other snakes did operate. A snake cult was led by priests and priestesses, male or female, who believed their powers derived from snakes living in a selected spot. The priests might predict one's fortune and claimed to heal.

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<sup>6</sup>P.J. Darling referred to this period as the primary phase of Iya (moat or wall) building. See P.J. Darling, Archaeology and History in Southern Nigeria: The ancient linear earthworks of Benin and Ishan, Part I, Cambridge Monographs in African Archaeology 11, 1984. p.112.

Devotees of these priests became the members of the cult and they revered and protected the cultic snake, usually pythons or cobras. It is possible that priests and priestesses of some snake cults became so influential that they functioned as arbiters in disputes in the community.<sup>7</sup> With the decline of the cults and the growing popularity of ancestor and ancestress reverence and totems, the old priestly lineages adopted the python or cobra as their clan totem. Usually such totems were not held in combination with others.

The next phase (c.1130-1175) possibly witnessed the intrusion of a people who introduced the idea of plant totems. This incursion might be associated with the coming of the Ogiso chieftaincies and the rapid expansion of the great-wall building era throughout the Benin and Esan regions.<sup>8</sup> In the third phase (c.1300 onwards) animal totem groups came in and marked the establishment of new settlements and may be linked with the foundation of a new ruling house, the Eweka dynasty in Benin.<sup>9</sup> Additionally groups coming into Owan directly from Ife also seemed to revere animal totems. This potential and

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<sup>7</sup>Snake cults reached their peak among peoples of no totems or those revering plants. Frequently they are found in communities primarily devoted to plants.

<sup>8</sup>Darling called this period the secondary wall-building phase. It coincided with the period of the Ogiso dynasties and their multiple mini-kingdoms.

<sup>9</sup>According to Darling this was the tertiary wall-building phase which also witnessed the establishment of the Eweka dynasty. Following the tertiary phase was the period of other external additions which could be referred to as the era of Benin expansionism.

hypothetical periodization based upon totemic data provides a framework for the examination of the movement of human groups, establishment and growth of settlements in Owan.

On the basis of evidence elsewhere in Africa that early pre 1000 A.D. authority figures were often associated with snakes and non-totemic populations,<sup>10</sup> it seems likely that the 27% of the people of Benin and 16% of Owan who possessed no totems belonged to an indigenous strata.<sup>11</sup> To these might be added 6% in Benin and 20% in Owan who revered snakes. Taken together it has been assumed that 33% of the people of Benin and 36% in Owan descended from indigenes.<sup>12</sup> It seems likely that those who today revere the boa constrictor<sup>13</sup> might have

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<sup>10</sup>In Buganda one of the earliest authority figures, Bemba, was associated with a snake cult, the well-known snakes in Daura, Ngonde, Kwararafa and the Niger Delta.

<sup>11</sup>See Table Six. The writer collected data on the totemic observances of every ward, vilage and community in Owan except Ikao where research was not conducted. The total number of communities 10, villages 69 and wards 253. In Owan 569 totems were collected and classified as shown in table six. These were compared with a scattered collection of totems in Benin collected by N.W. Thomas and the only research conducted among the Edo on totemic observances.

<sup>12</sup>In analysing 321 place names - village, ward and community - in Owan 130 or 40% have no meaning in the modern spoken languages or Yoruba. This might confirm the 36% of the people identified from totemic evidence as indigenous. Depending upon the community, the distribution varies considerably from 21 to 63%. From time to time community percentages will be given in footnotes as "unknown place name meanings".

<sup>13</sup>The boa represents a group of South America serpents but the name "boa constrictor" is often given by the public to any large serpent of similar habit. Consequently the term in common speech includes the pythons in the tropical forests of Asia and Africa. On the West Coast of Africa they are venerated by certain people and are cared for in temples. See

converted their cult emblem into a totemic identification after totems became popular and widespread throughout society. Comparisons might be made with Buganda where the hero-ancestor, Kintu, of the lion-leopard totem led a migration which overthrew the indigenous figure, a so-called snake king or rather one who ruled by the authority of the python cult. According to tradition Kintu killed all the snakes in the area over which he extended his rule.<sup>14</sup> While the change-over in Buganda involved violence, in Ngonde<sup>15</sup> the indigenous snake cult priests co-operated with the incoming totemic king. Thus the snake cult declined in importance as the reverence of the king's ancestors grew but it continued to function into the colonial period.

Closer to Owan, kinship co-existed with Python cults in

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The New Educator Encyclopaedia, Toronto, General Press Service, 1952.

<sup>14</sup>In Apolo Kaggwa's The Kings of Buganda, Translated and edited by M.S.M. Kiwanuka, Nairobi, East African Publishing House, 1971, pp.5-7, narrative tradition explaining the overthrow of the Bemba "monarchy" by Kintu claimed Bemba was a snake. Clearly the existence of the snake cult points to the possibility that the Bemba monarchy represented the indigenous group who were overthrown by invaders represented by Kintu.

<sup>15</sup>O.J.M. Kalinga, A History of the Ngonde Kingdom, Berlin/New York, Mouton, 1985. The Ngonde Kingdom, located in what is today northern Malawi, presented a situation where the reigning monarch was in conflict with the snake cult priests. An incoming group said to have derived from the Lake Victoria region negotiated with the priests and overthrow the monarchy. Ultimately the new dynasty created a royal ancestor cult which was celebrated annually in the presence of the king. Annual gifts were sent by the king to the priests of the cult. But he never attended their ceremonies. The cult continued to exist in the early colonial period but faded out with the spread of Christianity.

the Niger Delta. Like the eastern Igbo, the people of the Niger Delta were not totemic. While the Eastern Igbo developed oracles, the Niger Delta people employed Python cults to regulate strife in society.<sup>16</sup> The indigenous people of Benin and Owan appeared to lean toward cults although oracles were also known. Presumably prior to the introduction of these institutions, the people revered natural features, caves, peculiar rock formations and streams. With the coming of oracles and snake cults, the shrines were located in or near these natural features, to associate and even combine the old beliefs with the new. Given that only 6% in Benin and 20% in Owan revere snakes - specifically the boa (python) - it seems plausible that these representatives of early authorities moved out of the more hierarchical Benin to the acephalous society in Owan. Many peoples who left Benin claim they departed because of tyrannical rulers. However most such as the Urhobo, Itsekiri, Isoko, Etsako and Esan re-created chiefs in their new homelands. The Owan people did not, suggesting their opposition was not only to evil chiefs but to the entire chiefly system.

The second phase witnessed the intrusion of a people who introduced the idea of plant totems. This has been associated with the coming of the Ogiso and the great wall building

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<sup>16</sup>Oracles located in caves, deep ravines or rocky areas, were not involved with any specific totems. They acted as judicial institutions. The most famous oracle, Arochukwu in Igbo land became perverted to support the slave trade. No such perversion occurred in Owan.

(c.1130-1175) which came with them. Worshippers of the python or other snakes probably had never eaten their cult reptile. So the various species of reptiles became kinship totems and in some cases newcomers and aboriginals adopted both a plant and the reptile as double totems. Thus for example in Uokha and Ihievbe the whole community respect the boa and a kind of bean, the former being derived from the cult and the bean from the totemic belief in a symbol which defined kinship or community. Plant totems seem to have been particularly associated with funerary rituals. They were offered to the dead, often thrown away or given to strangers or eaten by the family on that occasion only. In a survey by Thomas<sup>17</sup> in Benin it was shown that the totem plant was not used at all in ten cases, eaten by the family (36), thrown away (10), put to the mouth and then thrown away (6) or given to strangers in three cases. Consequently in a majority of cases the totemic plant was eaten by the family at the funeral of one of its members. This compares to animal totemic groups who slaughtered their totemic animal at funerals and when not available substituted a fowl. Since the totemic emblem carried the spirit of the family, it seemed that the spirit of the departed member should be accompanied to the after life by it.

Based on Bronislaw Malinowski's assertion that "Totemism appears thus as a blessing bestowed by religion on primitive

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<sup>17</sup>N.W. Thomas, "Totemism in Southern Nigeria", Anthropos X-XI, 1915-1916, pp.234-248.

man's efforts in dealing with his useful surrounding upon his "struggle for existence",<sup>18</sup> F.B Ataba<sup>19</sup> concluded that it could also serve conservation functions. Along the same line John E. Miller has suggested that plant totems have been mostly associated with people of the Sahel on the basis that they might have been designed to preserve the environment. Miller further explains that plants are far more common than animals as totems in the Sahel, while plant groups in the Benue Valley of Nigeria claimed a northern origin and many revered plants which did not exist in their present environment.<sup>20</sup> It is the writer's view that the conservation hypothesis of Malinowski is a recent interpretation by scholars like him and Miller. It is true that one of the outcomes of totemic observances has been the preservation of plant and animal species, however in Owan informants do not associate totems with concern for the environment. To them totems remain kinship symbols.

In the third stage animal totems were introduced with another wave of settlement. Animal totems have been associated with the dynasty in Benin. This would have been true totemism in that it carried the belief that the spirit of the departed

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<sup>18</sup>Bronislaw Malinowski, Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays, Gencoe, Illinois, The Free Press, 1948. p.29.

<sup>19</sup>F.A. Ataba, "Recent Developments in the use of Non-Documentary Evidence in African Historiography, with Special Reference to Totemism and Regional Chronology", M.A. Thesis, Dalhousie University, August, 1976. p.28.

<sup>20</sup>See John E. Miller "The Biu Plateau: Establishing a Chronology and Linkages Between Bura-Babur and Kwararafa", M.A Thesis Dalhousie University, Halifax, 1984. p.74.



kin lived in the specific animal, that a curse or sickness would follow should one kill, eat or fail to assist the kin animal. New animal totems might be combined with reverence for the boa, for example, or with a sacred plant. Numerous methods of adopting an animal totem were designed by those without totems or with only sacred plants, some of them involving taking a mother's or father's totems. Table six shows the percentage of people who hold to plant totems as 39% in Benin and 23% in Owan. These figures challenge the idea that the plant totem people moved away from Benin to escape the new intruders who revered animals. The aboriginals and plant totemic kin groups appeared to embrace 72% of the people in Benin. They were not overwhelmed by the animal totemic invaders. The only group which seemed to seek escape were the snake worshippers, implying that they might have held prestige and even authority in the early society, both of which were challenged by the coming of Eweka and the animal totem groups. Snake totems in modern times represent only 6% of the Benin totems but 20% of those in Owan. Furthermore the percentage of animal totems reaches 35% in Owan and only 22% in Benin. Oral tradition reports many migrations out of Benin as protests against abusive royal authority.<sup>21</sup> Owan totemic statistics would suggest that the animal groups - and snakes - resented

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<sup>21</sup>Esan, Etsako, Owan, Urhobo, Isoko and Itsekiri traditions claim they left Benin because of tyrannical rulers. Oba Ewuare reign is cited as the harshest in Benin history. See Egharevba, A Short History of Benin, p.15.

these more than non-totemic or plant totem people. In other words resentment against the monarchy became strongest among Owan animal totem followers and the authority figures of the earlier population.<sup>22</sup> The totemic distribution in Benin and Owan seems remarkably similar except for the snake group most of whom revere the boa (python). If the Eweka dynasty of the leopard totem replaced the authority of a snake ruling class functioning under the Ogiso chiefs of plant totems, the history of Benin would parallel that of Buganda, Ngonde and other places in Africa.<sup>23</sup>

The totemic distribution of Owan suggests that snake and plant totemic groups occupied the entire country before the onset of the invasions of the animal totems which began in the 1490's. The organisation of Uokha appears to come closest to that of the early people. By consensus Uokha<sup>24</sup> was the earliest community which possessed a high degree of cohesion, its three villages with eleven wards all worshipping at one shrine and respecting the three B's (boa, beans and beads). It can be assumed that this type of organisation was general

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<sup>22</sup>Totemic analysis is greatly hindered because we do not know the totem of those who claim descent from the Ogiso ruling groups in Benin. Certain villages in Benin still claim to be Ogiso in origin. An examination of totems in those villages would be most helpful.

<sup>23</sup>See footnotes 12 and 13 above.

<sup>24</sup>The traditions of origin of other communities recognise Uokha as the oldest settlement in the area. There are others who claim to have settled in Uokha after they left Benin. As a result there are claims of internal migration within Owan.

among the indigenous population. It seems likely that Uokha is ancient even though its narrative tradition might derive from the arrival of its three animal totem clans c.1320-1347. Preserving genealogies and oral narratives about history appear to have been attributes of the animal totem groups and the Eweka dynasty. At least recorded oral tradition started in Owan with the intrusion of descendants of the dynasty.

Other indigenous people have been incorporated into neighbouring communities. The village of Warrake in Ivbi-Ada-Obi community is organised much in the Uokha fashion. It has beads as its village totem - typical totem of the indigenous people - and nine of its twelve wards have no unique totem other than the village bead totem. One ward reveres a plant which is also indigenous. Only two wards respect animals. This is typical Uokha-type totemic organisation. The other five villages in Ivbi-Ada-Obi community are overwhelmingly dominated by animal totems, each of their wards having its own distinct one.<sup>25</sup> Finally the shrine which caters to the entire group commemorates a supernatural figure or deity who descended from the sky to earth to marry a human being. This is also a symbol of antiquity.<sup>26</sup> The founder did not migrate

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<sup>25</sup>The unknown place name meanings confirm the difference, being 53-53% in Uokha and Warrake and dropping to 38% among the other five villages dominated by animal totems.

<sup>26</sup>Wherever such a myth of creation is found it invariably indicates the existence of an aboriginal population before settlers moved into the area. See O.W. Ogbomo, "Oza-nogogo: A Peripheral Edo Community" in Nigeria Magazine, Vol.57 Nos. 3 & 4 Jul-Dec, 1989, p.89.

from somewhere. Other possible villages organised in the indigenous fashion are scattered in other communities. They include:

1. Igue: In Ugbekpe village, all five wards respect the boa and bean. In Oviosa village all three wards have no unique totem. They respect only the bean totem of the entire community.
2. Otuo: Ure village of five wards have no unique totem but respect only groundnuts and the boa common to the community.
3. Ihievbe: Three villages of one ward each have no unique totem and revere only the boa and beans of the clan group or community.
4. Evbo-Omion: The Ake village group of four villages who respect the boa and beans, whose shrines bear the same names as Uokha and whose totems are mostly plants.
5. Ozalla: The village of Uwiara whose three wards have the same plant totems.<sup>27</sup>

It cannot be assumed that the indigenous villages have been in their present location since the earliest times. Migration of animal totems into the central region of Owan seems to have swept it fairly clean of plant and snake totems. The plant totemic groups either adopted animal totems, dropped their totems altogether or moved to the north where plant and snake groups remained powerful and numerous or moved to the south, plant groups into Ozalla, snake totems into Ora. Unfortunately the oral narratives about the indigenous people or earliest migrants are almost non-existent to confirm these totemic suggestions. The relationship between plants and snake

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<sup>27</sup>This information were compiled from the Owan Historical Texts collected by the author.

totems and the aboriginals rests entirely upon the supernatural myth in Ivbi-Ada-Obi.

Around 1500 the first animal totem migrations came into Owan.<sup>28</sup> These were the communities later known as Ora and Ihievbe and Emai. Ora was led by a prince of the main royal line in Benin, Ihievbe and Emai by royals of junior lineages. Ora-Ekpen, his children and grandsons of Prince Uguan went about the organisation of Ora as if they intended to create a chiefdom. The leopard became the totem of the community which comprised six villages divided into thirty wards. The shrine to Ora-Ekpen, the founder, was unique in Owan. No plant totems were tolerated and the snake totems were grouped in one village. Consequently Ora became the animal-totem community par excellence, only rivalled by Emai. While Ora has thirty four animal and no plant totems, Emai has ten animal and just one plant totem and Ihievbe has thirteen animal and eight plant totems. At this juncture it is important to consider the different narrative traditions vis-a-vis totemic observances with some references to shrine traditions as a means of seeking to determine the ethnic composition of the migrants who moved into the Owan area.

#### Uokha:

The earliest of the Owan settlements, by consensus of the

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<sup>28</sup>This was the period of the foundation of Ora, Ihievbe and Emai communities by Prince Uguan, Obo and Ima respectively. From the genealogical tree of the three communities, the generation was c.1504-1536.

people themselves and the other Owan clans, was Uokha. They claim to have left Benin at the time of Oba Eweka I c.1320-1347.<sup>29</sup> The establishment of the dynasty under Eweka I was followed by a period of relative peace. As such there were no radical changes to the social and political structure of the Benin kingdom. Sargent concluded that "although personalities had changed there had not been any effective alteration in the style, demands or intercurative power relations in the new administration"<sup>30</sup> However Egharevba explains that "Omorodion's (Odion's) claim to the crown after the death of their father was passed over. He, in consequence, left Benin city in anger, with his family and followers, and became the founder of Uwokha [Uokha] in Ivbiosakon [Owan]"<sup>31</sup> Uokha narrative tradition has it that Odion was the eldest of two brothers. The youngest was named Omo. Odion was said to be a very hard working farmer who spent most of his time in the farm. At the death of their father Eweka, Omo succeeded to throne. When Odion came back he was infuriated at the development. He left Benin for Uokha after seizing Omo's Ada, the state sword.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>O.H.T #92 Interview with Mr. J. Ohiochioya Afeinkhena, (66), Uokha, November 6, 1990. O. H. T. #94 Interview with Pa. Akharumen Amaize, (85), Uokha, November 8, 1990.

<sup>30</sup>R.A Sargent, "Politics and Economics in the Benue Basin c.1300-1700", Ph.D Thesis Dalhousie University, 1984, p.57

<sup>31</sup>J.U. Egharevba, A Short History of Benin, Ibadan, Ibadan University Press, 1968, p.85.

<sup>32</sup>O.H.T. #92, O.H.T. #94, O.H.T. #96 Interview with Chief Edegbai Esezobo, (80), Uokha, November 9, 1990, O.H.T. #98 Interview with Chief Ikhianvode J. Ogboro, (90), Mr. Ikpekhai

Uokha people were unable to prove this general claim with a genealogical tree stretching back to anywhere near c.1320-1347. However as already shown Egharevba confirms the tradition. The founder has been called Odion which probably refers to his title. Many other Owan groups over the centuries left Benin and sojourned in Uokha before migrating to their present areas of settlement.<sup>33</sup>

Uokha is located in the north-central region of Owan. The community land is situated on the top of the ridge dividing the head waters of the Owan and Edion rivers.<sup>34</sup> Mostly the environs are open savannah, with some out-crops of granite on the eastern border. In the south-western section of Uokha lies the Utete hills. Uokha also possessed an important priesthood, associated with the name of Akpwewuma, likely a title too. Akpwewuma and his brother Uvbie (Ovie) were said to be living in Use, in Ondo State, as traditional doctors. In search of a place to practice his trade, Uvbie left for Benin. For unruly behaviour Uvbie was later thrown out of Benin. He then sought refuge with Odion in Uokha. Odion readily accepted Uvbie because they had known each other in Benin. Not long after, Akpwewuma left Use in search of Uvbie in Benin where he was

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Evbotokhai, (80), Uokha, November 15, 1990. See also Ohokhokai, "Owan and the Benin Kingdom..."

<sup>33</sup>Oral tradition of other communities such as Ora, Iuleha and Igue claim they settled temporarily in Uokha.

<sup>34</sup>Marshall, Part V, p.2.

told his brother had migrated with his family to Uokha.<sup>35</sup> Consequently Akpwewuma left Benin for Uokha where he met both Uvbie and Odion. Akpwewuma was also accepted by Odion. Another version states that Akpwewuma was a mad priest who left Ife for Benin. He later migrated to Uokha. This account contends that Uvbie who founded the village of Evbuvbie was Akpwewuma's son.<sup>36</sup> Other Owan groups occasionally note this priest in their sojourns in Uokha. For instance Ora's tradition claims Prince Uguan married Akpwewuma's daughter who bore him a son, Erhae-Ekpen, while Irimo, the founder of Iuleha was said to have been his follower.

As noted earlier, animal totems are associated with the Eweka dynasty, the leopard being the royal emblem. The indigenous people of the Benin region probably revered snakes particularly the boa. The Ogiso era was associated with plant totems and were strongly matriarchal. Matriarchal<sup>37</sup> peoples appear to have been less inclined to maintain genealogical information. This might explain the limited references to female genealogies in Owan. The coming of the animal totems

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<sup>35</sup>O.H.T. #92, O.H.T. #101 Interview with Mr. Sdney Isaiah Imohin, (80), Uokha, November 18, 1990.

<sup>36</sup>All my informants in Uokha agreed that Evbuvbie village was founded by Uvbie. To them this is why no elder from the village can be the community head of Uokha. However they do not know if Uvbie was a friend, brother or son to Akpwewuma.

<sup>37</sup>In chapter four a detailed definition of matriarchy as used in this study will be offered as it applies to Owan. Let it be noted that matriarchy does not mean female rulers, any more than patriarchy means male rulers because the Owan communities were chiefless.



into Benin strengthened patriarchy and the preservation of genealogies.

It seems possible that Uokha originally was a mixture of indigenous (the boa totem) and people of the Ogiso (the bean) period who moved away from Benin to escape the spreading fashion of animal totems and patriarchy.<sup>38</sup> The evidence for this comes from the modern organisation of Uokha. In Uokha and Owan generally the quarters normally represented extended families within which inter-marriage was not tolerated. Therefore usually people of a quarter revere the same totem. However in Uokha eight quarters out of eleven scattered in three villages had no unique totems. Thus matrilocal marriages were possible since a man might move from his natal ward to his new wife's without violating any totemic law. Where villages possessed unique totems, as in Ora, this could not occur. A man from the Goat village could not move into his wife's Termite village. It had to be the other way around. Thus totemism tended to promote patrilineal and patrilocal social organisation.<sup>39</sup> Only three quarters were strangers to

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<sup>38</sup>Although Uokha narrative tradition claims they migrated from Benin during the Eweka period (animal totems), the community totems point to an earlier phase, the Ogiso period (c.1130-1175).

<sup>39</sup>In the strongest matrilocal and matrilineal societies in Africa - parts of Malawi, Zambia and Mozambique - totemism did not exist. The coming of totems seemed to promote patriarchy because a man's totem was inherited by his children, and it became the man's ancestors who were revered and who inhabited the totem. Among the Edo, Thomas suggests women's totems were also revered but that there was much confusion over the issue. It is possible that the widespread use of dual and multiple

Uokha, two animal quarters and one revering an oblong squash or egg plant called garden egg. It might be assumed that the influence of these stranger quarters gradually over the centuries converted the Uokha community to patrilineal and patrilocal concepts of organisation. The distribution of Uokha totems are as follows:

<u>Totems of Uokha Community</u>	<u>Shrines</u>
Ikpin (boa), Ihie (type of bean) Ivie (beads)	Oisa and Oron goddess

1. Amienkhon Village and its Quarters
  - a. Izaken: No unique totem
  - b. Okhilogba: bushbuck, rabbit
  - c. Idatto: leopard
  - d. Abada: Not Known (no unique totem)
  - e. Evbuvbie: No unique totem
2. Evburuye Village and its Quarters
  - a. Agbara: big garden egg
  - b. Ivbieguomi: No totem
  - c. Ivbiokho: " "
3. Ekheremi Village and its Quarters
  - a. Amuvbie: No totem
  - b. Ivbiogulu: " "
  - c. Ifesa: " "

These stranger groups probably inter-married and stayed behind in Uokha. When later groups came out of Benin, they settled temporarily in Uokha before moving on to colonize other areas in Owan.<sup>40</sup> The Bushbuck-Rabbit, Leopard and Garden Egg supposedly represent remnants of these sojourners. In

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totems - 44% against 27% single totems, [See Table One] - arose from the widespread use of both male and female totems in the early years as patriarchy challenged matriarchy.

<sup>40</sup>Ora, Iuleha, Igue and Ake traditions of origin claim they first settled in Uokha before they moved out to found their different settlements.

order to assimilate into Uokha these three stranger group had to revere the three B's as well as their own totems. The three B's therefore represented biological totems to eight quarters and political totems to three. In the case of Evbuvbie (Uvbie's village), the lack of a unique totem could be explained by the fact that Odion gave both Uvbie and Akpwewuma land to settle. As stranger elements from Yorubaland, they adopted the Uokha three B's as political totems. In essence they opted for political and social accommodation within Uokha community. Coming from the Yoruba of Ondo, Uvbie possibly had been from a matrilineal - matriarchal society.<sup>41</sup>

The community was further united in worship at two shrines, to a god, Oisa and a goddess, Oron. The existence of a goddess further enhances the evidence of early matriarchy/matrilineality in the area. Uokha might be seen as the model of Ogiso organisation in Benin prior to the Eweka dynasty. Since all clans everywhere in Africa have some aliens within them, the Uokha community is probably as pure biologically as any. Alone among the Owan groups, it comes closest to being a biological clan rather than a community.

All that Uokha people can remember about Oisa, is that he was their father. They do not remember how he came into

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<sup>41</sup>Ondo has been shown to have been a matriarchal society in the distant past before males took over political offices in the kingdom. See 'Biodun Adediran, "Women, Rituals and Politics in Pre-colonial Yorubaland", A Paper presented at the Faculty/Graduate Seminar, Department of History, Dalhousie University, Halifax, November 27, 1992. pp.10-13.

existence nor does their genealogical tree stretch back to him. Afeninkhena reports that Oisa is "the great father of gods, men, and rulers"<sup>42</sup> in Uokha. Three months in every year the inhabitants of Uokha celebrate the Oisa festival. During its observance the secrets of the shrine are kept away from women and children. Oron was Odion's wife. It was said she came to Uokha from Benin with a shrine at which she worshipped throughout her lifetime.<sup>43</sup> Following her death the shrine was named after her. This marked her deification as mother of the clan. The people of Uokha celebrate the Oron festival annually in the month of November. To Uokha men and women Oron protected them from any form of danger or evil. They also rely on Her to ensure good agricultural yields. During the festival, the people give thanks to Her for the abundance bestowed on them. Moreover the populace ask for continuous protection and assistance. Unlike the Oisa celebration, both males and females participated. In fact a male priest now looks after the Oron shrine. Clearly veneration of gods and goddesses indicate the powerful position the individual occupied during his or her life time. Parallels exist between

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<sup>42</sup>J.O Afeninkhena, The First History of Uokha-Ivbiosakon, Ifon, Ajipadola Press, 1966, p.16.

<sup>43</sup>O.H.T. #95 Interview with Mr. Ogbeide J. Jegede, (76), Uokha, November 8, 1990, O.H.T. #102 Interview with Madam Esther Imohin, (70), Madam Makanju Ogunleye, (68), Uokha, November 18, 1990. See also M.B. Jegede, "The Role of Music in Oron Festival of Uokha in Owan Local Government Area of Bendel State", N.C.E. Project Essay, Department of Vocational and Technical Education, Bendel State University, Abraka Campus, Abraka, 1987.

Oisa and Oron on one hand and the Yoruba, Sango and Oya on the other. Sango and Oya were husband and wife, and a god and goddess.<sup>44</sup> By tradition Sango was the founder of the Yoruba Kingdom of Oyo back to which the royal genealogy stretches.

The most likely interpretation of the shrines and festivals in Uokha suggests that the mother of the community came long before its foundation as recorded by oral narrative. Presumably Uokha was founded upon matrilineal and matrilocal if not matriarchal principles. Oron therefore formed the oldest of the deities and her worship had been conducted by women and mostly for women but with male participation. With the spread of patriarchy, possibly before but certainly after Eweka of Benin, the god Oisa was invented and maintained as a secret particularly from the women. Under the new creeping patriarchal influences the symbolism of marriage between two individuals who may have lived 500 to 1000 years apart brought unity to the religious ideology, strengthened ideas of the male as head of the household and became an instrument of control. It is this kind of myth or legend Joan Bamberger<sup>45</sup> argues feminist must watch out for. Additionally men took over from women the control of the Oron shrine to perpetuate patriarchal doctrine. Sheer manipulation of the religious

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<sup>44</sup>See Judith Gleason, Oya: In Praise of the Goddess, Boston, Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1987. p.107.

<sup>45</sup>Joan Bamberger, "The Myth of Matriarchy: Why Men rule in Primitive Society", in M.Z. Rosaldo & L. Lamphere, (eds.) Woman, Culture and Society, Stanford University Press, 1974. pp.263-280.

ideology gradually came to suggest that Oisa the god came first, when, from where and why, being questions best left unanswered. Then arrived the goddess from Benin, who is pictured as a mere woman who worshipped at a shrine to some unknown deity. After her death, the shrine became named after her and the people - males and females - begin to patronize it. The religious tradition seems to have been purposely confused and illogical and unlike secular traditions better not challenged or questioned. The more mysterious, the more powerful a religious tradition becomes.

As noted most other Owan communities sojourned in Uokha. The cohesion of the Uokha is demonstrated by this. These temporary sojourners left little imprint. The Ora clan group of animal totems exclusively became the first to settle temporarily in Uokha. Later the Igue clan group passed through. It appeared most like Uokha in social organisation and seemed more related to the Ogiso people. Ora and Igue stood at the extremes of the Owan peoples if one considers the Uokha community as unique. The Ake people in Evbo-mion community also record a tradition of settling in Uokha after leaving Benin.

**Ora:**

Almost 200 years after the departure of the Uokha people, another group left Benin. While the Uokha represented the conquered Ogiso people, Ora emerged from the political establishment of the kingdom. Ora formed a community, a

cluster of six villages and numerous wards or quarters. The founder of Ora was Prince Uguan c.1504-1536,<sup>46</sup> the son of Oba Ozolua who led Benin during a period of great crisis, expansion and dispersal of people. If Uokha represents the pre-Eweka political organisation, Ora seems to be a replica of dynastic Benin as it had been organised around 1500.

Ugvan obviously sought to create a miniature chiefdom in Ora after his sojourn in Uokha where he married the daughter of Akpewuma. Ugvan created the leopard as the "national" totem and a shrine to the leopard for all the citizens of Ora. He had been a prince of Benin and the leopard had been the royal emblem of that kingdom. The traditions suggest that when Ugvan had been expelled from Benin, he had turned against the leopard. However when his wife had difficulty in birth, a diviner insisted that the father return to his totemic emblem. He did. The son was named Erhae-Ekpen (Ora-Ekpen), the "fiery leopard". The "fiery leopard" had numerous sons who according to the community charter founded the six villages which together made up the Ora community. Since every one of the thirty quarters of Ora revere the leopard, it became the supreme example of a political totem. It does not mean that all the people of Ora descended from the fiery leopard.

Ora-Ekpen married six wives according to tradition and

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<sup>46</sup>This date has been determined by generation dating of Ora genealogies which fit into the generation of the sons of Oba Ozolua as dated by R.A. Sargent, "Politics and Economics in the Benue Basin c.1300-1700", Ph.D Thesis, Dalhousie University, 1984.

the six villages of Ora descended from their sons.<sup>47</sup> The six villages are listed in Ora in the order of their seniority on the assumption that the oldest descended from the first son, and the sixth from the youngest. However a substantial body of evidence challenges this tradition of the community charter.<sup>48</sup> It will be assumed that the order of seniority does reflect the age of the villages, that Ohia the most senior had been founded before the others and that Eme-Ora had been established last. The evidence suggests that all six had been in existence prior to Ora-Ekpen, the fiery leopard since the tradition suggests that his father, Prince Uguan had died on the migration and prior to their arrival in Ora. The shrine traditions to be analysed in the next chapter strongly imply that the youngest village, Eme-Ora had been under female leadership and in existence prior to the royal immigrants. Another tradition makes a similar statement for the fourth village, Uhonmora. Furthermore the Otuo tradition suggests that Prince Uguan led twelve age grades<sup>49</sup> out of Benin, and these still possessed a corporate spirit when they pulled out of Ora from c.1632-1664 and migrated to Otuo in protest

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<sup>47</sup>.Marshall, Part II, p.5. All informants interviewed in Ora confirmed this information.

<sup>48</sup>Primarily the genealogies do not confirm the community charters. The so-called oldest villages do not have the longest genealogies. Furthermore, if the villages descended from sons they should have the same totems. They rarely do.

<sup>49</sup>In Otuo the twelve age sets give rise to twelve villages which informants now say are grouped into six village groups (two in each group). Note the number six both in Ora and Otuo.



against political developments. It becomes further significant that six totemic clans - and only six - in Ora became strangers or incoming migrants from Benin suggesting that the age grades so-called might have been comprised of single clans or kinship groups. Additionally the most senior village, Ohia, was an exclusive Boa clan village, usually identified as the cult snake under female leadership. Finally the unknown place names meanings decrease from 60% in Ohia to 44% in Uhonmora the fourth village to 10% in Eme-Ora the last settled.<sup>50</sup> It seems logical to assume that unknown meanings should increase as one goes back in time. And they do.

Of the six, all but one possess village totems. It will be assumed that these pre-existed the royal arrivals, and that each village consisted of one clan as frequently occurs in Igbo villages, often the proto-type of acephalous organisation. This is not to suggest that the population was Igbo or Igbo-speaking, but merely that the villages were organised on the principle of one clan, one settlement. As the following table shows these village totems would therefore represent those of the pre-leopard migration.

Table One  
Ora Totems, Wards and Immigrant Wards

Villages by Seniority	Totem & Number of Wards	Number of Immigrant Wards
1. Ohia	Boa & Ovbe snake 4	0

<sup>50</sup>All place names have been analysed in the Owan Historical Text (oral interviews) as to their meaning.

2. Ovbiokhuain	Bushcat 1	0
3. Evbiobe	Queen Termite 3	2
4. Uhonmora	Grasscutter 4	4
5. Oke-Ora	No Village Totem 2	1
6. Eme-Ora	Goat 5	5

It might be significant that not one of the totems in this table is replicated in Otuo. The quarrel remained one among the immigrants in Ora. The table also shows the new wards established in the villages by Benin immigrants. As noted they represented six totemic clans: five Bushbuck wards<sup>51</sup> in four villages, three Tortoise in one, two Dogs in one, and one Antelope, Grasshopper and Leopard each in one village. Three of the latter totemic group are also located in Otuo: four Bushbuck wards in three villages, seven Leopard in four and one Antelope in one village.

The single leopard ward in Ora needs some explanation. Where there is both community and village totems, wards with their own unique one revere three. However wards which claim no unique totem still possess two. Given that informants do not distinguish between political and kinship totems since their community charter seeks to portray them as kin, the problem becomes severe. For example in Eme-Ora five wards claim no unique totem except the community leopard and village goat. One cannot be absolutely sure which fall in this category. One ward in Eme-Ora, Ivbiojekpen meaning "children

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<sup>51</sup>Bushbuck is also called deer by Owan informants.

of the leopard" is the one case which appears to have been proven. Furthermore in that same village, Eme-Ora, there is a distinct tradition - the only such one - linking a son of the fiery leopard called Uguanroba or "Uguan the King" as the husband of Ome, the female leader of Eme-Ora. There is a shrine to him signifying a tribute to his unsuccessful efforts to carry patriarchy to chiefly status, as will be further discussed in the next chapter. When that failed and Ora turned to Ife for titles c.1568-1620, the totemic evidence suggests a large exodus of the Leopard clan to Otuo as the seven Leopard wards in Otuo indicates. Nevertheless the leopard became the community totem of Ora, binding together the six separate villages which previously had possessed neither unity nor a symbol of it.

There remains the problem of the fifth village, Oke-Ora which according to R.E. Bradbury once consisted of two wards but had been swelled to four as a consequence of Esan strangers. The present writer was given only two wards, Igbale and the ward group, Ivbiore, as Bradbury called it. According to him:

In Oke village, ... there are now four wards, Igbale, Osi, Okpokumu, and Okpotole. Originally there were only two, Igbale and Osi, but the latter was later joined by the founders of the remaining two [Okpokumu and Okpotole] who came from Ishan [Esan]. Osi, Okpokumu, and Okpotole now form a ward group Ivbiebiolue [Ivbiore].<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>R.E. Bradbury, The Benin Kingdom and Edo Speaking Peoples of South-Weastern Nigeria, London, International African Institute, 1964. p.93.

In the ward group of Ivbiore, two totems exist, the female sheep and the more traditional bushbuck probably the totem of the Esan migrants. Bushbuck was also one of those totem groups which followed Prince Uguan and settled with the fiery leopard. The other ward, Igbale revered the grasshopper. Presumably this had been the original village totem, one not replicated in Otuo.

Thus Ora becomes a community united by reverence for the leopard. It contains four major and early settling clans: Goat (5 wards), Boa (4 wards), Grasscutter (4 wards) and Termite (3 wards).<sup>53</sup> These are politically powerful clans whose totems require respect by others who live in the villages. It seems clear that these four, who also descend from the pre-leopard migration, were powerful enough in c.1600 to command respect and political compromise. Major clans in terms of numbers include the five Bushbuck wards scattered in four villages, and the three tortoise wards concentrated in one settlement. Minor clans include the Dog concentrated in two wards in one village and the Antelope in one ward. The major clans represent the earliest, the minor, those who came with the prince from Benin. Presumably the immigrants had been much more numerous before the flight of significant numbers of them to Otuo. Presently they form a minority claiming thirteen wards out of thirty. When the wards have been divided in this

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<sup>53</sup>These totemic data are contained in Owan Historical Text collected by the present writer.

fashion it becomes significant that eleven of the thirteen place names without meanings in the modern language belongs to them. Almost all of those coming out of Benin c.1500 have names with clear and easy to decipher meanings.

Ora is far more typical of the Owan communities than Uokha. That presumably arises because all except Uokha came out of Benin after the Eweka dynasty had firmly established its influence. Uokha stands as an example of pre-Eweka Benin, Ora of the Eweka establishment. Uokha formed a single community, Ora a group of villages. Uokha represented snakes and plants of indigenous organisation; Ora became dominated exclusively by animals and their type of organisation. Uokha remained small scale; Ora demonstrating how a larger scale organisation might operate even without hereditary leadership. The community charter creates the myth of distant biological relatedness where all villages descend from the children of one founder. The analysis of the totemic data suggests that partly this is true and partly it reflects how society assimilates stranger elements.

**Igue:**

Shortly after the departure of Prince Ugwan and his Ora followers from Uokha the Igue clan group led by Anamah c.1568-1600 left Benin. Anamah was of the Bean totem group, most of his followers revered snakes or plants and therefore he appeared to represent a combination of the aboriginal and Ogiso people. By tradition Anamah had been sent by an Oba of

Benin (possibly Oba Ehegbuda c.1563-1590) by genealogical calculations, to secure sacrificial victims for royal celebrations. Up to 1892 Igue sent to Benin two or three slaves every three years.<sup>54</sup> When he initially settled in Uokha, Anamah attempted to seduce one of Odion's wives.<sup>55</sup> By doing so he may have successfully drawn away some of Odion's followers, since the boa and bean were prominent totems in Uokha and Igue. In any case Anamah moved up north and settled in modern Igue. This would have been about the same generation c.1568-1600 in which Ora-Ekpen's sons were establishing themselves in the villages of Ora. According to tradition Anamah had four sons who founded the four villages of Igue. The evidence suggests that only one - Oviosa - was founded this way while the other three were villages of strangers, possibly established much later. According to the genealogies [see genealogical chart five] Onegah the Leopard village was founded c.1696-1728, the Boa Village Ugbekpe c.1728-1760 and the Porcupine Village - Oreva - later yet.

The Igue Community: Villages and Wards - Bean Totem

1. Oviosa Village: Bean Totem: Male Shrine, c.1568-1600
  - Related Wards: No unique totems
    - a. Afokha
    - b. Afozo
    - c. Afiye

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<sup>54</sup>Military Governor's Office, Investigation into the Role of Chiefs in the Midwestern State: Divisional report in Respect of Owan Division, November, 1971. pp.49-50.

<sup>55</sup>O.H.T. #109 Interview with Mr. J. Ohiomolomo Ajayi, (57), Mr. S. Ohiolei Idika, (55), Igue-Sale, November 30, 1990, O.H.T. #110 Interview with Pa. Samuel Ojeoghare, (88), Oviosa-Igue, December 2, 1990.

2. Onegah Village: Leopard Totem: Male shrine, c.1696-1728  
 Related wards:  
   a. Afomare} No totem  
   b. Uyonkhu} No totem  
 Non-related wards:  
   c. Imionogbudu Oti<sup>56</sup>  
   d. Afovie - Corn totem  
   e. Imarebe - Boa totem  
   f. Ogueme - Yam totem
3. Ugbekpe Village: Boa & Oma snake Totems, no shrine,  
 c.1728-1760  
 Related Wards: No unique totems.  
   a. Afekpe  
   b. Imokhuoh  
   c. Imiekpe  
   d. Imidego  
   e. Iyenronvo
4. Oreva Village: Porcupine Clan: Male Shrine, c.1800 +  
 One Ward only

As in Ora, the Boa clan remained segregated. This was general although not exclusively so, everywhere in Owan. This group may have come out of Uokha since they combine the boa with the bean as totems. However the dating clearly indicates that they did not come with the founder. The Leopard village here as elsewhere in Owan demonstrated much greater willingness than the Boa to welcome strangers in its midst. If the Boa represented cult followers of an early age, they demonstrated considerable exclusivity while the royal leopard seemed more prepared to embrace stranger groups. Although the organisation of Igue community resembles Ora and dynastic Benin of c.1500, the plant and snake totems which are in the majority resemble Uokha. The first village even more strongly resembles Uokha.

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<sup>56</sup>Leaves for cooking soup.

Oviosa is comprised of three quarters with no unique totems. They revere only the bean which forms the totem of the whole clan group as in Uokha. The fourth village Oreva, possessed only one ward of the Porcupine Clan, perhaps late arrivals whose tradition has been pushed back to associate them with one of the founder's sons.

Oviosa village, with no unique totem for the whole village or its wards, could imply a strong attachment to patriarchy (note the male shrine). The Igue community was dominated by snakes and plants in that twelve wards out of fifteen revered them. In this respect it was much like Uokha. The major difference was that the Leopard clan formed a major group in Igue, possibly a reflection of Anamah's collaboration with the government of Benin. What is really amazing is that while snakes and plants predominated as totems in the Uokha fashion yet there appears no hint of matriarchy which seemed to parallel those types of totems in Uokha. Three villages have their own male shrines. This is hardly surprising for the Leopard and Porcupine villages but quite surprising for Oviosa which revered the bean, but possibly explained by the close collaboration of Anamah with the royal house in Benin. The Boa clan, possibly associated with authority in the ancient matriarchal society, possessed no shrine of any type in its village. This was common for the Boa clan elsewhere in Owan. The composition of Igue totems were as follows:

Major Clans  
Boa (6)

Minor Clans  
Oti (1) Yam (1)

Distribution  
Snakes (6)



Bean (3)  
Leopard (2)

Corn (1)  
Porcupine(1)

Plants (6)  
Animals (3)

**Ihievbe:**

Ihievbe community to the north and located next to Uokha was founded by Obo c.1504-1536 who was a contemporary of Prince Uguan and according to narrative tradition, related to Uzuanbi of Emai.<sup>57</sup> Obo was further related to a junior branch of the royal clan of Benin. The totemic evidence suggests that Obo was of the indigenous or Ogiso people in Benin, and that his relationship to the Leopard was either through his mother or his wife. If his father had been a Leopard, then Obo perpetuated his mother's totems because the community totems of Ihievbe were the boa and bean, very much indigenous emblems. This offers an excellent example of how totemic evidence may challenge the "official" narrative tradition. In all the Edoid sub-groups the suspicion becomes pervasive that hero-ancestors claimed, or their descendants claimed, royal ancestry in Benin. Research which depends entirely upon an analysis of narrative traditions, either must accept or reject such claims or little more than instinct or ideological predilection since some want to support the Benin connection, other resenting it. By use of non-narrative techniques one can be more assured of what to accept and what to reject.

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<sup>57</sup>O.H.T #211 Interview with Mr. Romanus O. Gbadamosi, (58), Mr. Andrew O. Isunuoya, (55, Ihievbe, September 13, 1990, O.H.T. #212 Interview with Mr. Mosaidu Sedenu, (62), Ihievbe, September 13, 1990 and O.H.T. #214 Interview with Chief Aliu Ikpekhia, (82), Ihievbe, September 14, 1990. See also Marshall, Part IX, p.4.

The community of Ihievbe is a mixture of plants and animals. It consists of nine villages seven of which have only one ward. The largest village has five wards the other, three. Three single-ward villages recognise no unique totem and respect only the group totems, the boa and bean. Four villages respect animals, one being leopard which might be descendants of the people of Obo's mother or wife. Both multi-ward villages mix animal and plant totems. There is no group shrine, no village totems. Clearly Obo did not seem to have had a chiefdom in mind like Ora-Ekpen. The evidence suggests Obo was escaping the chiefdom model while at the same time failing to set up an indigenous model like Uokha. Possibly he had too many animal totem followers for that. Ihievbe fell between the two extremes, Ora and Uokha.

Emai:

According to the tradition the writer collected, the original founder of Emai was named Ima. He was said to have committed murder in Benin and fled from justice.<sup>58</sup> On his arrival in the Owan area he found people already living in Uokha and so decided to settle close by. He fathered a son, Uzuanbi, who himself fathered four children, Uanhumi, Owuno, Ivbiame and Urule. Emai seems to be the least cohesive of any of the communities. It comprises four villages divided into

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<sup>58</sup>O.H.T. #54 Group Interview with Chief J. Ogedengbe, (80), The Oleije of Emai & his chiefs, Afuze, August 1, 1990; O.H.T. #57 Interview with Chief J. Igboa Ehimiaghe, (64), Ovbiowun, August 3, 1990.

fourteen wards. There is no group totem or shrine. There are no village totems or shrines. Totems or shrines are confined to the wards. There are seven ward shrines the largest number in any Owan community. There is only one plant and one Boa ward. Animal totems predominate. However of the fourteen wards six have no totemic emblems at all. It has been assumed that non-totemic groups were pre-Ogiso, the earliest of all Edo peoples. The founder Ima c.1504-1536 was said to have been related to the royal group in Benin. Again it must have been either through a mother or wife. Since he did not perpetuate his own totem, it must be assumed that he descended from the aboriginal Edo. The distribution of Emai totems are as follows:

Emai Community: No Community or village Shrines or Totems

Urule Village

- a. Afuze: Elephant \_\_\_\_\_ Uze shrine (male) & Ovbiagede shrine (female)
- b. Uanhumi: Boa \_\_\_\_\_ Oyaibi shrine (male)
- c. Okpa: Antelope \_\_\_\_\_ Obi (male)
- d. Okpokhumi: No totem
- e. Ojavun:
- f. Eteye: Leopard \_\_\_\_\_ Ekpenore shrine (female leopard)

Evbiamen Village Group

Obada Village

- a. Ivbiomokhi: Grass-cutter \_\_\_\_\_ Omoikhi shrine (male)
- b. Ivbiokpighi: No totem
- c. Evbodie: Roasted yam

Ogute Village

- a. Afojie: No totem
- b. Afudi: No totem
- c. Okoohi: No totem

Ovbiowun Village

- a. Ivbiolei: Bushbuck \_\_\_\_\_ Edeye shrine (male)
- b. Ivbiakhihia: Female Sheep, Leopard and Buffalo

A case might be made that almost all clans entered Emai

without totems. Normally informants have no idea how they procured their totem, claiming that the restrictions have come down to them from their ancestors. "It has always been so" forms a typical answer. However when stories of totemic adoption are known, the researcher has reason to believe that this happened within historical times. Of the eight wards in Emai with totems, five have narrative traditions of how they were adopted. Furthermore of the seven wards with animal totems - those usually associated most strongly with patriarchal values - six possess shrines to males identified in narrative traditions as belonging to the families of the founders. Even more remarkable is the fact that male shrines or shrines of any type are confined to the animal totem wards. In brief the traditions of the male shrines are as follows:

1. Uze : commemorates the founder of Afuze, "Uze's family".
2. Oyaibi: A shrine to Uzuani, the son of the founder of the community, Ima. The ward named after Uzuani's maternal uncle Uanumi "will prosper"; whose first wife was Igala.<sup>59</sup>
3. Obi: In honour of Aribi, who inherited his brother's (Uanumi's) second wife. She was nicknamed Okpa, "legs like a guinea fowl" which became the ward name. She was said to have seduced Aribi's sons who were her step-sons.
4. Ekpenore: Following a remarkable friendship between a hunter and a female leopard, the children of the hunter called their family "Goddess" Ekpenore, "the leopard enters the house". The ward name refers to the death of the leopard when the family shouted "Otoi Oyeo" meaning "she is falling down" which was later corrupted to Eteye. Thereafter the ward would fight mock battles with anyone who killed a leopard and staged a funeral for any such animal killed.
5. Omoikhi: A shrine to the founder of the ward Omoikhi. The

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<sup>59</sup>Oyakhire, The First History of Emai, pp.11-12.

ward is called Ivbiomoikhi, "the children of Omoikhi".

6. Edeye: Olei the founder of the ward Ivbiolei, "the children of Olei" had two sons, one Edeye a native doctor for whom the shrine was created and Agangan who looked after the poor and needy for whom an annual festival is celebrated.

Thus Emai's narrative traditions of totemic adoption and the remarkable proliferation of male shrines which were created late as compared to the traditions of female shrines which seem far back in time, appears to point to an unusual triumph of patriarchal values. Had the animal totems been in existence prior to migration, it might be argued that they arrived in Emai with patriarchalism firmly established. But they did not. Had the shrines been carried into Emai, a similar argument could be made. Rather both had been adopted within genealogical time. This makes Emai unique. Furthermore it becomes obvious that the community charter of four sons of Ima founding the four villages, is faulty when confronted with totemic, shrine and even narrative tradition. Combined with the lack of community or village totems or shrines, Emai appears not to have been a community until just before or even after the British arrived, much like the communities of Evbo-Mion and Ivbi-Ada-Obi which admit their unity had been brought about by military alliance and colonial decrees.

#### Ozalla:

In one version of the tradition of origin, Iyelolo was the founder of Ozalla whose son Uza was an abomination because

he had been born feet first.<sup>60</sup> Iyelolo was said to have committed adultery with one of the Oba's wives. But his life was spared through the connivance of his mother and the executioners.<sup>61</sup> For the abominable act his son was named Uza.<sup>62</sup> Uza may have been an abomination because he had been the result of inter-marriage between plant and animal totems. It will be re-called that the Ora group today is exclusively devoted to animals. On the other hand the people of Ozalla revere a mixture of plant and animal totems. Animals represent 63% and plants 23% of Ozalla totems.<sup>63</sup> By tradition it was the sons and grandsons of Uza who founded villages of the community. This would have been between c.1632-1664 or about 120 to 160 years after the establishment of Ora. Ozalla might therefore represent a much later stage in the evolution of the Edo people, where the antagonism among plant and animal totemic groups was declining to the point where mixed "abominations" like Ozalla had become possible. The mixed nature of Uza's parents is probably symbolised in the two totems which apply to all of the people of Ozalla, the goat and cocoyam.

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<sup>60</sup>Marshall, Part VI, p.3.

<sup>61</sup>Military Governor's Office Benin City, Investigation into the Role of Chiefs in the Mid-Western State: Divisional Report in Respect of Owan Division, 1971. pp.101-102.

<sup>62</sup>O.H.T. #141 Group Interview with the Onotare of Ozalla, Chief Samuel Ojieriakhi, (88), and Ozalla elders, Ozalla, July 30, 1990.

<sup>63</sup>These calculations were done from totemic data collected.

Many of the villages of Ozalla exhibit similar mixtures so that the people of Ozalla respect more totems than any other community in Owan. The average citizen reveres four totems, the most extreme six and the least, two. Three villages mix animals and plants following the example of Uza's parents. In the totemic data below, the extraordinary proliferation of totems in Ozalla is demonstrated as well as the unusual mixture of plants and animals in the first six of the eight villages. For various reasons, one being the goddess myths to be analyzed in the next chapter, these six villages seem to pre-date the coming of the migrants from Benin. Assuming that the plant people tended to matriliney, taking the mother's totem and that the animal totem people tended to take the father's, intermarriage would explain the proliferation of totems in Ozalla where the two groups were almost equal in number. Two villages were exclusively animal and one village plant yet they too seemed to adopt dual totems, strengthening the argument that they were the product of a mixture of matrilineal and patrilineal ideas. It should be noted that the first six villages have been homogenous in that there appears to be no stranger wards. This seems to be a characteristic of matrilocal villages and quite unlike the behaviour of the animal totems in Ora.

Ozalla Community: Goat and Cocoyam: Male & female shrines

1. Iraede village: Elephant and three plant totems. Both wards have the same totems suggesting they are segments of one major clan. Citizens of Iraede respect four village totems as well as the community totems goat and cocoyam for a total of

six.

2. Uhonmoke village of the mushroom and two bird totems. Once again both quarters have the same totems. Total number of totems five.

3. Usuamen village of three animals and one plant. Total six totems.

4. Igbidin village of the Dove, Rabbit and Wildcat totems. All three wards adhere to the three totems. They combined those three with the two for the whole group for a total of five.

5. Ekhon village of the Rabbit<sup>64</sup> and Tortoise clan. All three wards venerate the two totems as well as the two community totems for a total of four.

6. Uwiara village of two plants. All three wards respect both plants plus two community totems making four.

7. Ivbihiere Village: No village totem.

- |                  |                                |
|------------------|--------------------------------|
| a. Erie-Aisabor} | No unique totems. They adhere  |
| b. Idumu-Annun}  | to the goat and cocoyam totems |
| c. Erie-Kebe}    | of the group suggesting direct |
|                  | descendants from Uza.          |

Stranger wards:

- |                      |                                  |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| d. Okhumerie:        | Dog totem                        |
| e. Erie-Ukheduan:    | Female sheep totem               |
| f. Ivbihiere-Nokhwe: | Female sheep totem <sup>65</sup> |

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<sup>64</sup>Although never a community or village totem, the rabbit appears in six of the eleven Owan communities, its largest concentration being in Ozalla (seven wards). Among the seventy eight totems collected by N.W. Thomas in Benin the rabbit does not appear once. Furthermore of the nine place names in Ozalla with unknown meanings, five of them relate to wards with a rabbit totem. Even more convincing, of the seven Rabbit wards in five other Owan communities not one name has a meaning. This appears fairly good evidence that the Rabbit clan were either of an earlier phase or strangers of unknown origin. On the other hand of the numerous rat totems in Benin, Esan and Etsako, not once do they appear anywhere in Owan.

<sup>65</sup>In the earlier discussion of the village of Oke-Ora in Ora community it was supposed on a fairly strong evidence that the female sheep represented the migrants from Esan. Since one version of the Ozalla narrative refers to an Esan "son", it might be assumed these female sheep totems also reflect Esan people. The only other community with a female sheep in Owan, is Emai where it is combined with totems of Benin origin as in



8. Ekeke Village: No village totem. All three wards respect only the goat and cocoyam , suggesting direct descent from Uza.

The genealogical chart [chart six] of Ozalla, following the community charter shows the village founders as the sons and grandsons of Uza. The totemic data does not support that contention. The first six villages would seem to have been established prior to Uza or the migrations from Benin. Nevertheless the last two villages do appear to have been founded according to the tradition. The size of the two also suggest that Ivbihiere was established before Ekeke as the genealogy suggests. Ivbihiere was listed as a son of Uza and Ekeke, the founder of the smaller village as a grandson.

Readers will see that the taking of both father and mother totems cannot proceed beyond the initial compromise in the first couple of generations. For example if a man of Iraede village today married a woman from Usuamen, combining matrilineal and patrilineal descent regulation, the children would inherit the burden of ten totems, the elephant and three other animals, four plants as well as the goat and cocoyam of the community. The system could have persisted from one to three generations which would explain its modern complexity. However with the growing popularity of patrilinealism among the Edo and Owan peoples, the mixed system probably solidified into its present form by c.1750. Thereafter children generally

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Ora. On much slimmer evidence the tortoise might also have been originally of Esan origin. It is found in Ora and Ozalla only, both communities with Esan noted in their traditions.

took only the totems of their fathers. Sufficient remnants of the dual system remained even in Benin to worry N. W. Thomas<sup>66</sup> who collected Edo totems around 1910 and found conflicting evidence as to whether children inherited their mother's totems.

**Iuleha:**

The traditions of the Iuleha Community do not claim origins from Benin which makes it unique in Owan. A problem apparently arose in Uokha between the plant and animal totemic groups. Like Ora, Iuleha is almost exclusively composed of animal totems. Furthermore Iuleha was probably founded in the same generation c.1632-1664 as Arokho/Ikhin and Otuo as the Owan chronology chart (chart eleven) shows. Clearly by c.1632-1664 animal totemic observances and their social organisation were triumphing among the Edo. One can surmise that over the previous century animal totems had been increasing in Uokha fed by numerous small, recorded and unrecorded migrations from Benin. People leaving Benin appeared to favour Uokha as a place of settlement. Thus by c.1630 animal totems were very numerous in Uokha and apparently their adherents resented the organisation and behaviour of the dominant early settlers of the three B's: beads, beans and boas. Consequently the division in Uokha involved not merely animal and plant totem groups but also matrilineal against patrilineal ideology.

The animal group was led out of Uokha by Irimo a follower

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<sup>66</sup>Thomas, "Totemism in Southern Nigeria", p.234.

of the priest Akpewuma.<sup>67</sup> Given the totemic distribution in Iuleha it would appear that Irimo was of the leopard totem. In any case narrative traditions do not record the strife between plant and animal totemic groups, nor give any reason for the departure of Irimo from Uokha. Before he left, Irimo had married Otoi and again from the distribution of totems it might be presumed that she revered the bushbuck.

According to the narrative tradition Irimo and Otoi produced three sons, Aoma, Okpuje and Eruere who founded the three village groups of modern Iuleha.<sup>68</sup> This seems questionable. Irimo and Otoi may have produced Aoma, while Okpuje seems to have been from a second wife of the Boa clan and Eruere from a third of the Bead clan. These three marriages would help Irimo to draw a following from the animal, snake and bead groups in Uokha leaving the plant totems isolated. The overall structure of Iuleha is shown below:

Table Two  
Iuleha Community: No Totem or Shrine

Village Group	Related Villages (& Wards)	Uokha Totems	Stranger Villages (& Wards)	Stranger Totems

<sup>67</sup>O.H.T. #154 Interview with Mr. Abraham Alukpe, (54), Mr. Christopher Alukpe, (32), Okpuje, March 17, 1991, O.H.T. #155 Interview with Chief Eduke Ogedengbe, (80), Avbiosi, March 18, 1991.

<sup>68</sup>O.H.T. #151 Interview with Mr. O.A.J. Enahoro, (68), Uzebba, Febuary 28, 1991, O.H.T. #152 Interview with Mr. J.U. Aigbeloga, (53), Avbiosi, Febuary, 28, 1991.

Aoma	6 (29)	leopard, bushbuck, rabbit	3 (12)	plants, dog, bat, buffalo, snake
Okpuje	1 (3)	leopard, boa,	0	civet
	1 (5)	leopard, bushbuck		
Eruere	1 (2)	beads	0	bird, dog

Generally patrilineal type villages have a mixture of numerous clans without one single totem common to all the people. On the other hand matrilineal villages do have one dominant totem. In the Aoma village group the villages related to the founding families do not have dominant totems. The stranger villages all do, one revering a plant, the other, dog and the third, buffalo. Only the plant totem village is completely homogenous in both of its wards. However in the patrilineal villages the leopard and the bushbuck are always present, suggesting the totemic connections of the founder family. A further complication is that one of the villages of the Okpuje group appears patrilineal and has both leopard and bushbuck totems. It is therefore suggested that the second village of Okpuje was geographically close to the Leopard-Boa village but actually had been settled from Aoma. Charting the related patrilineal villages, one sees the following:

1. Avbiosi Village: No totem and four wards.
  - a. Ivbiamanusi: leopard, termite, goat
  - b. Ehora: bushbuck
  - c. Ikposi: Ekhiri (An animal)
  - d. Ivbigo: No totem
2. Ivbiughuru Village: bushbuck village totem and two wards.

- a. Aghenukhu: leopard
- b. Ulioben: snake

3. Uzebba Village with eleven wards. Ten wards claimed they either had no totem or did not know what it was. One ward revered the rabbit, an Uokha clan totem. Little can be said about Uzebba in the light of this lack of evidence.

Related villages meaning those related to the founder's family are so defined because they have been shown on the Iuleha genealogy. The unrelated or stranger villages do not appear on the genealogy. If the above re-organisation of the village groups is valid, only Aoma really remains a group. Eruere although called a group is only one village of two wards. The whole village respects the bead totem, an unusual one but common in Uokha. Okpuje also shrinks from a group to one village with the Boa-Leopard clan being its village-wide totem.

Unless unusual circumstances associated with soil or trade intervene, one naturally expects an old village to be larger than two wards, when its neighbour contains almost a dozen. This might suggest that Okpuje and Eruere were founded much later than Aoma. The tendency of narrative tradition to give all the villages equality in having them established by sons of the founder must always cause the researcher some uneasiness. Elsewhere - in Ora and Igue for example - the Boa clan tends to remain segregated and does not welcome strangers. This may explain its small size in Iuleha as well.

**Evbo-Mion:**

The community of Evbo-Mion as defined by the British and

maintained after independence consisted of six village groups. They include Arokho with eight wards, Ikhin with eleven, Urole (Uruore), Ohami, and Iru-oke with three each;<sup>69</sup> and Ake a group of four villages divided into eleven wards. The narrative tradition of Evbo-Mion focuses exclusively upon each settlement since it did not form a community. This region formed an area of acephalous village organisation, each village being independent of the other. In table two Evbo-Mion has been placed in the northern tier of Owan communities on the flimsiest of evidence, merely because it contains a minority of animal totems. Since Evbo-Mion was a colonial creation, it seems more logical to look at its constituent villages. For example the statistics below clearly place Ake within the northern tier of communities and Arokho-Ikhin within the central. Ake, with 91% of its totems being plants and snake, becomes the most typically northern of all communities where the average is 69% and the second highest is Igue community with 82%. Arokho-Ikhin with 70% animals and no totems sits close to the average of 71% for the central tier communities. The table below demonstrates the similarity in totemic distribution of the Evbo-Mion villages of Ake to the northern tier, and Arokho-Ikhin to the central tier communities.

Table Three  
Evbo-Mion Totemic Distribution by Percentages

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<sup>69</sup>Uruore, Ohami and Iru-oke are not discussed here because research was not conducted in those areas.

	Animals	None	Plants	Snakes
Ake	11	3	57	34
N.T. Average	15	13	39	30
Arokho-Ikhin	41	29	12	18
C.T. Average	50	21	14	14

Arokho and Ikhin have a tradition of common origin. In detail the tradition states that: Arokho and Ikhin were full brothers and sons of the Oba of Benin. Ikhin was very proud and took the nickname "Epen-Oga" meaning "the leopard shall be served".<sup>70</sup> If this means he was of the Leopard clan, he left no record of it. In the Ikhin village group, there is no group totem, no village totem among the three villages and among the wards only one leopard. But according to the ward tradition, the founder had been Ule, thus Amule, the village of Ule". If Ikhin was not of the Leopard, then no other totem appears to derive from him either. He was driven out of Benin because of his unruly behaviour. His brother Arokho went with him. They travelled towards Ifon. While Ikhin settled in Ifon, Arokho pitched his camp in Ukaro. Ikhin started to sell the Ifon people into slavery. As a result he was driven again from Ifon. He relocated in Urumolele in Iuleha community. Arokho later felt compelled to look for Ikhin, whom he found in Urumolele. They both decided to move to their present

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<sup>70</sup>Marshall, Part VII, p.4. Also informants confirmed this tradition in the following interviews O.H.T. #125 Interview with Chief E.A. Omoruanzoje, (84), Arokho, March 23, 1991, O.H.T. #127 Interview with Mr. Edgars Ohio moje Ikhiboya, (43), Afuze, March 26, 1991 and O.H.T. #129 Interview with Pa. Iboi Omoruanzoje, (87), Arokho, March 28, 1991.

locations.<sup>71</sup> The Arokho-Ikhn genealogical chart places the possible date of the establishment of the two settlements at c.1632-1664. The claim that Arokho and Ikhn descended from two brothers who were princes from Benin is possible because there is one Leopard ward in Arokho and another in Ikhn, if one keeps in mind the reservations noted above. Given the long sojourn of the two brothers outside of the area today associated with Owan, it is suggested that a large percentage of the totems in Arokho-Ikhn are found nowhere else and a particularly large number of place names have no meaning. Recalling that overall about one third of the place names in Owan cannot be translated, the percentage in Arokho-Ikhn reaches 63% or the highest in Owan.<sup>72</sup> In addition among the ten different totems in Arokho-Ikhn, six were unique plus the illusive rabbit which is ubiquitous but seems to stem from non-Edo origins.<sup>73</sup>

The Ake village group does not figure in the Arokho-Ikhn tradition. Apparently Ake was founded originally as part of the Uokha community. The Ake dialect is closer to Uokha than

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<sup>71</sup>O.H.T. #129 Interview with Pa. Iboi Omoruanzoje, (87), Arokho, March 27, 1991; O.H.T. #132 Interview with T. Amu Aigbokhai, (51), Ikhn, April 5, 1991.

<sup>72</sup>The place names in all of Owan were scrutinized by a Yoruba speaker as well. He could identify none of those in Arokho-Ikhn despite their long stay in the Yoruba country.

<sup>73</sup>The following totems were unique: the yellow monkey, two tree species, the cobra (in three wards), th Oin (a snake) and the Udomoriri (a bird) in three wards but also found once in Ake. The rabbit was a totem in one ward, not sufficient to presume a Yoruba connection.



any other community. Furthermore the political totems of Ake include the boa and bean (ihie), the same as Uokha except that the bead has been dropped. It also seems that members of both the Rabbit and Bushbuck clans left Uokha to settle in Ake and create two wards. Those clans founded the Ake village of Okhuara with two wards, one Rabbit and one Bushbuck. The second village Oguamo was also founded from Uokha. As common in Uokha the founding ward of Oguamo too adopted no unique totem probably being biologically of the Boa and Bean, the political totems of Ake. Finally Ake adopted the same community shrine names - Oron and Oisa - as in Uokha. Thus there is ample totemic and shrine evidence to confirm that Ake was once part of the Uokha community. The narrative tradition recorded by Marshall authenticates this contention too. Tradition has it that Ake was the wife of a Bini called Iyewa. Ake and Iyewa fled Benin because their son had committed adultery with a wife of the Oba.<sup>74</sup> After fleeing Benin, they first settled in Uokha. However during field research by the present writer, informants denied being part of Uokha in the past.<sup>75</sup> This is understandable in that current political relations do not make for acceptance of subordination of one group to another. Narrative tradition in Otuo community claims

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<sup>74</sup>Marshall, Part VII, p.4.

<sup>75</sup>O.H.T. #121 Interview with Mr. James Ohioreoya, (85), Mr. Omoikhoje Obaikhedo, (78), Ake, November 20, 1990, O. H. T. #122 Interview with Mr. Ehimai J. Idu, (78), Mr. Ekpeakhena Omokhudu, (75), Ake, November 20, 1990.

that they gave permission to the Ake people to settle where they did.<sup>76</sup> Again Ake informants denied this assertion. Since the third village - Ewara was founded by a fish clan (the same as in Otuo) the Otuo claim also seems valid. While Otuo-Ake relations cannot be reduced to mere permission to settle, evidence points to the fact that there must have existed some pre-colonial interaction. This may have been kinship relations which have been forgotten over time. It may well have been an explanation for the settlement of Otuo migrants in Ake in the distant past. In Ake a ward reveres Ehe (a type of fish). In all of Owan, fish clans are confined to Otuo<sup>77</sup> where six quarters revere fish and one village has a fish as its political totem. This fish connection might point a relationship in the distant past.

In the nineteenth century Ake formed a defensive alliance with the other Evbo-Mion village groups (with the exception of Iruoke) against the Nupe invaders from the north.<sup>78</sup> As a result of this alliance, inter-migration and inter-marriage occurred. The consequence was a dog totem probably from Ikhin which founded the third village (Oguedo) in Ake. Three tree wards were added to the second village (Oguamo) by settlers

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<sup>76</sup>O.H.T. #172 Interview with Chief Ilaebor Ikhiafe, (71), Chief T. Uduo Ekhanerua, (70), Oluma-Otuo, Febuary 15, 1991, O.H.T. #173 Interview with Chief T. Ohiomanuwa Igbafe, (73), Oluma-Otuo, Febuary 15, 1991.

<sup>77</sup>Except one in Ihievbe which refers to all fish in a certain stream, not one specific species.

<sup>78</sup>O.H.T. #129, Arokho, 1991. See also Marshall, Part VII, p.5.

from Arckho and Ikhin. In the first village (Okhuara), two tree and one bird ward were added by the new settlers. The new wards were unlikely to have come from anywhere else because tree totems existed nowhere else in Owan.<sup>79</sup> Tree totems flourished in Ake, there being seven of them. The Bird ward - Udomoriri - must have come from other Evbo-Mion settlements especially Oare in Ikhin because the same bird is revered in both places.

Despite the infusion of new settlers into Ake from other Evbo-Mion communities and to a lesser extent from Otuo, the village group maintained a balance among the totems which resembled those in Uokha. In both Ake and Uokha, plant totems remained the largest group. Clearly it is significant that as many as seven plant totems moved out of other Evbo-Mion settlements where they formed a minority to Ake, where they were and continue to be a majority. Probably the migration did not flow only one direction, that is towards Ake. In Arokho and Ikhin three wards contained boa totems, never alone but always in combination with others. In addition one ward in Arokho (the first village of Evbo-Mion), which revered the boa among others, had a shrine whose name was exactly the same as one shrine in Ake and one in Uokha.<sup>80</sup> If one removed Ake from Evbo-Mion and grouped it with Uokha, the totemic balance

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<sup>79</sup>Except in Irhofio ward, Oshogben village, Ivbi-Ada-Obi community where the people revere Okha (A tree).

<sup>80</sup>This shrine is Oisa.

between animals, snakes and plants would not change in Uokha. The balance would change in Evbo-Mion, placing that community with those in the central region, where animals dominate.

Consequently we see in Ake a tendency toward the separation of plant totems from animals. This division had shown up elsewhere, particularly in the exodus of plant totem clans from Ora to Otuo, the "abomination" tradition from Ozalla as a result of inter-marriage between the two groups, and the migration of the animal totems out of plant-dominated Uokha to Iuleha. The prejudice between the two groups did not at any point break into actual conflict and therefore has left no narrative record. But the grouping of clans and their inter-Owan migrations is evident in the traditions and present distribution of totems. The wars against the Nupe were overpowering enough that internal prejudices were suppressed and Ake (primarily plants and snakes) felt comfortable enough to ally with the animal totemic groups in the other villages of Evbo-Mion.

When the British arrived in the 1900's and set up their administration, they sought, as was their custom, to group into units people historically related. The Ake people opted to be grouped with Evbo-Mion because of their anti-Nupe military alliance.<sup>81</sup> The alliance alone was not enough. The migration of peoples during that alliance guaranteed that of the eleven wards of Ake, seven had been founded from other

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<sup>81</sup>O.H.T. #127 and #129 already cited in full.

villages in Evbo-Mion. The fact that Ake had been named after a woman and one of their community shrines was dedicated to the goddess, Oron, confirmed the earlier importance of women in the society, a factor more typical of the northern than of the central tier of communities in Owan. It seems highly significant that the woman Ake and her husband Iyewa, who fled from Benin, left behind a village group named after the woman. In Owan most communities take their founding ancestor as a man. Often his wife's name is not recalled. Others become named from a man whose wife's name is remembered. Only Ake, Eme-Ora, Ivbiaro and the major rivers are named after women. The prominence of females as founders and goddesses generally increases as the plant-snake totems form larger percentages in a community. Animal totems and the royal house of Benin were clearly hostile to the public role of women in politics.<sup>82</sup>

**Ivbi-Ada-Obi:**

The Ivbi-Ada-Obi community incorporates three village groups, Warrake with twelve wards, Ivbiaro with four villages and eighteen wards, and Errah with four villages. They could have been treated as separate British-styled clans. However because they were very small settlements, the British brought them together. In any case in pre-colonial times they had been

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<sup>82</sup>Nina Mba in her study Nigerian Women Mobilized, p.17 reported that there were no women amongst the palace and town chiefs in pre-colonial Benin. She also noted that the wives of the oba were secluded in the palace. This supports the earlier assumption that the influx of animal totems was synonymous with the advance of patrilineal ideals.

united by the worship of the Ada-Obi<sup>83</sup> shrine located in Irhofio ward, Ivbiaro. Oral tradition claim Ivbiaro contains an aboriginal population. Before the Nupe invasion of the nineteenth century and the subsequent imposition of Islam, the Ivbi-Ada-Obi people solved most of their communal problems at the shrine.<sup>84</sup> It was a form of long juju to the contiguous population. Over time its influence spread to Emai and Ihievbe. However with the advent of Islam its prestige in the area began to wane. The Ada-Obi shrine still exists in Ivbiaro despite the Islamisation of the area, and people still worship at the shrine.

Warrake's tradition, as recorded by Marshall, traces descent from a Benin man named Ake.<sup>85</sup> Following a war in Benin, Ake fled with a woman called Uwaren who he later married. Tradition also has it that Ake was a brother to Obo the founder of Ihievbe.<sup>86</sup> The totemic data does not support

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<sup>83</sup>It is worth noting here that the village groups also claim they migrated from Benin at the same time. Marshall asserted in 1937 that "although all four clans [communities] (including Ihievbe) worshipped "Ada-Obi" the relationship between the latter two (Errah and Ivbi-Aro) is not now known". (Marshall, Part IX, p.4)

<sup>84</sup>O.H.T. #192 Interview with Mr. Asone Musah, (35), The priest of Ada-Obi shrine, Ivbiaro, January 24, 1991, O.H.T. #195 Interview with Pa. Suma Arebun, (88), Ivbiaro, Febuary 25, 1991 and O.H.T. #204 Interview with Pa. Garuba Ikhekheakhe, (87), Ivbiaro, March 8, 1991.

<sup>85</sup>Marshall, Part IX, p.4.

<sup>86</sup>O.H.T. #185 Interview with Chief Alhasan Ogegere, (90), Warrake, January 15, 1991 and O.H.T. #186 Interview with Mr. G. Dauda, (55), Warrake, January 15, 1991.

this claim but if we interpret brother as "contemporary", then Warrake's foundation date could be put between c.1504-1536, or Obo's generation. The totemic data from Warrake show that the village group revere ekan-ivie (beads), indicative of Ogiso influence. Because of the association within the three B's of Uokha, beads have been classified within the Ogiso period totems. Outside of Uokha beads are not common totems. Other than Warrake, beads are the village totem of Eruere village in Iuleha. The tradition that Ake was related to Obo, founder of Ihievbe is also strange since Ake's totem was the bead while Obo's were the boa and beans. In other words the two brothers split the three B's between them. Thus one is inclined to think that they belonged to the same faction, party or social strata in Benin. To complicate the mystery even more, the female "Ake" from Benin and founder of the Ake Village Group revered the boa and beans while "Ake" the male founder of the Warrake also from Benin revered beads or the third B.

Table Four  
The Distribution of the Three B's

Uokha	beans,	boa,	beads
Warrake			beads
Eruere Village, Iuleha			beads
Ihievbe founder	beans	boa	
Ake (female)	beans	boa	

According to Marshall, Ivbiaro ("Children of Aro") "alone among the Ivbiosakon (Owan) clans [communities] have no tradition of migration, but claims to be direct descendants of

a God-like being known as Ada-Obi".<sup>87</sup> Ada-Obi married a woman called Aro from whom the village group took its name. Aro was said to have given birth to four sons. They included Ebese, Iyokuoto (Ubuneke),<sup>88</sup> Oshogben and Usu, who became, according to the charter, the founders of the four villages. The Ivbiaro genealogical chart places its foundation in the generation of c.1536-1568. The present writer's field research revealed that the Ivbiaro people report a tradition of migration from Benin.<sup>89</sup> One of my informants claimed Ada-Obi and Aro were mortals who married in Benin. This version maintains that Ada-Obi while in Benin killed a leopard, the royal totem of Benin and refused to hand over the skin to the Oba.<sup>90</sup> Expectedly Ada-Obi was driven out of Benin by the monarch. This account agrees that Ada-Obi's wife, Aro, gave birth to four children as stated by the first narrative tradition.<sup>91</sup> A critical analysis of the two traditions and

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<sup>87</sup>Marshall, Part IX, p.13. See also R.I. Ohikhokhai, "Owan and the Benin Kingdom: An Analysis of a Relation up to the 20th century", M.A. Dissertation, Department of History, University of Benin, Nigeria, 1986 p.27.

<sup>88</sup>It is also known as Ogbeni meaning "killer of Elephant".

<sup>89</sup>O.H.T. #193 Interview with Malam Abu Elakhame, (87), Ivbiaro, January 25, 1991 and O.H.T. #194 Interview with Chief Sule Elabor, (67), Ivbiaro, January 25, 1991.

<sup>90</sup>O.H.T #194.

<sup>91</sup>My informant, Chief Sule Elabor is a resident of Afesoto ward where the leopard is one of the ward totems. It is therefore not surprising to collect from the ward a tradition which focuses on migration from Benin. However the ward also reveres the boa totem of the aboriginal population. What this means is that Afesoto incorporates both aborigines and settlers.



totemic evidence suggests that both accounts are tenable. The probable scenario, here as in other Owan communities, is that there existed an aboriginal population whom the Benin migrants met. While the aborigines are represented by the boa and plant totems, the invaders conceivably brought the animal totems. In addition it is logical to argue that princes may have led the migration from Benin since four wards venerate the leopard, the royal totem in Benin. On the other hand the informant who rendered this tradition of origin in Benin is a Muslim who would in any case reject the supernatural character of a narrative which emphasized a god descending to the earth. Thus one might at least assume that the indigenous story is valid for the earliest settlers and migration from Benin also took place. The problem arises because the second story has been woven around characters who probably belong to the first. Greater elaboration of this narrative tradition is in chapter four where the shrine traditions are analysed. Chief Sule Elabor's account fails to explain why Ada-Obi had been deified. It is noteworthy too that both accounts agree that the village, Ivbiaro, was named after the woman, not the man.

Looking at the larger picture, of the eighteen wards of the Ivbiaro group fifteen revere animal totems even though a few combine them with the boa or a plant. The group confirm the oral tradition that it came out of Benin after the

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Clearly Marshall must have collected his information from the indigenous wards to have recorded an aboriginal story.

monarchy had been established, that the migration had been triggered by friction within the animal group of totems and that Marshall in his research would have collected his aboriginal story from one of the four wards of the nineteen without animal totems.

**Errah:**

In the case of Errah, Marshall reports the people claim they were a direct off-shoot of Emai. Their founder, Eleme was said to have left Ovbiowun (a village in Emai) for Otetemuna<sup>92</sup> before settling in present-day Errah. Eleme's (Ovbome) departure from Ovbiowun was attributed to a quarrel with Owuno its founder. Oyakhire says "Ovbiowun decided to go to war with Era (Errah) in order to determine once and for all, the question of who was the owner of the land on which Era lived and farmed".<sup>93</sup> Ovbiowun sought the assistance of the rest of Emai community in the invasion of Errah. But before an attack could be launched the Errah people got wind of it and so fled Ovbiowun.<sup>94</sup> In Errah, Eleme founded Ugbovbighan, Oluelo, Ekeke

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<sup>92</sup>No one today in Owan knows where Otetemuna is located.

<sup>93</sup>G.B.L. Oyakhire, The First History of Emai Clan, p.21. This tradition was confirmed by my informants in Ovbiowun, Emai. However I was unable to conduct interviews in Errah because of a land dispute between it and neighbouring Egoro-Amede, an Esan-speaking village. In spite of my strenuous attempt to explain my mission to Errah elders I was seen to be spying for Egoro. To compound my problem the land dispute was before a law court. As such Errah elders were not prepared to give any information which might later surface in the court.

<sup>94</sup>O.H.T. #69 Interview with Chief Ekeinde Aidelokhai, (56), Ovbiowun, August 20, 1990 and O.H.T. #73 Interview with Chief Imaku Atakoi, (90), Chief Izegaigbe Atakoi, (85), Evbiamen,

and Isioriri villages. Oyakhire reported c.1790 as the date of Errah's flight from Ovbiowun.<sup>95</sup> Furthermore totemic evidence confirms the narrative tradition because the bushbuck is a major totem in Errah and Ovbiowun. Both villages are composed exclusively of animal totems. The dates also do not challenge the narrative tradition since Emai had been founded long before Errah.

If one analyses the totemic distribution of Ivbi-Ada-Obi by splitting the British-created community into its pre-colonial units, they appear quite unique. They fit into neither the northern nor the central tiers. Whether this reflects Islamization is not clear. The table below demonstrates the numerous ways in which Ivbi-Ada-Obi is unique when compared with the northern, central and southern tiers of communities.

Table Five  
Warrake and other Community Totems Compared by Percentages

	Animals	None	Plants	Snakes
Warrake	15	69	15	0
N.T. Averages	14	16	38	32
C.T. Averages	44	18	18	18
S.T. Averages	65	14	13	8
Ivbiaro-Errah	85	5	5	5

Warrake shows the highest percentage (69%) of wards without totems. This is far above Emai (33%) the next highest. In

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August 28, 1990.

<sup>95</sup>Oyakhire, The First History of Emai Clan, p.21 It is however not clear how Oyakhire came about an exact date. A more acceptable dating would be generational which would place the event between c.1760-1792.

addition Warrake is the only community without snake totems. Ivbiaro-Errah possess the highest number of animal totems, the lowest number of plants and non-totemic wards. Combined together, British fashion Ivbi-Ada-Obi appears to fit comfortably into the southern tier of communities dominated by animal totems. However by pre-colonial standards in which Warrake, Ivbiaro and Errah lived as separate communities, the former is unique while the latter two resemble others in the southern tier.

**Otuo:**

Oral narrative collected by Marshall has it that Otuo descended from twelve age grades (Otu ni'egbeva) which were followers of Prince Uguan, the founder of Ora when he left Benin.<sup>96</sup> The twelve villages include Oluma, Amohon, Olila, Orake, Ohigba, Amoya, Imoukpe, Iyeu, Ishiokha, Ighera, Obo and Imafun. At first these age grades lived at Ora and served Prince Uguan, his son Ora-ekpen and his descendants. Later they quarrelled with the Ora people and left. They established an independent community among the inaccessible hills (Otuo hills) which they now occupy. The clan consists of twelve village units, each one of which is supposed to represent one of the original twelve age grades. A 1971 government report

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<sup>96</sup>Marshall, Part VIII, p.3. In Otuo today this is the popular tradition of origin of the people.

and my field research corroborated this tradition.<sup>97</sup> The elders claim they left Ora for their present site as a result of inter-clan wars.

Another version recorded by an Otuo historian, S.I. Lawani (Rev. Imevbore Edeki) claims Otuo was founded by an Oni of Ife's son, Gbadejo.<sup>98</sup> He was said to be a temperamental and impulsive young man. For this reason he was nicknamed Otuaka ("He scatters"). Gbadejo was said to have left Ife on a hunting expedition which took him to Idogun through Ilesha, Akure and Owo. He pitched his camp at Idogun and hunted wild animals in the Otuo bush. He married wives who bore him children. Consequently he decided not go back to Ife. They settled at Okotheko or Igbobi brook. This version asserts Gbadejo met people in the area. However the narrative claims it was after Gbadejo and his followers had settled in the area that an Oba of Benin sent his messengers to Otuo for palm oil. It also claimed the Oba's messengers did not go back to Benin. Clearly these messengers became the same twelve age grades referred to in the first version. Lawani concludes thus: "It appears from the Otuaka story that Otuo was an admixture of two separate stocks, one from Benin and the other from

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<sup>97</sup>Military Governor's office, "Investigation into the Role of Chiefs in the Mid-Western State: Divisional Report in Respect of the Owan Division", 1971; O.H.T. #172 and #173 already cited in full.

<sup>98</sup>S.I. Lawani, A History of Otuo, Ibadan, Advent Press, 1947. p.14.

Yorubaland".<sup>99</sup> Field research by the present writer revealed that the Ife migration theory does not go down well with the Otuo people.<sup>100</sup> A recent study by S.O.J. Ojo<sup>101</sup> also questions the tradition recorded by Lawani. He argues that because Otuaka met people in the area, the Ife tradition is not valid. Furthermore Ojo contends that the people Gbadejo met in the area were Benin migrants. In Ojo's words:

This appears to provide a break down of the Otuaka theory of origin of Otuo as recorded in Rev. Edeki's book because it raises questions as to where the people Otuaka and his team met in the location on their arrival from Idogun area came from and what language they spoke[?].... In all probability, these people that [whom] Otuaka and his company met in Otuo bush would have come from Benin and that in itself resolves the question,...<sup>102</sup>

The fact that there were people in place before Otuaka arrived in Otuo is not sufficient ground to reject the Ife migration theory. Possibly Otuaka and his group met aborigines and not necessarily Benin immigrants. Two of the Otuo community totems are the boa and ground-nut which indicate the existence of an aboriginal population before the coming of either Yoruba or Benin settlers. It may well be that when the Otuo people moved out of Ora c.1632-1644 by their genealogy,

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<sup>99</sup>Ibid., pp.14-15.

<sup>100</sup>O.H.T. #172, #173 and #174 Interview with Mr. Maji Uloko, (65), Oluma-Otuo, February 16, 1991.

<sup>101</sup>S.O.J. Ojo, Otuo: A Study in African Traditional Political Systems, An Unpublished Research Report, Department of Political Science, Bendel State University, Ekpoma, 1990.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., p.15.

they too carried plant totems with them. They moved just after the foundation of the Ora villages where all the villages were enforcing animal political totems. The genealogy also fits the narrative tradition that the age grades were followers of Prince Uguan. As such the Otuo people could possibly have moved out of Ora during the period of Prince Uguan's children and grand-children. Furthermore it fits the period of internal migration c.1632-1664<sup>103</sup> in which Irimo led his followers out of Uokha and Arokho and Ikhin were creating new settlements. For all of these, the direction of migration appears the same - to the west of Uokha. The assumption by Ojo that the area was a tabula rasa is unacceptable. Unquestionably all that can be concluded from available evidence is that there was an autochthonous people in Otuo area before the Yoruba and Benin colonists moved in. For now it is safe to assume that the Yoruba migrants settled there before those from Benin. Moreover the predominance of Edo words in the Otuo language could be explained by the fact that the Benin invaders were more numerous than the aborigines, and therefore the Yoruba migrants ultimately adopted the Edo language. The narrative traditions point to the fact that Otuaka came with his wives and followers, while the Benin migrants arrived with twelve age grades. The animal totems predominate in Otuo especially the leopard and bushbuck which represents the migrants from

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<sup>103</sup>It might be noted that this is a generation after Ora had secured a title system from Ife. The dispute in Ora may have been related to the advisability of this new institution.

Benin. Certainly the predominance of animal totems and the Edo language in Otuo is significant. On the other hand the mud fish and gorilla totems are found only in Otuo and not elsewhere among either the Owan or Edo people.<sup>104</sup> The only possible conclusion one can reach at the moment is that they might be Yoruba totems. As a consequence a theory of Yoruba participation in the origin of Otuo is understandable.

When dealing with contrary traditions as in Otuo, it becomes important to attempt to synthesize them rather than become caught up in a futile bid to argue that one is faulty and the other is correct. The question is not who first settled in Otuo, but rather what population elements went into its present composition. While oral narratives have seldom been manufactured out of the thin air, some adjustments are often made to them so as to fit modern conditions. For example in the Otuo tradition one could become suspicious of twelve villages descending from twelve age organisations. Over time villages multiply and 200 years ago, when there were only six villages, the tradition may have referred to only six age grades. In fact the totemic evidence below suggests only six. It is in practice difficult to believe in twelve different age sets in operation at one time. The Otuo tradition will therefore be analyzed against the totemic distribution within the community, employing the following criteria:

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<sup>104</sup>Except in Ake. However as noted previously Otuo immigrants had settled in Ake.



1. Aboriginal elements will be associated with plant and snake totems. 2. Totems unique to Otuo, that is those which appear nowhere else in Owan will be considered to be of Yoruba origin. 3. Totems which appear both in Ora and Otuo will be considered as signs of the age organisations which departed from Ora and 4. Others which fit none of these categories and yet are duplicated elsewhere in Owan will be considered as derived from inter-region migrations whose traditions have not been collected. Employing the above criteria the following appears to represent the complexity.

1. One village appears completely aboriginal with the indigenous elements forming a majority in three and a minority in four villages. Thus aboriginals live in eight of the twelve villages, in 23 of 46 wards making up about 50% of the total population.
2. One village appears completely Yoruba while they form the majority in another and minorities in four. Yoruba settlers live in six of the twelve villages, in 9 of the 46 wards comprising about 20% of the entire population.
3. The Ora age sets which settled in six villages, dominant in one, as a majority in one and a minority in four, occupying 12 wards out of 46 forming 26% of the whole population. It is significant that these age grades depart from six villages not twelve, in Ora.
4. Only two wards in two villages were migrants from elsewhere in Owan and comprised about 4% of the total population.<sup>105</sup>

Ironically while 50% of the people of Otuo descend from aboriginals their story has not been collected; the academic debate has focused on two settler groups - Yoruba and Benin

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<sup>105</sup>Forty percent of the fifty eight names of Otuo have no meaning. This is not unusually high, nor can the names be linked exclusively to either Yoruba or Edo wards/villages.

which represent 20% and 26% of the people respectively. Only the dual totems of the whole community - a plant and a snake - point directly to the importance of the aboriginals. The aboriginals live in 23 wards which claim no ward totem, but only revere the plant and snake totems which are emblems of the entire community. Furthermore as people who revere a snake and plant, this population was not aboriginal in the true sense who held to no totems. Rather they came from the Ogiso strata of Edo society. From earliest times they spoke Edo. The Yoruba language had little chance of becoming the lingua franca. Additional evidence of the "aboriginal" nature of the population involved the fact that a shrine catered to the entire community. Observing the aboriginal strata of the population of Otuo, it suggests a perfect image of Uokha. The community as a whole shared a common shrine, revered the python and a plant and did not add village or ward totems.

The descendants of the Ora age grades were also interesting in that they came entirely from only two totemic groups, leopard and bushbuck, one bushbuck ward combining with an antelope. As the community totem of Ora, every Ora citizen revered the leopard. However the village totems in Ora such as the goat revered by eleven wards, queen termite by four, and grasscutter by eight have no representative in Otuo. The leopard and bushbuck totems are the most widespread and numerous throughout Owan, particularly concentrated where connections have been proven with the royal family of Benin

and generally scarce in the northern tier of communities, Otuo being the outstanding exception.

Finding the indigenous people of Owan has proven illusive because they have been so assimilated into the Benin immigrants both physically and culturally. It has been assumed that they were non-totemic as 10% of the Owan people are today. But if early Yoruba settlers were living in the area as suggested by one tradition in Otuo, then this assumption might surely be challenged. Owan traditions of origin recognise Uokha as the earliest community (c.1320-1347) even though its genealogy does not support such an early date. For that reason alone and because of its goddess, plant totems, and totemic organisation it seems probable that Uokha had been a matriarchy/matrilineal community and like Orhueren of Ozalla (also plant totem) possibly a part of the wall-builders. The tradition of a female ancestress impregnated by a sky god in Ivbiaro also seems to point to aboriginals, the only ones which Marshall<sup>106</sup> and Ohikhokhai<sup>107</sup> will admit to. But overall this research has failed to fulfil its expectation of a full aboriginal history. But it has been shown that indigenous people were already living in Owan before the intrusion of Yoruba and Benin migrants.

The major exodus from Benin began around 1500 with migrants arriving in Owan in every generation but one in that

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<sup>106</sup>Marshall, Part IX, p.13.

<sup>107</sup>Ohikhokhai, "Owan and the Benin Kingdom...", p.27

century. Prince Uguan, Obo and Ima founded Ora, Ihievbe and Emai communities respectively (c.1504-1536). Anamah and Prince Iyelolo established Igue and Ozalla respectively (c.1568-1600). This was the great century of migration and while moving groups appeared to have comprised plants and animal totems, in Owan they tended then and later to sort themselves out into predominantly plant totems in the northern tier of communities and animals in the central and southern regions. Only Ozalla in the south held the two groups together. Table one demonstrates that overall 43% of the people revered plants and snakes, while 35% preferred animals. In the generation c.1632-1644 the last major migration came out of Benin led by two brothers Arokho and Ikhin. However migration within Owan was substantial as Irimo left Uokha founding Iuleha community and the age grades which left Ora and joined Yoruba settlers to take over Otuo.

This latter period (c.1632-1644) might be when the animal and plant totems were segregating. Among the matriarchal plant totem groups, the peculiar position of the snake or more specifically Boa-Python clan has been noted. Normally segregated in separate villages, usually not in combination, the totemic observance possibly arising from an earlier Python cult, the snakes have been associated with authority in the early matriarchal societies. The snake totems are the most widespread and are found in fifty one wards in nine communities, the python alone existing in thirty seven, also

in nine communities. Next came the leaders among the animals, the leopard and royal totem of Benin, in thirty four wards in ten communities and the bushbuck in twenty three wards in seven communities. Unfortunately where the fullest information exists about the early period - with Orhueren in Ozalla - there is no reference to snakes and coincidentally that community remains the only one today devoid of snake totems. Thus no direct evidence of python cults was ever discovered. However no other totem, not even the leopard, occupies such a prominent positions. The boa-python is the community symbol in three communities and a village totem in four others. On the whole what can be said about the ethnic composition as far as current evidence will allow is that three major groups made up the Owan communities. First was the aboriginal people who are seldom recognised. Clearly they lived in all Owan communities as against Marshall and Ohikhokhai's assertion that they existed only in Ivbiaro. Secondly Yoruba migrants from Ife and Ondo area have been identified as comprising sections of Uokha, Iuleha, and Otuo communities. Lastly were the Benin migrants who have dominated all narrative traditions which points to the fact that they might have formed the most important and prestigious of all the groups which moved into Owan.

The Benin migrants after 1500 have been the most historically conscious. They have seized control of the historical tradition and even between Marshall in the 1930's

and this research in the 1990's their narratives have begun to dominate and overwhelm all others, as for example the indigenous and Yoruba traditions in Ivbiaro and Otuo. The totemic evidence suggests most of Ozalla villages existed prior to their arrival. They were not pioneers in a virgin land but rather small groups settling among an established population. Yet the published material and oral traditions continue to stress and debate which of the settler groups "founded" the various communities. The suspicion arises that neither the Yoruba nor the Edo migrants after 1500 founded any of the communities. It would be tempting to argue that the villages had existed before the settlers who brought to them larger organisation of community. That is not tenable. Frequently the community totems appear to derive from the pre-existing peoples. As example in Otuo 50% of the people seem to descend from the pre-1500 population where a python and groundnuts were the symbols of its kinship. Thus even the community seems to have pre-existed the settlers. The migrants, however, possibly created one change. Prior to 1500 the communities probably were extended kin groups, or single clans. The Otuo indigenes for example, belonged to one totemic group. The Yoruba and Benin migrants converted single clans into multi-clan communities. But the myth of one kin was vigorously perpetuated and so successfully too, that the British referred to the eleven Owan communities as clans.

Table Six  
Totemic Comparison of Benin and Owan.

Items	Benin		Owan	
	No. of Totems	%	No. of Totems	%
No Totems & Not Known	21	27	89	16
Snakes	5	6	113	20
Swamp	5	6	17	3
Plants	30	39	134	24
Animals	17	22	198	35
Others	-	-	18	3
Totals	78	100	569	100
No Totems	21	27	89	29
Single Totems	37	47	83	27
Double Totems	20	26	61	20
Multiple Totems	-	-	73	24
Totals	78	100	306	100

Table Seven  
Percentage Distribution of Owan Totems

British Clans	Animals	Snakes	Swamp	Plants	None + Not Known	Others	Tot als
North-ern Tier							
Ikao	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Igue	1 2.8%	11 31%	-	19 51%	5+0=5 14%		35
Uokha	3 6.9%	11 26%	-	13 30%	4+1=5 12%	Beads 11 26%	43
Otuo	16 11%	49 33%	8 5%	54 36%	6+15= 21 14%		148
Evbo-Mion	16 36%	8 18%	2 4.4%	10 22%	5+4=9 20%		45
Central Tier							
Ivbi-Ada-Obi	36 63%	4 7%	-	3 5%	1+10= 11 19%	Beads Termite Cricket	57
Emai	10 56%	1 6%	-	1 6%	4+2=6 33%		18
Iuleha	29 56%	5 10%	-	4 8%	3+9=12 23%	Termite Beads	52
Ihievbe	11 24%	15 33%	1 2%	16 35%	0+3=3 7%	-	46
South-ern Tier							
Ora	34 58%	9 15%	3 5%	-	8+3=11 19%	Termite Grass- hopper	59
Ozalla	42 64%	-	3 5%	15 23%	3+3=6 9%		66
Totals	198	113	17	134	39+50= 89	18	569
%	35%	20%	3%	24%	16%	3%	100%



## Chapter Four

### Goddesses and the Matriarchal Past

A major theme evident in the different Owan narrative traditions is the existence of a form of matriarchy and matrilineality in the distant past. Some scholars are of the view that matriarchy (rule by women) was a myth and did not exist in any society.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand some writers believe matriarchal societies existed in the distant past.<sup>2</sup> Current feminist ideas of matriarchy and the Mother Goddess draw on the theoretical foundations provided by the works of a group of nineteenth century anthropologists - Briffault, Bachofen, Morgan, and Tylor.<sup>3</sup> The conviction of the pro-matriarchy and goddess feminists is also based on contemporary studies on

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<sup>1</sup>Anne L. Barstow, "The Prehistoric Goddess", in Carl Olson (ed.), The Book of the Goddess, Past and Present: An Introduction to Her Religion, New York, Crossroad, 1983. p.9; Joan Bamberger, "The Myth of Matriarchy: Why Men Rule in Primitive Society", in M.Z. Rosaldo & L. Lamphere, (eds.) Woman, Culture and Society, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1974. pp.263-280; Joan B. Townsend, "The Goddess: Fact, Fallacy and Revitalization Movement," in Larry Hurtado, Goddesses in Religion and Modern Debate, Atlanta, Scholars Press, 1990. pp.179-203.

<sup>2</sup>See Chapter Six of Evelyn Reed's Woman's Evolution: From Matriarchal Clan to Patriarchal Family, New York, Pathfinder Press, 1975; Marija Gimbutas, The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe, 6500-3500 B.C.: Myths and Cult Images, Berkeley, University of California, 1982 and Merlin Stone, When God was a Woman, New York, Dial Press, 1976.

<sup>3</sup>Robert Briffault, The Mothers: The Matriarchal Theory of Social Origins, 3 vol.; New York, Macmillan, 1931 [1927]; J.J. Bachofen, Das Mutterrecht, Basel, Schwabe, 1861; Sir Edward Burnett Tylor, Primitive Culture: Research into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom, London, John Murray, 1871 and Lewis Henry Morgan, Ancient Society, New York, World Publishing, 1877.

prehistoric and ancient Mother Goddesses. Of note are the archaeological findings of Eric Neumann, E.O. James, James Mellaart and Marija Gimbutas.<sup>4</sup>

**The Goddess Debate:**

Basically the argument is that in the socio-cultural evolution of humankind early matriarchy was followed by patriarchy. However Evelyn Reed adds that in between matriarchy and patriarchy there existed "fratrilineal kinship" or "fratriarchy". According to her fratrilineal kinship or fratriarchy "was the male corollary of the female line of kinship in the period of the maternal clan system that preceded patrilineal kinship".<sup>5</sup>

Opponents of the concept of matriarchy maintain that there are no known societies where female rule was all pervading. However they fail to recognise that the advocates of matriarchy are actually discussing equality between the genders in prehistoric societies rather than a pervasive female dominance. As Reed argued:

The resistance against accepting the matriarchy (sic) is due in part to a false image of "female rule" over men, an inverted version of modern male

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<sup>4</sup>See Eric Neumann, The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype, New York, Bollingen Foundation, 1963, [1955]; E.O. James The Cult of the Mother Goddess, London, Thames & Hudson, 1959; James Mellaart, Catal Huyuk: A Neolithic Town in Anatolia, London, Thames & Hudson, 1967 and Marija Gimbutas, The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe 6500-3500 B.C.: Myths and Cult Images, Berkeley & Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1982.

<sup>5</sup>Reed, Woman's Evolution, p.165.

domination over women. This misconception comes from a failure to take into account the diametrically different nature of the two social orders. ... Neither sexual nor social inequalities could exist in the matriarchal epoch when society was both communalist and egalitarian.<sup>6</sup>

As Robert Briffault pointed out :

In the most primitive human societies there is nothing equivalent to the domination which, in advanced societies, is exercised by individuals, by classes, by one sex over the other. ... Neither the notion of economic domination through the ownership of private property, nor the notion of privileged right or authority, is a primitive idea or has any place in truly primitive forms of society.<sup>7</sup>

Essentially Reed and Briffault see the matriarchal phase as an era where both genders can be considered as equal rather than one exercising power or authority over the other. Furthermore the whole idea of matriarchy emphasises the high status of women in the past. The matriarchal epoch is also linked with the assumption that women invented agriculture towards the end of the palaeolithic period and the beginning of the neolithic era.

In this study the term matriarchy is defined as possessing three attributes: 1. matrilineality - tracing kinship relations through the mother, 2. A pantheon of goddesses which appears to relate to early female authority figures and 3. Matrilocalty where settlements are made up of

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p.131.

<sup>7</sup>Briffault, The Mothers, vol. 1, pp.433-34.

related female kin, the married males being strangers. Matriarchy did not in Owan refer to female chiefs just as patriarchy did not refer to male chiefs. Except for short unsuccessful attempts to introduce male chiefs, the Owan people remained acephalous.<sup>8</sup> The matriarchal people seem to have been associated with plant and snake - especially the boa (python) - reverence. Initially these two may have been distinct peoples but their distinctness cannot be traced today. In the face of the animal totem invasions, the plant and snake groups usually operated together except in two communities - Ora and Ozalla. In Ora a strong snake group which might have been indigenous, remained behind when all of the plant totems left for Otuo. In Ozalla some plant totems remained while all snake groups left. Otherwise the stronger the plant element within a community the stronger the snakes. Notice the ratio over all in Owan by wards of plant to snake totems:

<u>Plants</u>		<u>Snakes</u>
Igue	51%	31%
Uokha	30%	26%
Evbo-Mion	22%	18%

Those three communities have been discussed above as particularly inclined to matriarchal organisation. Conversely the stronger the animal totemic group the numerically weaker

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<sup>8</sup>Oral tradition records attempts at imposing male chiefs in Uokha and Ozalla which failed. Also in Ora the totemic observances of the community point to an attempt to impose a hereditary male chieftaincy.

the snakes.

	<u>Animals</u>	<u>Snakes</u>
Emai	56%	6%
Ivbi-Ada-Obi	63%	7%
Iuleha	56%	8%

Thus it appears that plant-snake totems, early peoples and matriarchal organisation were associated, while animal totems tended towards patriarchy and late comers.

Scholars of non-western cultures have through the study of pantheons of goddesses examined the position and power of women in such societies.<sup>9</sup> In Africa the closest study a scholar has conducted and known to the present writer was that by B.I. Belasco<sup>10</sup> amongst the Yoruba people of Nigeria. In his inquiry Belasco demonstrated the relationship between the existence of gods and goddesses in different historical epochs and the extent to which both genders controlled trade, especially the coastal trade with the Europeans. This chapter will attempt an analysis of totemic observances, pantheon of goddesses and reenactment ceremonies of shrine traditions with a view to determining the existence of

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<sup>9</sup>See the following articles: Alan K.L. Chan, "Goddesses in Chinese Religion"; Terence P. Day "The Twenty-One Taras: Features of a Goddess-Pantheon in Mahayana Buddhism"; Rory B. Egan, "Isis: Goddess of the Oikoumene"; Klaus Klostermaier, "Sakti: Hindu Images and Concepts of the Goddess" all in Larry W. Hurtado (ed.), Goddesses in Religions and Modern Debate, Georgia, Scholars Press, 1990. See also Carl Olson (ed.), The Book of the Goddess, Past and Present: An Introduction to Her Religion, New York, Crossroad, 1983.

<sup>10</sup>B.I. Belasco, The Entrepreneur as Culture Hero: Preadaptations in Nigerian Economic Development, New York, Praeger Publishers, 1980.

matriarchy/matrilineality in pre-colonial Owan. The characteristics of the goddesses and how Owan people perceived them will also be examined. Furthermore attempts will be made to extrapolate from the analysis the position of women in pre-colonial Owan society.

**The Early Gender Interactions:**

As the patriarchal and animal totemic peoples began to move in from Benin, the interaction with the matriarchs created a number of ritual compromises. Patriarchy did not totally sweep the matriarchal forms before it. Had the patriarchs done so, the chieftaincy system of Benin would have been imposed in Owan. The problem for the patriarchs was that Benin itself probably had been matriarchal and in turmoil caused by the intrusion of patriarchs there associated with the Eweka dynasty and its animal totemism.<sup>11</sup> Many of the matriarchal peoples (men and women) of Benin wished to leave, as an expression of opposition to patriarchy, hereditary leadership and the absolute rule of the Eweka dynasty especially as it evolved around 1500. Men usually led the exodus being able to muster followers in patrilocal villages, but less able to do so among the male stranger community in

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<sup>11</sup>See J.U. Egharevba, A Short History of Benin, pp.8-9 where he discusses the establishment of the new Eweka dynasty and the disagreement between Eweka's children. According to Egharevba, "Eweka I had a long and glorious reign but he had many children who were always quarrelling among themselves. He sent some of them away to be the chiefs (enigie) of various villages"(p.9). Odion of Uokha was included in the list. However chieftaincy institutions failed in Uokha.

matrilocal communities. However these male leaders were forced to compromise with many matriarchal-inclined followers. Once in Owan some of these matriarchy-patriarchy alliances fell apart. Prince Uguan, a high ranking son of the royal house in Benin introduced so much patriarchy into Ora, that all of his plant-totem followers left him. This division presumably contributed to the exodus of Otuo migrants from Ora. Since Uguan's line failed to establish chieftaincy - after what appeared as an abortive attempt to do so - even his patriarchal followers were divided in their objectives. Some might have welcomed patrilocality but were not ready for patriarchal ideas of heredity, much less chieftainship. Consequently Ora was left with a patriarchal totemic organisation and a community shrine to the fiery leopard who had acted as a king but proved unable to guarantee a throne to his descendants. Ora was possibly the most "patriarchal" of the Owan communities creating in the process the most coherent of their historical traditions.

In the compromises between matriarchy and patriarchy Uokha stands out with 84% of non-animal totems and 16% animals. This is the community with the smallest animal component and therefore weakest patriarchal faction. According to tradition, Odion came from Benin and his wife was Oron.<sup>12</sup> She worshipped at a shrine which became the community

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<sup>12</sup>O.H.T. #95 Interview with Mr. Ogbeide J. Jegede, (76), Uokha, November 8, 1990.

institution after her death. Since the genealogy does not stretch back to Eweka when this was said to have occurred, it seems more likely that the female Oron initially established Uokha about c.1320-1347. She might have been a child of Eweka. The community was a true matriarchy by the definition offered above with exclusive plant and snake totems, matrilocal and matrilineal with a female authority figure or leader. After her death the people established a shrine to her memory. Females might have been the authority figures in Uokha from her death until the coming of Odion two hundred years later. As noted elsewhere matriarchal societies either possessed no mechanisms to perpetuate their history and genealogies or they permitted the incoming patriarchs gradually to drop the story from their traditions.<sup>13</sup> When Odion arrived from Benin, c.1568-1600 according to his genealogy, his descendants harmonized his tradition with hers, arguing in the interest of unity that he had been the husband of Oron. Egharevba, the royal chronicler of Benin probably secured the tradition about Odion and his relationship to Oba Eweka from the elders of Uokha. Nevertheless Oron remained the community shrine until modern times.

To the Uokha people Oron represents peace and progress. They look to her for protection from all evil and danger. As with other goddesses in Owan, Oron epitomizes different things

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<sup>13</sup>It is because of the invisibility of women in historical documents that some feminists have advocated oral history methodology as the best strategy to recover women's voices.



to different people. Any average Uokha man and woman insist Oron is real and dependable.<sup>14</sup> During the present writer's fieldwork informants reported the story of a school teacher who impregnated a young girl. While the teacher accepted responsibility for the pregnancy, he refused to marry the girl. This infuriated the girl's mother. Hence she planned to kill the teacher. Fortunately for the teacher his landlord had long before the incident gone to the priest of the Oron shrine to obtain a piece of cowrie which he placed at the main door to his house as protection against evil forces. When the woman came at night to kill the teacher through witchcraft she was struck by Oron.<sup>15</sup> As a consequence the woman fell ill and only at the point of death did she confess her evil intentions. To the teacher Oron became a protector, while the supposed witch may view Oron as the goddess of death. From the perspective of both the teacher and the supposed witch Oron falls into the category of deities who stand for death as well as life.<sup>16</sup> In spite of the attempt by male chroniclers to downplay the eminent position of Oron such testimonies recounted above have

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<sup>14</sup>O.H.T. #97 Interview with Madam Agboson Agbekhai, (78), Madam Iyokhuen Otu, (77), Uokha, November 10, 1990; O.H.T. #100 Interview with Chief Ikhianvbode J. Ogboro, (90), Uokha, November 15, 1990.

<sup>15</sup>O.H.T. #96 Interview with Edegbai Esezoo, (80), Uokha, November 9, 1990 & O.H.T. #107 Interview with Aimiegbehi Aidelokha, (86), Uokha, November 24, 1990. See also M.B. Jegede, "The Role of Music in Oron Festival of Uokha Owan Local Government Area of Bendel State", N.C.E Project Essay, Bendel State University, Abraka Campus, 1987.

<sup>16</sup>See Barstow, "The Prehistoric Goddess", p.12.

aided the reconstruction of the past and place Her in a proper perspective. Clearly most traditions about female deities and goddesses belong to periods long before recorded history.<sup>17</sup> Hence scholars have relied on fragments of oral information and archaeological discoveries.

In Uokha, Odion's era c.1568-1600 represents the beginning of male genealogies and formal methods of recording oral traditions. The longer time passed the more elevated Odion became in the historical narrative and ideology of the Uokha community. However social power in the clan group remained with Oron and Her priest. Possibly the ritual head had been a woman before Odion. Perhaps he or his successors engineered the switch to a male priesthood. However other migration group leaders passing through Uokha seemed anxious to secure marriage alliances with the daughters, of the priest not with the family of Odion.<sup>18</sup> Such marriages may have been designed to secure the favour of their matriarchal followers.

In the case recorded above and settled by the priest of Oron, one might see considerable gender bias. Both the male and the female trespassed against customary law. However only the female was punished. It might also be surmised that the mother turned to witchcraft because she was convinced that she could not get justice from the priest of the shrine.

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p.7.

<sup>18</sup>Oral evidence from Ora, Iuleha, Igue and Ake communities point to the fact that their founder heros temporarily settled in Uokha.

Frequently when either gender turns to witchcraft it becomes a symbol that gender justice can not be trusted. Thus in patrilocal societies, witches are usually women or witchcraft their last resort while in matrilocal both are often associated with men. The tradition of the teacher and the mother of the pregnant girl was reported by both male and female informants as a commendable example of the justice of Oron suggesting how far both genders have been socialized into patriarchal values.

#### A Male Deity:

Another type of matriarchy-patriarchy compromise occurred in Ivbiaro, a village group placed by the British in Ivbi-Ada-Obi, but separate in pre-colonial times and clearly part of the central tier of communities. Here the village was founded by the female Aro and her children. By tradition she had been impregnated by a deity Ada-Obi.<sup>19</sup> Ivbiaro means the "children of Aro". There is no reference to Benin in this indigenous tradition and it is the only one claiming to be so in all Owan. On the other hand there exists a tradition which claims all Ivbiaro people came from Benin and that Aro and Ada-Obi were mortals. Here the shrine is to Ada-Obi, a male deity, which indicates that the tradition was not the earliest but created after patriarchs had arrived. In this study the present writer has assumed that female deities suggest

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<sup>19</sup>O.H.T. #194 Interview with Pa. Suma Arebun, (88), Ivbiaro, January 25, 1991; O.H.T. #204 Interview with Pa. Garuba Ikhekheakhe, (87), Ivbiaro, March 8, 1991.

matriarchy, while male deities patriarchy. Today animal totems dominate the Ivbiaro village group. Thus the influx of patriarchs had been overwhelming. It is hardly surprising that the indigenous tradition has been overwhelmed by that of Benin origin. There are eighteen wards in Ivbiaro, fifteen of which have animal totems, two have none and one is a plant ward. In two of the animal wards the boa is revered along with other animals and in another a tree totem is combined with animals. The indigenous tradition might survive only in that one plant, two Boa and non-totemic wards. Thus the indigenes might survive in less than one third of the population. This forms a far different situation than in Uokha where the plant and boa dominates 84% of the people. Clearly given the mixture of animals in the Plant and Boa wards the indigenes have been and continue to be assimilated into the animal totem system, the Benin tradition of origin and the ideology of patriarchy.

The Ivbiaro tradition remains troublesome but because it involves a truly indigenous story - the only one - it requires close attention. There are three words which might be analyzed as to meaning. In the Owan language "Aro" might refer, depending upon pronunciation, to an "eye", "Ada" means "sword" and "Obi", "poison". By a long stretch of the imagination something might be constructed out of the meanings. In Igbo "Aro" refers to a group of people renowned for their trading and priestly class, "Ada" means "the first daughter of a family" and "Obi" refers to a chiefly title. Thus Ivbiaro were

the children of Aro who had been the first daughter of a chiefly family. Consequently she not only founded the community but the shrine was also in her memory. What the incoming patriarchs needed to do was merely get a priest in charge of the shrine and convert the deity into a male who married Aro. Belasco in his work among the Yoruba has shown how change of gender can be brought about. In his study Olokun became "a god on the coast, emerged as a goddess inland".<sup>20</sup> Olokun became god along the coast area because men were more involved in the European trade and emerged as a goddess inland as a result of women's predominant involvement in internal trade. In Ivbiaro as the original Igbo language faded out "the first daughter of a chief" could readily be converted to a man named the "sword of poison".

It is possible to postulate a theory that the ancestors of the modern Edo lived in a multi-ethnic community, which included some Igbo.<sup>21</sup> It is a theory quite outside orthodoxy and fiercely opposed by Edo nationalists who desire to see the purity of the group, speaking the same language back to the dawn of history. The same consideration informed the opposition to the tradition that the Benin dynasty came from

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<sup>20</sup>Belasco, The Entrepreneur as Culture Hero, p.101.

<sup>21</sup>For example Eghraveba reported that Oba Ewedo was placed under the care of an Ugbo [Igbo?] priest before he became the Oba of Benin (See Egharevba, A Short History of Benin, p.9) He also reported on pp.15-16 that two Igbo priests took charge of the royal gods of Osa and Osuan. It is not therefore impossible to suggest that Igbo were involved at an early stage of history in Ivbi-Ada-Obi.

Ife and therefore had probably been Yoruba-speaking.<sup>22</sup> Those who call attention to such traditions are usually accused of seeking to use history as a cover to justify some modern political objectives. Very briefly the theory of Igbo in the heartland of Benin rests upon 1.the claim that the main rival city - Udo - could have been primarily Igbo<sup>23</sup>; 2.the king who was involved in long and protracted warfare with Benin had been the ruler of Udo; 3.Egharevba notes Igbo priests<sup>24</sup> at the royal court; 4.the great exodus from Benin whose leaders founded Agbor, Onitsha, Asaba and other West-Niger Igbo chiefdoms were actually partly Edoized Igbo because they bore both Edo and Igbo names<sup>25</sup> and finally 5.the organisation of many Edo villages resembled that of the Igbo while the royal court or palace more closely seemed to be a replica of the

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<sup>22</sup>This tradition has been challenged by Benin writers claiming Ekalderehan was the Bini culture hero. See G.A. Akinola, "The Origin of the Eweka Dynasty of Benin: A study in the use and abuse of oral tradition", Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria, VIII, 3, 1976.

<sup>23</sup>Darling inferred that Udo had been Yoruba when he asserted that Udo's geographical location between Ife and Benin makes it more likely to have adopted an Ife-aligned traditional culture than Benin...(p.153). See P.J. Darling, Archaeology and History in Southern Nigeria: The Ancient Linear Earthworks of Benin and Ishan, Cambridge Monographs in African Archaeology 11, 1984.

<sup>24</sup>J.U. Egharevba, A Short History of Benin, p.15-16.

<sup>25</sup>J.O. Ijomah, "The Evolution of Kingship Among the West-Niger Igbo Chiefdoms, with Particular Reference to Benin Influences", unpublished manuscript, 1981; J.B. Webster, J. Butcher et al., "A Critical Analysis of the Royal Chronicle of Agbor", Benue Valley Project Papers, NO.13, 1975, Killam Library, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Canada.

Yoruba.<sup>26</sup> Additionally it might be noted that centralized states often arise in multi-ethnic populations and that sometimes the more centralized and strong the central government, the greater the original multi-ethnicity of the founding population. Such a theory would clearly explain the Benin situation. Consequently if there were Edoized Igbo in the Benin heartland, there can be no reason to deny that some of them might have migrated with Aro. After all the shrine to Ada-Obi operated more like an Igbo oracle than it did like other shrines in Owan.

**Nature Spirits and Goddesses:**

Long before the intrusion of patriarchalism - or so it seemed - when female authority figures became deified and emerged as goddesses, the idea of spiritization had to be justified and fused into the dominant ideology of nature reverence. Presumably this was how Ekeva emerged as a ward goddess of the Ihievbe community. The little which Ihievbe tradition can remember about Ekeva, is that she had been very powerful during her life time and turned into a stream upon her death. Informants claimed that owing to her powers the people of the Ivbioguonu quarter worshipped the goddess asking for protection and claiming that she was their mother.<sup>27</sup>

Similarly the Owan River became the manifestation of a

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<sup>26</sup>R.E. Bradbury, Benin Studies, London, 1973. pp.6-16.

<sup>27</sup>O.H.T #226 Interview with Mr. Dauada Ohiosumuan, (74), Madam M. Ohiosumuan, (60), Ihievbe, January 20, 1991.

goddess to one village in Ora. The woman from whom the Owan River derived its name was called Omouwa, "A child of riches".<sup>28</sup> She was married to a man in Otuo. However she had no child and at death her corpse was not returned as was the custom in the culture. As her corpse began to decay it turned into a river and flowed back to Uhonmora village her original home.<sup>29</sup> From then on the people of Uhonmora deified Omouwa and all inhabitants of the village were forbidden to eat any type of fish from the Owan River. Whenever the people confront a problem they offer sacrifices to the goddess of the Owan River. The people of Uhonmora regard Omouwa as their mother and they depend on her for protection. One suspects she stood for more than what she is remembered for today, particularly because she is revered by both males and females in Uhonmora. The fact that the tradition of Omouwa has survived in Ora community is indeed quite remarkable, recalling the lack of plant totems, the strong indications of patriarchal ideology and the early attempts to establish hereditary chieftaincy.

Another tradition in Eme-Ora reports of Ome shrine. The Eme people regard themselves as children of Ome. According to

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<sup>28</sup>O.H.T. #16 Interview with Chief Okpaise Idornijie, (88), Uhonmora, October 2, 1990.

<sup>29</sup>O.H.T. #16 Interview with Chief Okpaise Idornijie, (88), Uhonmora, October 2, 1990; O.H.T. #25 Interview with Chief Omozuanvbo Oarhe, (70), Evbio-Ora, October 15, 1990; O.H.T. #38 Interview with Chief J. Jegede Agbebaku, (79), Uhonmora, October 26, 1990.



tradition Ome came from Ozalla and married in Eme.<sup>30</sup> It is claimed that she gave birth to four sons namely Ara, Dato, Ekpenafi and Erokho.<sup>31</sup> They grew up to be warriors. Tradition has it that during a war in which Eme fought against Egoro in Esanland, Ome made a charm (ogbele) which she tied round her waist to protect her four children. Also she placed on a fire a tuber of yam rubbed with a charm. The yam tuber was used to determine the exact time her children would come back from the war. But at the appointed time Ome's children failed to show up and she became agitated. At this point Ome declared that she preferred to die instead of her children. During the long wait Ome and the people around her heard a loud noise, following which she fainted and subsequently passed away.<sup>12</sup> Later news came that Eme had been victorious in the war. But Ome had thought the noise was an indication of the death of her children. Following her death the Eme citizens decided to deify her. Because the goat was Ome's totem it was adopted as the village totem of Eme-Ora. Describing Ome, Chief Abiodun Ogwai noted:

Ome stands out as a symbol of strength and unity for us Eme people. No Eme indigene who goes to war in the name of Ome, ever dies. Ome gives blessing to all

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<sup>30</sup>Ome's Ozalla origin accounts for Eme's goat totem.

<sup>31</sup>O.H.T. #6 Group Interview with Chief Irohio Usidame, (87), Chief Akhagbe A. Izebe, (76), Chief Olorufemi Aruya, (87), Chief Abiodun Ogwai, (64), Chief priest of Ome shrine, September 5, 1990.

<sup>32</sup>O.H.T. #6.

of us. We give sacrifice to her to procure whatever we want. Man or woman look up to Ome for things of life.<sup>33</sup>

Ome was said to have been married to Uguanroba whose generation was c.1568-1600. Today in Eme there is also a shrine in honour of Uguanroba a grandson of Uguan the founder of Ora. While tradition would want to us to believe that Ome belonged to the generation of Uguan's grandson there is every likelihood that she was the founder of Eme-Ora. As prevalent in male-controlled tradition the female figure is made subservient to a founder hero through the fiction of marriage. If the similarity in the names of Eme and Ome is anything to go by, it is possible that she was the founder of the village of Eme-Ora. In addition she came to Ora from Ozalla with her totem.

While narrative tradition tries to obscure the preeminent position of Ome in Eme, totemic evidence strongly supports the view that she was the founder of the settlement. Since the Goat is an animal totem and because animal totems are the only known totems in Eme-Ora, there is the temptation to reject the suggestion of a matriarchal past for Eme-Ora. However the community totem of Ozalla - the goat - has a clear and rational story of how it had been adopted in Benin. This might suggest that these people had held to no totem - being indigenous therefore and possibly following matriarchal

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<sup>33</sup>O.H.T. #7 Interview with Chief Akhagbe A. Izebe, (76), Chief Abiodun Ogwai, (64), Chief priest of Ome shrine, Eme-Ora, September 6, 1990.

practices - prior to the adoption. Had they already revered a totem, the normal practice would have been to add the goat to it. Multiple totems, after all, were not exceptional in Owan. Thus Ome might have descended from a clan of matriarchal inclinations which would explain why she founded the settlement, her "husband" arriving a couple of hundred years later, leading the influx of patriarchs c.1568-1600. This fictional marriage unifying the two traditions and forming the narrative which supported the community charter, follows the usual pattern. After all the patriarch's name, Uguanroba, means "Uguan becomes the oba" which clearly establishes that he sought chieftaincy in Eme-Ora but failed, his patriarchal supporters building a shrine in honour of his efforts.

The story of marriage between Ome and Uguanroba in Eme-Ora, of Oron and Odion in Uokha and Aro and Ada-Obi in Ivbiaro were likely intended to conceal the distinguished position of female founder-heroines and demean the status of early women. Research elsewhere has shown that where a marriage occurred between a goddess and a mortal - and the woman noted became a deity with a shrine in Her memory - it demonstrates the female power over fertility, war and the fortunes of their people. As Judith Ochshorn pointed out about the Mesopotamian goddess, Ishtar:

The heart of the sacred-marriage rite resided in Inanna/Ishtar's great power over fertility, war, and the destiny of peoples and cultures; in her commanding role in actively choosing and sexually enjoying the king; in the energizing and

beneficent nature of her sexuality in her aspect as goddess of love and fertility, and in the consequent good fortune for the human community which it, in turn, fervently commemorated.<sup>34</sup>

Having provided the above interpretation of the character of the sacred-marriage rite and the powers of Ishtar, Ochshorn also acknowledges that the marriage and sexual relations between the goddess and the king led to the sanctioning of the latter as the ruler of the people.<sup>35</sup> Arguably this points to a symbolic transfer of power from a matriarchal goddess to a patriarchal mortal king. This reinforces the present writer's argument that supposed marriages noted in Eme-Ora, Uokha and Ivbiaro might have symbolized the fusion and triumph of patriarchal over matriarchal principles. In present day Owan the shrines in Eme-Ora and Uokha dedicated to the female spirits are looked after by a priest<sup>36</sup> which goes contrary to the accepted norm that shrines of goddesses were usually controlled by priestesses. As with most shrine traditions the priest of Ome is now divinely chosen by the deity.<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless the issue is why a male was chosen as against a female or why and when priests replaced priestesses.

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<sup>34</sup>Judith Ochshorn, "Ishtar and Her Cult", in Carl Olson (ed.) The Book of the Goddess, Past and Present: An Introduction to Her Religion, p.23.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p.22.

<sup>36</sup>While Chief Abiodun Ogwai is the current priest of Ome shrine, Chief Ozeoya looks after Oron shrine.

<sup>37</sup>Chief Ogwai claimed he was chosen by the deity. See O.H.T. #7.

From Matri- to Patrilocality:

In Otuo, a community in which 50% of the population descend from aboriginals, there existed a tradition of matrilineality which Lawani calls "the Uthomeran institution".<sup>38</sup> According to Lawani "Uthomeran ... is the place where everybody concerned serves his or her mother with the head of an animal; hence the name".<sup>39</sup> During the present writer's fieldwork the elders of Otuo confirmed the existence in the past of the institution of Uthomeran. Today there are still traces of it. The concept of Uthomeran provided for matrilocality within Otuo and patrilocality for outsiders. Thus:

A child by a wife who is a native of the soil [an indigene of Otuo] belongs to his or her mother's Uthomeran and that by a wife married from outside the town to his or her father.<sup>40</sup>

It has been suggested in chapter three that the reason for the exodus of Otuo migrants c.1632-1664 from Ora might have been the result of the disagreement between plant and animal totemic groups, which represented matriarchal and patriarchal peoples. This may well explain the predominance of plant totems with 36% as against 11% animals in Otuo today.<sup>41</sup> At the time matrilocality existed in Otuo "All the people who belong

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<sup>38</sup>Lawani, The History of Otuo, p.9.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.. Uthomeran literally means "the head of an animal".

<sup>40</sup>Lawani, The History of Otuo, p.9.

<sup>41</sup>See Table Seven.

to the same Uthomeran together, constitute one family in which the most distant grades of relationship are recognized as an obstacle to marriage",<sup>42</sup> and any man who broke the prohibition sacrificed a he-goat to his Uthomeran. Although oral tradition is silent on it, the fact that a man was punished for breaking marriage prohibition within an Uthomeran indicates the existence of matriliney and matrilocality in pre-colonial Otuo. It is very likely that since Otuo society was matrilocal, women meted out the punishment to male offenders. However when matrilocality lost out to patriarchy, the situation changed. The first change which occurred following the victory of patriarchal values over matrilineality was the emphasis placed on patrilineal descent. To achieve this men preferred to marry stranger women from outside Otuo. As Lawani stated:

...a man who did not marry a non-native [stranger] before his death is regarded as a person "who did not reach home". Hence most Otuo men marry "foreign" women at all costs. Other reasons why they like [sic] to marry foreigners are: If a man dies the children by his non-native wife have more right to his property than those by his native [indigenous] wives. When without children of this sort [children from stranger wives], his property is divided among the male members of his Uthomeran.<sup>43</sup>

Since Otuo men were opposed to matrilineal descent they sought to break it by marrying wives from outside. The Otuo migration from Ora took place c.1632-1661. Thus this conversion to

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<sup>42</sup>Lawani, The History of Otuo, p.10.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., pp.9-10.

patrilocality might have occurred sometime after that. The change marked the end of matriarchal institutions in Otuo which was related to similar transformations in other Owan communities. The Otuo experience remained part of an Owan-wide phenomena.

Among the matrilineal, matrilocal Yao of the Malawi region, it has been observed that hereditary male chiefs emerged as men took slaves as wives. Descent was therefore traced through wives (often slave wives) of a village headman.<sup>44</sup> Moreover "a higher proportion of marriages took place outside the village than was the case in the larger states".<sup>45</sup> Since both males and females brought spouses from outside, all of the children remained within the community which therefore grew in population at twice the rate of their matrilocal neighbours. Slave marriages thus allowed men to gain patrilineal style rights over their children and wives. The position in Otuo seems to duplicate the Yao villages. It too appears to be the largest of the communities of Owan with twelve villages and forty seven wards compared with other larger ones such as Iuleha (nine villages and thirty nine wards) and Ozalla (eight villages and twenty three wards).

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<sup>44</sup>Kathleen Gough, "Descent-Group Variation among Mobile Cultivators", in David M. Schneider & Kathleen Gough (eds.) Matrilineal Kinship, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1961. p.538.

<sup>45</sup>Kathleen Gough, "Variations in Preferential Marriage Forms", in David M. Schneider & Kathleen Gough (eds.) Matrilineal Kinship, p.617.

Otuo men were seeking to circumvent the restrictions laid upon them by matrilineal and matrilocal institutions. Typical of other matrilocal societies such as the Chewa, the men of Otuo belonged to a secret society in which at times they appeared masked probably with the intention of abusing and complaining about female behaviour without running the risk of being identified. Lionel Tiger in a related argument claims: "Secret societies, ...are the consequences of an effort of individuals - usually and mainly men - to create the social conditions for exercising their gregarious propensities, the expression of which may be (or may be seen to be) inhibited by their community".<sup>46</sup>

**Separate Male and Female Deities:**

Afuze, Emai community, is the home of a shrine in honour of a female figure called Ovbiagbede. G.B.L. Oyakhire reports that Ovbiagbede (the blacksmith's daughter) was not allowed to marry because her father wanted her to stay home to bear a male child who would have inherited his property and presumably his skills.<sup>47</sup> Unfortunately Ovbiagbede died childless. Oyakhire states that because of the love which Ovbiagbede's cousins had for her after she died, they "erected

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<sup>46</sup>See Lionel Tiger, Men in Groups, New York, Random House, 1969. p.130.

<sup>47</sup>Oyakhire, The First History of Emai Clan, p.19. Ironworkers often sought to restrict their skills to the confines of the immediate family.



a monument [shrine] to immortalise her name".<sup>48</sup> While Oyakhire claims love was the reason for Ovbiagbede's deification, informants interviewed by the present writer claimed she fought for women's rights. According to Madam Ilekesun Againe:

Ovbiagbede was a woman who fought for the welfare of other women. She was very wealthy and prosperous. She did not marry. She was energetic and powerful. She challenged the powers of men. Uze is the shrine for men and Ovbiagbede for women.<sup>49</sup>

Ovbiagbede is referred to as the mother of the Afuze people. Certainly her deification elevates her status to that of a goddess, although her characterization makes it look as if she belonged to the recent past. Like other goddesses in Owan, Ovbiagbede represents different things to both genders. For instance She is regarded as a fertility goddess by women. As Madam Againe noted: "Women do come to Ovbiagbede [meaning the shrine] for children. Usually it is the oracle which decides what sacrifices a woman makes to Ovbiagbede. As soon as the sacrifices have been carried out, a woman goes home reassured that her request will be granted. Ovbiagbede does not fail us".<sup>50</sup> Women also argue that the goddess of Ovbiagbede aids them in other life endeavours such as trade and farming. As

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid..

<sup>49</sup>O.H.T. #76 Interview with Madam Ilekesun Againe, (85), Priestess of Oviagbede shrine, Afuze, September 10, 1990. Madam Againe's view of Ovbiagbede was also confirmed by other female informants in Afuze.

<sup>50</sup>O.H.T. #76.

for the men they argue that it was the tradition in the past for them to go to the Ovbiagbede shrine to seek protection before any war effort.<sup>51</sup> Beyond calling on Ovbiagbede for assistance most Afuze indigenes believe that she is always concerned for their welfare. The feeling is prevalent that Ovbiagbede protects her people even without being asked. It is for this reason they annually offer sacrifices for the good she has brought them during the past year.

As noted above Uze shrine caters to the male deity of Afuze. Unlike the case with Oron or Aro, there is no tradition of marriage between Ovbiagbede and Uze. They more or less operated independently and presumably they belonged to different periods in Afuze history. Without doubt, Uze represents the leader of migrant patriarchs. Nevertheless the Afuze people are very clear as to the position of Ovbiagbede. The separateness of the two deities may explain why today a priestess takes care of the Ovbiagbede shrine. Hence it is safe to argue that the symbolism of marriage represents the victory of patriarchy and the male takeover of the shrines to the goddesses in Owan. However in Emai patriarchy had failed to advance to a position of authority such that fictionalized marriage could be propounded to subtly suggest that Ovbiagbede had been subject to Uze. As long as female informants like Madam Againe insist that Ovbiagbede "challenged the powers of

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<sup>51</sup>O.H.T. #72 Interview with Pa. Jiedu Imiere, (80), Afuze, August 25, 1990; O.H.T. #79 Interview with Madam Egbodion Igbafen, (90), Afuze, September 26, 1990.

men" the males of Afuze, in Emai will fail to create a tradition whereby the goddess became the wife of Uze. For the madam the two deities remain equal, Uze for men and Ovbiagbede for women.

**The Festivals of Ozalla:**

The Orhueren river embodied the community goddess of Ozalla. Today a shrine exists in her memory in Ozalla. Given that this goddess has a shrine as well as being manifested in the river, She seems to span two periods, or rather personify two religious manifestations, conceptions or experiences. Orhueren became associated with the river as the deification process became fused with or attached to nature reverence, while she also possessed a shrine to her memory as became customary for later goddesses. Thus Orhueren seemed to occupy an intermediate position between river goddess such as Ekeva (Ihievbe) or Omouwa (Owan) in Uhonmora and shrine goddess such as Oron in Uokha, Ovbiagbede (Emai) or Ome (Eme-Ora).

Three festivals in Ozalla focus upon Orhueren. The first of these - the Eghe - recognises that all the children of Ozalla come from the goddess, that She was therefore the mother of them all, despite the narrative tradition that Orhueren died childless. The Obo festival performed by unmarried girls was designed and demonstrated dedication to Orhueren as well as testifying to their sexual purity.<sup>52</sup> The

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<sup>52</sup>During the course of my field work I was opportuned to witness the celebration of the Obo festivals. Young girls paraded the street of Ozalla naked. Informants claimed their

narrative tradition suggests that Orhueren lived in an age after Omouwa (later deified as the Owan River) but Orhueren and her people came into conflict with those of Omouwa.<sup>53</sup> Ceremonial re-enactment also suggests that Orhueren was not merely a single outstanding authority figure but was possibly the founder of a line of female rulers. The senior daughter of the senior man of Iraede village held custody and control over the ceremonial sword of Ozalla. She married a man in Igbidin village. The woman who held the ceremonial sword "which was not to be given over to any other person except in case of death"<sup>54</sup> determined the timing of the various festivals held to honour Orhueren in Ozalla community. In other words the ceremonial queen always came from Iraede (okra totem) and customarily married in Igbidin (rabbit). These were probably the only two villages in ancient Ozalla. Later the village of Usuamen (okra and rabbit totems) may have emerged because it was the only other one to feature in the rituals. Iraede is known as the first village in Ozalla. Its name means "crossed the river", suggesting that its people were Edo-speaking. The names of the other two have no meaning in the modern language, suggesting non-Edo peoples.

The third celebration to Orhueren's honour in Ozalla is

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nakedness testified to their sexual purity as virgins.

<sup>53</sup>See Ikpekhia, The Historical Background and Cultural Heritage of Ozalla, p.35.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p.37.

called the Ivbamen festival during which the main activity involves the male age groups carrying water from the river to the town.<sup>55</sup> Each year a different age group performed this ritual. Upon all occasions the group was led by the males from Igbidin and Usuamen villages who marched in front to the river and back. Igbidin of the Rabbit clan were related to the queen by marriage while Usuamen of the Rabbit and Okra clans were either blood kin or kin by marriage to the Okra queen. P.J. Darling<sup>56</sup> in his archaeological excavations and mapping of the earthen walls which spread over the entire Edo country and partly into Esan points out that the early settlements were built on the upper interfluves. Walls encompassed them, while the lowlands around the rivers were considered the wilderness of disease.<sup>57</sup> Darling suggests that the wall building began in the savannah north which moved into modern Esan and over the centuries from about 900 onward - and thereby in the Ogiso period - spread down to the heartland of modern Edo around the city of Benin and then further south, east and west.<sup>58</sup> Below an attempt will be made to link the ceremonial re-enactments

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<sup>55</sup>O.H.T. #137 Interview with Mr. Robert Alufoje, (70), Ozalla, July 28, 1990.

<sup>56</sup>P.J. Darling, Archaeology and History in Southern Nigeria, p.25.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p.31. One might suppose the river valleys were more subject to malaria and other diseases than the upland ridges.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p.176. Darling does not claim he has located the entire wall system. His maps suggest that the ones he did identify stretched a slight way into Owan district.

in the Ozalla festivals in honour of Orhueren to these larger developments in the Edo country.

Let us suppose that Queen Orhueren did not originate in Ozalla, marry in Egoro-Amede (Esan today) and flow back to Ozalla upon her death as a river as narrative tradition suggests. Let us also suppose she came from Egoro-Amede country as a pioneer of this wall-building culture. Wall building might be thought of as requiring male leadership but it should be recalled that in Hausaland wall construction has been credited in tradition to Queen Amina.<sup>59</sup> If the wall builders settled the ridges, possibly indigenous and probably hostile populations were already dominating the regions along the rivers which explains why they were considered a world of disease, a world of darkness and hostility. Since water was essential to the new settlement, Queen Orhueren organised the male age groups - the units usually employed in war - to fetch it from the river and in opposition to the indigenous people. In the Ivbamen festival when the men bring the water it must "never be stored in any one's house over night".<sup>60</sup> This seems to suggest it was being treated as stolen property with no one household wishing to be held responsible for the theft. It should be noted that customarily the fetching of water from

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<sup>59</sup>See R.A. Adeleye, "Hausaland and Borno 1600-1800", in J.F. Ade Ajayi & Michael Crowder (eds.), History of West Africa, Vol. 1, Longman, 1976. p.561; Also see "Amina of Hausaland" in David Sweetman, Women Leaders in African History, London, Heinmann, 1984.

<sup>60</sup>Ikpekhia, The Historical Background..., p.36.

the river would have been a female undertaking. However it was far too dangerous for that and the male army had to seize, protect and escort it to the village. Since water was so indispensable and yet so dangerous to procure, it and the queen who supervised and organised its collection became celebrated in the Eghe festival as the "mother of all the children". Queen Orhueren and her people ultimately crossed the river but not without opposition from the existing population under Queen Omouwa (Owan).<sup>61</sup> The narrative tradition collected by Ikpekhia notes this: "It was impossible for her (Orhueren) to drive ... Owan away".<sup>62</sup> Finally they joined together. Having succeeded, Orhueren and her people founded Iraede ("crossed the river") near to the indigenous village of Igbidin (no meaning in the modern Ozalla language). If the narrative tradition is followed the two settlements (Iraede and Igbidin) remained hostile until after the queen's death and her deification by Iraede. The narrative tradition explains the reconciliation thus:

a certain hunter from Okokhumu [quarter] in Igbidin [village] went to the bush for a hunting expedition. He eventually met the goddess of River Orhueren who told him how the people... should be worshipping her... The goddess of River Orhueren revealed many things to this hunter and she directed him to tell the

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<sup>61</sup>See O.H.T #140 Interview Mr. Usiobafo Omigie, (76), Ozalla, July 29, 1990 & Ikpekhia, The Historical Background, p.35.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid...

elders at home.<sup>63</sup>

Thus the reconciliation took place and new "queens" of Iraede thereafter always chose a husband from among the indigenous males of Igbidin. Ozalla had been founded. The assimilation of the two peoples was symbolized in the new village of Usuamen where the okra totem of the queen was combined with the rabbit her husband from of Igbidin. In no other village or ward does the ceremonial okra totem exist in Ozalla. In fact it is found nowhere else in Owan. The Rabbit is concentrated in Ozalla (seven wards) but found in five other communities being the fourth largest of all clans, possibly suggesting that not all the inhabitants of Igbidin were prepared to accept the reconciliation agreement worked out in Ozalla.<sup>64</sup>

The widespread scattering of goddesses and other related evidence over the communities of Owan clearly point to an early era of matriarchy/matrilineality/matrilocality. The greatest concentration of ceremonies and related narratives about that early age occurs in Ozalla which has been dealt with above. The Ozalla evidence suggests that early authority figures were females, that when their influence faded males attempted but failed to achieve a patriarchal order based upon

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<sup>63</sup>Ikpekhia, The Historical Background, p.37.

<sup>64</sup>In the previous chapter evidence had been provided to suggest the foreignness of the Rabbit clan.



chiefs.<sup>65</sup> Rather what emerged was an acephalous society based upon consensual authority where the numerically dominant males within the governing system could not override female spokeswomen and representatives of their gender. The acephalous system became a compromise between matriarchy and the chiefly system which many males desired. It emerged in a struggle between the genders.

#### A Return to the Goddess Debate:

Thus far what we have attempted to do in this chapter is an analysis of totemic evidences, shrine traditions and the Owan pantheon of goddesses as a way of making meaningful postulations on the position of women in the distant past in this region. The writer is aware of the opposition of a section of the feminist intellectuals to this mode of scholarship. For instance Joan Bamberger disagrees with Bachofen on this. In her analysis she pointed out that:

Apart from the question of accuracy as a cultural historian, there is the question of the value and desirability of his moral defense of females. If I have read him correctly, Bachofen's matriarchy is a far cry from today's liberated woman. Not surprisingly, she bears a closer resemblance to mid-Victorian conceptions of the perfect woman... The Victorian vision of woman elevated her to the status of goddess, but it did little or nothing either to promote her independence or to offer her opportunities to fulfil herself outside

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<sup>65</sup>Oral tradition has it that by c.1824 the Oba of Benin (possibly Oba Ogbedo or Osemede) appointed one Ayuhe the Enogie (chief) of Ozalla. Ayuhe was succeeded by two other Enigie following which the institution was discontinued.

the home.<sup>66</sup>

It is on the basis of this kind of assumption and myths she collected among the Kayapo Indians in Brazil that Bamberger challenged what she termed the "myth of matriarchy". A closer look at Bamberger's assertion reveals that her opposition to the concept of a matriarchal phase in the history of societies is based on the dubious Eurocentric interpretation of what the notion of the mother goddess stands for. To Bamberger since the elevation of woman to the status of goddess led to women's oppression in Europe, wherever goddesses or legends about them exist they must represent the subordination of women. This is the result of a belief so common among western feminists, who all too often believe that nothing of significance can ever come out of the so-called Third World. If it does not exist in the western world it cannot be true. There is also a paranoia among some feminists that an acceptance of a matriarchal past is tantamount to conceding that women had power and authority in the past but they lost. To them the acceptance of failure in the past does not help contemporary feminist struggle. We do also know that the ambivalent attitude of some feminist writers to the idea of a mother goddess representing a glorious past for women is because in Judeo-Christian religious canon, the symbol of the

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<sup>66</sup>Joan Bamberger, "The Myth of Matriarchy: Why Men Rule in Primitive Society" in M.Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere, Woman, Culture and Society, p.265.

goddess was forcibly evicted.<sup>67</sup> Finally while Bachofen might have been a victim of Victorian conceptions, the Owan evidence clearly demonstrates the early role of the matriarchs in all kinds of roles, but never in the home. Since "goddess" has a Victorian connotation, possibly its use in this study suggests an inaccurate picture in relation to Owan for some readers. These early female figure became spiritized, as ancestress spirits to which the community looked for assistance, for arbitration and the smooth operation of the social system.

In the same vein Joan B. Townsend states that her opposition to the Goddess movement has to do "with the tendency of some to treat the myth as historical fact".<sup>68</sup> Rather than see the characterization of the goddesses as myths, most societies where they exist, argue that they represent symbols of the people's consciousness. Again reducing the traditions of a group of people to mere myths is to deny the people a sense of being and a history. It is based on the assumption that the so-called primitive people are not capable of representing correctly their feelings. Since the "myths" are not open to rational interpretation of the "civilised" world of the west, they must be rejected. Among the Owan people, as demonstrated by the examples recounted in

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<sup>67</sup>See Carol P. Christ, "Symbols of Goddess and God in Feminist Theology" in Carl Olson (ed.) The Book of the Goddess, p.249.

<sup>68</sup>Joan B. Townsend, "The Goddess: Fact, Fallacy and Revitalization Movement", in Larry W. Hurtado (ed.), Goddesses in Religion and Modern Debate, p.182.

this chapter, the symbols of goddesses go beyond mere myths and legends. To them the symbols express every aspect of their daily lives. It is for this reason that Carol Christ paraphrasing Carl Jung, argued that:

...cultural symbols often express the human quest for meaning, the desire for connection to a wellspring of life power and creativity deeper than that offered by modern science. ...modern life was truncated by a slavish adherence to rationality and ... people needed to be open to an irrational and mysterious dimension of life in order to find meaning.<sup>69</sup>

Another ground upon which Townsend rejects the "Goddess" argument is that she refused to "endorse the accompanying assumptions that the gender and role of the deities reflect the status of the sexes in societies".<sup>70</sup> Again this is contentious. The claim that the role of the deities cannot be used as a basis to assess the status of both genders assumes that there are no links between religious beliefs and secular matters. If there are no links one wonders why for instance in Christian tradition the symbol of God has been depicted as male, father, son, lord and king. Certainly there is a connection between the male images of God and patriarchal dominance of society. As Carol Christ has pointed out:

Those who are influenced by the symbol of God as (exclusively) male are led to believe that men should rightly have significant and legitimate power in

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<sup>69</sup>Christ, "Symbols of Goddess", p.232.

<sup>70</sup>Townsend, "The Goddess", p.189.

society. Reciprocally, the fact that men hold most of the significant and legitimate power in society reinforces the notion that God is most appropriately symbolized as male.<sup>71</sup>

If this is the case, and if religious symbols have relevance for human secular beliefs and if men have benefited from this, it is appropriate for feminists to be receptive to ideas aimed at recovering women's past. One cannot imagine western patriarchalism flourishing in its present form or even flourishing at all, if the christian god had been female who sent her only begotten daughter to the earth, who in turn gathered around her twelve female disciples and whose later popes, cardinals, bishops and priests were entirely female.

Where writers think only in terms of myth as a completely imaginative exercise, created solely to meet certain social needs, then there remains little common ground to debate. Where, as with people studied here, a leader after death becomes a deified spirit upon whom the needs of society become projected, then history combines with myth. It might be recalled that two deified women who never bore children while alive, yet are approached by women who wish to become pregnant. Thus history and social needs come together in an awkward conjecture just as a Christian couple might pray to Jesus - a bachelor - to solve their marital problems. Writers who remain sceptical do not comprehend how ancestor and ancestress reverence operates and works itself out in society

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<sup>71</sup>Christ, "Symbols of Goddess", p.234.

over the centuries.

Townsend has also argued that some societies which revere female deities do not as a rule hold living women in high regard. As a consequence she concluded that: "The reverence of a goddess, through contrast may actually lead to more oppression of women".<sup>72</sup> She cited the example of goddesses in Hindu India where women are oppressed by their husbands' family for paying a small dowry. First many have pictured the Indian woman as independent, powerful and assertive. So the contention remains debatable. Second what Townsend has forgotten is that the Indian society she referred to, is now essentially patriarchal in nature and probably has been since the arrival of the Aryan pastoralists about 3,000 B.C. who succeeded in marrying the females of the pantheon of the indigenous people to their own male gods. In India as in Owan patriarchs have employed marriage among the gods as a symbol of female submission. It is a known fact that with the ascendancy of patriarchal values, female members of society suffer more oppression. Hence it is ridiculous for Townsend to argue that there is a direct corollary between the worship of goddesses and female subordination. In spite of her spirited effort to shoot down the Mother Goddess philosophy, Townsend concedes that "the concept of a "femaleness" or "goddess" within the deity (or deities), manifesting "female values and experiences" can serve as inspiration to today's women in

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<sup>72</sup>Townsend, "The Goddess", p.195.

their spirituality and their daily lives".<sup>73</sup> The point being made is that although patriarchal power and authority is pervasive in most contemporary societies, there is need to show that it had not been so in the past. Hence scholars should explain female loss of power in a historical context.

**The Partial Triumph of Patriarchy:**

The question then arises as to what were the influences which inspired males to seek greater authority, the circumstances which favoured their elevation in status and the institutions which they employed to achieve it. The narrative record in Owan remains almost completely silent on gender competition and one must therefore surmise answers to these questions from the institutions, historical events, beliefs and rituals which have remained in the record. A hint of gender competition might be gleaned from the strict injunction that the ceremonial sword of the senior woman in Ozalla "was not to be given to any other person",<sup>74</sup> for which one might read not to be turned over to any "man", especially a "husband".

It seems logical to assume that males moved easily from hunting to war, to negotiations with alien groups to migration and that the age groups provided institutions to facilitate these activities. Migration leaders often governed their followership from young un-married men of their own age group

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p.197.

<sup>74</sup>Ikpekhia, The Historical Background., p.37.

as appeared to have occurred in Otuo. War companies were drawn from them as well, while the oldest age group sought recognition as judicial and mediating agents. Slave or alien wives might have been secured to create patrilineal communities to escape the authority of women associated with matrilocal villages and kinship networks, as demonstrated in Otuo. Men's secret societies as in Otuo became powerful institutions in advancing male interests. In Africa at least the greatest triumph of males involved the wiping out the past history of female leadership. Females too might not have seen the importance of history as a weapon and in this, they resembled many feminist writers of modern times who manufacture reasons to condemn the idea of an early matriarchy.

However the pressures towards matrilocality remained strong in the communities of Owan. Charismatic male leaders usually married more than one wife and the children of one often settled in one ward, the children of another in a second ward while husbands circulated among their wives' wards. To balance this tendency stranger males were often welcomed in stranger wards. If these strangers were animal totemic they strengthened the ideology of patriarchy. Thus the new villages pushed matrilocality out of the villages and into the wards. This became a triumph for the patriarchs because a male kinship network now spanned the whole village while a woman's was confined to one ward. Male kinship networks had a claim to



"govern" the village while female kin groups might only claim a ward.

As the kingdom of Benin grew in wealth and power, prestige and attractive festivals, it became a role model for patriarchal values. While some migrants into Owan were clearly fleeing the oppression of patriarchy, others particularly after c.1550 were obviously enamoured of it. People without chiefs have been presumed by scholars and lay observers as having less-developed political systems. As a consequence they are regarded as "bush", "primitive" and backward. Male migration leaders in most of the communities were being deified and ultimately "married" to the pre-existing female spirits. In a period when migrants from Benin were setting up chiefdoms on all sides of the kingdom, among the Esan and Akoko-Edo, Etsako and the West-Niger Igbo, the Urhobo and Itsekiri, it seems almost miraculous that the communities of Owan did not follow their example or be tempted by the royal court in Benin City to do so. Presumably the women of Owan saw that chieftaincy would significantly reduce their status and they were supported by those men who resented the idea of heredity and autocracy which full patriarchal and hierarchical rule entailed. Men might unite in favour of dominance over women but they could be severely divided over heredity as a principle in society and a chief and embryonic class system which challenged their feelings of equality and bonding. One hesitates to suggest an ideological predilection among reasons

for migration out of the heartland of Benin but there were few economic incentives for choosing to settle in Owan. Greater opportunities in commerce lay in moving south like the Urhobo and Itsekiri towards the Atlantic or east to the Niger like the Igbo or even north like the Esan who straddled the land route to Idah. All of these regions held out greater economic prospects than Owan. However if an Edo group around 1500 felt oppressed by the growing popularity of patriarchy and particularly its more extreme manifestations such as heredity by primogeniture and chiefly autocracy, then migration in most directions from Benin merely meant more of the same. Only Owan offered relief from these new ideas and perpetuation of or return to gerontocracy, matrilocality and a degree of gender equality. However even in Owan the matriarchal ideology came under pressure since the communities could not totally isolate themselves from the new ideas.

The power of the matriloal system was the extreme reluctance of a young woman to leave her kin and move twenty miles away to another village. However in the new village a girl from one ward might be induced to move to a neighbouring ward, only a short walk away. She could return to her native ward for daily visits and permanently if the marriage became unsatisfactory. Thus by pushing matrilocality into the wards, the tendency of even the wards towards patrilocality increased over the centuries. For sometime, the secret societies bonding stranger males survived - in Otuo until modern times - but as

patriarchy increased, the necessity for them declined. Male bonding had shifted into seeking to monopolize the politics of the villages.

As long as the villages were matrilocal the power and influence of females remained strong. As noted, migration by young males became an important method of challenging female influence and authority. However even before migration, males had begun to create institutions to achieve unity within their gender. Age groups might have been instituted initially for purposes of hunting and war. However they united males and bonded them over numerous villages within one community and could easily be turned to methods of enhancing the prestige and authority of their gender. Age groupings provided males with an institution which could deal with and seek to improve their status. Female age groups were normally only pale imitations of their male counterparts and frequently became confined to the existing kinship network within a matrilocal village or even ward. The bonds shaped within male groups which might bind the entire community, might be called upon for migration purposes noted previously. Even more important for male bonding were the secret societies and their associated festivals such as the Ekhai in Arokho and Ikhin, also discussed in chapter three. Their more obvious function of criticizing female society, while very obvious, might have been secondary to the aim of regulating unhealthy male competition and creating a brotherhood, often in the form of

shared experiences of secret nudity and ceremonies of symbolic blood sharing.<sup>75</sup> Through age grades and secret societies males spread their unity from the village to the community.

Secret societies brought men together for psychological support. In Arokho and Ikhin men smeared themselves with charcoal in order to demonstrate that while they might be strangers they were also united and bonded together for protection and the enhancement of their status.<sup>76</sup> Often during this festival the men sang songs which indicated their alienation and pointed out what they did not like about the family behaviour of their wives' kin. It was their one chance for free speech during the year, since all the females were related, they could combine to punish any man for behaviour they did not like. Ultimately if he failed to conform, all the women might boycott him which might become so severe as to drive him out of the village. The Ovbaso and Orai festivals in the brother settlements of Arokho and Ikhin respectively were probably designed to check the abuse of female power.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>In Ozalla an informant confirmed that nudity rites during manhood ceremonies in the Orhueren River served to break down barriers between initiates and create solidarity among them.

<sup>76</sup>See chapter six of Tiger's Men in Groups..., pp.126-155 for a detailed discussion of objectives of male secret societies.

<sup>77</sup>When I put this theory before my informants in the two communities it was rejected. However they were all males. My assessment of the situation was that my informants' rejection of this theory was not based on any logical reason. They did not know. For instance they did not know the reason for men smearing themselves with charcoal. I was told, "it has always been like this". Unfortunately female informants did not know either.

One of the most serious failures of matriarchy was that it has not been able to maintain genealogies or organised methods of perpetuating oral history. It becomes dangerous to argue from the absence of evidence. However it is equally foolish to imply that no one lived in Owan until c.1320-1347 or c.1504-1536 when genealogies indicate the patriarchs arrived from Benin. What must we make of the centuries before these leaders? The shrines to outstanding females sometimes still exist, the goddesses have occasionally survived. All of these hint at female authority in the past. One might argue that the first task of the patriarchs involved wiping out the early tradition and also wiping out the memory of the indigenous people by implying that everyone descended from the migrants from Benin, that the land was empty and that the pre-existing female deities were merely wives of male migration leaders who they in turn deified. It might be argued that where patriarchy scored its greatest victory involved seizing and maintaining control over history, and shaping it in a patriarchal image. Those who control the tradition of the past might be said to control the present and the future.

It has been shown how by the analysis of festivals and the myths of the goddess Orhueren in Ozalla, it becomes possible to write a type of history about the age before the patriarchs. However one can hardly refer to the results as satisfying. Without any narrative tradition, it appears difficult to construct an analysis which gives more than a

speculative postulation for a limited time period. Surely the failure of matriarchy stands out most glaringly where in the hundreds years of its potential existence prior to c.1500 in Ozalla, the limited reconstruction of Orhueren is the best the historian can do.

An interesting point to note here is that the beginning of real genealogies in this region for Uokha, Ozalla, Ivbiaro, Arokho/Ikhin, and Otuo, all with strong hints of early matriarchy, fall in the same generations c.1568-1600, and c.1632-1664. Furthermore these generations appear to be ones where the struggle between patriarchy and matriarchy had become fiercest. Animal totem groups and their patriarchal ideologies were moving out of matriarchal Uokha. The matriarchal plant groups were totally withdrawing from Ora and moving north into the Otuo hills. Arokho and Ikhin, also patriarchal were migrating out of Benin. They moved widely in the Owan country and finally settled in Evbo-Mion. Thus the generation c.1632-1664 witnessed a widespread influx of patriarchally-inclined groups and conflict within Owan between matriarchal and patriarchal principles. As will be shown in the next chapter, it was also an age of economic prosperity from which, it seemed, women benefitted more than men.

#### **The Gender Struggle in Benin:**

This period also witnessed some serious developments within the royal family in Benin. Between c.1617 and c.1671 the primogeniture system, and even father to son succession

was abandoned in the royal court of Benin. The office of the Oba was opened to a wide range of candidates within the royal family. Presumably this opened the throne to children of sisters of the reigning Oba as in a matrilineal system. Egharevba reports that "When Ohuan [c.1590-1617] came to the throne, the Iyase, named Ogina, rebelled. This chief had shown himself very unfriendly to the late Oba and had even committed adultery with one of his wives".<sup>78</sup> Ogina was only defeated after the Oba retreated to Evbohnan village for several months before re-launching an attack. On the other hand Oba Ahenkpaye [c.1644-1671] was dethroned "because he usurped the rights and privileges attached to the offices of his chiefs, and his voice was law".<sup>79</sup> Since the ideology of patriarchy and matriarchy have been ignored, this period of instability has been interpreted as struggle between the Oba and the major chiefs or a dispute over the degree of royal power. While royal power probably was a factor it appears that Oba Ahenkpaye had espoused a degree of matriarchal ideology. Following Ahenkpaye's dethronement "He and his heirs after him have been the Enogie [chiefs] and priests of the goddess of Igbaghon of Iguosa ever since till this day".<sup>80</sup> If Ahenkpaye favoured matrilinealism, let him and his heirs serve a goddess! The instability which characterised this period led

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<sup>78</sup>Egharevba, A Short History of Benin, p.34.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., p.35.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p.36.

to the re-establishment of primogeniture in c.1671-1698. It does not seem mere coincidence that the matriarchal-patriarchal feuds also raged in and disturbed the peoples of Owan during the overlapping generations: Oba Ahenkpaye (c.1644-1671) and the influx of migrants into Owan (c.1632-1664).

Particularly following the assumption of power by the Eweka dynasty in Benin, the patriarchal influences began to pour into Owan through the numerous migrants from that area. However the ideology emanating from Benin embraced not only male dominance but also principles of heredity and chieftaincy which involved autocratic rule. It becomes impossible to sort out which parts of the ideology were most influential among the migrants coming into Owan. In Owan, males did not attempt or if attempted they failed, to push their dominance to chieftaincy. The issue of chieftaincy divided rather than bonded males. It involved the principle of heredity which operated contrary to the very deep beliefs and emotions of segments of an egalitarian society. It might be assumed the majority of women were resolutely opposed to the principles of heredity through the male line and male chieftaincy. Surely the institution of queen mother in Benin c.1509-1536 had been designed to cater to women and secure support for the monarchy.

This occurred before the great exodus of migrants from Benin into the Owan communities and probably in an era when



hope still survived that the dynasty could be combined with certain matriarchal principles. It might be hoped that the queen mother could stand for women's rights. However she remained as mere tokenism. As the biological mother of the monarch she became more concerned with her son's power and position and therefore her own, than she might be with the rights of women. The queen mother in Benin was unlike those in Daura<sup>81</sup> or even Ondo<sup>82</sup> where she was not the biological mother, nor appointed or controlled by the monarch and not dependent upon him for support. Clearly the queen mother in Benin did not have the authority to depose the king as in Daura. It only took a generation for it to become obvious that the queen mother institution had not halted the advance of patriarchalism in Benin and the first major exodus into Owan began c.1568-1600.

The colonial British in fact imposed chieftaincy. Possibly this imposition became successful in Owan because it catered to the sentiments of a growing segment of the population. After all chieftaincy appeared to be the crowning achievement of patriarchy. It is noteworthy that British-imposed chiefs failed in the acephalous heartland of the Igbo whose social organisation came closest to that of the Owan

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<sup>81</sup>See M.G. Smith, The Affairs of Daura, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1978. p.57.

<sup>82</sup>See 'Biodun Adediran, "Women, Rituals and Politics in Pre-Colonial Yorubaland", A Paper presented at the Staff/Graduate Seminar, Department of History, Dalhousie University, November 27, 1992. p.11-13.

communities amongst all southern Nigerians. Furthermore the British chiefs were seriously challenged, primarily by Igbo women in their celebrated resistance to colonialism and male dominance.<sup>83</sup> The passivity of the women of Owan under colonial chiefly rule might best be understood by the creeping patriarchalism and gradual socialisation of females into male dominant values which occurred in the three hundred years before the arrival of the British.

Royal succession frequently became the issue in African politics. A widespread form of succession involved one where any son of the king by any of many wives might become a candidate to succeed. This form gave the kingmaker chiefs considerable power. In the interest of their own influence they were often accused of choosing the weakest of the sons. This form of succession usually witnessed the matrilineal relatives of one son rising up against those of another. Around 1500 Benin had adopted primogeniture where the eldest son by the single royal-designated wife or queen became automatically the successor. This virtually eliminated the influence of the kingmakers. The situation in Benin between c.1617-1671 has often been interpreted as a variation of this

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<sup>83</sup>See Judith Van Allen, "'Aba Riots' or Igbo 'Women's War'? Ideology, Stratification, and the Invisibility of Women", in Nancy J. Hafkin & Edna G. Bay (eds.) Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change, California, Stanford University Press, 1987. pp.60-85.

theme of conflict between the Oba and his counsellors.<sup>84</sup> However it went much farther than that. What was being sought was the opening of the throne to anyone related to the royal clan not just to the dozens of sons of the Oba but also to the children of brothers, sisters, uncles and aunts, even junior branches long separated from the royal lineage. It might be suspected that Oba Ahenkpaye came from a branch of the royal line related through females. The patriarchy of Benin would feel it absolutely necessary to unite against such an intolerable departure from its ideology. In the re-establishment of primogeniture, while both the matriarchal ideology and chiefly influence had been defeated, patriarchalism along with monarchy had become victorious.

It became obvious as the research advanced that in a society such as Owan in which the dominant groups had originated in Benin, understanding depended upon linking the developments in the two societies. Since no scholar has studied gender relations in Benin, a similar research in Owan begins with an automatic handicap. As noted repeatedly some males sought but failed to achieve chiefly organisation in Owan. Had they done so, it would be possible that the memory and institutions recalling earlier matriarchy would have been further eroded such that studying them would have become pure conjecture, if not impossible. What is urgently required is a

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<sup>84</sup>Egharevba alluded to this in his A Short History of Benin..., p.34.

study of gender relations in Benin. Early matriarchy there might be impossible to reconstruct since even the males of the Ogiso period or what the Edo like to refer to as pre-dynastic, have been mostly ignored. However in Benin the Eweka dynasty did not put an end to - or at least cover up - gender struggles. Combining the chronicle with intensive interviewing might still bring this issue into the historical record.

Finally and possibly the most far reaching postulation suggested in this chapter, has been the idea that an acephalous society built on consensus among males and females replaced matriarchy because of opposition from women to the victory for patriarchy which chieftaincy might symbolize. The examination of the pantheon of goddesses focuses attention on females authority figures as part of the historical process of the foundation of Owan. For instance the identification of Oron, Ome, Omouwa, Aro and Orhueren challenges the received tradition that Owan society only produced founder heros rather than heroines. Males were hampered in their desire for authority and power because long distance trade by which elsewhere they frequently broke into the women's monopoly did not flourish in Owan. A series of wars with Yoruba or Nupe aliens - both patriarchals - did not occur until the late nineteenth century. Owan was also protected from alien patriarchal religions until the same period just before colonialism. Granted the example of Benin lay close at hand but as demonstrated the gender struggle there had not resulted

in a victory for males until after the main migration into Owan had been completed. Many Benin migrants entered Owan to escape the emerging patriarchal dominance in that kingdom. The record exists of the serious effort to create male chieftaincy in Uokha, Ozalla and Ora. But it is difficult to believe that male members of the wide-spread and numerous royal Leopard clan did not harbour ambitions to chieftaincy, seek to effect them and fail as they did in Ora. However the voices of women were obviously too strong and while matriarchy/matrilineality gave way, it was replaced by a consensual system of governance. It seems probable that the balance between the pros and cons about the value and usefulness of patriarchy were fairly evenly divided because, unlike in Igbo country, the Owan people accepted the chiefs forced upon them by the British supported as they were by opportunities for long distance trade and the arrival of patriarchal religions.

## Chapter Five

### Gender and Pre-Colonial Economics

This chapter sets out to reconstruct the pre-colonial economic structures in Owan. This reconstruction will highlight the major factors which shaped the evolution of economic institutions. The discussion will focus on the development of agriculture, manufacture and trade. The traditional historiographical approach has been to treat pre-colonial social, economic and political institutions from a purely male perspective. Since "the social world is the creation of both male and female actors," and because "any full understanding of human society and any viable program for social change will have to incorporate the goals, thoughts, and activities of the 'second sex',"<sup>1</sup> the thrust of this analysis will be the contributions of both genders to centuries of economic, social and political development of pre-colonial Owan society.

#### Agriculture:

Agriculture was the pillar of the pre-colonial Owan economy. To the people the origin of agriculture can be traced to the beginning of humankind. Usually informants claimed agriculture started a "long time ago" in the area. They are very clear about how agriculture began. For instance one informant declared agriculture began a "Long time ago when our

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<sup>1</sup>M.Z. Rosaldo & L. Lamphere, "Introduction" to M.Z. Rosaldo & Lamphere (eds.), Woman, Culture and Society, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1974. p.2.

ancestors started gathering wild crops and fruits".<sup>2</sup> The wild root crops available were yams and a tuber crop called bobozi.<sup>3</sup> A number of fruits and vegetables were also obtained. Although Owan informants are very clear about the beginning of agriculture, they are unsure of the dawn of domesticated food production. As a result it is difficult to date the transition from foraging to domesticated food production in the Owan area. It has been "linked to the beginnings of African metallurgy and the emergence of major exchange systems within the continent".<sup>4</sup> Between the fourth and sixth millennia B.C.E. Ethiopia became the first zone in which domestication of food production occurred.<sup>5</sup> In West Africa there is controversy amongst scholars as to the origins of food production. On one hand Desmond Clark and others argue that "agriculture began in the savanna around 2000 B.C., following the diffusion of ideas and plants from Egypt".<sup>6</sup> On the other G.P. Murdock has asserted that "agriculture began independently in West Africa about 5000 B.C.". <sup>7</sup> While Portères agrees with Murdock on the

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<sup>2</sup>O.H.T. #12 Interview with Mr. Theo A. Esele, (58), Eme-Ora, September 8, 1990.

<sup>3</sup>Bobozi was a wild root crop which looked like cassava. Information was obtained from O.H.T. #12

<sup>4</sup>Ralph Austen, African Economic History: Internal Development and External Dependency, London, James Currey, 1987. p.9.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p.12.

<sup>6</sup>See A.G. Hopkins, An Economic History of West Africa, New York, Columbia University Press, 1973. p.29.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid..

independent development of agriculture in the region, he is of the view that "it originated between 2800 and 1500 B.C."<sup>8</sup> The point which can be made out of the controversy is that whereas there was a West African neolithic agriculture, there is every likelihood that there were external influences since there had been centuries of interactions between different regions of Africa. With the development of agriculture in Africa different crops found their way into the continent through diffusion from Asia and the new world.

In pre-colonial times the Owan people cultivated a variety of food crops. They included yams (Dioscorea Dumettorum), maize (Zea Mays), rice, groundnuts (Arachis Hypogea), pepper, cotton, okra (Hibiscus Esculentus), cocoyam (Colocasia Antiquorum), plantain, banana and egusi (Langenaria Vulgaris). While in the earlier period yam had been the staple food of the Owan people, with the advent of cassava (Manihot Utilissima), the latter replaced yam as staple food. Other crops included cowpeas (Vigna Unquiculata), sweet potatoes (Ipomoea Batatas), gourds (Lageneria Siceraria) and tobacco (Nicotiana Tabacum). Tree crops such as kola and oil palm were also harvested. In a study of the Igbo economy A.E. Afigbo claims there were three stages of crop evolution and development in the guinea forest zone.<sup>9</sup> A.I. Okoduwa adopted

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid..

<sup>9</sup>A.E. Afigbo, Ropes of Sand: Studies in Igbo History and Culture, Ibadan, Oxford University Press, 1981. p.126.



the same schema in his research among the Esan people of Nigeria.<sup>10</sup> Since a greater part of Owan falls into the guinea forest zone it is appropriate to adopt the same stages in this inquiry. The first stage is associated with the domestication of crops indigenous to the forest region of Africa. In Owan as among the Igbo and Esan, this stage marked the cultivation and exploitation of such crops as two species of yam - white and yellow, cotton, pepper, cowpeas and palm trees.

The second stage was marked by the introduction of crops which were associated with the "South East Asian crop complex". This phase witnessed the advent of Asian yams (water yams), cocoyams, bananas and plantains in West Africa. A.G. Hopkins noted these crops came "by way of the Near East between the first and the eighth centuries A.D."<sup>11</sup> It would be ideal if one could identify the earliest crops with the aboriginal people, those with no totems in Owan and the Asian complex with the wall builders or those with plant totemic observances. Clearly the third stage, the American complex of crops (to be discussed below) arrived with the third group of migrants - the animal totems - from Benin after 1500 and after contact with the Portuguese. If such a schema could be postulated, it would suggest that the spread of new peoples came about as the consequences of the new and attractive food

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<sup>10</sup>A.I. Okoduwa, "Economic Organisation in Pre-Colonial Esan", M.A. Dissertation, University of Benin, Benin, Nigeria, 1988. p.36.

<sup>11</sup>Hopkins, An Economic History of West Africa, p.30.

crops which they possessed and that these in turn assisted those newcomers to achieve prestige and pre-eminence in the society. The link between migration, agricultural technology tied to variety in agricultural crops becomes an attractive proposition but not provable from the limited data on Owan. One point might be noted. Hopkins claims that the Asian crop complex spread between the first and eighth centuries while Darling - from archaeological dating - places the primary phase of wall-building in Benin at c.780-1010 A.D.<sup>12</sup> Thus by the coincidence of overlapping dates, the spread of the wall builders, plant totems and Asian food crops might be brought together.

The diffusion of South American crops marked the third and final phase in the assimilation of foreign seeds and plants into West Africa. The new crops which came during this period included maize, cassava (manioc), groundnuts, tobacco, cocoa, tomatoes and such fruits as pineapple, paw-paw and mango. This phase has been dated to the late fifteenth century.<sup>13</sup> The adoption of these crops without doubt positively affected the economies of the West African societies. Each crop had specific advantages. While maize had the advantage of yielding twice a year, cassava was easy to grow and produced food all year round. It is for these reasons

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<sup>12</sup>Darling, Archaeology and History in Southern Nigeria..., p.112.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid..

that they had an edge over existing crops such as yams which "make more demands on the soil and ... need a great deal of labour"<sup>14</sup>. Despite the benefits, the spread of cassava was slow, since it contained a poisonous acid called cyanide. It took some time before farmers, particularly women learnt the technique of processing to make it safe for consumption. Once the technology of processing was acquired, cassava became the staple food of several West African peoples. On the whole the introduction of South American crops solved the problem of relying on limited sources of food. The supply of food was therefore secure all year round.

Thus the immigrants from Benin who tended to become pre-eminent in the communities of Owan arrived with a whole new complex of crops, cassava being particularly important in spanning the normal hunger season which often preceded the harvesting of the new yam and in being able to flourish in soils where yams did poorly. The northern tier of communities was the region of yam production par excellence, and the region was dominated numerically by plant totems. The central tier with poorer soils for yam and more adapted to cassava became the stronghold of the animal totem immigrants from Benin. The south became divided with Ora being famous for cassava and animal totems, Ozalla for yam and plant totems. While yam and cassava became staple foods eaten in all regions, the evidence suggests that the balance tilted towards

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p.31.

yam in plant totem regions and cassava among animal totems. Since yam was a male crop and cassava a female, it might be argued that the gender balance varied as well with men being more influential in yam-dominant regions.<sup>15</sup> The evidence for this, however, appears slight, probable in the northern and central communities but less so in the south. Possibly the balance in the south, remained almost even because men in Ora appeared historically more powerful while in Ozalla women seemed to be so.

As a prelude to a detailed discussion of agricultural practices in Owan it is pertinent to examine the land tenure system. Land was communally owned in pre-colonial Owan.<sup>16</sup> Although land is a fundamental factor of production, labour was more crucial in the Owan production process, because land was available in abundance in relation to the population. The basic economic unit was the family. Notwithstanding the "village [was] the smallest land-holding unit, individuals and families retaining rights in land only so long as it was under cultivation".<sup>17</sup> Once a farmer had harvested his crops, the land reverted to the control of the community. In cases where permanent crops were planted, such land remained under the

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<sup>15</sup>A Crops was determined to be male or female by the fact of which gender controlled its cultivation.

<sup>16</sup>During the present writer's field research all informants both men and women pointed out land was communally owned in pre-colonial times.

<sup>17</sup>Bradbury, The Benin Kingdom..., p.96.

control of the planter. It is for this reason that:

...membership of a group (tribe, clan, lineage, village, etc.) only conveyed the right to participate in the use of its ancestral land, without giving perpetual right to a specific area, as a rule the individual to whom the land was allocated was left in undisturbed possession of it as long as he put it into proper use and fulfilled the concomitant obligations.<sup>18</sup>

This proviso prevented alienation of land by individuals. Although land was communally owned, it did not mean communal cultivation. Basically individuals had specific rights which were granted them through consultations with elders of a lineage or village. Such rights to the use of land were "restricted by the will of the gods [and goddesses], the all-pervading spirit of the ancestors [and ancestresses] whose wishes were interpreted through the priest of the earth goddess".<sup>19</sup> The right which individuals exercised over land were in different forms and for distinct social and economic purposes. These included land for building houses, farmlands both for planting crops and grazing animals such as cows and goats and gathering areas where women picked wild fruits, vegetables and such protein products as mushrooms and snails. Furthermore men exercised hunting rights in communally reserved lands. With regards to communal land use, the elders of a village or lineage decided from time to time where

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<sup>18</sup>P.L. Wickins, An Economic History of Africa from Earliest Times to Partition, Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1981. p.47.

<sup>19</sup>Okoduwa, "Economic Organisation in Pre-Colonial Esan", p.43.

shrines, ponds and markets were to be sited.

Because individuals had no direct ownership rights, land disputes were avoided. According to informants since individuals did not own lands, it was very easy for elders to guarantee usufruct land rights to those who needed them. For instance one informant claimed "where a man encroaches on another's right of land use the easiest way of determining the rightful occupant of the land at that point in time was to ascertain the first person to gain access to the land or whose crop was still on the land".<sup>20</sup> A major factor which prevented land disputes in pre-colonial Owan society was the fact that land was available in abundance relative to the inhabitants of the area. In the same vein Evans-Pritchard noted the same type of practice among the Nuer of southern Sudan:

There [was] enough land for everybody on the Nuer scale of cultivation and consequently questions of tenure [did] not arise. It [was] taken for granted that a man has a right to cultivate the ground behind his homestead unless some one [was] already using it, and a man can choose any spot outside the village which [was] not occupied by the gardens of others. Newcomers [were] always in some way related to some of the villagers, and kinsmen [did] not dispute about gardens.<sup>21</sup>

Although land was readily available to whoever needed it,

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<sup>20</sup>O.H.T. #2 Interview with Chief E.O. Otoijuanmu, (63), Evbiobe-Ora July 19, 1990.

<sup>21</sup>E.E. Evans-Pritchard, The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of A Nilotic People, Oxford, 1940. p.77.

its allocation was subject to the control of village or lineage heads. Owing to the nature of pre-colonial Owan society - patrilineal and patrilocal - the rules and regulations which guided land use were determined by male elders. As a consequence women had no say in land matters, even though they were the primarily users of this important factor of production. In order for women to gain access to land they had to rely on their fathers, husbands and sons. In theory it would seem that if land were in abundance, women should have had free access to its use. However experience has shown that this was not the case. Because land was primary the means of subsistence, women had to compete among themselves for the favours of their fathers, husbands and sons. As an instance one female informant reported that because her husband has many wives they go to great lengths to curry his favour in order that they may obtain fertile plots for cultivation.<sup>22</sup> While her experience was focused on contemporary Owan society, she nevertheless argued that such practices were part of gender relations in the pre-colonial period. She emphasised the point that because each woman in a household invariably took care of her children from her own agricultural yields, any woman "worth her salt" had to do everything for her husband if she and her children were to avoid starving. Thus land could be said to be an instrument of

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<sup>22</sup>I have decided not to reveal the identity of the informant here because of the nature of the information.

control in the hands of the male population in their relations with women. Whereas land was not in limited supply in pre-colonial or modern Owan, it could be said to be a scarce resource because the users did not directly control access to it. This explains why women had to compete for the attention of their fathers and husbands. One clear technique women adopted in eliminating competition was witchcraft accusations as discussed in the previous chapter.

In pre-colonial Owan the agricultural calendar revolved around the cultivation of yam which was regarded as a male crop. Also among the Igbo and Esan people yam was not only considered as such but also called "king of crops".<sup>23</sup> Thus yam was held in high esteem. The people practised slash and burn agriculture with cutlasses, axes and hoes as the major agricultural implements. The agricultural year began in the dry season months of December to February when the yam plots were cleared and large trees were felled. As soon as they dried, the bush was burnt preparatory to hoeing which commenced with the first rains in the months of March and April. Actual planting of yams began in late April and lasted to the end of May. Following the planting of yams, other crops such as maize, okra, pepper, melon, cotton and cassava were planted. Usually these crops were planted between mounds or

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<sup>23</sup>See A.E. Afigbo, "Economic Foundations of Pre-Colonial Igbo Society" in I.A. Akinjogbin & S.O. Osoba (eds.), Topics on Nigerian Economic and Social History, Ile-Ife, University of Ife Press, 1980. p.4; Okoduwa, "Economic Organisation in Pre-Colonial Esan", p.36.



heaps made for the yams. Since the inter-planted crops were female, the weeding and tending of the "male" yams also fell to the women. In other cases some women prepared separate plots for maize or cotton. Banana and plantains were planted in acreage left to fallow. Some farmers preferred to grow such crops as rice, plantain, okra, cocoyams and maize in separate plots.

Following the planting season there was a period of lull, when the farmers waited for the yams to sprout and other crops to germinate. As soon as the yams sprouted, the vines were staked to poles of wood or bamboo. The poles supported the yam tendrils from which the leaves developed. Meanwhile the first weeding of the yam plots took place in the month of July. As we already noted the Owan people cultivated three types of yams, white, yellow and water yam. The three varieties were planted and harvested in that order.<sup>24</sup> Once the white yam matured they were harvested for the celebration of the new yam festival. Usually the earth priest determined the date of the festival. The period of the new yam festival was set aside to make sacrifices to the earth goddesses and the spirits of the people's ancestors and ancestresses seeking good yields.

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<sup>24</sup>The order of the planting of the three varieties of yam had some significance in the subsistence process. Because the white yam matures first, the populace relied on it for subsistence before the yellow yam matures. The yellow yam was eaten for greater part of the year. When the supply of yellow yam begins to diminish the people fall back on water yam till the next harvest season. This circle guaranteed the people a fairly reliable source of yam cycle throughout the year.

In examining pre-colonial agricultural production, yam cultivation was designated a male occupation and other crops were the responsibility of the women. Even then the women and children supplied the labour for all production processes from the period of planting to harvesting. It is for this reason one can safely argue that Owan falls within the category of African communities which Ester Boserup characterised as the "region of female farming par excellence".<sup>25</sup> The determinants as to whether a farming system is male or female relates to population density, technology and type of cultivation. Thus Boserup argues that shifting cultivation is associated with female and plough cultivation with male farming. In the female farming system the male population carry out the more muscular tasks of clearing the bush and felling trees, after which the females performed all other operations.<sup>26</sup> This no doubt best describes the situation of the pre-colonial Owan farming system. The question which arises is what factors determined the sexual division of labour in pre-colonial Owan? All

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<sup>25</sup>Ester Boserup, Woman's Role in Economic Development, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1970. p.16. While Boserup's work broke new grounds in focusing attention on the role of women in agricultural production a number of studies have critically reexamined her contribution. See for example chapter four of Jack Goody's Production and Reproduction: A comparative Study of the Domestic Domain, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976; Suellen Huntington, "Issues in Woman's Role in Economic Development: Critique and Alternatives", Journal of Marriage and the Family, 37, 4, November 1975. pp.1001-1012; Lourdes Benería and Gita Sen, "Accumulation, Reproduction and Woman's Role in Economic Development: Boserup Revisited", Signs, 7, 2, Winter 1981. pp.279-298.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p.35.

informants, males and females in response to this question claimed it has always been that way. By implication they were invariably arguing that the division of labour was natural and unchanging.

Boserup in examining the sexual division of labour and the position of women in rural communities pointed out that:

...two broad groups may be identified: the first type is found in regions where shifting cultivation predominates and the part of agricultural work is done by women. In such communities, we can expect to find a high incidence of polygamy, and bride wealth being paid by the future husband or his family. The women...have only a limited right of support from their husbands, but they often enjoy considerable freedom of movement and some economic independence from the sale of their own crops.

The second group is found where plough cultivation predominates and where women do less agricultural work than men. In such communities we may expect to find that only a tiny minority of marriages, if any, are polygamous; that a dowry is usually by the girl's family; that a wife is entirely dependent upon her husband for economic support, and that the husband has an obligation to support his wife and children, at least as long as the marriage is in force.<sup>27</sup>

The characteristics outlined in the first group best describe the pre-colonial sexual division of labour in Owan society. Nonetheless Boserup's description of the agricultural system as shifting cultivation should not be applied to the Owan situation. The term which best depicts pre-colonial Owan practice is "rotational bush fallow". In pre-colonial Owan

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p.50.

whereas settlements were fixed, farmers rotated their farm lands to allow the lands to regain depleted nutrients.<sup>28</sup> Hopkins clearly defined both terms in An Economic History of West Africa. According to him, "Shifting cultivation involves the periodic movement of settlements"... and in rotational bush fallow "settlement is fixed, and the land under cultivation rotates over a defined area of fallow grasses or woody plants, though the woodland is not allowed to regenerate".<sup>29</sup> Furthermore in equating male farming only with ploughs, Boserup is inaccurate. In many areas males were the farmers, as for example in Borgu where females became the predominant traders because they were relatively free from agricultural activities.<sup>30</sup>

Although Owan women were very visible in the agricultural process the locus of control resided with the adult males, especially the lineage heads. Since the family or household was the unit of production, men as heads of the family determined farm sites, crops to be planted and controlled labour supply and its utilization. As one writer stated, "the household is a terrain of struggle, manifest in disputes over

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<sup>28</sup>A Similar practice has been observed among the Etsako people. See B.J.E. Itsueli, "Aspects of the Economic History of Etsako, 1800-1960", Ph.D Thesis, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1982. p.86.

<sup>29</sup>Hopkins, An Economic History of West Africa, p.32.

<sup>30</sup>See chapter five of Julius O. Adekunle's "Nigerian Borgu c.1500-1900: An Analysis of a Segmentary Society", Ph.D Thesis, Dalhousie University, Halifax, 1993.

allocation of labor, control over female reproduction, the distribution of resources, etc., the outcome of which helps to shape the broader society, as the household in turn is shaped by those broader social forces".<sup>31</sup> Based on this consideration it is important to examine the structure and relations within the household as a means of understanding pre-colonial Owan production methods.

Evidently the establishment of a household by a man was viewed in social terms, that is to raise a family. However the household was also perceived as an economic unit. Since the capacity of a household to produce for subsistence was dependent upon the size of the family, in pre-colonial Owan, men married as many wives as they could cater for. It also followed that the more wives a man possessed, the more the number of children. As a consequence women and children became social and economic assets to adult males. In view of this, one of the factors which determined the status of a woman was the number of children she had. A woman without one was derided. Each household was hierarchically structured. As heads of the family, the men occupied the top of the ladder. Amongst the female population, older women, mother-in-laws and senior wives enjoyed higher status than young women, daughter-

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<sup>31</sup>Elizabeth Schmidt, Peasants, Traders and Wives: Shona Women in the History of Zimbabwe, 1870-1939, Portsmouth, NH, Heinemann, 1992. p.1.

in-laws and junior wives.<sup>32</sup> Thus while men exploited women and children's labour for their own ends, highly placed women in turn capitalized on the labour of lower status women.<sup>33</sup> It follows that in considering the politics of the household, it was not just the exploitation of women by patriarchs. The factors of age, gender and class are crucial to a better understanding of the politics of the household. Granted that the household was an important unit of production, nevertheless each household in pre-colonial Owan was an integral part of a lineage. As such even though households competed amongst themselves for scarce resources, the overall organisation of production was within a lineage system. At this juncture it is vital to examine the mode of production and labour structure of the pre-colonial Owan economy.

Since acephalous socio-political organisations have been administered by gerontocracies, it has been suggested that acephalous social formations - cum modes of production - can be typified as gerontocratic lineage modes of production.<sup>34</sup> A major characteristic of this form of production pattern was

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<sup>32</sup>O.H.T. #52 Interview with Mrs. Julie Ogoigbe, (62), Ovbiokhuan, March 5, 1991.

<sup>33</sup>See Penelope A. Roberts, "Rural Women's Access to Labor in West Africa, in Sharon B. Stichter & Jane L. Parpart (eds.) Patriarchy and Class: African Women in the Home and the Workforce, Boulder, Westview Press, 1988. p.105.

<sup>34</sup>See J.B. Webster, "Evolving Social Formations and a Static Mode of Production", IRORO: Journal of Arts of Arts and Social Sciences, Bendel State University, Ekpoma-Nigeria, vol.3 Nos.1 & 2, 1990. pp.17-30.

that the production unit involved the lineage. It has also been referred to as a "primitive communist mode of production".<sup>35</sup> The major difference between Webster's gerontocratic lineage mode of production and Hindess and Hirst's primitive communist mode of production lies in the manner in which the two point of views picture the role of the elders of the lineage. While Webster argues that the elders occupied a preeminent position which made it possible for them to exploit the cadets, women and children's labour, Hindess and Hirst's position leads to a denial of exploitation in lineage societies. As a case in point Webster argues that:

The gerontocracy maintained its ascendancy through control over reproduction via bridewealth, male initiation and age institutions, by an ideological monopoly over shrines, spirit cults and cursing power, occasionally by control over prestige goods, cattle, game and land. Agricultural surpluses were primarily accumulated to support the gerontocracy and enhance its prestige.<sup>36</sup>

On the other hand Hindess and Hirst claim:

The control by elders over the conditions of labour and over certain of the conditions of reproduction of the productive community is a necessary effect of the dominance of the complex redistribution variant of the communist mechanism of the appropriation of surplus-labour. Thus even if the elders in a lineage society perform little or no productive labour they do not necessarily constitute a class. Exploitation, in the

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<sup>35</sup>B. Hindess & P.Q. Hirst, Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975.

<sup>36</sup>Webster, "Evolving Social Formations...", p.18.

sense of the appropriation of surplus-labour by a class, cannot be deduced from the coordinating and regulating position of the elders.<sup>37</sup>

The crux of the matter is whether the elders of a lineage constitute a class of exploiters who remained dependent on the labour of young males, children and women without offering anything substantial in the production process.<sup>38</sup> Clearly the elders of pre-colonial Owan exploited the labour of the male age-grades, children and women. Oral information collected in the field indicated that once an adult male was initiated into the class of elders (Edion), he automatically ceased to perform any communal manual labour.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore the grades even prior to Edion became managers and exempt from labour and that this exemption in extreme cases might extend to men as young as thirty years of age. This assertion is also supported by Bradbury's findings. In his words, "In Ora the senior otuleha set is promoted to edion status every three years. Its members then become exempt from communal manual labour and assume a recognized voice in village affairs".<sup>40</sup> Another pertinent point to note is that at the time Hindess and Hirst wrote, it had become fashionable for scholars of Africa to

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<sup>37</sup>Hindess and Hirst, Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production, p.67.

<sup>38</sup>Before the 1970's the concept of class was not applied to Africa. Even when scholars adopted class analysis to Africa, many were still reluctant to apply it to the pre-colonial period.

<sup>39</sup>All informants interviewed alluded to this fact.

<sup>40</sup>Bradbury, The Benin Kingdom..., p.89.



argue that class did not exist in the continent. They both followed that tradition. Many of their examples of primitive communist societies were drawn from Africa. It goes to show that they were determined to argue for classlessness in the continent before the advent of colonialism, or as they would say, before the advent of capitalism.

In this study the gerontocratic lineage mode of production concept will be adopted.<sup>41</sup> The choice has been influenced by the conviction that there was a marked distinction between the status of the elders - indeed of all married men - and the position of the cadets, women and children on the social ladder.

The organisation of labour resources for production purposes took different forms. A readily available source of labour in pre-colonial Owan was basically through the mobilization of children, relatives, friends, and members of

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<sup>41</sup>This writer is aware of the debate which surrounded the mode of production concept. In the course of the debate some scholars had doubts about the usefulness of the model. However others think it has served its purpose. As Edward A. Alpers noted in "Saving Baby From The Bath Water", in Canadian Journal of African Studies, vol.19 no.1 1985, "What the concept of the mode of production has done, however imperfectly, is to sharpen our awareness of the coexistence of the parts within the whole. No less importantly, it has focused our attention more squarely than ever before on the realm of production and its pivotal relationship to the whole social fabric"(P.18). It IS in relation to the latter advantage this writer has adopted the use of the mode of production concept. There are other articles on the debate in the same volume.

the extended family or lineage for farming activities.<sup>42</sup> However the success of such a mobilization was dependent on the size of the network of friends, relatives, in-laws and the extended family system. The head of the family or lineage expropriating the labour of others must of necessity occupy a preeminent position or status in society in relation to those he is relying on for the supply of labour power. The status could have been determined by age or headship of a social organisation which the membership rely on for survival. More often than not the members of the organisation looked up to the head for protection and leadership. In return for the services rendered by the young labourers, the lineage head was expected to entertain the workers with food and drink as well as share his harvests with the needy in his kinship network. The more successful he became in production, the more he had to share and thus the more labour he could expect to attract in the next cycle as more distant kinship links became active.

Another source of labour for agricultural activities depended on the organisation of work parties which entered into contractual agreements to help members with farm work. In his study of Awori Egba and Ijebu Remo communities of Nigeria, B.A. Agiri pointed out that the work parties or contractual

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<sup>42</sup>O.H.T. #49 Interview with Pa. Akhigbe Emidoma, (86), Oke-Ora, January 6, 1991.

associations of youths were limited to the age grades.<sup>43</sup> However evidence from Owan and Etsako communities indicates such agreements were struck by adult males, youths - both boys and girls - and women.<sup>44</sup> Farmers were out to harness all available sources of labour wherever they could obtain it. As pointed by an informant "because there were no wage labourers in those days our forefathers organised labour from any source".<sup>45</sup> The utilization of work parties was an effective method by which farmers optimized labour resources. Noting a similar practice among the neighbouring Etsako people, B.J.E. Itsueli concluded that:

This arrangement was very useful to those who did not have a large family to do collective work. It was also useful to those who were cultivating their own private farms, and at the same time having to put in their own quota of work in the family farm. It also represented the way in which the barter system of exchange was extended into agricultural production.<sup>46</sup>

In each work party the specific task to be performed was determined beforehand by members. Until the task was completed in each member's farm they did not embark on a new one. For

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<sup>43</sup>B.A. Agiri, "Aspects of Socio-Economic Change among the Awori Egba and Ijebu Remo Communities during the 19th Century", Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria, vol.7, No.3 December 1974. pp.464-482.

<sup>44</sup>O.H.T. #49; See also B.J.E. Itsueli, "Aspects of the Economic history of Etsako...", p.112.

<sup>45</sup>O.H.T. #49.

<sup>46</sup>Itsueli, "Aspects of the Economic History of Etsako...", p.113.

instance when a party of ten youths decided to form a work group they, almost without doubt, had in mind the specific task they wanted to accomplish for each other. As a consequence members were not allowed to employ a work group set up for tree felling for other farm activities such as weeding or harvesting.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore until a member fulfilled his or her obligation to other members, he or she was not allowed to pull out of the work group. In spite of the strict regulations which guided work groups, their workability and survival depended on the sincerity of members. In the case of work parties established by age grades, group solidarity based on oaths of commitment to one another kept them going. Although young men who belonged to the same age grades were locked in stiff competition, they were nonetheless prepared to help themselves in work parties. It was without doubt that work parties were excellent sources of procuring labour.

Work parties became institutions whereby young men might toil together to raise themselves to escape the control and "tyranny" of the elders. In a gerontocratic lineage mode of production, the major lines of division became generational. By being patient, young men could look forward in the passing of time to becoming elders and joining the controlling group. However ambitious young males often lacked patience especially

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<sup>47</sup>O.H.T. #109 Interview with Mr. J. Ohiomolomo Ajayi, (57), & Mr. S. Ohiolei Idika, (55), Igue-Sale, November 30, 1990. See also Itsueli, "Aspects of the Economic History of Etsako...", p.113.

if confronted by overly demanding and controlling elders. Work parties of their own ages permitted them to work less for the elders, if they so chose and more for themselves especially since they had fewer wives and children than their "fathers". Successful work parties promoted male bonding and with the right mix of leadership within the group combined with oppressive control by the gerontocrats, they could become the nucleus of a migration. To a greater or lesser degree in each community the lines of tension lay between ambitious elders desiring to exploit the bonds of kinship and young men willing to employ the bonds of fraternity. The migration option prevented the worst forms of exploitation by the elders such that writers like Hindess and Hirst might classify the mode of production as communal and largely egalitarian. On the other hand the system probably set limits upon the surpluses which might be accumulated. While designed to mobilize labour, it was also propelled by the desire of males to escape labour as fast as they could.

In pre-colonial Africa a major source of labour recruitment was through the institution of slavery. Although some informants in Owan spoke of the use of slave labour in the pre-colonial era, it appears to have been of a limited nature.<sup>48</sup> The general impression is that if indeed slavery was a flourishing institution in pre-colonial Owan there must have

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<sup>48</sup>O.H.T. #59 Interview with Chief J.O. Ahonkhai, (72), Evbiamen, August 5, 1990; O.H.T. #61 Interview with Chief Ohiozibau Aigbevboile, (50), Ovbiowun, August 8, 1990.

been a total assimilation of the slaves into the population which now makes it unacceptable for informants to talk freely about it. Another plausible explanation is that because pre-colonial Owan society was relatively egalitarian, there was no class of idle nobility which required the services of slaves. Despite the fact that a title system came into effect in the seventeenth century available evidence does not point to the fact that they became successful enough economically to warrant slave labour. It is therefore relevant to take a closer look at Hopkins' conclusion that in West Africa, "[t]he main concentration of slaves were in areas where the development of domestic activities created employment opportunities which could not be met by local, free labour".<sup>49</sup> From the evidence which can be gleaned from oral sources, despite the development of a pre-colonial exchange economy in Owan it lacked the capacity to engender slavery and slave labour. Furthermore Owan society was a peripheral vassalage of the Benin kingdom. It does follow that the region must have acted as a source of supply of slaves for the kingdom. Considering the extent and power of the kingdom, it was in a position to exploit slave labour from Owan. As Hopkins argued:

In West Africa, as in many other parts of the pre-industrial world, such as Greece and Rome, it was large states, such as Mali and Songhai in the savanna and Ashanti and Dahomey in the forest, which had the greatest need for slaves and also

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<sup>49</sup>Hopkins, An Economic History of West Africa, p.23.

the means to buy or capture them.<sup>50</sup>

In fact one source quoting a colonial intelligence report, has it that Anamah the founder of Igue community "was sent by the Oba of Benin to collect sacrificial victims for his annual sacrifices and that until 1892, about two to three slaves were sent from Igue every three years to the Oba of Benin".<sup>51</sup> In the nineteenth century the Nupe warriors and Yoruba invaders under Ogedengbe of Ilesha raided the area for slaves.<sup>52</sup> For example Bradbury reported "[t]he Yoruba seem[ed] to have limited themselves to raiding, burning houses and carrying off slaves and livestock".<sup>53</sup> From all indications Owan was vulnerable to external attacks from stronger powers such as the kingdoms of Benin, Nupe and Yoruba raiders who saw in the area a ready supply of slaves for their economic pursuits. Thus there is a direct relationship between political and military power on one hand and slave raiding on the other. Paul Lovejoy alluded to this fact when he asserted that: "Slavery was virtually always initiated through violence that reduced the status of a person from a condition of

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid..

<sup>51</sup>Military Governor's Office, Benin City, Investigation into the Role of Chiefs in the Mid-Western State: Divisional Report in Respect of the Owan, 1971. p.50.

<sup>52</sup>O.H.T. #20 Interview with Chief V. Ola Ologbesere, (78), Eme-Ora, October 14, 1990; O.H.T. #66 Interview with Mr. E. Otorkpaivbo Iziren, (60), Evbiamen, August 11, 1990.

<sup>53</sup>Bradbury, The Benin Kingdom..., p.86.

freedom and citizenship to a condition of slavery".<sup>54</sup> The relative political and military weakness of Owan acted as a disadvantage in two ways. One, it opened the territory to external incursions for the appropriation of able-bodied males and females. Two, it offers an explanation for the limited use of slave labour. Since Owan had to contend with invasions from more powerful political entities, she was not in a position to raid others for slaves. Hence it is safe to conclude that slave labour probably had been of no significance to agricultural production in the Owan economy.

As seen from the above discussion, whatever the mode of labour mobilization, the family or lineage heads in association with other adult males controlled the procurement and utilization of labour resources in pre-colonial Owan. Within lineage societies the seniority of elders was built on three factors, namely "1.genealogy, 2.symbolic political position such as the order of migration, rights of occupation, and the like, or 3.simply on such facts as conquests or the control of an important group of dependents".<sup>55</sup> The elders in exercising these prerogatives gradually established a distinguished status for themselves. They were set to exploit

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<sup>54</sup>Paul Lovejoy, Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa, London, Cambridge University Press, 1983. p.2.

<sup>55</sup>Bogumil Jewesiewicki, "Lineage Mode of Production: Social Inequalities in Equatorial Central Africa", in Donald Crummey and C.C. Stewart (eds.), Modes of Production in Africa: The Pre-Colonial Era, Beverly Hills, Sage Publications, 1981. p.99.



the surpluses of the lineage which were secured from two identifiable sources. As stated by Jewsiewicki, the two sources included:

1. appropriation of the production of direct dependents such as wives, cadets, slaves, and clients, who had been integrated into the extended family or lineage, and 2. appropriation from other extended families and from temporary units of production such as hunting and fishing groups.<sup>56</sup>

Thus in the exploitation of resources, control of the redistribution of surpluses, the elders exercised power and authority which were reinforced by their alliance with other lineage patriarchs. They went further to consolidate their position by establishing relations with elders in other communities. According to Jewsiewicki, "Solidarity among the elders of different territorial groups appeared in economic-political exchanges and led to the formation of an intergroup political and ideological culture".<sup>57</sup>

In pre-colonial Owan the most common avenue through which these intergroup relations were cemented was marriage contracts. An elder could establish extra-territorial bonds with another elder either by giving away a daughter to a family which might enhance his status or try to marry a daughter from that family. In this power game the women of the different lineages became pawns in the hands of the elders.

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 98.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid..

Furthermore young males or cadets were subjected to long waits in their attempt to become independent which was signified by marriage, and invariably the establishment of a family. This was because the cadets did not have direct control over the resources from which they could pay bride wealth, namely cattle or yams. Since Owan was an agricultural society, the young men required large quantities of yams for marriage ceremonies. In addition they were expected to provide long periods of agricultural service to potential in-laws. On the average young males became married between the ages of 30 to 35 years. As a result of this the average generation length in pre-colonial Owan stood at 32 years. Despite this long wait young males found consolation in the fact that they would one day become elders through age grade initiations. Whenever the wait became unbearable some revolted by "protesting with their feet",<sup>58</sup> that is they decided to migrate and found new settlements where they could establish their own hegemony over other younger males. At any point in time there were groups of young men who were subjected to the control or even tyranny of the elders.

We have earlier in this chapter pointed to the significant role women played in reproduction and production in pre-colonial Owan society. It is important at this point to examine closely those contributions. Within the lineage mode of production there is a clear cut division of labour based on

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<sup>58</sup>See Webster, "Evolving Social Formations...", p.18.

age and gender. To understand the manner in which the mechanism of the division of labour works, one has to comprehend the structure of the household or lineage. In the pre-colonial Owan household there existed three groupings of the social and economic functions which corresponds with Jeanne K. Henn's categorisation. According to her the three categories include "the top position of the household head, the middle position of temporarily dependent males who would one day attain the position of household head, and the base position of permanent dependents"<sup>59</sup> which included women and enslaved men who sought the care of the household head. In defining the division of labour the structure of the household comes into play. Thus the head of the household,

...sometimes in conjunction with the lineage head or clan chief, controlled the use of land and other economic resources (such as tools or cattle [or yam]). He also controlled the labor of his family members. The household head allocated food fields to his wives, instructed them to feed clients and guests, and sometimes required that a portion of the harvest go into his personal granary. He distributed field clearing, ... and military tasks among the dependent males of the household. A patriarch with a large family did little work himself.<sup>60</sup>

To any Owan male the role of a wife in the pre-colonial era

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<sup>59</sup>Jeanne K. Henn, "Women in the Rural Economy: Past, Present and Future", in Margaret Jean Hay and Sharon Stichter (eds.), African Women South of the Sahara, London & New York, Longman, 1984. p.4.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid..

was "to assist a man raise a family". The statement "to assist a man raise a family" in terms of division of labour entailed much labour. In examining women's roles in a lineage mode of production two themes will be explored. These include women's reproductive and productive roles. Furthermore the reproductive function will be examined in two forms, biological reproduction and the reproduction of the labour force. By biological reproduction we mean childbearing and the different processes which lead to the "physical development of human beings".<sup>61</sup> On the concept of the reproduction of the labour force we rely upon Beneria's articulation of the concept. According to her, "[w]hat is meant by the reproduction of the labour force is not only the daily maintenance of workers and potential labour, but also 'the allocation of agents to positions within the labour process'".<sup>62</sup> The productive role of women in this study will examine their contributions as agents of production which sustained pre-colonial Owan society. The nature of the division of labour as it relates to agricultural production will also be explored.

In pre-colonial Owan, women were involved in a variety of productive activities. They included domestic work agricultural production, trade, and craft productions. Owan

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<sup>61</sup>Lourdes Beneria, "Reproduction, production and the sexual division of labour", Cambridge Journal of Economics, 1979, 3, p.205.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid..

women's domestic or reproductive work (biological reproduction and reproduction of the labour force) had much to do with their role as mothers. As mothers women were married into households and lineages to bear offspring for the pride and prestige of male heads. Both wives and children were social and economic assets to men. As a result the fertility of a woman was considered crucial to the survival of the household. Thus one of the factors which determined a woman's status was undoubtedly whether she had children or not.

As a consequence it has been observed that, "It is in the reproductive sphere of the household that the primary relations of subordination/domination between the sexes is located".<sup>63</sup> Admittedly women's role as child bearers placed them in a position for male exploitation. However it should be noted that in pre-colonial Owan society, men recognised the significant role of their wives. For instance they recognised the fact that without women there was no possibility of male children who would inherit the patrilineal and patrilocal kinship system. Furthermore it was through childbirth that household heads obtained daughters whom they exchanged for bride wealth and labour power. Arguably it is very difficult to measure men's recognition of women's importance. Thus women's role as agents of regeneration of the family was well acknowledged. But how this acknowledgement translated into fair treatment of female folks varied from one family to the

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p.210.

other. A logical outcome of women's child bearing role was the assignment of the job of "child care and the complex of activities associated with the daily maintenance of the labour force through domestic labour".<sup>64</sup> This has invariably led to a situation in which women's work is associated with the domestic domain. Again the domestic nature of child care and the reproduction of labour has also been blamed for women's subordinate position within the household.<sup>65</sup> The extent to which this thesis can be accepted as valid has to do with its effect on the status of women vis-a-vis their husbands and how women's work is valued. Certainly it does account for the nature in which women's work is highly demanding but regarded as unpaid labour. For instance because of the hierarchical nature of pre-colonial Owan households, women were placed in subordinate positions. However in a rural economy such as that in Owan, women's domestic work contributed to the sustenance of households and lineages. Since women have been made to contribute a larger share towards family care, they seemed to take satisfaction mainly in the well being of the family.<sup>66</sup>

Another crucial point to note is that in considering the subordination of women in the household there were clear cut class and age differences. Older women enjoyed a higher

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p.206.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p.209-210.

<sup>66</sup>A female informant expressed the opinion that economic rewards are good but the well being of their family is paramount.

status. They were in a position to control the labour of younger women and men. As an instance senior wives in a polygamous home encouraged their husbands to marry younger women so as to free them from the burden of taking care of members of the household.<sup>67</sup> The relations within the household was without doubt very complex. As a feminist writer observed amongst the Kusasi of Ghana:

Women work[ed] for men, juniors for seniors, the poor work[ed] for the rich, and all these relationships are inserted into a web of social relations woven largely, in the case of small-scale agrarian communities, through kinship, residence and patronage. However women mobilize these social relations of production primarily through marriage.<sup>68</sup>

Other categories of women who enjoyed relatively distinguished status within the household were grandmothers, mothers-in-law, midwives, healers, diviners and priestesses.

Grandmothers and mothers-in-law occupying the position of preeminent members of the household were well placed to exploit the labour of other younger segments. Specifically the mothers-in-law had much influence and power amongst their sons' wives from which they constantly demanded service and respect. Midwives were respected for their significant role in child birth. Some of them combined the function of delivering babies with that of circumcision surgeons. For their services

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<sup>67</sup>O.H.T. #34 Interview with Mada Ikhidaboa Ikhidero, (84), & Madam Ovbialeke Ikhidero, (82), Ohia-Ora, October 21, 1990.

<sup>68</sup>Henrietta L. Moore, Feminism and Anthropology, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1988. p.58.

they were paid with yams, cocoyams, pepper, palm oil, salt and other products a family could offer. Additionally informants interviewed claimed the midwives developed special relationships with the children whose birth they supervised. As a consequence the children grew up cultivating sentimental attachment to the women who saw them enter the world. The attachment translated into children rendering various services to the midwives. The same arguments were also offered by informants for the role of mothers as child bearers. The explanation was that because mothers carried children for nine months in their womb, many children grew up feeling they owed their mothers obligations for their upbringing. Consequently it was understandable to see a mother disappointed when a child was not living up to her expectations. In such circumstances women did wield the power of motherhood to ensure compliance on the part of their children. As one female informant revealed, a woman can say to a recalcitrant child "I cannot believe that a child I have carried in my womb for nine months will not listen to me. I hope I have not made a mistake for bringing you to this world".<sup>69</sup> Conceivably this amounted to a form of blackmail. But considering the fact that women more often than not, exercised informal influences and power, it is without doubt that this was a legitimate weapon to secure conformity on the part of their children.

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<sup>69</sup>O.H.T. #8 Interview with Amewie Izebe, (53), Eme-Ora, September 6, 1990.



Priestesses and female diviners were another class of women who enjoyed respect from both genders. Priestesses in pre-colonial Owan looked after shrines of goddesses. As shown in chapter four the existence of goddesses was associated with the equality women enjoyed vis-à-vis their male counterparts. As patriliney and male hierarchal rule took over there was a deliberate attempt to substitute priestesses with priests. Nevertheless priestesses were still accorded the respect they deserved. The high esteem with which they were held was linked with their role as intermediaries between the goddesses and the citizens of the different communities.<sup>70</sup> Since Owan indigenes went to the shrines for supplication for good agricultural yields by farmers, for children by women and protection in war by warriors, their words were law in the communities. The diviners were extensions of shrines, gods and goddesses. They interpreted dreams, determined the cause of illnesses and foretold the future. In addition to tracing the root of peoples problems they also offered solutions which might involve offering sacrifices or outright treatment by healers. Because of their spiritual and medical functions, midwives, healers, diviners and priestesses enjoyed prominent recognition in society which ordinarily would not have been conferred on them because of their gender. Thus their relevance to the survival of individuals and the society at

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<sup>70</sup>In contemporary Owan society priestesses still minister at Ovbiagbede and Ora-ekpen shrines in Afuze and Eviobe respectively.

large meant that these women were accorded their due by all.

A notable female responsibility involved the reproduction of the labour force. Again because it had everything to do with the domestic sphere there has been the tendency to assume that it was naturally determined. Men took it for granted it was manifestly a female obligation to take care of labour hands. Women's involvement in the reproduction of the labour force took different forms. It included transfer of agricultural knowledge, cooking, fetching of water and fuel, home making and care of the adult members of the household. According to informants a typical day for a married woman started with the provision of drinking water which was collected from distant streams or rivers. Thereafter the woman and her daughters swept the house and the compound. Furthermore the woman was expected to prepare breakfast for the whole family, possibly including members of the extended family. In addition to all these domestic tasks a woman was also required to attend to production responsibilities in the farm. Even though women not only participated in farm work, but put in more hours on it than males or children, they also returned home to prepare meals for the family. Thus women in pre-colonial Owan worked from morning till evening without much time for leisure. Clearly they experienced a "double day" all their lives. Capturing the situation one Owan historian argued that, "women tended to be over-used or over-worked. In addition to house work - scrubbing, cooking, washing, mending,

etc and child-bearing, - the women spun, wove, and carried loads".<sup>71</sup>

In spite of the fact that the importance of women's role in labour maintenance was recognised by patriarchs of the household, their contribution to household subsistence was perceived as given. That is, because of women's role as mothers their labour maintenance function was constructed as a natural role. This became a major source of women's oppression in pre-colonial Owan households. For instance women spent a greater part of their time taking care of members of the household other than themselves. It also limited their opportunities to engage in other productive activities determined by themselves. As Beneria has pointed out:

The connection between these relations and the productive sphere is twofold: (a) it relates to the question of the origins of female subordination ...; (b) in terms of the extent to which relations of subordination in social production, although derivative of household relations, are reinforced by hierarchical and exploitative structures of production.<sup>72</sup>

Granted that the household production relations were oppressive to pre-colonial Owan women, but they were neither helpless nor passive. The fact that women were expected to maintain the labour force and as such provide essential needs

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<sup>71</sup>E.T.O. Orhewere, A History of Ora, Benin City, Okoyo Enterprises, 1988. p.123.

<sup>72</sup>Benería, "Reproduction, Production and the Sexual Division of Labour", p.210.

to the household, they were also placed to utilize such functions as weapons in gender relations within the household. Female informants confirmed that women in pre-colonial times employed such tactics as denying their husbands sex or food as means to draw attention to their dissatisfaction with problems in the home.<sup>73</sup> Faced with such a protest men were prepared to reassess their relationship with their wives. Clearly women's role as reproducers of the labour force became a double edged sword. While it accounted for their subordinate position in the household, it also afforded them avenues through which they might express their dissatisfaction with the actions of the male folks.

While women might strike back to correct the behaviour of abusive or disrespectful males, there seems to have been no documented occasion where they were able to shift the burden of labour towards greater equity between the genders. No matter how far the water supply might be during the dry season, it has not been shown that males ever took over the task to lighten the burden of the women. The division of labour appeared to remain remarkably rigid. The image of males, relaxing under a shade tree in the square or compound, waiting for a calabash of palm wine or their next meal while the women moved about endlessly symbolised the division of labour and created the adult model to which young boys

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<sup>73</sup>O.H.T. #76 Interview with Madam Ilekesu Againe, (85), Priestess of Ovbiagbede shrine, Afuze, September 10, 1990.

aspired. Women could defend themselves against abuse, but rarely could they shorten their labour hours.

Women's participation in agricultural production in Africa has been well documented. In pre-colonial Owan their predominant involvement in most food production activities can be associated with female fertility and its direct relationship with land fruitfulness.<sup>74</sup> It is also traceable to the fact that women were food gatherers during the hunting and gathering stage of human development. At least in Africa and specifically in the study area, women's historic association with food gathering has led to a situation whereby they have for centuries, disproportionately shouldered the responsibility of feeding the household and the lineage. In that early society men were associated with hunting as a full occupation. As agriculture took over, the hunting function declined drastically leaving males more leisured and females more burdened. At that point some societies at least - especially where cattle were not a factor - probably moved toward matrilineal organisation. In most modern matrilineal societies, the males either dominate farming or at a minimum carry out the major part of its labour.<sup>75</sup>

Since this study has suggested in the previous chapters that Owan tradition exhibits many signs of an earlier

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<sup>74</sup>This link has also been established in pre-colonial Shona society. See Schmidt, Peasants, Traders and Wives..., p.26.

<sup>75</sup>This is the situation in the matrilineal society of Chewa in Malawi.

matrilocality, it remains a mystery as to the process by which agricultural labour became shifted from males to females. Is it possible that in the centuries before the coming of the migrants from Benin, agricultural production had been primarily a function of male labour? After all the two so-called male crops - yams and palm oil - were the staples of that pre-1500 age. Did men at one time perform most of the labour associated with them? Is it not noteworthy that the so-called female crops are primarily from the American complex introduced after 1500 by the immigrants? How could the shift in labour have occurred? Where the shift in the staple food from the male yam to female cassava occurred, the change in gender hours came about as a consequence. Previously it had been noted that female crops were usually inter-planted with yam. Thus weeding and tending both might rather easily be shifted to the women and children. Males prepared the fields, a rather short but strenuous task, while women and children did the weeding and tending, a lengthy and tedious one. Men once again gave a hand at harvesting. If males in the earlier age monopolised the products of the land, females might have been "bribed" into longer hours by the promise that they would be given control over the new crops - their crops - to do as they wished with them. More importantly women may have been pushed into intensive and extensive longer hours of work because they were primarily concerned with feeding the family.

If a change of such proportions took place why is it the

consensus of both men and women today, that the division of labour stems back to time immemorial? Household duties and child care might be considered natural for females but the same can hardly be claimed for field labour. Some scholars have argued that women's labour outside the home is invariably an extension of domestic work.<sup>76</sup> As in the matter of political changes men have controlled the memory of the past. Just as matrilinealism and matrilocality have faded except as hints in certain rituals and institutions and men have emphasised the period of patriarchy as the start of history, so the maintenance of the division of labour should seem to stretch back to creation. By implication what is natural and fixed for all time cannot be changed. Owan women have learned the lesson. Men may respect their female kin but that does not interfere with their willingness to over-work them. Respect becomes the compensation women enjoy.

In pre-colonial Owan the association of female fertility with the fruitfulness of the land guided agricultural rites at the beginning of the planting season when farmers went to the priest of the earth goddesses to prayer for a good farming year.<sup>77</sup> While praying for superior yields, they also offered sacrifices to the earth goddesses to ward off evil forces, pests, drought and famine. It has been pointed out that no man

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<sup>76</sup>See Benería, "Reproduction, Production and the Sexual Division of Labour", p.211.

<sup>77</sup>O.H.T. #7 Interview with Chief Akhagbe A. Izebe (76), & Chief Abiodun Ogwai, (64), Eme-Ora, September 6, 1990.

or woman ever embarked on planting without these rites.<sup>78</sup> In Owan oral tradition, there are isolated cases where there has been attempts to link these rites to both gods and goddesses. But if the almost universal practice of associating earth goddesses with land fertility is anything to go by, it does show that it was another subtle bid by patriarchal males to obliterate women's prominent status. In reinforcing the claim that female deities had so much to do with agricultural rites, Madam Againe the priestess of Ovbiagbede shrine in Afuze Emai pointed out that in the past when there were threats of drought the people of Afuze came to her predecessors to pray for rain.<sup>79</sup> She also confirmed that the custom of rainmaking is still prevalent in the society. Commenting on the same practice among the Shona people, Schmidt argued that:

In a number of charter myths, there is strong association between female fertility and the fertility of the land, often represented by the rainmaking power of a female ancestor. As was the case for the fertility of the lineage, rainmaking powers came from outside. Just as the lineages were forced to marry exogamously, they had to depend upon strangers for the vital rainmaking powers.<sup>80</sup>

The role of rainmaking priestesses clearly gave such women a recognisable status within Owan society. The women occupied a

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<sup>78</sup>O.H.T. #7.

<sup>79</sup>O.H.T. #76 Interview with Madam Ilekesu Againe, (85), Priestess of Oviagbede Shrine, Afuze, September 10, 1990.

<sup>80</sup>Schmidt, Peasants, Traders and Wives..., p.27.



position in which they became a class who made a difference between the people eating or starving when there appeared a threat of drought. Because of this recognition the women readily employed their powers in asserting themselves in community matters. They represented a class of females upon whom other women relied to mediate between them and men in times of gender conflict. As a consequence their voices were seriously regarded by males in arriving at decisions.

A number of female informants interviewed revealed that while the men were the heads of the household and as such exercised greater influence over food production, females were still able to exert control over a majority of the crops because they were regarded as 'women crops'.<sup>81</sup> The categorisation of certain crops as women's confers a status of inferiority. Nevertheless it precluded men from meddling in the business of producing those crops. For instance when cassava was introduced it was designated a female crop. Not long after it became the staple food of the people. However as it grew in popularity, cassava increased female working hours. The impression gathered from interviewing male and female informants was that the relations between both genders within

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<sup>81</sup>O.H.T. #10 Interview with Madam I. Usidame, (71), Eme-Ora, September 7, 1990; O.H.T. #18 Interview with Madam Alokose Okpaise, (75), & Madam Onotanua Aigbodion, (65), Uhonmora, October 12, 1990; O.H.T. #80 Interview with Madam Egbodion Igbafen, (90), Afuze, September 27, 1990; O.H.T. #113 Interview with Mrs. Ajoke Agboighanuan, (59), Igue-sale, December 7, 1990; O.H.T. #188 Interview with Madam Adiza Ogegere, (80), & Mrs. H. Ogegere, (72), Warrake, January 16, 1991.

the household was not that of "us against them". Rather men and women saw their position within the household as that of members working for the good of all. There is no doubt however that the older male members of the household occupied a higher status than women, children and other men.

A review of women's involvement in agricultural production in pre-colonial Owan reveals that while in theory men controlled production in the gerontocratic lineages, women nevertheless wielded influence and power which guaranteed them the control of the products of their labour. Thus women were no passive participants in the pre-colonial Owan economy.

#### **Manufacture and Craft Production:**

Manufacture and craft production in the pre-colonial Owan economy was carried by every one or no one. Production was not as specialised as was the case in some centralised states of West Africa. Since agriculture was the main occupation of the people, craft production was undeniably subsidiary. As such Owan people carried out craft activities when they were free from their agricultural obligations. Manufacture and craft production included wood carving, rope, hat and mat making; smithing, pottery, soap making, textile, dye, bag and palm oil and palm wine production. As was the case with agriculture there existed a sexual division of labour in manufacture and craft production. Furthermore there was also a regional division of production as a consequence of the availability of raw materials. However oral narrative from Uokha and Igue

communities would want us to believe that their non-involvement in the production of clay pots was as a result of taboos.<sup>82</sup> While some informants hold strongly to this view, one would think that a more plausible explanation would be the lack of raw materials for the industry. For instance the people of Uhonmora, Ivbiaro, and Otuo were famous potters because they were located in areas rich in clay deposits.<sup>83</sup>

The nature of the sexual division of labour within craft industries clearly delineated the areas of specialty of both genders. As a consequence men were involved in iron smithing, wood carving, basket weaving, jewelry making, various arts works and palm wine tapping. On the other hand women were engaged in food and palm oil processing, textile, mat and pot making as well as soap manufacturing. Again as in agricultural production, women were dominant in supplying labour and expertise in craft production. Since pre-colonial Owan was an agricultural society, the iron smithing industry was linked primarily to food production. The smiths who were outsiders from Uneme and Agede produced such agricultural tools as axes, cutlasses, and hoes, war implements such as spearheads and swords as well as ceremonial objects. In fact the Ineme people

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<sup>82</sup>O.H.T. #92 Interview with Mr. J.O. Afeinkhena, (66), Uokha, November 6, 1990; O.H.T. #110 Interview with Pa. Samuel Ojeoghare, (86), Oviosa-Igue, December 2, 1990.

<sup>83</sup>O.H.T. #17 Interview with Mr. Imoisiri Esese, (65), Uhonmora, October 2, 1990; O.H.T. #177 Interview with Chief M. Igiehoi Igaga, (76), Iyeu-Otuo, February 17, 1991; O.H.T. #199 Interview with Amina Elakhame, (70), Ivbiaro, February 27, 1991.

were referred to as "Ineme no gbe gue" meaning "Ineme the smiths" and the word "Agbede" means "the smith" in the Owan language.<sup>84</sup> However it is also the name of the Agbede people to the east of Owan. It would appear that both Agbede and Ineme smiths were initially itinerant iron workers. With time they settled in the Owan villages.<sup>85</sup> The lack of local Owan smiths can be attributed to the absence of iron ore deposits in Owan. Realising they were in possession of a technology others needed, the Ineme people turned it into an advantage. For instance they provided the different ethnic groups in the area with both agricultural implements and military weapons. They soon became a people feared and respected by their neighbours. However because of their role as arm suppliers they were despised by all because they sold implements especially for war to the highest bidders.<sup>86</sup> Consequently their neighbours placed taboos on them and as such no intermarriage between them and other groups were allowed. While this was the story told by other ethnic groups about the

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<sup>84</sup>O.H.T. #111 Interview with Chief Ijeamiran Agboighanuan, (90), Igue-Sale, December 7, 1990; O.H.T. #125 Interview with Chief E.A. Omoruanzoje, (73), Arokho, March 23, 1991.

<sup>85</sup>Today the Ineme smiths are settled among Owan communities. The Agbede smiths could also be found in Ivbiaro and Ihievbe communities.

<sup>86</sup>O.H.T. #83 Interview with Mr. G.U. Otoikhian, (62), Afuze, September 28, 1990; O.H.T. #131 Interview with Mr. Michael F. Omueti, (45), Ikhin, April 5, 1991.

Ineme people,<sup>87</sup> the most logical explanation could be that because of their expertise they were not prepared to marry outside their group in order to prevent others from learning their trade. While Ineme and Agbede were the major suppliers of iron products to Owan farmers in the pre-colonial era, the neighbouring Esan boasted of iron workers who had migrated from Idumu-Igun in the Benin Kingdom.<sup>88</sup> Presumably no such migration had occurred into Owan because of the lack of iron ore deposits.

Another male craft production industry involved wood carving. Wood carvers obtained their raw materials from silk-cotton, Iroko and Obeche trees. Because of the limited guinea forest in the area, the silk cotton became the most popular tree for carving. The wooden products which carvers made included mortar and pestle, wooden trays, handles of dane guns, cutlasses and knives, walking sticks, ritual objects such as the family staff called Ikute and masks for masquerade societies.<sup>89</sup> Wood carvers also produced doors for houses and general art for home decorations and for shrines. Since there were no guilds for iron and wood working, there was no body regulating the production of iron and wood products as

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<sup>87</sup>All informants interviewed in Owan communities reported this one sided story. The Esan, Etsako and Akoko-Edo people had the same beliefs about the Ineme.

<sup>88</sup>Okoduwa, "Economic Organisation in Pre-Colonial Esan", p.63.

<sup>89</sup>Edeh Iziren, "The History of Emai: From the Earliest Times to 1950, Honours Essay, Department of History, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, 1976. pp.17-18.

occurred in the Benin Kingdom. Hopkins noted that in societies where guilds existed they "exercised control over entry to a craft, methods of production, standards of workmanship and prices. Consequently, membership of a craft was usually inherited, though it was sometimes possible for outsiders to join once they had completed an apprenticeship".<sup>90</sup> Since there existed no regulating body in Owan, it became possible for any one interested in the vocation to enter without any hinderance. Presumably because there were no guilds to monitor the production of iron and wood works in Owan the products might have suffered in quality as compared, for example, to those in Benin. Nevertheless the carving of ritual objects such as masks was not open to just any carver. For instance in Ora a carver must have been initiated into the masquerade age grade before he was allowed to create masks.<sup>91</sup>

Palm wine tapping was also an important manufacturing occupation. In pre-colonial Owan all palm trees were wild. As a consequence they were owned communally. For this reason adult males who were interested in tapping the trees for wine had to seek the permission of the village or community elders. Palm wine was used for entertainment purposes during festivities - marriage ceremonies, festivals and ancestor worship. Whereas women generally brewed beer in Nigerians

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<sup>90</sup>Hopkins, An Economic History of West Africa, pp.49-50.

<sup>91</sup>O.H.T. #25 Interview with Chief Omozuanvbo Oarhe, Evbiobe-Ora, October 17, 1990.

communities and it became a significant source of wealth for them, it never became an industry in Owan because of the popularity of palm wine which as elsewhere was dominated by men. The basic determinant was the fact that the process of climbing the palm tree for wine tapping was very dangerous. As such it was considered a male task. In order to ensure that daring women did not tap palm wine, male elders invented taboos prohibiting them from climbing palm trees. As a consequence it became an abomination for a woman to do so.

It seems unlikely a taboo would have been necessary unless the control of palm wine had become a gender issue at some point in the past. In the division of crops into male and female there seemed to be no need to enforce the division by taboos. It should be recalled that palm products had been collected in that early stage where matrilocality, probably matrilineality, plant totems and possibly male dominance in agriculture had been the norm. The taboo against women tapping wine suggests that the genders had quarrelled over this resource in that early era. Males had obviously won, and a major victory it had been since palm wine became a product with high demand, whose supply could be regulated providing its producers something of a superior life style. This was the age when males controlled the three major agricultural products, yams, palm oil and wine, before the coming of the American complex most of which became designated as female.

In communities where palm trees were tapped for wine, the

procedures have been the same. As Okoduwa found out among the Esan people,

Palm wine production took a uniform procedure throughout Esan. The climbing ropes Ohendin were used by the tapper to get to the neck of the tree where with the aid of a cutlass he [cut] off the dried branches of the tree. He thereafter punched a hole into the male fluorescence part of the palm tree. Through this hole he inserted a tiny bamboo from which the liquid dripped into a calabash...<sup>92</sup>

The quantity a tapper collected from a tree was dependent on both his skills and the age of the palm tree. A tapper could collect about four litres within a day from one palm tree. Okoduwa recorded similar figures for Esan tappers.<sup>93</sup> On the average some tappers tapped about five to six trees, which meant about twenty to twenty four litres of wine in a day.

Women's craft and manufacturing activities were very crucial to the growth and development of the pre-colonial Owan economy. As Gloria Thomas-Emeagwali has argued: "These activities (manufacturing) along with full participation in agricultural production, facilitated surplus generation in the pre-colonial Nigerian economy. They were therefore central to economic growth".<sup>94</sup> One of the outstanding contributions of

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<sup>92</sup>Okoduwa, "Economic Organisation in Pre-Colonial Esan", pp.83-84.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid, p.84.

<sup>94</sup>Gloria Thomas-Emeagwali, "Women and the Pre-Colonial Economy", A Paper Presented at the 33rd Annual Congress of the Historical Society of Nigeria, Bayero University, Kano, 27th March to 1st April, 1988. p.10.



Owan women was in the area of food processing. Because women performed the tasks which were linked with the process of reproduction of the labour force, they were saddled with the responsibility of processing food items. Since they had literally to feed the household, they were the first to be confronted with the problem of scarcity of food. Hence they had to device means of processing food items so as to guarantee storage for longer periods. Also women invested much time and labour in the processing of palm nuts into cooking oil and other by-products such as kernel oil used as body lotion and for soap.

Traditions have it that in the early stages of the development of the pre-colonial Owan economy the processing of palm products was specifically geared towards household consumption. Although Owan occupied an economic backyard of the Benin Kingdom, informants recall that with the introduction of legitimate commerce in the nineteenth century, Owan supplied palm products to the coast through Benin, Agenegbode and Illushi (Ozigono) on the Niger River.<sup>95</sup> Following this development the production of palm oil and palm kernel for export purposes increased. Unfortunately it is very difficult to estimate from oral information the volume of

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<sup>95</sup>O.H.T. #67 Interview with Chief Asuenimen Ohiovbeunu, (62), Ovbiowun, August 17, 1990; O.H.T. #107 Interview with Madam Aimiegbehi Aidelokhai, (86), Uokha, November 24, 1990; O.H.T. #144 Interview with Madam I. Elijah, (79), Ozalla, July 31, 1991 and O.H.T. #214 Interview with Chief Aliu Ikpekha, (82), Ihievbe, September 14, 1990.

trade in palm products from Owan. What is clear is that the trade did open up opportunities for both men and women to accumulate capital. When palm oil was for household consumption the men cut palm nuts for the women to process for cooking purposes. From the nineteenth century when palm products became valuable export commodities, the men were determined to control the sale.<sup>96</sup> However women who were rich enough to purchase palm nut bunches, bought them from their husbands and others. In turn whatever profits which accrued from the processing and sale of the products belonged to the women. It was then possible for individual women to accumulate capital. Without doubt the commercialisation of palm products created avenues for some women to create independent sources of income. Since men controlled the palm products, they could sell the unprocessed palm nuts. But women did the processing into oil. Thus they could often negotiate with males to reap rewards for the sale of oil. This new autonomy which women secured did create tensions within the household. Most men certainly did not like a situation whereby their wives were able to assert themselves economically.<sup>97</sup> Nevertheless it was a change which the men could not hold back. Robertson observed a similar tension between Ga men and women when the later became more involved in trading activities. Quoting G.A.M Azu, she pointed out that "[t]he psychological state of the men in

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<sup>96</sup>O.H.T. #67, #107 and #214.

<sup>97</sup>O.H.T. #107 & #144.

front of this growing strength of the women is one of hostility and frustration. They say that now no man can compel his wife to come to sleep, and that the women do not give their husbands the same devotion and respect as they did in the past".<sup>98</sup>

Women faced a major difficulty in Owan. While they could bargain to control the sale of palm oil, the transportation of the product became much more difficult, than the head loading of the bags of palm kernel. Palm oil became an export where canoes and river transportation were close at hand as in the Niger Delta and along the rivers running into it. Palm kernels were head loaded where rivers did not exist. Generally Owan fell into the last category. Consequently while a few women might have benefitted from the trade in palm products, the major beneficiaries should have been males.

A different situation obtained in the soap making industry. The material which was used in the production of soap were waste products from palm nut processing and pieces of wood. The by-products of palm oil processing basically were considered women's property. Hence men were unable to take over the control of the final production of soap. In addition soap making was recognised as a female specialty. Therefore it was not proper for any man to seek to take over its control. However women made soap available to every member of the household for bathing, washing clothes and kitchen utensil.

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<sup>98</sup>Robertson, "Ga Women and Socioeconomic Change...", p.122.

Thus, once again non-profit production for the household became a task for women while products with market value mostly were kept in male hands.

The first stage in the process of soap manufacturing was the gathering together of the waste products of palm oil production. Combined with other raw materials, they were burnt into ashes which were placed in a basket which acted as a sieve. Water was poured on the ashes in the basket and allowed to drain into a clay pot below.<sup>99</sup> Thereafter the dark-brownish liquid was heated in the pot over a fire to dry, the residue being the soap. Soap making became another avenue through which women made a small independent income because before currency, soap makers carried out barter exchanges with producers of other commodities.

Pottery was another vocation which was exclusively controlled by women. Most clay deposits were far away from the villages. Women and children supplied the labour and walked long distances to excavate potter's clay from the deposits where men assisted their wives in securing and kneading it. Five stages have been identified in pottery manufacturing: "the gathering of clay from clay reserves; the building of the pots; the pre-drying of them in the sun; firing; and

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<sup>99</sup>O.H.T. #34 Interview with Madam Ihidaboa Ikhidero, (84) & Madam Ovbialeke Ikidero, (82), Ohia-Ora, October 21, 1990.

marketing".<sup>100</sup> Notable communities in pottery making included Otuo, Emai, Uhonmora and Ivbiaro. The sizes and nature of pots were determined by the specific needs of the consumers. The types included a large pot for cooking soup, a small one, porridge pot, one for carrying water and another like a plate. Other ceramic products included smoking pipes and ritual pots which were produced specifically for religious objectives. The uses to which pottery products were put in pre-colonial Owan society, were numerous. As result it enhanced women status for they were seen as valuable producers. As Aronson observed, :

[c]eramic pottery... is the most pervasive and perhaps the most important of arts forms which African women perform. In addition to serving important religious and political purposes, it is economically vital as is indicated by the degree to which women impose rigid boundaries and controls to protect their profession and the processes with which it is associated.<sup>101</sup>

Because the production of pots was regionally spread, there was not much long distance exchange of the product in pre-colonial Owan. Hopkins argues that because of the risk of breakages it was not profitable in pre-colonial West Africa to do long distance trading in pottery products.<sup>102</sup> However since every community did not possess the proper quality of

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<sup>100</sup>Lisa Aronson, "Women in the Arts" in Margaret Jean Hay & Sharon Stichter (des.), African Women South of the Sahara, London, Longman, 1984. p.127.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid..

<sup>102</sup>Hopkins, An Economic History of West Africa, p.50.

clay, a market existed for pots within Owan itself. Thus for some women in a few communities, ceramic products gave them an income beyond the reach of males.

Women were also prominent in the production of cloth. The local cloth called Akitikpa was produced in virtually all communities in the pre-colonial era. As previously shown, cotton was produced with the combined labour of men, women and children.<sup>103</sup> Once the cotton lints had been produced every other responsibility belonged to women and children. For instance the processes of ginning, spinning and carding were carried by women and children. Cloth weaving was a part-time occupation. N.W. Thomas reported that "[t]he time taken to make a piece of cloth five feet long seems to be about three days".<sup>104</sup> From oral data collected a weaver spent two days to weave an Ughanuhumi (a strip about twelve inches wide and six feet long) and thus during the slack work season could produce twelve to fifteen pieces a month. The vertical hand loom which women weavers used produced narrow strips of cloth. Hence women sewed them together to produce a full cloth. For a woman to acquire a full wrapper she had to sew six separate pieces together. The Dutch who purchased a great deal of Benin cloth

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<sup>103</sup>O.H.T. #88 Interview with Madam Abouvbo Akhareghemen, (86), Ogute-Evbiamen, October 5, 1990; O.H.T. #217 Interview with Madam Asimawo Isunuoya, (83), & Madam Mamuna Badamosi, (74), Ihievbe, September 15, 1990.

<sup>104</sup>N.W. Thomas, Anthropological Report on the Edo-Speaking Peoples of Nigeria, Part I: Law and Custom, London, Harrison and Sons, 1910. p.21.

calculated one piece as a three-strip unit. At the height of the demand c.1600-1630 the Dutch reported one ship taking 16,000 pieces,<sup>105</sup> an English ship having loaded more and often the Portuguese were pictured as the largest buyers. On the guess that twenty ships loaded each year - one estimate - then the exports would amount to 320,000 Dutch pieces or almost one million Owan strips, representing one million days or 2,700 years of female labour. However the cotton cloth which found its way to the Europeans was produced over the whole Edo region, not just in Owan.

Colours were restricted to white, black and indigo because of the limited variety of dyes. Red cloth, initially introduced into Benin by the Portuguese from Indonesia, could only be worn by royalty and was never worn in Owan. At the same time c.1500 to 1700 the Europeans found large markets for Benin cloth - the same as the Akitikpa in Owan - in Kongo, along the Gold Coast<sup>106</sup> and almost everywhere else in tropical Africa. Cloth became the main Benin export. Since the climate and geography of Owan were more suited to the growth of the cotton plant than the Edo heartland, it seems possible that the migration from Benin into Owan c.1500-1700 was motivated in part by the desire to grow cotton and produce cloth for

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<sup>105</sup>A.F.C. Ryder, Benin and the Europeans 1485-1897, London, Longmans, 1969. pp.93-94.

<sup>106</sup>See Ray A. Kea, Settlements, Trade and Politics in the Seventeenth-Century Gold Coast, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982. p.209.

export. Furthermore in Owan, the central tier and the Ora region were the best for cotton production and even today those areas produce the most cloth. It seems more than coincidence that again those were the regions dominated by the animal totemic groups of migrants.

The cloth trade began around 1500 with the Portuguese, grew substantially and reached its peak c.1600 to 1650 attracting Dutch and British. Benin traders ranged far and wide in search of cloth, some of it arriving from "three hundred or more miles inland".<sup>107</sup> This has prompted Ryder to suggest some of it came from Nupe. But Nupe cloth was quite different and surely would have been noted by the Europeans. Benin woven cloth was exchanged for gold on the Gold Coast and for slaves in Kongo, Gabon and Angola.<sup>108</sup> Gold Coast demand appeared insatiable, so great in fact that much against their will, the Europeans were offering the Benin traders credit in order to secure it in the mid-seventeenth century. Credit rapidly expanded the cloth trade.<sup>109</sup>

Ray kea demonstrates the unusual prosperity of the Gold coast during the seventeenth century which involved significant urbanisation, large markets, commercial exchange, class formation and many competing European merchants.<sup>110</sup> Gold

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<sup>107</sup>Ibid, p.94.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid..

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., p.130.

<sup>110</sup>Kea, Settlements, Trade and Politics...



fuelled this prosperity but in order to get it, Europeans had to offer cloth from Benin. Thus it seemed that the spill over from this prosperity was significantly felt among the Edoid people and specifically in those groups such as Owan which could grow cotton.

By 1700 the cloth trade among the Dutch and English was much in decline, one ship in 1698 carried only 285 pieces. Ivory had replaced cloth as the major item of trade. However a huge cotton growing and weaving industry had been created and the Oba of Benin sought by every means to protect it from the falling demand. By 1715 Europeans were being compelled to purchase 1,700 cloths for each ship before trade in ivory and other items might begin.<sup>111</sup> Compulsory cloth purchase was considered by the European merchants as an addition to the custom dues they paid.<sup>112</sup> In 1719 Dutch ship captains were being advised to avoid cloth at all cost because huge unsaleable stocks were being held in Elmina.<sup>113</sup> Ultimately Europeans began to abandon Benin because the kingdom refused to supply slaves beyond a few criminals and because of the burden of purchasing cloth.

If women benefitted most from this demand for their cloth, the two century after 1500 might be classed as their golden age of influence. It should also be recalled that this

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<sup>111</sup>Ryder, Benin and the Europeans...., p.143.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., p.173.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., p.165.

age also witnessed the introduction of the American complex of crops, all of which became classified as female. Furthermore it seemed to be an age of tension between matriarchy and patriarchy. What possibilities arise when it is considered that the three factors might have been interacting with each other? If we suppose that the men played a more dominant role in producing field crops - yams and palm products - but women cultivated the minor crop of cotton with the sale of cloth their major source of revenue, then the migration occurred, the best cotton-growing regions being chosen for settlement. The influence, wealth and power of women increased.

Having departed from a region where gender struggles were common, the new migrants settled in an area where matriarchy remained considerably stronger than in the Edo heartland. Combined with the economic power of cotton, women demanded and secured a monopoly over the new American complex of crops. Since males seemed to be pushed out of the productive export sector, they made rather frantic efforts to institute chieftaincy and used age grades to halt their declining influence. These efforts failed. Once the Europeans ceased to patronize Benin, and the market for its cloth has been replaced by a demand for Indonesian, the economic foundations of female influence collapsed. They had been left with a dominant role in producing food crops especially as cassava became the staple in the cotton growing regions. Cotton and cassava seemed to move together. Since cassava required less

labour than yams, it had flourished alongside the labour-intensive cotton. Thus by about 1700 the division of labour and balance of influence between the genders observable today and claimed as typical of the pre-colonial era had begun to emerge.

Whatever the gender balance had been, it certainly seems to have been tilted towards women in the two centuries after 1500 when all the other influences favouring patriarchy were arrested by the wealth and influence women gained from the sale of their cloth. With the sharp decline of the cloth trade and the rise to prominence of ivory, it would seem that the influence of women was likely to have dropped and that of men risen, even though ivory never became a major export from Owan as far as tradition can recall. However given the climatic disadvantages of the Edo heartland, it can be assumed that the majority of the cloth came from peripheral regions such as Owan, Etsako and Esan. The collapse of the industry must have devastated the economy of these regions and contributed to the decline in the status of women.

#### **Trade and Exchange:**

Scholars of Africa have long maintained that the pre-colonial economy before the advent of Europeans was subsistence in nature.<sup>114</sup> As a consequence it was claimed that

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<sup>114</sup>See Peter Wickins, An Economic History of Africa, p.116. Wickins declares, "Household self-sufficiency was the rule in Africa, exchange the exception, carried out for the benefit of the rich or privileged...Such commerce as there was frequently took the form of gift-exchange or tribute and largesse rather

little commercial exchanges of goods ever occurred in the pre-contact period. This has been challenged by other research.<sup>115</sup>

Hopkins pointed out that:

Descriptive evidence showing that exchange was widespread in the pre-colonial period is overwhelming, and refers to the greater part of the region, whether forest or savanna, whether influenced by Islam or animism, whether in areas controlled by large, centralised states or among small communities in which political authority was dispersed.<sup>116</sup>

Our task here is to explore the different ways in which pre-colonial Owan people exchanged their surpluses. On the development of markets and the exchange system, informants do not know exactly when markets began in Owan. Usually what they said was that exchange of commodities began "a long time ago when farmers were producing more than they needed. Furthermore informants claimed that because individuals in a household could not produce all they needed, they began to ask other household for such goods. This took the form of gift-giving. Gradually there developed a symbiotic relationship which evolved into a barter exchange system. Once barter trade came into force, reciprocal exchanges followed. These reciprocal exchanges took the form of men and women placing their wares

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than genuine trade". (p.116).

<sup>115</sup>Hopkins, An Economic History of West Africa, pp.51-75. It might be pointed out that for the Edo pre-contact came 500 years before the end of the pre-colonial era. The Owan people did not directly contact the Europeans during this period. But unquestionably they felt the effects of their presence on the coast.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., p.51.

in front of their houses before going to the farm. Whoever needed the commodity placed another product in its place and took away what was wanted.

Trade within a village or cluster of villages on the basis of inter-household exchanges might flourish along with itinerant traders who carried the specialities of one community to another. Such commodities as pots and iron products, salt and fish were exchanged through itinerant traders. While the ideal of the society involved self-sufficient households or extended families, the distribution of natural resources rarely permitted the ideal to be fully realized. Some of these goods and commodities such as pots, iron, and salt made the difference between "primitive" and comfortable living and in the case of iron weapons might mean the choice between death or survival. Consequently the self-sufficient ideal of the household could never be reached and of the village or community in the rarest of instances.

Following inter-household exchanges and the growing popularity of itineration, the idea of establishing central places where people could come and swap items arose. Explaining the process of the development of local trade, Hopkins commented that "[t]he basic aim of most households was to secure the products needed to maintain their customary standards of living. In order to reach this target each household tried to plant the amount of crops needed for survival in what, from experience, was known to be a poor

year".<sup>117</sup> According to Hopkins the need to avoid starvation led to the production of crops over and above the needs of the household. Thus with surplus production, inter-village and inter-community exchanges developed.

Since the need and desire for exchanges existed, it was only a matter of time before markets developed. Following compound markets came village and community exchange centres. The establishment of village markets became the prerogative of the elders. In order to avoid clashes in the market days, neighbouring villages met before deciding on market days. They were organised in such a way that traders from a group of villages were able to attend a particular market on the same day. The rhythm and periodicity of the markets were particularly designed to cater to the class of itinerant traders who because of them became full-time traders. As Okoduwa found out among the Esan people, "members of villages who wished to have a common market usually came together to clear a parcel of land. Representatives from the various sides usually took the oath of friendship on behalf of all the people. A market could then emerge from such a covenant".<sup>118</sup> In pre-colonial Owan such covenants (Amasi) were sealed by exchange of blood between participants. The periodicity of markets in pre-colonial Owan ranged between four and eight days. Usually the local markets were held on the basis of a

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<sup>117</sup>Hopkins, An Economic History of West Africa, p.54.

<sup>118</sup>Okoduwa, "Economic Organisation in Pre-colonial Esan", p.99.

four-day week. Informants recalled that at the initial stage of the development of the Owan economy, women took charge of local markets.<sup>119</sup> Since most of the items for sale were mainly specialty food-stuffs, cloth and pots they were invariably commodities produced by women for the household. As Hopkins has mentioned:

The traders involved in local exchange tended to be predominantly female, part-time, small scale, mobile and numerous. They were mainly female because local trade was a convenient adjunct to household and, in some societies, farming activities; they were part-time because trade was regarded as a supplement, though often an important one, to primary, domestic occupations;...<sup>120</sup>

The long distance trade at the initial stage was dominated by men. Informants claimed this was prompted by the fact the trade routes were generally unsafe for women. As such most men did not want to risk the live of their wives. However the more plausible reason could be that this was a deliberate attempt by men to exclude women from the lucrative, but also dangerous trade. If danger was the primary factor how come the same trade routes were not dangerous to male traders? Since Owan women were very much involved in agricultural production, the men were quick to secure an advantage by taking control of

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<sup>119</sup>All informants insisted the local trade was controlled by women. O.H.T. #40 Interview with Chief Aigboje Aikoroje, (80), Uhonmora, October 26, 1990; O.H.T. #113 Interview with Mrs. Ajoke Agboighanuan, (80), Igue-Sale, December 7, 1990; O.H.T. #153 Interview with Mrs. E. Aigbeloga (40), Avbiosi, February 28, 1991.

<sup>120</sup>Hopkins, An Economic History of West Africa, p.56.

long distance trade. It is almost certain that where women were primarily responsible for farming, usually males took to trade. Conversely where males were the farmers as in Borgu, for example, the females not only dominated domestic trade but also launched into regional trade.<sup>121</sup>

It should be noted that Owan did not lie astride important long distance trade routes as for example the Esan who were located between the important trading centres of Idah and the Benin Kingdom. As Igbafe has surmised:

Another trading association...called the Ekhen-Oria ...traded into the Ishan [Esan] area of the Edo-speaking peoples with Ehor as its main centre. Places like Igueben, Amaho, Oria and Illushi (Ojigono) on the River Niger were on the routes frequented by this group of traders. This associations depot near Igueben which bears the name of Ekekhen till this day is good illustration of a village founded as a temporary resting station by traders who distributed their wares all around the neighbouring areas.<sup>122</sup>

Despite the fact that the Owan people were not as strategically located as their Esan neighbours, Igbafe also reported that "[a]nother trading association...the Ekhen-Iruheen...traded into the Ivbiosakon [Owan] area of Afenmai".<sup>123</sup> It might be assumed that this trading association

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<sup>121</sup>Adekunle, "Nigerian Borgu c.1500-1900..." Chapter Five.

<sup>122</sup>p.A. Igbafe, "The Pre-Colonial Economic Foundations of the Benin Kingdom", in A.I. Akinjogbin & S.O. Osoba (eds), Topics on Nigerian Economic and Social History, p.29.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid..



became very active during the years of cotton exports. Since the royal court became a major purchaser of cloth for resale to the Europeans, the Benin trading associations probably had advantages over male traders from Owan.

In addition to the trade with the Benin Kingdom, long distance trade in Owan also involved regional trade among the communities and with their immediate neighbours. Itinerant iron implement traders were probably the harbingers of this regional exchange. Where small markets existed they sold their wares in them. Where they did not, they displayed items for sale in the compound which had offered them hospitality and people came to purchase exchanging cloth and later cowries for iron implements. Itsueli in examining pre-colonial trade between Etsako and Owan claimed that the former obtained woven cloths from the latter.<sup>124</sup> He also noted that the "[t]rading associations [from Benin] gained access to Etsako from three directions, ...the Ishan country in the south from their main depot at Igueben; and from Ivbiosakon [Owan] to the south west".<sup>125</sup> From all indications the trade between Etsako and Owan which Itsueli alluded to must have involved the Agbede people. Since Itsueli maintained Etsako secured cloth from Owan, the Agbede would have exchanged their iron products for the Akitikpa cloth. Following the trade between Owan and the

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<sup>124</sup>Itsueli, "Aspects of the Economic History of Etsako...", p.229.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid..

Agbede and Ineme smiths, both groups began to settle amongst the Owan people. While the Ineme located in the northern tier, the Agbede settled in the central and southern tiers of the Owan communities. Since no iron ore deposits existed, smelting was impossible and thus the iron had to be brought from the homelands of the Ineme and the Agbede, in what is today Akoko Edo and Etsako respectively.<sup>126</sup>

The technology to produce salt locally from swamp grasses did not exist as far as modern informants know. Where salt originally came from, therefore remains unknown. However after the migration from Benin c.1500 to 1650, salt and cloth greatly stimulated regional trade to Benin and to the ports of Agenegbode and Illushi on the Niger River. Salt was procured in both centres. From the above discussion it does not appear that Owan men took much part in trade which was dominated by the Benin traders association, Ekhen Iruheen and the two iron working groups from the north. It must be recalled that it has been suggested that the major staples were male crops, yams and palm products, that matrilocality have been the rule and therefore males probably were the major farmers of the early period. If so, they were not likely to have also specialised

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<sup>126</sup>Iron bars were major imports from the Europeans on the coast in the seventeenth century. Anthony Njoku demonstrated how in Igboland, imported iron bars allowed blacksmiths to move southward away from the iron ore deposits and smelters and closer to their customers. Owan has no record of imported iron bars. However the settling of iron smiths in Owan strongly suggests a similar development. See Onwunka O. Njoku, "A History of Iron Technology in Igboland, c.1542-1900", Ph.D Thesis, Dalhousie University, 1986.

in trade. The situation would therefore have resembled Borgu where women dominated the domestic trade and "foreigners" long distance commerce.

As noted earlier major structural changes occurred in Owan from the arrival of the Portuguese, the rising demand for cotton cloth throughout the two centuries c.1500-1700 and the introduction of the American crop complex. The cloth was designed for the Atlantic trade with the Portuguese and later the French, the English and the Dutch.<sup>127</sup> The first contact between the Portuguese and Benin dates back to late fifteenth century. According to Egharevba, "A Portuguese explorer named John Affonso d'Aveiro visited Benin City for the first time in 1485-6. He introduced guns and coconuts into the country".<sup>128</sup> This period also saw the exodus of Benin migrants into Owan area. Again Egharevba stated: "There were many migrations from Benin during Ozolua's time [c.1482-1509]. The Ora people are descendants of Uguan, one of the sons of Ozolua whom he left behind when he returned from exile".<sup>129</sup> The overlapping of these dates obviously points to the possibility that the movement of Benin migrants into Owan might have been in response to the new opportunities for growing cotton and the cloth trade with the Europeans. Okoduwa's research among the neighbouring Esan reveals that they also capitalized on the

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<sup>127</sup>Igbafe, "The Pre-Colonial Economic Foundation...", p.30.

<sup>128</sup>Egharevba, A Short History of Benin, p.26.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid..

trade in cloth. In Okoduwa's words: There are hints in the traditions of Uromi that Ichesan and Agba's reigns and that which followed (c.1439-1538) was the century of trade and prosperity. This was the era when benefits from the cotton industry and trade led to the emergence of merchant princes in Uromi".<sup>130</sup> Predictably the "European trade with Benin stimulated the growth of trade between Benin and the hinterland as a result of the new and heavy demand for certain products, the most notable of which was cotton cloth".<sup>131</sup> Fortunately for the Owan and Esan communities, the vegetation of the area favoured cotton production and women possessed the required skills. As a consequence they benefitted significantly from the Benin-European trade. It might be argued that the Benin Kingdom and its trading associations were more middlemen of the commerce than they were producers and manufacturers. It would seem that Owan probably exported cotton thread to the Edo weavers as well as the finished cloth to Edo traders.

Moreover the Dutch were very aggressive in their bid to overthrow the Portuguese in the coastal trade. Their major interest was in the locally produced cotton cloth. By the sixteenth century the Dutch had succeeded in establishing strong trading links with Benin. Clearly "by 1620, they had

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<sup>130</sup>Okoduwa, "Economic Organisation in Pre-Colonial Esan", p.105.

<sup>131</sup>Igbafe, "The Pre-Colonial Economic Foundations...", p.32.

outrivalled, and seized the Benin trade from the Portuguese".<sup>132</sup> Benin suffered some commercial setbacks in the seventeenth century when it became involved in civil wars caused by succession disputes. Earlier it has been suggested that these were intertwined with gender issues, as some contenders sought to cater to female sentiments. Here it might be added that greed to secure a greater share of the profits of the coastal commerce played a role because the Oba held a monopoly in some products, had first opportunity to trade his goods in other products and charged custom dues on all ships which arrived for trade. Thus his position and wealth caused numerous royals to challenge the rules of succession. Since women were so vital to the major item of trade and since their influence rose as a consequence, commercial issues became entangled with gender. When the international market for Benin cloth collapsed it is not surprising that the kings of Benin sought in every way to protect the industry by forcing Europeans to purchase it. The ultimate demise of the industry became a major disaster to women. It was at the very height of the demand for cloth, when the Europeans would buy almost anything produced - the Dutch once complained that the English took the best leaving them the poor quality - that migrants founded Otuo, Iuleha and Arokho/Ikhin communities between c.1632-1664. Although Benin recovered from the effects of the civil war in the eighteenth century, by 1700 the cloth market

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<sup>132</sup>Ibid., p.28.

had collapsed and by 1862 "the glory had departed from the city and the kingdom".<sup>133</sup>

Following the decline of Benin's power and in the nineteenth century the Ogendegbe forces of Yorubaland and the Nupe had started encroaching upon the Owan communities. For instance between 1878 and 1884 Ogendegbe and the Nupe forces at different times invaded. As Bradbury reported, "The Nupe conquered these [Owan] and other northern Ivbiosakon tribes and planted representatives in them to collect regular tribute... The Yoruba seem[ed] to have limited themselves to raiding, burning houses, and carrying off slaves and livestock".<sup>134</sup> These raids were apparently disruptive to the Owan communities. While such communities as Ora and Emai had to relocate their settlements, Otuo inhabitants sought refuge at Owo (Yoruba), Agbede (Etsako) and Irrua (Esan).<sup>135</sup>

Despite these raids the Owan people became involved in the nineteenth century palm produce trade. As has been shown earlier on, the trade in palm produce was conducted through Benin, Agenegbode and Illushi ports on the Niger River. The history of long distance trade in Owan hindered as it was by Nupe and Yoruba invasions contrasted with Esan where it

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<sup>133</sup>Ibid., p.33.

<sup>134</sup>Bradbury, The Benin Kingdom, p.86. The Nupe incursion into the Owan communities and subsequent establishment of the former's hegemony was felt more in Ivbi-Ada-Obi settlements of Ivbiaro, Warrake and Errah; and Ihievbe community.

<sup>135</sup>Ibid..

flourished. Among the Esan dues on traders and commerce supported chiefs confirmed by Benin, created paramountcies which collected regular and substantial tributes for the royal court in Benin, resulted in revolts against the imperial authority as well as intra- and inter-chiefdom conflicts.<sup>136</sup> Many of these features remained notably absent in Owan.

In summary it has been shown that prior to the migration into Owan from Benin beginning just before 1500, men may have provided the major labour in agriculture, especially if the society leaned more towards matrilocality/matrilinealism than patriarchy. This was the age when the major crops - yams, palm oil and palm wine - were designated as male. If the migration had been stimulated by the rather sudden and rapidly growing demand for cotton cloth, the women became very important because they grew both the crop and wove the cloth. Women moved toward agriculture gaining all the new crops being introduced from the American complex. In the best cotton growing regions of the central and south, women saved labour by growing cassava, in order to give more attention to cotton. In the process the staple food changed in those regions from yams to cassava. When the cloth trade collapsed, women lost their lucrative source of revenue but had been left with the major burden of producing most of the food for their households. Prosperity had lured them into farming in a major

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<sup>136</sup>Okoduwa, "Economic Organisation in Pre-Colonial Esan", p.105.

way, depression left them in a weaker position vis-a-vis their male counterparts. Patriarchy had won a major victory.

In the hills of Otuo where cotton did not flourish and where cassava did not take over completely from yam as staple food, it might be noted that the most noteworthy remnants of the early matriarchy/matrilinealism survived. Male age grades, matrilocal arrangements and plant totems flourished. Consequently Otuo appeared to demonstrate the degree to which the "cotton revolution" changed the central communities and Ora. The other southern community of Ozalla also escaped the major influences of cotton and cassava. It too recalls remnants of the early matriarchy. One might postulate that the more cotton and cassava became dominant in a community, the more matriarchy ultimately declined, the fewer hints of it have remained in tradition and custom. In the nineteenth century with the export of palm produce the revenue came entirely into the hands of men. It had been a male crop and its carriers and traders were exclusively male. Consequently in the late pre-colonial period - the one informants recall in most detail - males controlled a source of revenue which gave them prestige and dominance which was new in the society. However to modern informants the norms of the late nineteenth century are those pictured as stretching back to the beginning of time. To the keepers of tradition, the theme is continuity, to the historian it must also involve change.



## Chapter Six

### Gender and Pre-Colonial Socio-Political Relations

Against the background of discussions in chapters three and four on the role of both genders in the evolution of pre-colonial Owan society, this chapter explores how gender relations functioned vis-a-vis the socio-political organisation. Chapter three demonstrated that with the intrusion of patriarchal groups into Owan from Benin, matriarchal/matrilineal/matrilocal values came under serious challenge. In chapter four an attempt was made to focus on how totemic observances, goddesses and shrine traditions suggest that women in pre-colonial Owan wielded considerable power in the past. The objectives of this chapter are twofold. The first involves examining gender relations vis-a-vis the pre-colonial socio-political structures. Second would be to investigate the mechanisms with which women sustained their visibility in socio-political affairs even in the face of growing patriarchal and hierarchical oppression.

Colonial ethnographers in Africa have inexcusably assumed that politics have always been a male preoccupation and that women's roles were limited to the domestic domain. The reason for this misinterpretation can be found in the erroneous belief that politics can only be found in the public domain. Furthermore there has been the assumption that since female figures were not easily identifiable in positions of authority in most pre-colonial African polities, it became an indication

that women did not possess any measurable political power. Hence they could not be considered to have had an interest in politics. This view is the outcome of a narrow western conception of what amounts to politics and political activities. A sample of statements by western writers will further clarify the point as it relates to the present and far into the past. T.O. Beidelman claims "It is common sociological truth that in all societies authority is held by men, not women".<sup>1</sup> In the same vein Marvin Harris asserts that "men have always been politically and economically dominant over women".<sup>2</sup> Lastly Walter Goldschmidt concluded that "[a]t both primitive and advanced levels, men tend regularly to dominate women".<sup>3</sup> Henrietta L. Moore argues that such narrow minded claims are the result of the fact that "[w]estern observers found it too easy to rediscover their own assumptions about the 'male' nature of political power in non-western societies".<sup>4</sup> In this study we will adopt Kate Miller's definition of politics which refers "to power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is

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<sup>1</sup>T.O. Beidelman, The Kaguru: A matrilineal People of East Africa, New York, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971. p.43.

<sup>2</sup>Marvin Harris, Culture, Man and Nature: An Introduction to General Anthropology, New York, Crowell, 1971. p.328.

<sup>3</sup>Walter Goldschmidt, Man's Way: A Preface to the understanding of Human Society, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1959. p.164.

<sup>4</sup>Moore, Feminism and Anthropology, p.133.

controlled by another".<sup>5</sup> It is hoped that an analysis which draws on this broad definition of politics will reflect the true nature of gender relations in pre-colonial Owan society.

An examination of Owan socio-political organisation reveals three different systems, namely gerontocratic, aristocratic (for want of a better term loosely used to describe a title system) and monarchical. While the gerontocratic administrative system operated in, Otuo, and Igue, the title system was found in Uokha, Ora, Emai, Ozalla, Ihievbe, Iuleha, Evbo-Mion, and Ivbi-Ada-Obi. With the notable exception of Uokha and Evbo-Mion the titles were found in those communities where animal totems predominated and where the Benin migrants after 1500 were in the majority. The "pure" gerontocracy tended to prevail in plant/snake communities. It was only in Ikao a monarchical system functioned. Additionally there existed an "Ukor system" which was uniquely Owan in the region. Simply put this involved a delegation of authority "made by the titular head of a Clan [community], or in some cases a 'senior village', to a representative individual or 'junior village' described as the Ukor [messenger]".<sup>6</sup> Later in the chapter we will return to the issue of Ukorship. Before the advent of the title system which was introduced from Ife

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<sup>5</sup>Kate Millett, Sexual Politics, New York, Equinox Books, 1971. p.23.

<sup>6</sup>Military Governor's Office, Benin City, Investigation into the Role of Chiefs in the Mid-Western State: Divisional Report in Respect of the Owan Division, 1971. p.24.

between c.1600-1632, the prevalent socio-political arrangement in Owan was the gerontocratic administrative structure.

**Gerontocratic Administrative Structure:**

As with other Edoid (Edo-speaking) peoples the primary gerontocratic feature in pre-colonial Owan was the stratification of the male population into age grades. In the Benin Kingdom there were three age-grades, namely Edion, Ighele and Erhoghae. While the edion (elders) formed the village council for political and judicial functions, the Ighele was the executive arm of the political and judicial authority.<sup>7</sup> The Erhoghae were young boys in their teens who carried out communal tasks of clearing paths to farms, streams, shrines and other public places.<sup>8</sup>

In Owan the structure of the age organisation was quite different from Benin and varied considerably among the various communities. The indigenous age organisation tended to multiple age grades. For example while in Benin there were two working grades under the Edion, in Ihievbe there were fourteen, in Otuo twelve, in Iuleha, Ozalla and Ivbiaro nine, in Warrake seven and in Igue four.<sup>9</sup> When the immigrants came

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<sup>7</sup>Bradbury, The Benin Kingdom..., p.32.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid..

<sup>9</sup>O.H.T. #172 Interview with Chief Ilaebor Ikhiafe, (71), & Chief T. Udueo Ekhenerua, (70), Oluma-Otuo, February 15, 1991; O.H.T. #221 Interview with Pa. Igazi O. Akharame, (86), Ihievbe, December 6, 1990; O.H.T. #110 Interview with Pa. S. Ojeoghare, (86), Oviola-Igue, December 2, 1990; O.H.T. #140 Interview with Usiobafo Omigie, (76), Ozalla, July 29, 1990; O.H.T. #157 Interview with Chief Okanigbuan Aigbirhio, (86),

from Benin, they sought to interpret the new systems they met in terms of those from their homeland. Thus they often grouped the grades into three as in Benin. For example in Ozalla the four junior grades have one name, the middle two another and the senior three yet another. Thus the picture drawn by the informants is of three age grades as in Benin, each one with a given number of sub-grades. Two Benin terms have been widely adopted: "Edion" for the elders and "Ighele" for the working grades. But the word for the junior grades differs among the various communities. "Igbama" refers to the junior grades in Ivbiaro and Ora, in Warrake to the senior.

Given its royal pedigree, it is hardly surprising that Ora came closest to the Benin model. The junior grade is called Igbama (in Benin, Erhoghae), the Ighele grade has two sub-grades (no sub-grades in Benin, but also called Ighele) and the Edion or elders the same for both, out of which four were chosen as the seniors. Elsewhere the senior elders might form seven. Except for Ora, the evidence in Owan demonstrates that while the age organisation probably arose from the same cultural sub-stratum, the Benin immigrants after 1500 did not either introduce it nor impose their own system on the indigenous people. Rather they adopted the existing systems adding to them some of the terminology from Benin. Even the widely adopted Benin term "Edion" was not employed in the

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Avbiosi, March 19, 1991; O.H.T. #186 Interview with Mr. G. dauda, (55), Warrake, January 15, 1991.

communities of Otuo and Igue.<sup>10</sup>

In most of the communities the initiation of members of an age grade was performed every three years. However in "Iuleha and Arokho the interval [was] five years, in Urole and Ikhin four years, in Ihievbe two years, while in Era (Ivbi-Ada-Obi) a new set [was] said to be formed whenever enough youths reach[ed] the right age".<sup>11</sup> In Otuo the promotion from one grade to another took between five and ten years depending on the age grade. There were a number of differences in the internal organisation of the age grades from one community to another. As Bradbury noted:

There are differences of detail in some of the other tribes [communities]. In Iuleha there were nine working otu, but the four senior ones took no part in day-to-day communal tasks; they acted as supervisors. The nine working otu of Ivbiaro are divided into three junior sets (igbama) and six senior sets (ighele). They are grouped into three companies as at Ora, each consisting of one igbama and two ighele sets. The nine warrior otu of Era [Ivbi-Ada-Obi community] are known as ighele. In Uareke [Warrake] there are seven working otu of which the three senior are called igbama; the name ighele here refers to the middle age-grade. In Ihievbe there are seven "working" otu (ofiekpude) and seven "warrior" otu (ighele). At Ozala [Ozalla] the four junior sets are known as egbolughele, the next five as ighele, of which the three senior otu are called otuleha.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Information from a number of interviews. See Ibid..

<sup>11</sup>Bradbury, The Benin Kingdom... p.89.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid..

In spite of these differences there was a general discernable structure and an attempt to relate to, and harmonize with the Benin model. For instance there was the council of Edion (elders), middle age grades and junior age grades. This Benin gloss tends to make an extremely varied number of systems appear less complex than they, in fact, were.

The most senior age grade was the Edion. Whereas in most of the communities the senior age grade was called the Edion, in Otuo and Igue they were named "Ekpahe" and "Okhuekhe" respectively. The Edion were usually elders exempted from communal labour, but had a recognised voice in village and community matters. The oldest member of the Edion was called the Odionwere. He was the spiritual and political head of the village. Because of his spiritual role he was in charge of the village ancestral shrine. As the political head, he chaired meetings of both the council of elders and the village assembly. In some communities there were a class of elders, who were regarded as primus inter pares. In Ivbiaro they were called Edionma and in Warrake they were referred to as Edion nihiron (meaning the oldest seven elders). In Benin villages they were four. As in the villages of the Benin Kingdom, the Edion age grade formed the political and judicial arm of government. Even though decisions were reached by consensus their influence was vital in directing the affairs of the community. Members of the council of elders by virtual of their age were heads of their respective households and

lineages. As heads of the lineages they controlled social and economic resources.

In some communities there were nine age grades below the Edion. The nine grades were divided into two groups the Ighele (the seniors) and the Igbama (the juniors). The number of grades within each of the two major divisions varied from one community to the other. In Iuleha for instance there were four senior grades and five junior ones, whereas in Ivbiaro there were six senior and three junior. In Ora they were organised into three grades, one Igbama and two Ighele. Although the nine were regarded as the working age grades, technically the seniors did not take part in any communal work. They supervised the junior age grades during communal assignments.

Calculating from the age grades it can be shown that a male possibly moved into a supervisory grade at forty years of age in Iuleha and at thirty in Ivbiaro. Assuming one entered the age organisation at fifteen years of age and passed through nine grades (average five years each) then a male became an Edion at about age sixty. With four senior grades, a male could become a manager twenty years before elderhood or at forty and in Ivbiaro at thirty given the six manager grades. If this could be considered the norm for communal labour, might it not also be thought to apply to farm field labour as well? If so, then the age organisation worked in such a way as to shift the burden of work among males to those under thirty five years of age. Thus shortly after a man



married and sired his first child, he ceased manual labour and became a supervisor. Consequently the age organisation in Owan might be seen to have been an institution of labour exploitation which heightened the generational tension and conflict in the community more than in a system where supervisory grades did not exist.

The nine grades were divided into three fighting forces, namely the Obodion (those who fought to the right), the Okhiode (those who fought in the centre) and the Ogobor (those who fought to the left). The leading sets of the three fighting forces were known as Otu-leha (three groups). The Otu-leha were the messengers of the elders and supervisors of the nine age grades. As Bradbury reported:

The otuleha or middle age-grade summoned offenders to appear before the councils and carried out the latter's decisions...At Ozala [Ozalla] it is reported that they could punish petty thieves or assaulters, probably by forcing them to return stolen goods, or pay compensation plus a small fine which they shared among themselves".<sup>13</sup> Basically the nine grades acted as the executive arm of pre-colonial Owan community government.

By the formation of supervisory grades and offering them minor judicial functions, the Edion sought to co-opt middle aged men, prevent resentment and protesting through migration.

Before the introduction of the title system, the smallest unit of administration was the household Afen or Ukhuede. The

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<sup>13</sup>Bradbury, The Benin Kingdom..., p.94.

household was headed by the oldest man called Odafen or Odion-Ukhuede.<sup>14</sup> His role was that of taking care of members of the household. He summoned family meetings through his Ukor (messenger). Household meetings deliberated on intra-household disputes, and such other issues as marriage and inheritance. The Odafen and the elders of the household also negotiated settlement of disputes between households and families. According to Bradbury, "A family head would adjudicate between members of his own family and two families of the same ward would attempt to reach agreement in the case of a dispute between their members".<sup>15</sup> To the outsider it is very easy for one to assume that since women occupied a subordinate position to the men, they had no voice. Because of the rule of consensus the women used informal procedures to influence decisions within the household.

The Odafen or Odion-Ukhuede also catered to the religious well-being of the household. He was the intermediary between the living members of the household and their ancestors and ancestresses. He offered sacrifices at the family Ikute (a symbol of the family ancestor) on behalf of the household at the family shrine.<sup>16</sup> It was his responsibility to check with the oraclist over the health and good of the family. In

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<sup>14</sup>O.H.T. #9 Interview with Chief Airoje B. Oriaran, (70), Eme-Ora, September 6, 1990; O.H.T. #75 Pa. Iriabekhai Ojeaburu, (82), Afuze, August 30, 1990.

<sup>15</sup>Bradbury, The Benin Kingdom..., p.94.

<sup>16</sup>O.H.T. #9 & #75.

conjunction with other male elders in the family, he took decisions on such issues as marrying out daughters of the household. Furthermore he was duty bound to find wives for young male members of the family. As well the young men looked up to the elders of the household expecting them to pay the necessary bride price. The young men expected the elders to do this because over the years they had offered heavy labour services to the latter. In fact no young man was able to establish his own family without the blessing of the Odafen and the elders of the family. As Uri Almagor noted among the Dassanetch of Ethiopia and quite applicable to Owan, "[t]hough the first aim of a young man is to engage in economic activities of his household, he is unavoidably caught up in a political game in which he is forced into dependence upon elders".<sup>17</sup> A wife became the bribe or payment to a young man for his strenuous fifteen years of labour (between ages fifteen and thirty) in the service of the family. The obedient individual might marry a few years before the recalcitrant who waited his turn as decided by the elders. Once the payment had been made and the wife provided, the elders had less hold over the young male and not surprisingly rather quickly thereafter he ceased his heavy labour and became a manager in the age organisation and over the farming activities of his new wife.

Lineages were named after their founders. In Emai,

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<sup>17</sup>Uri Almagor, "Gerontocracy, Polygyny and Scarce Resources" in J.S. La Fontaine (ed.), Sex and Age as Principles of Social Differentiation, London, Academic Press, 1978. p.152.

Iuleha, Ihievbe and Evbo-Mion the prefix "Ivb" was added to the name of the lineage. In Ora a lineage was called Equare earle and the lineage head was known as Odion earle. The head led the lineage at worship at the Ikute. The lineage elders while exercising political and spiritual authority, were also in control of social and economic decisions. Granted that the household was an important unit of production, the lineage was also a recognised locus of redistribution of resources.

The village was made up of a number of lineages. Authority at the village level was vested in a council of elders. The council was headed by the oldest man in the village, the Odionwere. As with the family and lineage heads, the Odionwere was the spiritual and political head of the village. He was expected to mediate between the village ancestors and ancestresses and the people. The Odionwere summoned meetings of the village assembly. Every adult male and female were entitled to attend the meetings. Usually the elders of the village set the agenda of each meeting. But when an indigene of the village had a complaint, he or she requested the Odionwere to convene a meeting of the village assembly to discuss the issue. Although the elders represented a prominent class in the administration of the village, the final decision at each assembly was based on the rule of consensus. In most cases the decisions taken by the council of elders were based on the agreement reached by all. Elders only pronounced the decision of the majority. The assembly also

arbitrated disputes between individuals and wards. While the elders occupied a preeminent position in the gerontocratic political arrangement, they relied on consensus to reach decisions. The age grades were normally saddled with the responsibility of executing the decisions. Thus every member of the supervisory or managerial grades were made to feel a sense of belonging to the system.

**Title Associations:**

With the exception of Otuo, Igue and Ikao all of the Owan communities possessed title associations in pre-colonial times. Several traditions exist as to how the title system was introduced into Owan in the seventeenth century (c.1600-1632) from Ife. According to Oyakhire, some Emai individuals went to Ife to obtain medicine with which to ward off invasion from raiders from the Benin Kingdom. In his words:

In the bygone days it was usual, illegitimately though, for the Edo people to come to Emailand and confiscate all the belongings of those who died without having issues [children]... A hunter from Uhe (Ile-Ife) who witnessed the confiscation of the property of Emai people who had no issues [children] after their death by the Edos elected to render the Emais assistance to see to it that cruel action was totally extirpated. He advised the Emais to send some people to Ife and approach the Oghene (The Oni of Ife) and beg him to give them medicine which would make it thoroughly impossible for the Edos to carry on this sort of thing.<sup>18</sup>

In Benin, the Oba inherited property from those who died

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<sup>18</sup>Oyakhire, The First History of Emai Clan, pp.45-46.

childless. Obviously the Edo were treating Emai and possibly Iuleha and Ora (as shown below) as if they were an integral part of the Kingdom of Benin. It might be noted that this occurred just before 1600 when cotton growing and cloth weaving were bringing considerable wealth to those regions. Emai, Iuleha and Ora were located in the heartland of the cotton region as discussed in the last chapter. Presumably childless individuals who passed away possessed wealth and property worth seizing. The willingness of the Owan communities to turn to Ife - from which the Benin royal family also derived its legitimacy - demonstrated the power of their location, within the Benin sphere of influence, but not subject to its more oppressive regulations.

The representatives of Emai, Iuleha and Ora left for Ife in company of the hunter who made the suggestion. However when they arrived at Ife and as the delegation was waiting for the Oni (king), the hunter fell ill and died. Disappointed at the turn of events, the representatives of Emai and Iuleha left for home. Nevertheless the Ora representative, Agba remained behind. He later met with the Oni, who gave him the medicine. Oyakhire claims Agba forgot the name by which the medicine was called and when he came back home he called it "Ejere" which is the same as the name of the title.

A related version by Amu reported that it was Agba, a "native" doctor of Ora who went to Ife to visit fellow healers. During the visit he was invited to take part in a

medicine ceremony, after which he was handed the medicine and told "Ojere re" meaning "you will profit by it".<sup>19</sup> With time the word was changed to Ejere which is related to the Edo and Esan words of "egie" and "ijie" meaning "title". When Agba returned to Owan, he was said to have shared a portion of the medicine with Ozalla. When the Iuleha representative arrived, the medicine had finished and so he had to accept the thread with which the medicine had been tied.<sup>20</sup> Finally the Emai representative took the stone on which the medicine had been ground. Following the establishment of the title system in Ora, Iuleha and Emai, it spread to other Owan communities except Otuo, Igue and Ikao. Oyakhire has likened the Ejere title association or cult to the Ogboni secret society in Yorubaland.

The traditions surrounding the introduction of male titles, indicate how they came from Ife, but as to why, they are threadbare except for the Emai tradition which suggests they had something to do with wealth and who controlled it. However thereafter both traditions agree that the titles came through Ora rather than Emai. As indicated in the last chapter from c.1485-1700 the central tier of Owan communities and Ora flourished on the sale of cotton and the rapidly expanding demand for cotton cloth. Both the cultivation of cotton and weaving were the prerogatives of women. Consequently this

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<sup>19</sup>Amu, The Ora History Book, p.25.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p.26.

period became a golden age for females. Was the wealth being confiscated in Emai belonging to females? The tradition does not make it clear. Given that the dates c.1600-1632 coming after a century of rising female prominence in the economic system, it becomes tempting to argue that titles were designed to bolster the rather bruised male egos in a period of decline in their prestige. In addition the Ejere cult probably catered to the managers in the age organisation who through titles sought to raise their prestige vis-a-vis the Edion group. Since titles had to be purchased, it was also a system whereby certain males might accumulate wealth at the expense of others.

In pre-colonial Owan there were two title associations, the Ejerenokhua and the Olakpa, the higher and lower titles respectively. Marshall contended that the introduction of the titles "had its origin in an attempt to combat the obvious weakness of a system whereby the only criterion of a person's fitness to rule, was his age".<sup>21</sup> This suggests that economic factors were operating in the gerontocracies to create embryonic classes where some were more well off than others. Subsistence had given way to a commercial economy. It could have also been an attempt by a group of ambitious young men to seize political authority, even though the general explanation for the exodus of the Owan people from Benin had been a resistance to tyrannical and hierarchial rule. More

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<sup>21</sup>Marshall, Part I, p.16.



importantly the young men who went to Ife for chieftaincy were generations apart from the founders of the Owan communities. As such the sentiments against stratification of power had declined. Agba and his associates were obviously in favour of the recognition of personal achievements in the new commercial age rather than ascribed status based on age as in an earlier period of subsistence. It may well be that since gerontocracy relied very much on ones longevity, Agba and his compatriots could not wait for old age to smile on them.

Hence the wealth generated by the cotton revolution and the growing circulation of cowries and iron bars as currency made title purchase possible. They became a device to challenge the developing influence of women and the traditional prestige of the Edion. Above all they bolstered the male ego in the age grades where it has always had a substantial influence upon the behaviour of men.

Another feature of the title system was that they were not hereditary. The protagonists of the scheme were very much against a situation where persons who did not work hard would have inherited titles. This would have gone too far against egalitarian tradition and replicated the social system which they had protested against in their migration out of Benin. Thus individuals had to struggle and prove themselves worthy of the titles. There was also the recognition of the fact that all male adults could not aspire to the same title. Hence there was a two-title structure. Nevertheless every adult male

was eligible to acquire either of the titles, as long as they were able to afford the cost. For instance "in some Clans [communities] all title-holders first took the junior title, and then, if they were rich enough, the senior title".<sup>22</sup> However in some communities it was not possible to move from lower to higher titles. Moreover "[i]n some cases, a father and son, could not both be members of the same title grade; in other cases two title-holders were forbidden to live in the same house".<sup>23</sup> These restrictions were said to have ensured that the titles were evenly distributed amongst descent groups.<sup>24</sup> It also prevented the titles from becoming cheapened by their over-extension. Without doubt the most critical factor which frustrated intending title-holders was the cost of initiation. As reported by Bradbury, in 1947 the Olakpa title cost £15 in Uokha.<sup>25</sup> By 1970 the Olakpa cost between £100-£150 and the price of Ejerenokhua was £20-£50.<sup>26</sup> Consequently the payment system set up a continuing source of income for title holders, creating a new elite as distinct from the old elite based on age, the gerontocrats.

Before a candidate became initiated he had to name a

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p.17.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid..

<sup>24</sup>O.H.T. #55 Interview with Chief F. Oisemoje Ojiega, (63), Afuze, August 2, 1990. See also Bradbury, The Benin Kingdom..., p.90.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid..

<sup>26</sup>Investigation into the Role of Chiefs, p.24.

female companion who was also inducted into the women's version. She was called an Olua. This female version had not been brought from Ife and presumably had been added to win female support for the new institution. In Ora male initiates named their senior wives as their Olua - a reflection of the greater tendency to patriarchy in Ora - while in other communities sisters were designated, suggesting the continuing influence of the older matrilineal tendencies. As usual with colonial ethnographers, Marshall tried to down play the importance of the female titles. "It [the olua title system] had no administrative functions, but its members were treated with great respect, and had the right to adjudicate on minor offenses where a woman's morals were concerned".<sup>27</sup> Since Marshall was writing in an Intelligence Report designed to guide indirect rule over Owan, he was primarily informing authorities that they need not worry about women. They and their titles would be looked after by the males of the communities. Male informants might have misrepresented the Olua title system to Marshall during his investigation. Whereas the role of Owan women in the evolution of the title system has been obliterated from oral records, it had not been possible for the men to deny women altogether. Consequently the former relegated the female title to an appendage which served to massage male egos while guaranteeing their superiority over the women. The granting of female titles

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<sup>27</sup>Marshall, Part I, p.19.

might have been a compromise at a time when women resisted what appeared to be an advance towards patriarchal structures.<sup>28</sup> Certainly males enjoyed greater authority than women.

Marshall's assertion that the Olua class were accorded great respect and acted as arbiters in matters pertaining to women suggests a male bias. The question Marshall did not consider was why the Ilua (plural of olua) were held in high esteem? Could it have been because they were relatives to titled men? Certainly not. A major problem here is the inadequacies of the oral narrative which is now silent on the significant roles the Ilua played in the past.<sup>29</sup> In addition it might have been a misrepresentation on the part of Marshall borne out of his own cultural experience in Europe. As Moore argued: "A number of anthropologists have now made the point that, even where more egalitarian relations between women and men exist, researchers are very often unable to understand

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<sup>28</sup>In an age when women were selling their cloth to traders from Benin and therefore had wealth which men were denied, it might be possible to speculate that the sister or wife to be entitled provided the funds for the purchase. It is difficult not to believe that in some cases, women instigated the quest for a title. Consequently the male Ejere might appear as an appendage to the female Olua, rather than the reverse as pictured in modern oral tradition. Obviously with the switch to palm produce, male status increased and that of the women declined in the nineteenth century, as oral tradition has correctly pointed out.

<sup>29</sup>Despite limited information on the Ilua, two female informants claimed they acted as a pressure group who defended the interest of women and spoke up on public issues. O.H.T. #18 Interview with Madam Alikose Okpaise, (75), & Madam Onotanua Aigbodion, (65), Uhonmora, October 12, 1990.

this potential equality because they insist on interpreting difference and asymmetry as inequality and hierarchy".<sup>30</sup> Field work revealed that the view of an inferior female title might have also been the result of male informants' misrepresentation. A number of men gave the impression that the Ilua were subordinated to the men. Those feminists who believe in the women-as-victims paradigm would readily accept the inferiority hypothesis propounded by the males.

In the society, titles of males and females seemed to have had equal prestige but it appears possible that over the centuries the balance between genders and therefore the weight of their titles may have changed. As noted elsewhere tradition seek continuity of the present with the past while the historian searches for change. The wars of the nineteenth century, the demand for a male-controlled export crop, alien religions, colonial chiefs and a host of other factors have created a full-fledged patriarchal society today. In the continuity paradigm the present becomes a mirror image of the past, projecting a static society and basically leaving no role whatsoever for the discipline of history.

The introduction of the title system engendered a new political arrangement in some communities. Seeking to have a greater say in the affairs of their communities, the title holders became more involved in the political process. In Ora the title system became integrated with the gerontocracy. It

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<sup>30</sup>Moore, Feminism and Anthropology, p.2.

would seem as if there was a deliberate effort to ensure that both age and meritocracy were given due acknowledgment. In Emai the powers of the elders were eclipsed except where they were able to afford the cost of admission into the title association. In this regard it has been stated that there was the tendency "for the title grades to assume most of the real power, leaving to age, the traditional sacrifices to jujus [shrines] and all matters directly concerned with the spiritual life of the Clan [community]".<sup>31</sup> This was the existing situation when the British imposed their rule at the dawn of the twentieth century. The titled class became allies of the imperialists. They were rewarded for their collaboration with warrants which consolidated their political authority and power.

A notable development which undoubtedly affected the pre-colonial socio-political arrangements in Owan was the invasion of the area by Nupe jihadists in the nineteenth century. While the conversion of the Owan people to Islam was the ostensible reason for the invasion, the reality was that the Nupe were more concerned with the collection of tributes.<sup>32</sup> To ensure a smooth and orderly process of exploitation of the conquered areas, the Oba of Agbede,<sup>33</sup> a Muslim, was appointed the

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<sup>31</sup>Marshall, Part I, p.18.

<sup>32</sup>See Ohikhokhai, "Owan and the Benin Kingdom...", pp.51-52.

<sup>33</sup>Agbede is a Muslim community in the Etsako-speaking area of Edo State, Nigeria. It is located to the east of the Owan communities.

representative of the Nupe. He collected tributes from Ivbiaro, Ihievbe and Warrake.<sup>34</sup> Beside economic subordination, pre-Islamic titles were changed to the custom of 'tying turbans' or 'Ogbanuhumi'.<sup>35</sup> On this development the Resident, Benin Province (Mr. N.C. Denton) in 1937 commented:

Ivbiaro, Uwarake [Warrake] and Sebe [Ihievbe] have all departed from the ancient title system and adopted that of turban purchase. Erra [Ivbi-Ada-Obi] alone adhered to the former system. A number of Sebe elders raised the question of purchase of turbans and said that they were alarmed at the development of the turban system. Whereas formerly turbans were purchased from the Ogie of Agbede, nowadays the village heads were the grantors and no discrimination was used. Any youngster could purchase a turban, if he had the cash, and thereby claim a seat on the Council. This point is most important. Under the old system the Ejerenokwa title was governed by regulations. Unrestricted purchase of the right to tie a turban is likely to bring the system into disrepute and to upset the balance of the native system of government. It is in fact a money making concern. I advised the people to think about it carefully. Some of them said they would like to return to the old title system. It certainly seems to be less open to abuse than the present one, which tends to centralise power in the Village Head and is of course an alien

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<sup>34</sup>O.H.T. #185 Interview with Chief Alhasan Ogegere, (90), Warrake, January 15, 1991; O.H.T. #193 Interview with Mallam Abu Elakhame, (87), Ivbiaro, January 25, 1991 and O.H.T. #234 Interview with Alhaji M.I. Momoh, (63) Ihievbe, January 22, 1991. See also Marshall, Part I, p.12.

<sup>35</sup>Marshall, Part I, p.13.

institution.<sup>36</sup>

The introduction of a Muslim administrative system did change permanently the method of administering the areas where Islamic beliefs had penetrated. An estimate of Muslims in this region would be about 30% in Ivbiaro, 40% in Ihievbe and 55% in Warrake. It should however be noted that Islamic turbanning did not completely wipe out the indigenous title system. Those who did not convert to Islam still aspired to the old titles.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore the position of women in the new structure was further worsened because there was no recognition of female titles. Accordingly the new dispensation reinforced male dominance. By and large the introduction of titles into Owan between c.1600-1632 changed the criterion for political participation. Accomplishment obscured ascription. Youth eclipsed adulthood. Zest replaced blandness. Women might have insisted that they too must share in this new institution. As might be expected the patriarchal ideology of Islam offered no place for women in the new turbanning system.

Another custom tended to undermine the leadership of age and gerontocracy. The Ukor system was a unique characteristic of the pre-colonial socio-political structure in Owan. The practice of Ukorship had to do with the delegation of powers

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<sup>36</sup>Quoted in Investigation into the Role of Chiefs..., pp.23-24. Ironically of course, the old title system had also been an alien institution.

<sup>37</sup>O.H.T. #228 Interview with Mallam Isabemon Oyakhire, (83), Ihievbe, January 20, 1991.



by a titular head of a village to a representative. Among communities, the senior of a group of villages delegated its powers to summon meetings of the community.<sup>38</sup> The evolution of this system is traceable to the fact that as village heads became older and less active, they delegated their powers to younger men who were more energetic and dynamic. With time the Ukors (messengers) began to assert themselves independently of the Edionwere who had appointed them. Inevitably the position of the traditional village heads became threatened. As Marshall noted in his 1937 report:

The system is harmless as long as it is clearly recognised by every one, that the Ukor, while exercising the full functions of Headship, [sic] is only representing the Titular [sic] head; but unfortunately since the advent of Government there has been a tendency for the Ukor to be looked upon as the natural Head, with the result that the real Head, in many cases, now feels himself neglected and wishes to take the full power back into his own hands. This however would on the whole be an unpopular breach of custom. Therefore while the Ukor system must be allowed to continue, it is of the utmost importance that the true position of the Ukor should be realised.<sup>39</sup>

Ordinarily the introduction of the Ukor system was aimed at solving the potential problem of ineffective leadership as a result of old age. However during the colonial and post-colonial period, it became a source of friction within the chieftaincy institution. Having tasted power, the Ukors were

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<sup>38</sup>Marshall, Part I, p.18.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid..

not prepared to relinquish it. During the present research there were still pending chieftaincy disputes in Owan communities resulting from the appointment of Ukors by post-colonial governments.

Although "Ukor" is an Edo word, there was no equivalent institution in the Benin kingdom or Esan chiefdoms. It seemed to be, even more than the age grades, unique to Owan. Potentially it might have arisen during the period when titles were being debated and introduced. The Ukor seems to have been an effort of the Edion to dampen down the criticism of age as the criterion to rule. In some western Igbo groups with age organisations, the oldest age set, at a point ceremonially were retired which brought political authority into the hands of younger men, possibly around fifty years of age. One could speculate that this development might have occurred during the cotton revolution where similar forces to those in Owan might have been at work. However the economic phases among western Igbo were very different than in Owan, the prosperity and commercial activity of the nineteenth century reached unusual heights along the Niger. Thus retirement of the elders might well have begun then.

#### **Chiefdom Organisation:**

Ikao was the only community in pre-colonial Owan which had a semblance of monarchy. A better description would be that Ikao was a chiefdom rather than a monarchy as in the Benin Kingdom. The "state" apparatus was not that

sophisticated or complex so as to qualify as a monarchy. Before the introduction of the chiefdom organisation, the age-grade system was operative. Ikao's age grade system was closer to those in Otuo and Igue. Notwithstanding, while Otuo and Igue communities had twelve and five age grades respectively, Ikao had eight. They were as follows:

8th	Ikhegheki } Ruling	60 years
7th	Ikherekpa } Groups	50 "
6th	Otunesa } Warrior	40 "
5th	Egbibia } Groups	35 "
4th	Enezogan } Working	30 "
3rd	Imorumi } Group	25 "
2nd	Enarebaimorumi } Junior	20 "
1st	Ekpakhehe } Groups	1-15 "

A new Ikao age set was formed every five years. There were no title associations as there were in most Owan communities.

With the introduction of chiefdom administration, the head was named Ikao after the community. The position of the Ikao was hereditary, "passing from father to a son who must be the son of a woman of a different tribe [ethnic group]. If no such son [was] available who had reached the Enezogan grade a regent [was] appointed until his death when the title reverts to the original line".<sup>40</sup> Where the chieftaincy came from is not known. Since Owan forms an "island" of gerontocratic rule, it has chiefly peoples on all sides. Since the community of Ikao is located along the northern border, possibly the

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<sup>40</sup>Bradbury, The Benin Kingdom..., p.96.

chiefly institution came from the north and possibly from the ethnic group from which the mother of the heir to the throne should descend. However the design of the chiefly institution sought to harmonize a gerontocratic ideology - the chief must be elderly - with hereditary succession - father to son - a touch of alien mystery - monarchies are normally foreign<sup>41</sup> - and inter-ethnic alliances given its exposed border location.

Only the Ikao and the Olotu were hereditary offices. Because there were three villages in Ikao, the Ikao headed both Uherele village and the community of Ikao, the Olotu the Uso village and Oviamolede (non-hereditary) headed the third village of Ijegbe. The Ikao summoned the community meetings which were held in his house. As with other Owan communities every adult male and female were eligible to attend the meetings. On the position of women in the Ikao socio-political arrangement, Marshall claimed that it, "...is little different from that of women in other Ivbiosakon Clans [communities], though in neither clan [Otuo and Ikao] does there appear to have been any organisation among the women".<sup>42</sup> If previous assertions by Marshall are anything to go by he is undoubtedly claiming that women in pre-colonial Ikao had no influence not to talk of power or even authority. Furthermore in Otuo and Ikao there were no male title systems. Hence it would have

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<sup>41</sup>Ernest Gellner, Thought and Change, London, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1964. p.136.

<sup>42</sup>Marshall, Part VIII, p.15.

been unlikely to have a separate title organisation for women. However it should be noted that in Otuo and Ikao there existed women's organisations as in other Owan communities. Otuo should not be compared with Ikao as Marshall did. The community of Otuo was more matrilocal and matrilineal than any other in Owan as discussed in chapters three and four. Ikao on the other hand had gone full distance to patriarchy with an hereditary chieftain.<sup>43</sup>

#### **Women and Socio-Political Activities:**

The analysis so far in this chapter gives the erroneous impression that pre-colonial socio-political activities in Owan were entirely male-dominated. This is the result of the fact that most of the pre-colonial institutions so far discussed were undeniably male. The question then is, through what institutions did women participate in the running of pre-colonial Owan society? Furthermore how effective were they? This section of the chapter seeks to focus on these issues and explore further the manner in which Owan women interacted with their male folk vis-a-vis the socio-political institutions.

In the analysis of pre-colonial Owan socio-political organization, it is obvious that female figures were not

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<sup>43</sup>Because of lack of time and finance, Ikao was the only community in which no field work was conducted. It seemed at the time that if any community could be ignored, it would be the chiefly one since the research was focusing upon acephalous gerontocratic communities. However it became clear as the analysis proceeded that a comparison of the status of women in Ikao (a chiefdom) with a titled society like Ora and a gerontocracy such as Otuo might have been very rewarding.

visible in the formal structures of power and authority. Hence a rigid insistence on institutional analysis will unquestionably blur an understanding of how pre-colonial Owan women exercised power and influence. For instance there were no female equivalents to the male age grades. Scholars have tried to explain the lack of female age grades. As P.T.W Baxter and U. Almagor argued "it is because women are entangled in domestic cares much earlier and from the start much more tightly than are men, because they are usually married around puberty, that there are no age-systems for women".<sup>44</sup> It is doubtful if this explanation can be accepted. The explanation is very much similar to the claim that there is a marked distinction between the private and domestic domains. By implication Baxter and Almagor's assertion obviously reinforces the false conclusion that the private is female, dull and uninteresting, while the public domain is male, active and intriguing. However Owan women established unique organisations which served their needs both in the private and public spheres. These were the Idegbe (association of daughters of the family) and Ikhuoho earle or Ikposafen (wives of the family or married women). The Idegbe group was made up of unmarried and married daughters of a household and lineage.

Pre-colonial Owan lineages were organised according to

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<sup>44</sup>P.T.W. Baxter and U. Almagor, "Observations About Generations" in J.S. La Fontaine (ed.), Sex and Age as Principles of Social Differentiation, p.168.

patrilineal descent. As such male members of the lineage commanded a lot of respect. However daughters of the lineage, the Idegbe, also exerted considerable power. This was as a result of the fact that they were considered "males" within their lineage.<sup>45</sup> Hence the wives of a household and lineage regarded the Idegbe as their "husbands". The Idegbe unquestionably occupied a higher status than the married women - therefore strangers - within the household and lineage. The married members of the Idegbe at intervals came back home to hold meetings with their unmarried sisters on crucial family issues. For instance in a situation where a male member of the lineage was being maltreated by his wives, the Idegbe have been known to have applied pressure to force their sister-in-laws to conform.<sup>46</sup> They also settled disputes between co-wives in the family or lineage. Similar situations have also been observed among Nnobi Igbo, according to Ifi Amadiume:

Lineage daughters had strong powers in the place where they were born. Townfolk gave them special prestige and respect, because no matter how difficult a case was, they were believed to be able to solve it, whether in the lineage at home

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<sup>45</sup>O.H.T. #229 Interview with Madam Asimawo Oyakhire, (74), Ihievbe, January 21, 1991. The role of the Idegbe was very similar to the Umuada among the Igbo. See Kamena Okonjo, "The Dual-Sex Political System in Operation: Igbo Women and Community Politics in Midwestern Nigeria", in Nancy J. Hafkin & Edna G. Bay, (eds.) Women in Africa..., p.52; See also Judith Van Allen, "'Aba Riots' or Igbo 'Women's War'? Ideology, Stratification, and the Invisibility of Women", in Hafkin & Bay, (eds.), Women in Africa..., p.68.

<sup>46</sup>O.H.T. #161 Interview with Madam Juana Aitalegbe, (65), Avbioghola-Okpuje, April 8, 1991.

or abroad. It was their duty to ensure that their father's household was strong and at peace. If there was a quarrel in the lineage, they were called in to settle it. If the quarrel was among lineage wives, they were called in and, after settling the dispute, the married daughters would return to their respective marital homes.<sup>47</sup>

In the same vein they had outstanding influence on their fathers and brothers. The Idegbe's intervention in the affairs of the lineage was not one sided. Because the married members of the lineage faced similar marital problems as married women in their own natal homes, they sometimes intervened on behalf of their "wives". In essence where a man wronged his wife or wives the Idegbe also placed sanctions on their fathers or brothers so as to ensure they apologised to their wives. Basically they played the same role as any average male performed in ensuring peace and harmony in the lineage. However they had far more influence than any male including the Edion because they operated as a group.

The Idegbe were also very active in matters pertaining to birth, marriage and funeral ceremonies. Because of their position in the family as "alternate males" they were consulted before decisions were taken. Any attempt to ignore them resulted in serious protest on their part. For instance it has been assumed that because of the preeminent position of male heads of households they invariably took crucial

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<sup>47</sup>Ifi Amadiume, Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in African Society, London, Zed Books Ltd., 1987. p.59.



decisions on such issues as marriages. The evidence in the Owan situation reveals that such an assumption was only in theory. Some of my informants maintained that before a young man in the lineage acquired a wife, the Idegbe sometimes were involved in probing the background of a potential sister-in-law.<sup>48</sup> In addition they made contributions to the items a bride's family provided to her to start marital life. Where the Idegbe disapproved of any marriage arrangement, they threatened to pull out of all the ceremonies connected with the marriage. Such actions no doubt drew the attention of male members of the lineage to their grounds of opposition. An example occurred during the course of this research. The writer attended a wedding where the Idegbe held up the ceremony for some minutes. The issue at stake was that there were specific payments which the Idegbe was supposed to receive from the bridegroom's family, and in this particular instance, the male members of the bride's family had waived the payment without due consultation with the Idegbe. This decision infuriated the Idegbe members who insisted that they must be paid before the ceremony could proceed. Ultimately they were pacified when the male elders of their family opted to make the payment. The incident demonstrated that male household members exercised less powers in reality than might have been expected in theory. Without doubt pre-colonial Owan

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<sup>48</sup>O.H.T. #97 Interview with Madam Agboson Agbekhai, (78), & Madam Iyokhuen Otu, (77), Uokha, November 10, 1990.

men occupied more visible positions than the women but could only act with the cooperation of the latter.

Another significant women's organisation in pre-colonial Owan society involved married females, called the Ikhuoho earle or Ikposafen. The qualification for membership of the women's organisation was the status of being married. Thus the Ikposafen embraced the stranger women in the lineage. Although membership was determined by marriage status, the headship of the women's organisation was based on natural age. As a consequence a woman could still be the head after the death of her husband. This practice was the direct opposite of the Esan tradition where as soon as a woman lost her husband, she dropped in status amongst other married women.<sup>49</sup> Newly married wives were initiated into the association by older wives within the lineage. The major ceremony on the arrival of a new wife (Eghayo) was the setting up of her kitchen after tutelage under an older woman in the family.<sup>50</sup> Once her kitchen had been set up, the newlywed became a member of the married women's association. In a matrilineal society where husbands were strangers, it became common for them to organise into associations. Similarly in the patrilineal system of Owan, women were the strangers and required some organisation to

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<sup>49</sup>See C.G. Okojie, Ishan Native Laws and Customs, Yaba, John Okwesa & Co. 1960. p.57.

<sup>50</sup>O.H.T. #126 Interview with Madam Maria Omoruanzoje, (73), Arokho, March 24, 1991.

assist them in mediating with the family of all male kin.<sup>51</sup> Without such an organisation the lives of new wives could be made quite miserable under patriarchal oppression.

Within the association, women offered each other various types of assistance from baby sitting to work in the farm. The association also acted as a vehicle through which information on motherhood was disseminated to young girls.<sup>52</sup> The women further settled disputes between themselves. On the whole the women's organisation addressed numerous issues which had to do with their interests. Such groupings have often been dismissed as mere social gatherings. According to Moore, "It is sometimes assumed that women's groups are a form of 'domestic' gathering, where women get together to gossip, exchange news and do 'good works'".<sup>53</sup> In refuting this image of merry making, Moore maintained that "[t]he study of women's groups in comparative perspective shows that such groups have always been political in nature, and that they should not be glossed (sic) as 'social gatherings' whose activities are devoid of relevance for the wider society".<sup>54</sup> In the case of women's organisations in pre-colonial Owan, they were concerned with

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<sup>51</sup>This point has also been noted as one of the reasons why Ijaw women form associations. See Nancy B. Leis, "Women in Groups: Ijaw Women's Associations", in M.Z. Rosaldo & L. Lamphere (eds.), Woman, Culture and Society, p.232.

<sup>52</sup>O.H.T. #88 Interview with Madam Abouvbo Akhareghemen, (69), Ogute-Evbiamen, October 3, 1990.

<sup>53</sup>Moore, Feminism and Anthropology, p.165.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid..

broader issues which affected the villages and communities. Both within and outside the household pre-colonial Owan women demonstrated their social, economic and political consciousness. As one informant pointed out:

Women in our society have always organised groups to assist one another. Such groups could assist a member in times of serious problems. It could be that a woman is sick and cannot work in the farm, her friends would offer whatever assistance possible. Also there have been cases when men decide to do certain things which the women do not like. Usually women used their group to challenge the man or men. Also when a man maltreats his wife continuously friends of the woman in the village can protest to other men to warn the troublesome man. The women can also decide to boycott the man's house. In a village like this it is very shameful if many women decide not to enter a house.<sup>55</sup>

A man might abuse his wife on the assumption that all of his male kin would likely support him should the issue become public. However he became much more restrained when he knew that all of the wives in the village might boycott his home and support his wife in a possible public confrontation. Consequently the Ikposafen or married women's association acted as a strong restraint upon male aggression and a deterrent to physical or emotional abuse.<sup>56</sup> This public or

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<sup>55</sup>O.H.T. #10 Interview with Madam I. Usidame, (71), Eme-Ora, September 7, 1990.

<sup>56</sup>For a discussion of a similar practice among the Igbo see Judith Van Allen, "'Stting on a Man': Colonialism and the Lost Political Institutions of Igbo Women", Canadian Journal of African Studies, vol.6, No.2, 1972. p.170.

social pressure along with mechanisms to make it effective, acted to cause restraint on the part of both males and females in marriage relationship, being much more effective than proclaimed laws enforced by police officers. Unbearable husbands could expect the wrath of all the women, while unreasonable wives might be left alone to face the hostility of the man's entire kinship network, including their female husbands, the Idegbe.

The invisibility of female figures in the power and authority structure of pre-colonial Owan misled one of the colonial ethnographers to conclude that they were politically passive. He erroneously believed that the women spoke out only when they were allowed by the men or when their interests were at stake. In Marshall's words:

Generally speaking women were not expected to take any part in the affairs of the Clan [community]... and when their interests were at stake they would undoubtedly have made themselves heard. Council meetings were always held in public and women were permitted to listen, and a woman who was known to be sensible might even be allowed to give her views.<sup>57</sup>

The above assertion is the result of a Victorian belief that the place of women was in the domestic arena, that while all affairs of the community were of interest to males, only limited feminine issues concerned women and that, if permitted, they could speak on those. As such they should

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<sup>57</sup>Marshall, Part I, p.19.

mostly be seen but not heard. However when they were heard it should only be at the whims and caprices of the male folk. To the contrary all issues in a community involved women and they behaved in such a manner as to insist upon it. The reality of the situation was that Owan women utilised their organisations for articulating political matters. Most female informants interviewed agreed that women did not attend community assembly meetings as individuals. As they explained, they preferred to attend as a group. To them women's voices were more forceful when their views were presented as a group demand. As a result more often than not, they spoke through the leader of the women's organisation, the Odion Ikhuoho Evbo. As a representative of the women, she spoke for all and hence it was difficult if not impossible for the men to ignore her. If the men did so, they risked a situation where the women would revolt. Their actions were very similar to the Igbo women's tradition of "sitting on a man" or the Kom women of Cameroon's practice of using Anlu vines to protest against recalcitrant men.<sup>58</sup> An assessment of women's organisations in pre-colonial Owan points to the fact that while they were formed as a result of the need to assist each other, they inevitably became involved in political matters because of the inter-connectedness of all sectors of human life. Most women were far too busy and practical to attend the lengthy council

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<sup>58</sup>See Audrey Wiper, "Women's Voluntary Associations", in M.J. Hay & S. Stichter, (eds.) African Women South of the Sahara, pp.70-71.

meetings. The Odion Ikhuoho Evbo became their watchdog. She could hold up any council decisions and force it to be brought before a full assembly where women might turn out in full force. These were her "troops" and their number gave unusual force to her words as she spoke before the assembly. Wise males needed little more persuasion than this to drop the issue. Perceptive males on the council would have dropped the issue even before deciding to be humiliated at the assembly.

Beyond strictly political matters, women adopted various means to take control of their lives and also influencing those of the men. For instance religion was one of such avenues through which women expressed themselves and exercised considerable power. This could be explained by the fact that religious activities catered to different interests. As Margaret Strobel has observed:

Traditional [African] religious activities are focused on protecting the well-being of the lineage or society; dealing with routinely difficult or anomalous situations such as jealousy between co-wives or marriage partners, foreign invasions, or disease; and marking important changes of status such as birth, puberty, marriage, and death through rites of passage.<sup>59</sup>

The above contention has significant relevance to the experience of Owan women in the pre-colonial period even though the researcher quoted failed to include gender

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<sup>59</sup>Margaret Strobel, "Women in Religion and in Secular Ideology", in Hay & Stichter, African Women South of the Sahara, p.89.

problems. During periods of distress such as disease, epidemic, famine or drought, women were required to put a curse on whoever was responsible.<sup>60</sup> The major component of the Ekeyor ceremony involved the women who paraded naked at night to curse. It was a religious ritual aimed at expelling evil spirits from the community. While it was basically a religious obligation, it had political undertones. Because women were always naked during the rites, and cursing with the female genitalia, all men were expected to be in hiding during the ceremony. Any man who violated the code of conduct was punished by the women's organisation.<sup>61</sup> As a consequence whenever the women had the opportunity to humiliate a disobedient man they utilised it.

The ritual suggests that the evil spirits involved the men, were inside the men or were causing men to think evil thoughts which were polluting the community. Let the men hide away to reconsider their actions or thoughts because even disease might be considered the consequence of evil behaviour or thinking. Disease or famine could - and often was - believed to arise from an offence to the ancestors or deities. In that case the community propitiated the gods or ancestors and goddesses or ancestresses. When the Ekeyor ceremony was performed the source of the problem was not the supernatural.

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<sup>60</sup>O.H.T. #68 Interview with Madam Aita Ohiovbeunu, (90), Ovbíowun, August 18, 1990.

<sup>61</sup>O.H.T. #68.



Rather it involved the males of the community. Any one who disobeyed the women during the Ekeyor was obviously harbouring the evil spirit and had to be cursed. The ceremony involved a major humiliation of the male community and a suggestion that some of them were guilty. Those guilty presumably would be ones seeking to spy upon the naked women.

Because of the social and belief systems, midwives, diviners, healers and priestesses were accorded unusual respect in the community. The diviner, healer and the midwife played significant roles in the different stages of child birth. The diviner consulted oracles to ensure that no evil spirit would harm the foetus, the healers prepared herbs for the pregnant woman and the midwife delivered the babies. Because of their critical roles, they were very influential. In pre-colonial Owan society, these professionals were both men and women. Granted that both female and male professionals were given respect by the society, it was very important in enhancing the status of the female healers and diviners. Undoubtedly the women enjoyed a level of recognition which might have been denied them because of their gender. Their recognition thus placed them in positions of power where they significantly influenced opinions and decisions in the society. A similar situation has been observed among the Shona of Zimbabwe. Commenting on the role and position of midwives in Shona society, Schmidt said:

Despite their structurally subordinate position in society, some women attained

positions of significant prestige and influence. Elderly, post-menopausal women often practised as midwives, performing a function critical to the continuation of the lineage. Respectfully referred to as ambuya (grandmother), midwives were revered both for their age and their long experience of family life.<sup>62</sup>

The respect accorded post-menopausal women in Owan society was borne out of the fear of menstruation. The people believed that the blood from a menstruating woman could defile or weaken the spiritual powers of a man. Consequently it became the practice for menstruating women to be secluded. Since they were regarded as dangerous, their husbands did not eat any food cooked by them. Based on the negative connotation of what was purely a biological phenomenon, post-menopausal women became free of such discrimination, hence increased their status and were regarded as "males". Since they were considered as "men" it was proper to accord them the same respect and dignity as biological men. Two points should be noted. First women enjoyed one holiday each month when they became free from domestic labour. It seems unlikely that they would have willingly given up the taboo. Second the respect offered post-menopausal women explains why they were inevitably chosen as the female leaders such as the Odion Ikhoho Evbo who might approach the council. As a "male" she did not require - as Marshall insisted - any special permission to speak.

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<sup>62</sup>Schmidt, Peasants, Traders and Wives, p.24.

Constraints on Women's Power:

Gender and generational conflicts often appeared in witchcraft accusations. Bradbury states witchcraft in Owan followed the Benin pattern.<sup>63</sup> The Owan people perceived a witch as one who could utilize supernatural powers to harm or retard the progress of others. It was believed that for a witch to be able to carry out his or her objectives, he or she must turn into an animal, the most common being owls, cats and dogs. The Owan people believed that witches harmed their victims because of hatred, jealousy and wickedness.<sup>64</sup> As a consequence individuals invariably viewed people who did not like them as potential witches. If someone was seriously ill or failed to achieve set objectives, his or her relatives consulted the oracle to determine the individual responsible. In pre-colonial Owan the Ada-Obi shrine in Ivbiaro became very popular for the determination of witchcraft accusations. The utilization of the sasswood ordeal also became popular. According to Bradbury, "[t]he Ivbiosakon [Owan] area had been noted in the past for extensive outbreaks of sasswood poisoning in connection with witchcraft accusations. At Otwa [Otuo] whole families have been known to take sasswood when

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<sup>63</sup>Bradbury, The Benin Kingdom..., p.60.

<sup>64</sup>O.H.T. #62 Group Interview with Chief Ikizama Omiunu, (78), The Priest of Ideo shrine & his assistants, Ovbiowun, August 9, 1990; O.H.T. #100 Interview with Chief Ikhianvode J. Ogboro, (90), Uokha, November 15, 1990; O.H.T. #192 Interview with Mr. Asone Musah, (35), The Priest of Ada-Obi shrine, Ivbiaro, January 24, 1991.

one of their members has been accused".<sup>65</sup> Whereas both males and females have been accused of witchcraft, informants argued that there were more female witches than male. Bradbury's findings point to the same conclusion. As he pointed out, "[a]ny person of any age or of either sex can be a witch but female witches are believed to be the stronger and accusations are, in fact, more commonly made against women".<sup>66</sup> The question which arises is why were women in the majority?

From all indications witchcraft was obviously a weapon in the struggle between the genders. Pre-colonial Owan society widely believed that women were very powerful and frequently in a negative sense involving witchcraft. Therefore it became a common practice for relatives of a deceased man to accuse his wives of causing his death. Informants claimed instances abounded where a man's wife or wives had been compelled to swear on his corpse. Because women were easily accused of witchcraft, men often used it as means of getting rid of a wife they considered too powerful. Once a woman had been indicted, the people in the village ostracized her. A supposed witch's family could also suffer ostracism from the inhabitants of a village. Witchcraft allegations were not limited to relations between men and women. Co-wives have employed it in household and lineage competitions. In a situation where rivalry existed between co-wives, one might

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<sup>65</sup>Bradbury, The Benin Kingdom..., p.99.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p.60.

accuse another of witchcraft. Jealousy often resulted when a co-wife felt her counterpart was enjoying undeserved attention from their husband.<sup>67</sup> So to bring down or humiliate the favoured wife, her rival might resort to accusations. In the same vein Bradbury claimed witchcraft insinuations resulted from "jealousy and conflicts between co-wives and the internal conflict of loyalty in a woman who is the mother of a senior son and who may be suspected of seeking to harm her husband so that her son may inherit".<sup>68</sup> Mothers-in-law also employed the same technique "to get" at their daughters-in-law. Where a woman found it difficult to gain access to her son either for attention or resources, the man's wife or wives might be accused of giving him a love potion as a means to secure control. The reason for the insecurity of women's position in their marital home in pre-colonial Owan society arose from the stranger status they occupied. Since they did not live among their natal kin, they frequently were viewed with suspicion, and so any demonstration of being overbearing resulted in accusations as a witch. Constantly wives had to prove their loyalty to husbands and in-laws, failing which they faced ostracism and decline in status.

The intensity of witchcraft accusations would seem to point to the degree of flux and uncertainty in any society.

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<sup>67</sup>O.H.T. #215 Interview with Odion Ahenmokhai, Chief Priest of Akatamina shrine, Ihievbe, September 14, 1990.

<sup>68</sup>Bradbury, The Benin Kingdom..., p.60.

Informants could not recall the pre-colonial past and most seemed to be generalising about it, from their colonial experiences. Obviously Bradbury confined himself to the colonial period. Thus it becomes difficult for the historians to assess the intensity of witchcraft accusations at a specific time. However the Nupe Muslim influence in the nineteenth century and the British Christian presence in the twentieth obviously supported the enhancement of male status in Owan. New supreme male gods were introduced, male chiefs installed and male crop - palm tree - became the major source of income. Females found no effective method to deal with these new influences backed up as they were by military force. One might therefore assume that witchcraft accusations intensified between the genders and among females as they found themselves declining in importance and status in the society.

Witchcraft accusations became the strongest weapons which males possessed. Whenever they felt that the married women's organisation had become too strong or too demanding, it appeared easy enough to destroy its unity by fomenting witchcraft accusations. The lesson could readily be hammered home to women that submissions remained preferable to outspoken opposition to abuse. Since women as witches became strongly associated with patrilocal living patterns, women lost their major gender battle when matrilocality gave way to patrilocality. As noted, men had not entirely engineered this

change in Otuo and in the colonial period that community became the scene of some of the most vicious witchcraft hunts as "whole families" had "been known to take sasswood when one of their members"<sup>69</sup> had been accused. Otuo males were not involved in securing the title from Ife, had not become subject to Nupe and had not gained control over their children unless they married foreign women. Consequently Otuo females appeared to have the greatest authority among the Owan communities at the onset of British colonialism which probably explains the intensity of the witch hunts which occurred there in the twentieth century. Thus it would appear that the struggle between traditional religious beliefs and Christianity in Otuo, exhibited the same characteristics with the conflict between Christianity and Paganism in Europe.<sup>70</sup>

Inheritance laws in pre-colonial Owan varied from one community to the other. In principle it was generally the practice to recognize a man's children as his heirs but where he had died without children his brothers or sisters inherited his property. Male children were the first to be considered in the sharing of a man's property.<sup>71</sup> It was only when there were no male heirs that daughters inherited their father's possessions. In the inheritance process, there existed three

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<sup>69</sup>Bradbury, The Benin Kingdom..., p.99.

<sup>70</sup>See Jeffrey Burton Russell, Witchcraft in the Middle Ages, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1972.

<sup>71</sup>O.H.T. #133 Interview with Chief Orien Uahomo, (82), Ake April 5, 1991.

categories of male children. According to Thomas, first came the eldest son of a man, second the eldest sons of each of his wives and third the other sons.<sup>72</sup> Usually a deceased man's house was inherited by his eldest son who in turn was expected to accommodate his brothers. However other properties were shared on the basis of "doors" which meant that the eldest son of each of a man's wives inherited enough so they could take care of their brothers, sisters and mother.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore a man's property could be shared first among all the surviving sons and finally his daughters. The system adopted depended on the community. For instance Thomas reported that:

At Ijeba [Uzebba, Iuleha community] the sons get the property but a larger share goes to the head son. If there is a house the brothers can stay in it and bring their wives; (sic)... A daughter may take the property, failing heirs, and she hands it to the head of the house; (sic) but apparently he has little or no control. At Aroko [Arokho, Evbo-Mion community] the eldest sons of each of the wives share the property equally... At Otua [Otuo] the eldest sons of each wife are the heirs, but a daughter can get such things as cloth... At Sabongida [Evbiobe, Ora community] the eldest sons take the property and the head son gets the house; the others can stay in the house or live near; and cannot be ejected.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>Thomas, Anthropological Report on the Edo-Speaking..., p.64.

<sup>73</sup>O.H.T. #13 Interview with Mr. Dominic Aigbodion, (61), Uhonmora, September 24, 1990; O.H.T. #55 Interview with Chief Odion Ojieomoun, (90), Ovbiowun, August 3, 1990.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p.70. It becomes significant that only in Otuo did daughters inherit anything which they might keep for themselves.



Since land was communally owned, heirs could not inherit it from their fathers. However the lineage ensured that the children of a deceased male were allocated land when needed. Whereas women were part of the inheritable property,<sup>75</sup> they were disadvantaged by the inheritance provisions. No community in pre-colonial Owan provided for women to inherit their husbands' assets. Thus the only survival mechanism for women involved relying upon whatever had been bequeathed to their sons. Clearly wives and daughters in pre-colonial Owan were disinherited by patrilineal and patriarchal inheritance arrangement. Even in such communities as Otuo, Uokha and Ozalla where remnants of matriarchy/matrilineality were the strongest, males were still the major beneficiaries. In Otuo both matrilineal and patrilineal inheritance operated. In the first a man's sister's sons inherited and in the latter his own sons. In neither case were women beneficiaries except their children belonged to their kinship group which often came to the support of their own. Many Otuo men, however sought foreign women so as to avoid the disadvantages of matrilineality. The plight of such foreign women upon the death of the husbands might be serious indeed. Very serious social friction and even murderous confusion could arise where

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<sup>75</sup>Widows were inherited by either the sons of a co-wife or a brother of the deceased husband. It should however be noted that women were free to opt out of such arrangements. That is they were free to choose not to remarry within her deceased husband's family. In such a situation some women opted to return to their natal home, or remained with their sons.

a man died who had married one foreign and one local wife.

Generally the inheritance systems in all the communities severely discriminated against females. There is no hint that the situation had ever been different, back as far as the migrations from Benin beginning c.1500. If the indigenous people had been truly matrilocal - for there are many hints - the women would originally have controlled the land but there is no hint of this in the traditions. However one cannot imagine how a matrilocal system could operate unless the women controlled the land. Given the inheritance system, the plight of widows became unenviable.

A widow became a non-person, a status which most pre-colonial Owan women dreaded. It could have been a status which might guarantee a woman's independence from male control.<sup>76</sup> However pre-colonial Owan social organisation transformed it into a major disaster. Following the death of a man, his wife or wives were required as a matter of tradition to be inherited by his kin. Informants claimed this requirement was aimed at ensuring that widows were catered for by relatives of the deceased husband.<sup>77</sup> Considering the fact that women in pre-colonial Owan society were socially and economically valuable to their husbands, it is logical to argue that beside

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<sup>76</sup>There is a special collection of articles which have tried to address the constraints to widows' lives and ways in which they have taken control. See Betty Potash, (ed.) Widows in African Societies: Choices and Constraints, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1986.

<sup>77</sup>O.H.T. #13; O.H.T. #56 & O.H.T #133.

the care for the widows, their contribution to the household and lineage of their potential inheritors could have been another significant factor which cannot be ignored. Jane Guyer's study of the Beti widows of the Cameroon also revealed that the such a conclusion was obviously tenable. According to her, "[a]ll widows, regardless of their value, were attributed to an inheritor, but their past and possible future contributions to the male economy were an important determinant of the situation in which they had to re-establish their lives".<sup>78</sup> Other considerations for a widow in remaining in her husband's household or lineage were associated with the need to cater for her children.<sup>79</sup> It thus follows that even if a woman did not feel happy remaining for the sake of her children, she felt forced to endure some indignity. Of note is the fact that widows could decide not to remain. But such decisions were frowned upon by the society. It was tantamount to cruelty and abandonment of the children. Therefore women were left with very limited leeway to operate.

As in most societies women were expected to sacrifice their own wishes, desires and well-being for the sake of their children. Here one can see the great loss to women when the matrilineal system had been abandoned. With it, the death of a

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<sup>78</sup>Jane Guyer, "The Economic Position of Beti Widows: Past and Present, Boston University, African Studies Center Working Papers No.22, 1979. p.4.

<sup>79</sup>O.H.T. #30 Interview with Madam Onore Emokpaire, (73), Uhonmora, October 19, 1990; O.H.T. #148 Interview with Madam O. Aisabor, (63), Ozalla, September 27, 1990.

husband left her and her children surrounded by her own kin network, her own land and the freedom to marry another stranger male of her choice should she so desire or remain a widow without any discrimination and the freedom to pursue trade or other occupations of her choice. Thus matrilocality combined with matrilineality clearly offered women equality, if not possibly dominance. Once the former had been lost, matrilineality alone became a step down for women and up for men. Males could rather easily get around their disadvantages under matrilineality as the case of Otuo demonstrated. Thereafter the pattern became visible as age grades created an all-male governing structure, enhanced by titles, goddesses metamorphosed into gods or became subordinated as wives, and aliens such as the Nupe introduced tributes, chiefs and a supreme male god.

Owan became representative of a phenomenon which appears to have affected the whole of West Africa, the march towards patriarchy which occurred between the overthrow of the queens of Daura c.1000 and the queens of Ondo<sup>80</sup> to the present day when matrilocality survives as a remnant and matrilineality occurs only among coastal people such as Asante, the southern Yoruba and isolated communities in the Niger Delta. The historical memory of an earlier matriarchy in Owan possibly

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<sup>80</sup>See M.G. Smith, The Affairs of Daura, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1978. p.57; Biodun Adediran, "Women, Rituals and Politics in Pre-Colonial Yorubaland", A Paper Presented at Faculty/Graduate Seminar, Department of History, Dalhousie University, Halifax, November 27, 1992. pp.10-11.

has remained because of the economic circumstances of the two hundred years (c.1500-1700) when women were sustained by the demand for cotton and cloth both of which had been under their control and produced by their labour.

## Conclusion

Conclusions are for generalisations where the numerous exceptions can be ignored, where the themes compartmentalized in chapters should be brought together and where a "bird's eye" view of almost 600 years of development must be summarized in a few pages. The study has been entitled to begin about 1320 A.D. to the earliest dated event in the region but traditions generally cannot be placed in time frame until 1500. However given the lack of dating before 1500, one cannot exactly state where it begins. Prior to 1500 one enters the realm of "in the long, long ago". While there were major advantages to working in ten communities, it also became obvious that a major study could have focused on any one of them. Nevertheless until a survey of this nature had been undertaken, a researcher would not know that gender studies might best be conducted in Otuo and Ozalla, or the cotton industry in Emai and Ora.

The most obvious dual problem has been the overwhelming domination of narrative tradition by patriarchal values and the Benin migrants who came into the area in "waves" c.1320 (Uokha), c.1504-1536 (Ora, Ihievbe and Emai), c.1568-1600 (Ivbiaro, Igue and Ozalla) and c.1632-1664 (Iuleha, Arokho/Ikhin and Otuo). The migrants claimed they founded all the communities, introduced their institutions and, of course, the whole process was carried on by males some of whom had demonstrated their daring and machismo by sexual liaisons with

royal wives in Benin. History in Owan began with the settlers. The only challenge to this claim to exclusivity, were the Yoruba settlers whose tradition are rather rapidly being squashed. Thus the debate so far has been between two settler groups both, according to tradition, led by patriarchs.

Since community or village shrines are often dedicated to founders, it seems remarkably strange that in most there exist shrines to women who either do not figure in the traditions of the settlers or become wives of migration leaders. Only three communities have no female shrines - Arokho/Ikhin, Warrake and Iuleha - and one may therefore assume they were founded by the patriarchal settlers. However in looking at the goddesses "in the long long ago" or at least before 1500, one finds a shrine to Oron, a woman and likely founder of the community of Uokha, Aro a heroine-ancestress in Ivbiaro, Ome of Eme in Ora as well as Orheuren the mother of all the people of Ozalla celebrated in an annual festival. Nor should one forget the renowned Owan in Ora who gave her name to the river and later to the entire population. Finally and most convincingly the Queen of Ozalla who held the ceremonial sword, demonstrated through re-enactment ceremonies, the foundation of that community. One cannot imagine shrine rituals or festivals to have been invented or twisted in the manner of narrative traditions. Had these rituals and festivals honoured great men of the past, it can hardly be doubted that those males would have featured prominently in the narrative traditions. Male chauvinism

combined with settler arrogance, to begin history c.1500. Most communities had been in existence before the settlers arrived.

Combining institutions, rituals, shrines and odd fragments of tradition, matriarchal remnants are more pronounced and matriarchal tendencies greater according to the percentage in the population of those holding to plant and snake totems. The percentages vary enormously from around 56% animal totems in Emai and 63% in Ivbi-Ada-Obi to 82% plants and snakes in Igue and 56% in Uokha. The evidence suggests that before 1500, the plants-snakes dominated Owan, while the settlers who arrived thereafter primarily revered animals and had become far more devoted to patriarchal values. Those who argue that the myth of matriarchy had been designed to discredit female authority cannot be supported by the traditions of Owan. Male-generated traditions in Owan have been designed to obliterate the exploits of women. This seems less a policy of design, than from the arrogance of settlers believing that history began with them.

In the pre-settler communities, hints abound that some practised matrilocality, matrilineality and even possessed female authority figures such as the Queen of Ozalla. If as also suggested, Yoruba influence had been greater before it became swamped by the Benin settlers after 1500, then the queens of Ondo would have exerted powerful influences about gender roles and models. Primarily on the basis that the major crops before 1500 belonged to males we have postulated that



men carried out most of the farming activities, women growing certain garden vegetables. Finally one cannot see how matrilocality could have operated - the evidence in Otuo is very strong - unless the female kinship network owned the land. If all of this, or even some of it, represents the reality before 1500, then the arrival of the immigrants thereafter caused a major revolution in gender relations.

What pushed the migrants out of Benin? What pulled them into the Owan region? According to their narrative traditions, they left because of the harsh and autocratic rule of the obas of Benin. This becomes convincing for the second wave c.1504-1536 because the autocratic and even erratic behaviour of the obas had been causing great insecurity. However that reason becomes less convincing for the third and fourth migrations c.1568-1600 and c.1632-1664. Furthermore oppression and autocracy have become the standard reasons offered by all Edoid sub-groups outside the heartland of the kingdom. In all fairness, the Owan were consistent. Unlike the Esan who complained about chiefs, migrated and promptly re-created them, the migrants into Owan rejected the institution. However one suspects that the "indigenous" or pre-existing population probably had some influence in checking the chiefly ambitions of ambitious immigrants. The royal leopard in Ora clearly tried and failed.

The third and fourth waves of immigrants left Benin when the kingdom was much agitated by efforts to check the power of

the monarchy as recorded by the Benin royal chronicle, but this was also a period when cotton growing and cloth weaving were producing a bonanza for women. Certain events in Benin suggest that gender struggles were causing some of the confusion as certain obas sought female support. It seems clear that while patriarchs were far more in control of society in Benin than in Owan - the all-male monarchy had existed for 300 years - the economic situation had revived female hopes of greater equality. To appease them, the patriarchs had created a queen mother and supported an important female shrine. Consequently while the migrants were normally led by patriarchs of animal totems, many of their followers - plants and snake totems - were probably dissatisfied with the gender balance. Consequently the immigrants were not fully united behind the ideology of patriarchy. While it would not be justified to see all animal totems as patriarchal and all plant/snakes as matriarchal, it might be worth noting that in modern Owan 178 wards revere animals forming a majority in five communities, and 130 plants/snakes with majorities in four communities.

Whatever the political or gender reasons for leaving Benin, the economic motive operated powerfully to induce migrants to choose Owan or Esan. If up to one million strips of cloth were being sold to the Europeans in a year in the seventeenth century, then raw cotton, cotton thread and cloth were in high demand, carried into the Edo heartland by the

traders associations connected with the royal court. If migrants sought economic opportunities with chiefs, they went to Esan, if without chiefs to Owan. The cotton belt, in Owan and the widespread skill of weaving were concentrated among the central tier of communities and Ora. The migrants also brought with them new crops, the American crop complex, every one of which became labelled as women's crops. New currencies, especially cowries, greatly facilitated exchange, women primarily benefitting. With their economic power, it was hardly an age to introduce or enhance patriarchal norms.

With the excuse that titles from Ife would halt the raids on their wealth, possibly in the form of cloth, males secured two title systems to shore up their shattered self-respect vis-a-vis their wealthier wives and sisters. Probably the women supplied most of the money to purchase these titles and therefore they demanded a title system of their own. The title system proved popular and spread rapidly over eight of the eleven communities. Thus the cotton revolution began the change over from age as the sole criteria of authority to merit in titles which the colonial British seized upon as the foundation of chieftaincy. The Muslim Nupe converted titles to turbanning. Under the Nupe and the British, the female titles were abandoned or ignored.

With the collapse of cotton exports in 1700 and the rise of the palm products trade c.1800 women were dealt a severe blow. As cassava - their crop - became the main staple food,

they had also become the major labourers in farming. The increase in wars after 1800, allowed males to claim greater prestige and leisure as the protectors and saviours of the society. Matrilocality and matrilineality faded as chieftaincy flourished successfully in Ikao and temporarily in Ozalla for three generations. The descendants of the migrants looked to Benin as the model and the triumph there of patriarchal values. The old matriarchal model in Ondo had also collapsed as ruling queens were replaced by kings. From 1700 to 1900 became the age of triumphant patriarchalism. If one assumes that the division of labour between the genders, inheritance systems which discriminated against women and the wiping out of the past as pictured in modern tradition represent the situation around 1900, it becomes the contention of this study, that reality was quite different in 1700.

In modern times males are "riding high", their patriarchal values apparently unchallenged, having persuaded most women that the way it is today, is the way it has always been since the beginning of time, and that rituals, ceremonies and festivals which suggest the contrary, are merely entertainment, myth and superstition. Fortunately for the men, British colonial officials, traditional and local historians as well as undergraduate students - every one of them male - have been creating a written history to support the theory of the static society. This study has rather suggested that an age of matriarchy - with or without female authority figures -

existed prior to 1500, was followed by a golden age for women which might have stimulated male resentment and the popularity of patriarchal values and finally ended after 1700 with economic and political forces which contributed to their triumph. It was merely left to the colonial British to add the final achievement - chieftaincy - to the well-developed foundations of patriarchy. Massive change occurred in the gender relations in the communities of Owan between an age before 1500 and the onset of colonialism c.1900.

In the introduction the question had been posed as to whether gender research could be called primary and where the narrative traditions rarely mentioned women. Furthermore Owan is located in a particularly "dark" historiographic region with little unpublished research of any historical nature among its neighbours except Benin. The queens of Ondo became intriguing but it has not been determined, even to century, as to when males displaced them. Historians of the Yoruba have ignored the eastern frontiers of settlement, those most relevant to Owan. Other neighbours such as the Etsako or Akoko-Edo possess no written histories. Historians shy away from pre-colonial research where royal chronicles do not exist. It is hoped that this study has demonstrated that by the use of unconventional techniques involving totems, shrines and festivals, gender research is possible and can be rewarding.

The most promising area for gender research and one

likely to modify the interpretations of this analysis of Owan, would be in the Benin kingdom. There at least the royal story has been analyzed as well as relations with the Europeans. Dating is firm back to 1300 and exciting archaeological and linguistic studies have been undertaken and published. The larger framework has been laid, unlike Owan where one begins with nothing. Ceremonial re-enactments which relate to the monarchy have been analyzed. These are all male. There are river goddesses, shrines to ancient females and many other hints that Benin also have had a matriarchal past. Most importantly Benin history must penetrate back before the monarchy, into the period of the Ogiso, those chiefs of small states prior to the rise of Benin. Ogiso villages exist and are known. It is their shrines and festivals which are likely to be most rewarding about both gender relations and the multi-ethnicity of the early population. The methodology employed in Owan would appear to be relevant to the social and gender history of the Benin villages.

In the neighbouring regions of Etsako, Esan and Akoko-Edo, political organisation revolved around numerous small chieftaincies. Obviously patriarchy triumphed to a greater degree than in Owan. Chronology should however be easier to establish than in Owan since chiefly houses normally show much concern for genealogies than commoners. Thus the methods to create a chronology should involve a series of royal genealogies linked by cross references within and to societies

without, as Erim accomplished for the segmented chieftaincies of the Idoma. In Owan since every genealogy linked itself to the grandson of the founder of the community, he being the ward founder, a researcher could never be completely confident that he had found the longest available. In the neighbouring segmentary societies, the task would seem to be much easier.

It should be stressed that Owan became the only section among the Edo-speaking peoples indeed among all of the peoples west of the Niger and north of the Delta in Nigeria to preserve its acephalous organisation until 1900. It becomes the conclusion of this study that the fundamental reason lay in the balance of power between the genders. Women seemed to have remained unitedly opposed to male chiefs and they were aided by division in the ranks of the men, a sizeable number of whom would not tolerate heredity as a basis of prestige and honour. The failure to make titles hereditary suggests the strength of those males and females supporting merit rather than blood. It is to be hoped that the conclusion that chieflessness arose from the balance of power between the genders, may be tested among other acephalous peoples, especially the Igbo east of the Niger whose women demonstrated their power so convincingly in the colonial period.

Appendix A

LIST OF OWAN TOTEMS and Shrines.

<u>Community</u>	<u>Totems</u>	<u>Shrine</u>
<u>I. Ique Community</u>	Iziezie (A type of Beans)	
1. <u>Oneqah</u>	Ekpen (leopard)	Orowe
a. Afomare	No totem	"
b. Imionogbudu	Oti (leaves for cooking soup)	
c. Uyonkhu	No totem	"
d. Afovie	Ado (Red corn)	"
e. Imarebe	Ikpin (Boa)	
f. Ogueme	Ghamarin (A type of yam)	"
2. <u>Ugbekpe</u>		
a. Afekpe	Oma (snake), Ikpin (Boa)	
b. Imokhuoh	" " " "	
c. Imiekpe	" " " "	
d. Imidego	" " " "	
e. Iyenronvo	" " " "	
3. <u>Oreva</u>	Okhiagharo (porcupine family)	Okhuah shrine
4. <u>Oviosa</u>		Usaya shrine
a. Afokha	No totem	"
b. Afozo	" "	"
c. Afiye	" "	"
<u>II. Uokha Community</u>		
	Ikpin(Boa), Ihie (A type of beans), Ivie (Beads)	Oisa & Oron
1. <u>Amienkhon</u>		
a. Izaken	No totem	
b. Okhilogba Erhue	(Deer or Bush buck), Rabbit	
c. Idatto	Ekpen (leopard)	
d. Abada	Not Known	
e. Evbuvbie	No totem	
2. <u>Evburuye</u>		
a. Agbara	Idukhu (Big Garden Egg)	
b. Ivbieguomi	No totem	
c. Ivbiokho	" "	
3. <u>Ekheremi</u>		
a. Amuvbie	No totem	
b. Ivbiogulu	" "	
c. Ifesa	" "	
<u>III. Otuo Community</u>		
	Ekpa (Groundnut family) Ghikpin (python), Iyekheye (porcupine)-only women	Ugbo-navbuo
1. <u>Oluma</u>		
a. Oluma-eru	Ekpen (leopard)	
b. Imhede	No totem	
c. Imhokpo	" "	
d. Imhoje	Ekpen (leopard)	



e. Orhame	"	"
f. Ora	"	" , Eyan (pumpkin)
<u>2. Amohon</u>		
a. Imulo	Omame (mud fish)	
b. Uota	Imulo (Gorilla), Omame (mud fish)	
c. Uruwa	Omame (mud fish)	
d. Ogbela	"	" "
<u>3. Olila</u>		
a. Ogbosi	Omame (mud fish)	Oye stream
b. Imogun	Erhue (Deer or Bush buck)	
c. Imakpoke	Erhue (Deer or Bush buck),	
	Gava (Bush fowl)	
<u>4. Orake</u>		
a. Imobo	Omame (mud fish), Ijiejie	
	(A kind of beans), Erhue (Deer or Bush	
	buck)	
b. Imokhara	Ijiejie, Uno (Okra)-men only	
c. Imielu	No totem	
d. Imezene	Not Known	
<u>5. Amoya</u>		
a. Ohigba	Urhe (snail)	
b. Osiekpa	Not Known	
c. Amoyaike	"	"
d. Imovie	"	"
e. Imarokhe	No totem	
<u>6. Iyeu</u>		
a. Imoukpe	No totem	
b. Uzawa	Not Known	
c. Ikhueran	Rabbit	
d. Imakhize	Inih (elephant)	
-Umabieni}	Erhue (Deer or Bush buck)	
-Ikhema}kindreds	Ekpen (leopard), Eye (Brown Antelope)	
-Afelobu}	No totem	
<u>7. Ishiokha</u>		
a. Imoguo	Uhon (A kind of mat) Do not sleep on it	
b. Imolufe	Ekpen (leopard)	
c. Afekerebo	No totem	
<u>8. Ighera</u>		
a. Afuka	Ekpen (leopard)	
b. Okpao	Not Known	
c. Olega	No totem	
d. Ehoi	Not Known	
e. Afoba	"	"
f. Imi-ule	"	"
<u>9. Imafun</u>		
<u>I. Obo</u>		
a. Owo	Omame (mud fish)	
b. Imuza	"	" "
c. Imekor	Iyokho (cocoa yam) All types of snakes	
	Ohiobi (?)	
<u>II. Ure</u>		
a. Imoba	Not Known	
b. Afologho	"	"
c. Afeolotu/Afeunu	"	"

d. Imayan	"	"	
e. Afelobu	"	"	
<b>IV. Ihievbe Community</b>			
<b>1. Ogiekpenkhale</b>			
a. Uwereke	Ohuen (sheep)		
b. Odubi	Awa (Bush fowl), Osene (Cricket),		
	Orera (Squirrel)		
c. Ivbioguonu	Ehen		
	(Fish from Ekeva stream)	Ekeva Goddess	
d. Iviagbe	Ivan (Grass-cutter),		
	Oghede-ni-guere (small Banana)		
e. Afifah	Oka-oran (A type of corn)		
<b>2. Uqba</b>			
	Uzo (Antelope)		
<b>3. Ovongbuan</b>			
	Ekpekpe (Hawk)		
<b>4. Okhuame</b>			
	Ekpen (leopard)		
<b>5. Otuaajabor</b>			
a. Akhai	Ewor or Eoor (Buffalo)		
b. Ivbieraidu	Ikara (water yam cake),		
	Oghede-ni-guere (small Banana)		
c. Evboegbon	Ikhikhiri (A Kind of Beans)		
<b>6. Emabu</b>			
	Not Known		
<b>7. Ekhueye</b>			
	Uzo (Antelope),	Ivan (Grass-cutter),	
	Agua (Dog)		
<b>8. Oguore</b>			
	Not Known		
<b>9. Ihievbe-oqben</b>			
	"	"	
<b>V. Evbo-Omion Community</b>			
<b>1. Arokho Village Group</b>			
a. Ikhaze	Oriri (A tree), Avbere	Oisa shrine	
	(Yellow monkey Ikpin (python))		
b. Evbo-ogua	Not Known		
c. Ibiaitie	No totem		
d. Imagana	"	"	
e. Erete	"	"	
f. Ewai	Evbio (Rabbit)		
g. Amuge	"	"	
h. Iyarebe	Ekpen (leopard)	Ovbaso shrine	
<b>I. Ikhin Village Group</b>			
		Orai shrine	
<b>1. Oare</b>			
a. Amesa	Oin (reptile), Udomoriri (Bird),		
	Do not rear Dogs		
b. Ideren	Udomoriri (Bird)		
c. Awara	Not Known		
d. Eteye	Udomoriri (Bird)		
e. Avbangbede	Ikpi (Boa), Ohu (A tree)		
<b>2. Ukpe</b>			
a. Amule	Ekpen (leopard)		
b. Avhoi	Ikpi (python), Orovbi (cobra), Awa (Dog)		
c. Amozie	Orovbi (cobra), Awa (Dog)		



e. Ivbiezolo Awa (Bush fowl)

Community

f. Ikpotoi

Totems

Ewe (Goat)

Shrine

3. Oshogben

a. Ugiadi

b. Irhofio

c. Ufoki

d. Evboregbon

Iyokho (cocoa yam)

Ofeh (mouse), Erhue (Deer or Bush buck)

Rabbit, Okha (A tree)

Uzo (Antelope)

Not Known

4. Usu

a. Ivbigue

b. Umovie

c. Aferaro

d. Ugbelo

Oma (sheep), Agua (Dog), Ekpen (leopard)

" " " " " "

Akpe (small mouse)

Ovbele (monkey)

III. Errah

Erhue (Deer or Bush buck), Edo (termite),  
Ofelokhua (Rabbit), Osene (cricket)

VII. Emai Community

1. Urule

a. Afuze

b. Uanhumi

c. Okpa

d. Okpokhumi

e. Ojavun

f. Eteye

Eni (elephant)

Ikpin (Boa or python)}

Uzo (Atelope)

Not Known

" "

Ekpen (leopard)

Uze & Ovbiagbede

Oyaibi

Obi

Ekpenore

2. Evbiamen Village Group

I. Obada

a. Ivbiomoikhi

b. Ivbiokpighi

c. Evbodie

Ivan (Grass-cutter)

No totem

Roasted yam

Omoikhi

II. Oqute

a. Afojie

b. Afudi

c. Okoohi

Not totem

" "

" "

3. Ovbiowun

a. Ivbiolei

Erhue (Deer or Bush buck)

Edeye

b. Ivbiakihia

Oghogho (Female sheep),

Ekpen (leopard), Erwo (Buffalo)

VIII. Iuleha Community

I. Aoma Village Group

1. Uzebba

a. Ivbiokhide

b. Uletiare

c. Idegomi

d. Uleyon

e. Uleuantojie

f. Aghonhenlokhua

g. Uzebba-Osi

h. Ukhuoro-vboke

i. Ivbieye

j. Idumuodia

Not Known

" "

" "

No totem

Not Known

" "

Ofelokhua (Rabbit)

Not Known

" "

No totem

k. Araromi	Not Known	
<u>2. Avbiosi</u>		
a. Ivbigu	No totem	
b. Ivbiamanusi	Edo (termite), Ekpen (leopard), Ewe (Goat)	
c. Ehora	Erhue (Deer or Bush buck)	
d. Ikposi	Ekhiri (An animal)	
<u>3. Ukuse</u>		
a. Osi	Ukpa-Asu (A plant)	
b. Oke	" " " "	
<u>4. Ivbiughuru</u>		
a. Ulioben	Erhue (Deer or Bush buck)	
b. Aghenukhu	Ovbe (snake) Ekpen (leopard)	
<u>5. Obola</u>		
a. Oke ore	Akogan (Bat), Awa (Dog)	
b. Osiehimi	" " " "	
c. Okeyemi	" " " "	
d. Okeotien	" " " "	
e. Ukpodekhamen	Awa (Dog)	
f. Evboato	Awa (Dog)	
<u>6. Okagbo (Okagboro)</u>		
a. Ukhuede-okpia	Eyo (Buffalo)	
b. Ukhuede-adoko	" "	
c. Ukhuede-aigbirho	" "	
d. Osi-Okagbo	Akpoi (snake)	
<u>II. Okpuje Village Group</u>		
1. a. Oah	Ikpi (Boa), Ekpen (leopard)	
b. Ivbiedohen	Ikpi (Boa)	
c. Iloje	Ikpi (Boa), Ofe oah (mouse)	
<u>2. Ivbieleke</u>		
a. Ikpeyan	Erhue (Deer or Bush buck)	
b. Okeigho	Erha (civet cat) Ugbevbere (locust Bean)	
c. Avbioghola	Erha (civet cat)	
d. Oromen	" " "	
e. Okpuje-ogua	Ekpen (leopard)	
<u>III. Eruere</u>		
1a. Oshiofo	Irue (Beads) Erikon (Bird), Awa (Dog)	
b. Osi	Not Known	
<u>IX. Ora Community</u>		
	Ekpen (leopard)	Ora-Ekpen
1. <u>Eme-Ora</u>		
a. Ugbekporo	Erhue (Deer or Bush buck)	Ome & Uguanroba
b. Ivbiojekpen	No totem	
c. Ukpuerere	Ein (tortoise)	
d. Ukpafetibo	No totem	
e. Ivbiorere	" "	
f. Ukpafase	Ein (tortoise)	
g. Ukpafivbokhan	Not Known	
h. Ukokoyo	No totem	
i. Ukhiekhie	Ein (tortoise)	
j. Ivbielere	No totem	

<b>2. <u>Evbiobe (Sabo-gidca-Ora)</u></b>	
<b>I. <u>Idumu</u></b>	Ogie-edo (Queen termite)
a. <u>Ukhuedigberiae</u>	Not Known
b. <u>Igbobiorize</u>	" "
c. <u>Odebiogbeta</u>	" "
d. <u>Ukpafoyano</u>	Uzo (Antelope)
<b>II. <u>Ovbiare</u></b>	Erhue (Deer or Bush buck)
<b>3. <u>Oke-Ora</u></b>	
a. <u>Ivbiore</u>	Erhue (Deer or Bush buck), Oghogho (female sheep)
b. <u>Igbale</u>	Akaka (Grass-hopper)
<b>4. <u>Ohia</u></b>	
a. <u>Idumuegbon</u>	IKpin (Boa), Ovbe
b. <u>Ivbiegha</u>	" " "
c. <u>Ughere</u>	" " "
d. <u>Uhiele</u>	" " "
<b>5. <u>Ovbiokhuain</u></b>	Obuere (Bush cat)
<b>6. <u>Uhonmora</u></b>	
a. <u>Ukpafoga</u>	Ivue (Grasscutter)                      Owan River Goddess No totem
b. <u>Ukpafekhae</u>	Awa (Dog)
c. <u>Ukpafisi</u>	Isi (Bush pig), Awa (Dog)
d. <u>Odosi</u>	Erhue (Deer or Bush buck) Ikpi (python)
e. <u>Ukhuororo</u>	No totem
f. <u>Ukpafotisi</u>	No Known
g. <u>Ivbiae</u>	" "
h. <u>Okpokhumu</u>	Erhue (Deer or Bush buck)
<b>X. <u>Ozalla Community</u></b>	
	Ewe (Goat),                      Orhueren River Goddess Akhatiti (cocoa yam)
<b>1. <u>Iraede</u></b>	
a. <u>Idumu-edo</u>	Ini (elephant), Ikhiavbo (Okra), Iseghegue (melon), Irere (small melon)
b. <u>Ukhuede</u>	" " " " " " " "
<b>2. <u>Ivbihiere</u></b>	
a. <u>Erie-Aisabor</u>	Not Known
b. <u>Okhumerie</u>	Awa (Dog)
c. <u>Erie-ukheduan</u>	Oghogho (female sheep)
d. <u>Ivbihire-nokhwe</u>	" " "
e. <u>Idumu-Annun</u>	Not Known
f. <u>Erie-kebe</u>	" "
<b>3. <u>Uhonmoke</u></b>	
a. <u>Okokhumu</u>	Awai (Bird), Ituoyeye (mushroom) Bush fowl
b. <u>Otore</u>	" " " " "
<b>4. <u>Ekeke</u></b>	
a. <u>Okokhumu</u>	No totem
b. <u>Idumu-otore</u>	" "
c. <u>Idumu-Imomion</u>	" "
<b>5. <u>Iqbidin</u></b>	
a. <u>Okokhumu</u>	Akoto (Dove), Ovboto (Rabbit), Atalakpa (Tiger or leopard)
b. <u>Ivbiadon</u>	" " " " " "

c. <u>Amede</u>	"	"	"	"	"	"
6. <u>Echor</u>						
a. <u>Idekhe</u>	Ewi (tortoise),	Ovboto (Rabbit)				
b. <u>Aikpokhara</u>	"	"	"	"		
c. <u>Idumu-oke</u>	"	"	"	"		
7. <u>Uwiara</u>						
a. <u>Ivbioria</u>	Uyien (A plant),	Odu (Bitter kola)				
b. <u>Idumu-agbe</u>	"	"	"	"	"	"
c. <u>Ivbi-akhan</u>	"	"	"	"	"	"
8. <u>Usuamen</u>	Oghogho (F. sheep),	Awa (Dog),	Ovboto (Rabbit),	Ikhiavbo (Okra)		

## Appendix B

### Communities with Hints of Matriarchy/Matrilineality/Matrilocality

1. Igue
2. Uokha
3. Otuo
4. Ivbioguonu ward (Ihievbe)
5. Ivbiaro village (Ivbi-Ada-Obi)
6. Afuze village (Emai)
7. Eme-Ora and Uhonmora (Ora)
8. Ozalla.



## Bibliography

### Primary Sources: Oral Historical Texts

Oral field research was conducted in Owan East and West Local Government Areas of Edo State, Nigeria from July 1990 to April 1991. A total of 262 informants were interviewed in 234 interview sessions. While 220 were males only 42 were females. The unwillingness of most male informants to allow the researcher to interview their wives was responsible for the small number of female informants. The explanation was that they the men have told the researcher all he needed to know about Owan society. Both group and individual interview sessions were held. In some cases the researcher had to interview informants more than once in order to cross check facts. The oral information is still in long hand. However they have been indexed and are referred to as Owan Historical Texts (O.H.T.).

#### Ora

- O.H.T. #1 Chief U. Oise, (66), Evbiobe-Ora, July 19, 1990.
- O.H.T. #2 Chief E.O. OtoiJuanmu, (63), Evbiobe-Ora, July 19, 1990.
- O.H.T. #3 Chief E. Aisabora, (68), Oke-Ora, July 20, 1990.
- O.H.T. #4 Chief J.A. Akamen, (72), Oke-Ora, July 20, 1990.
- O.H.T. #5 Chief E.O. Odion, (62), Oke-Ora, July 23, 1990.
- O.H.T. #6 Group Interview with Chief Irohio Usidame, (87), Chief Akhagbe A. Izebe, (76), Chief Olorufemi Aruya, (87), Chief Abiodun Ogwai, (64), chief priest of Ome shrine, Eme-Ora, September 5, 1990.
- O.H.T. #7 Chief Akhagbe A. Izebe, (76), Chief Abiodun Ogwai, (64), Chief priest of Ome shrine, Eme-Ora, September 6, 1990.
- O.H.T. #8 Mrs. Amewie Izebe, (53), Eme-Ora, September 6, 1990.
- O.H.T. #9 Chief Airojie B. Oriaran, (70), Eme-Ora, September 6, 1990.

- O.H.T. #10 Madam I. Usidame, (71), Eme-Ora, September 7, 1990.
- O.H.T. #11 Mr. Theo Aireruo Esele, (58), Eme-Ora, September 7, 1990.
- O.H.T. #12 Mr. Theo A. Esele, (58), Eme-Ora, September 8, 1990.
- O.H.T. #13 Mr. Dominic O. Aigbodion, (61), Uhonmora, September 24, 1990.
- O.H.T. #14 Mr. Aigbokhai Esese, (54), Uhonmora, September 24, 1990.
- O.H.T. #15 Mr. Dominic O. Aigbodion, (61), Uhonmora, September 25, 1990.
- O.H.T. #16 Chief Okpaise Idornijie, (88), Uhonmora, October 2, 1990.
- O.H.T. #17 Mr. Imoisiri Esese, (65), Uhonmora, October 2, 1990.
- O.H.T. #18 Madam Alikose Okpaise, (75), & Madam Onotanua Aigbodion, (65), Uhonmora, October 12, 1990.
- O.H.T. #19 Mr. Ojuromi Iyele, (45), Uhonmora, October 13, 1990.
- O.H.T. #20 Chief V. Ola Ologbosere, (78), Eme-Ora, October 14, 1990.
- O.H.T. #21 Rev. G.U. Esebamen, (56), Eme-Ora, October 14, 1990.
- O.H.T. #22 Mr. Arthur Igben Itaifo, (68), Ohia-Ora, October 14, 1990.
- O.H.T. #23 Rev. Cannon Alfred Orhewere, (72), Eme-Ora, October 15, 1990.
- O.H.T. #24 Chief Omozuanvbo Oarhe, (70), Evbiobe-Ora, October 16, 1990.
- O.H.T. #25 Chief Omozuanvbo Oarhe, Evbiobe-Ora, October 17, 1990.
- O.H.T. #26 Chief Idornijie J. Ojiekhodion, (82), Evbiobe-Ora, October 17, 1990.
- O.H.T. #27 Chief P.A. Eghorawere Aigbuduevbo, (78),

- Evbiobe-Ora, October 18, 1990.
- O.H.T. #28 Chief Asudo Imokhuede, (91), Senior Odion-Urukpa, Evbiobe-Ora, October 18, 1990.
- O.H.T. #29 Chief Asudo Imokhuede, (91), Senior Odion-Urukpa, Evbiobe-Ora, October 19, 1990.
- O.H.T. #30 Madam Onore Emokpaire, (73), Uhonmora, October 19, 1990.
- O.H.T. #31 Chief J. Ojekhua Ikhidero, (91), The Senior Odion-Urukpa of Ora, Chief J. Eguaoje Agbi, (66), Ora Ekpen I, Oje Ora, Ohia-Ora, October 20, 1990.
- O.H.T. #32 Chief Agbodion Ehilebo, (64), Ukpoje naga of Ora, Mr. Oiseorumi Agbi, (62), Ohia-Ora, October 20 1990.
- O.H.T. #33 Chief J. Ojekhua Ikhidero, (91), The Senior Odion-Urukpa of Ora, Chief J. Eguaoje Agbi, (66), Ora Ekpen I, Oje Ora, Ohia-Ora, October 21, 1990.
- O.H.T. #34 Madam Ikhidaboa Ikhidero, (84), Madam Ovbialeke Ikhidero, (82), Ohia-Ora, October 21, 1990.
- O.H.T. #35 Chief Esebe Agidigbi, (90), Uhonmora, October 22, 1990.
- O.H.T. #36 Chief C. Asikhia Aikoroje, (80), Chief Jacob Soda, (78), Uhonmora, October 24, 1990.
- O.H.T. #37 Chief Aigboje Aikoroje, (79), Chief Oyibo Ekpekhilo, (80), Uhonmora, October 24, 1990.
- O.H.T. #38 Chief J. Jegede Agbebaku, (79), Uhonmora, October 26, 1990.
- O.H.T. #39 Chief C. Asikhia Aikoroje, (80), Uhonmora, October 26, 1990.
- O.H.T. #40 Chief Aigboje Aikoroje, (79), Uhonmora, October 26, 1990.
- O.H.T. #41 Mr. S. Ojiekere Ojieduma, (69), Mr. G. Ifounu Ohimai, (56), Uhonmora, October 28, 1990.
- O.H.T. #42 Mr. A. Isebe Ohiren, (59), Uhonmora,

October 28, 1990.

- O.H.T. #43 Mr. G. Ifounu Ohimai, (56), Uhonmora, October 29, 1990.
- O.H.T. #44 Chief. E. T. O. Orhewere, (64), Benin-City, December 27, 1990.
- O.H.T. #45 Chief O Ogbeta, (64), Uhonmora, January 4, 1991.
- O.H.T. #46 Chief E. Ohioze, (67), Uhonmora, January 4, 1991.
- O.H.T. #47 Chief U. Adeoye, (86), Oke-Ora, January 5, 1991.
- O.H.T. #48 Chief Willie Ohimai, (85), Oke-Ora, January 6, 1991.
- O.H.T. #49 Pa. Akhigbe Emidoma, (86), Oke-Ora, January 6, 1991.
- O.H.T. #50 Mr. Ifounu Ikhile, (74), Ovbiokhuan, March 2, 1991.
- O.H.T. #51 Chief Ehimika Ogoigbe, (70), Mrs. Julie Ogoigbe, (62), Ovbiokhuan, March 3, 1991.
- O.H.T. #52 Mrs. Julie Ogoigbe, (62), Ovbiokhuan, March 5, 1991.
- O.H.T. #53 Chief Jacob Imogbere, (80), Uhonmora, March 5, 1991.
- Emai**
- O.H.T. #54 Group Interview with Chief J. Ogedengbe, (80), The Oleije of Emai & his Chiefs, Afuze, August 1, 1990.
- O.H.T. #55 Chief F. Oisamoje Ojiega, (63), Afuze, August 2, 1990.
- O.H.T. #56 Chief Odion Ojieomoun, (90), Ovbiowun, August 3, 1990.
- O.H.T. #57 Chief J. Igboa Ehimiaghe, (64), Ovbiowun, August 3, 1990.
- O.H.T. #58 Chief J. Izirein, (58), Mrs. A. Izirein, (43), Afuze, August 5, 1990.

- O.H.T. #59 Chief J.O. Ahonkhai, (72), Evbiamen, August 5, 1990.
- O.H.T. #60 Mr. J.I. Ozeoya, (62), Mrs. E. Ozeoya, (51), Eteye, August 6, 1990.
- O.H.T. #61 Chief Ohiozibau Aigbevboile, (50), Ovbiowun, August 8, 1990.
- O.H.T. #62 Group Interview with Chief Ikizama Omiunu, (78), The Priest of Idoe Shrine & his Assistants, Ovbiowun, August 9, 1990.
- O.H.T. #63 Mr. Ohiofudu Omiunu, (59), Ovbiowun, August 10, 1990.
- O.H.T. #64 Chief Evbomai Airende, (76), Chief Erojie Airende, (59), Ovbiowun, August 10, 1990.
- O.H.T. #65 Chief Edokhagbe Ailemen, (81), Mr. Emode Adewole, (56), Ovbiowun, August 11, 1990.
- O.H.T. #66 Mr. E. Otokpaivbo Iziren, (60), Evbiamen, August 11, 1990.
- O.H.T. #67 Chief Asuenimen Ohiovbeunu, (62), Ovbiowun, August 17, 1990.
- O.H.T. #68 Madam Aita Ohiovbeunu, (90), Ovbiowun, August 18, 1990.
- O.H.T. #69 Chief Ekeinde Aidelokhai, (56), Ovbiowun, August 20, 1990.
- O.H.T. #70 Chief Ekeinde Aidelokhai, (56), Ovbiowun, August 21, 1990.
- O.H.T. #71 Mr. Okhawere Arukhe, (58), Ovbiowun, August 22, 1990.
- O.H.T. #72 Pa. Jiedu Imiere, (80), Afuze, August 25, 1990.
- O.H.T. #73 Chief Imaku Atakoi, (90), Chief Izegaigbe Atakoi, (85), Evbiamen, August 29, 1990.
- O.H.T. #74 Mr. Akhigbe Imonkhimi, (72), Mr. Aferuan Ohikhateme, (76), Afuze, August 29, 1990.
- O.H.T. #75 Pa. Iriabekhai Ojeaburu, (82), Afuze, August 30, 1990.

- O.H.T. #76 Madam Ilekesu Againe, (85), Priestess of Ovbiagbede Shrine, Mr. Akhibi Evboifo, (70), Afuze, September 10, 1990.
- O.H.T. #77 Mr. J. Okoin Uzuani, (65), Mr. T. Igbafen Ahanmisi, (75), Mr. Okuka M. Uankhogba, (80), Uanhumi, September 11, 1990.
- O.H.T. #78 Mr Akhibi Evboifo, (70), Afuze, September 22, 1990.
- O.H.T. #79 Madam Egbodion Igbafen, (90), Afuze, September 26, 1990.
- O.H.T. #80 Madam Egbodion Igbafen, (90), Afuze, September 27, 1990.
- O.H.T. #81 Mr. Masawane Airende, (76), Ovbiowun, September 27, 1990.
- O.H.T. #82 Mr. G. U. Otoikhian, (62), Afuze, September 28, 1990.
- O.H.T. #83 Mr. G. U. Otoikhian, (62), Afuze, September 29, 1990.
- O.H.T. #84 Mr. G. U. Otoikhian, (62), Afuze, September 30, 1990.
- O.H.T. #85 Chief M.I. Ileso, (70), Eteye, September 30, 1990.
- O.H.T. #86 Mr. Ehimingbai D. Akhareghemen, (69), Ogute-Evbiamen, October 3, 1990.
- O.H.T. #87 Mr. Ehimingbai D. Akhareghemen, (69), Ogute-Evbiamen, October 4, 1990.
- O.H.T. #88 Madam Abouvbo Akhareghemen, (86), Ogute-Evbiamen, October 5, 1990.
- O.H.T. #89 Chief S. O. Ikhuosho, (73), Mrs. O Ikhuosho, (58), Ogute-Evbiamen, October 5 1990.
- O.H.T. #90 Chief Isesa Ileaboya, (80), Chief Oviesu Irenoa (75), Eteye, October 6, 1990.
- O.H.T. #91 Chief Oviesu Eruanga, (77), Chief Gabriel Idonijie, (78), Eteye, October 6, 1990.

Uokha

- O.H.T. #92 Mr. J. Ohiochioya Afeinkhena, (66), Uokha, November 6, 1990.
- O.H.T. #93 Mr. J. Ohiochioya Afeinkhena, (66), Uokha, November 7, 1990.
- O.H.T. #94 Pa. Akharumen Amaize, (85), Uokha, November 8, 1990.
- O.H.T. #95 Mr. Ogbeide J. Jegede, (76), Uokha, November 8, 1990.
- O.H.T. #96 Chief Edegbai Esezoo, (80), Uokha, November 9, 1990.
- O.H.T. #97 Madam Agboson Agbekhai, (78), Madam Iyokhuen Otu, (77), Uokha, November 10, 1990.
- O.H.T. #98 Chief Ikhianvbode J. Ogboro, (90), Mr. Ikpekhai Evbotokhai, (80), Uokha, November 15, 1990.
- O.H.T. #99 Chief Idode Imonitie, (78), Mr. Iruobe Aigbologa, (64), November 15, 1990.
- O.H.T. #100 Chief Ikhianvbode J. Ogboro, (90), Uokha, November 15, 1990.
- O.H.T. #101 Mr. Sdney Isaiah Imohin, (80), Uokha, November 18, 1990.
- O.H.T. #102 Madam Esther Imohin, (70), Madam Makanju Ogunleye, (68), Uokha, November 18, 1990.
- O.H.T. #103 Chief Aidelokhai Izuyon, (82), Mr. Albert Irekhai, (63), Uokha, November 19, 1990.
- O.H.T. #104 Chief Ogidigo Ekpen, (81), Uokha, November 22, 1990.
- O.H.T. #105 Mr. OKhahua Arukhe, (85), Chief M. Iriafen Aigbevbirole, (58), Uokha, November 23, 1990.
- O.H.T. #106 Mr. Olotoi Oremeta, (62), Uokha, November 23, 1990.
- O.H.T. #107 Madam Aimiegbehi Aidelokha, (86), Uokha, November 24, 1990.
- O.H.T. #108 Chief Omaivboje Esechie, (31), Clan Head,

Uokha, November 26, 1990.

**Igue**

- O.H.T. #109 Mr. J. Ohiomolomo Ajayi, (57), Mr. S. Ohiolei Idika, (55), Igue-Sale, November 30, 1990.
- O.H.T. #110 Pa. Samuel Ojeoghare, (86), Oviosa-Igue, December 2, 1990.
- O.H.T. #111 Chief Ijeamiran Agboighanuan, (90), Igue-Sale, December 7, 1990.
- O.H.T. #113 Mrs. Ajoke Agboighanuan, (59), Igue-Sale, December 7, 1990.
- O.H.T. #114 Madam Adebola Agboighanuan, (80), Mrs Anima Agboighanuan, (68), Igue-Sale, December 8, 1990.
- O.H.T. #115 Barrister Ojo Esemokhai, (50), Auchi, December 12, 1990.
- O.H.T. #116 Group Interview with Chief M. Imiewa Oghaimeh, (81), Igue Clan Head, Chief Igbadiyah Oziokhaobo, (79), Chief Iyerehoro Ojo, (75), Mr. Boi Omokhudu, (77), Chief Uwaifo Adidi, (90), Chief Okhugbe Oghaimeh, (73), Igue-Oke, March 2, 1991.
- O.H.T. #117 Group Interview with Mr. Isewede Ohiomah, (80), Mr. Ehigbai Oghaimeh, (73), Mr. Moses Ajakaiye, (58), Mr. Johnson Ikpokpo, (56), Igue-Oke, March 3, 1991.
- O.H.T. #118 Mr. Akande Ovie, (45), Mr. Akande Ikhidero, (35), Igue-Oke, March 3, 1991.
- O.H.T. #119 Chief M. Imiewa Oghaimeh, (81), Igue Clan Head, Igue-Oke, March 4, 1991.
- O.H.T. #120 Chief Uwaifo Adidi, (90), Igue-Oke, March 4, 1991.

**Evbo-Mion**

- O.H.T. #121 Mr. James Ohionreoya, (85), Mr. Omoikhoje Obaikhedo, (78), Ake, November 20, 1990.
- O.H.T. #122 Mr. Ehimai J. Idu, (78), Mr. Ekpeakhena Omokhudu, (75), Ake, November 20, 1990.



- O.H.T. #123 Chief Aghomo Ozemoje, (77), Mr. Aihiockhai Ukhuedua, (77), Ake, November 21, 1990.
- O.H.T. #124 Mr. Odion Ekpeakhena, (74), Mr. Irivbaye Igbaruma, (74), Ake, November 21, 1990.
- O.H.T. #125 Chief E. A. Omoruanzoje, (84), Arokho, March 23, 1991.
- O.H.T. #126 Madam Maria Omoruanzoje, (73), Arokho, March 24, 1991.
- O.H.T. #127 Mr. Edgars Ohioomoje Ikhiboya, (43), Afuze, March 26, 1991.
- O.H.T. #128 Mr. D. Ohiockhuovbo Ukhueduan, (75), Arokho, March 27, 1991.
- O.H.T. #129 Pa. Iboi Omoruanzoje, (87), Arokho, March 28, 1991.
- O.H.T. #130 Chief E. Ojeila Ehimika, (78), Arokho, April 4, 1991.
- O.H.T. #131 Mr. Michael F. Omueti, (45), Ikhin, April 4, 1991.
- O.H.T. #132 Mr. T. Amu Aigbokhai, (51), Ikhin, April 5, 1991.
- O.H.T. #133 Chief Orien Uahomo, (82), Ake, April 5, 1991.
- O.H.T. #134 Mr. Omoikhoje Obaikhedo, (78), Ake, April 6, 1991.
- O.H.T. #135 Mr. Ehimai J. Idu, (78), Ake, April 6, 1991.
- O.H.T. #136 Mr. Andrew Iruobe Ohioerenoya, (54), Ake, April 10, 1991.

### Ozalla

- O.H.T. #137 Mr. Robert Alufoje, (70), Ozalla, July 28, 1990.
- O.H.T. #138 Mrs. M. Alufoje, (56), Ozalla, July 28, 1990.
- O.H.T. #139 Chief Okposugbo Iyogho, (85), Ozalla, July 29, 1990.
- O.H.T. #140 Mr. Usiobafo Omigie, (76), Ozalla, July 29, 1990.

- O.H.T. #141 Group Interview with the Onotare of Ozalla, Chief Samuel Ojieriakhi, (88), and Ozalla Elders, Ozalla, July 30, 1990.
- O.H.T. #142 Chief Ailemen Ilevbaedion, (75), Ozalla, July 30, 1990.
- O.H.T. #143 Mr. S. S. Elijah, (54), Ozalla, July 31, 1990.
- O.H.T. #144 Madam I. Elijah, (79), Ozalla, July 31, 1991.
- O.H.T. #145 Mr. Omoregba Adesokan, (59), Ozalla, September 23, 1990.
- O.H.T. #146 Mr. Cole Idahosa, (70), Ozalla, September 23, 1990.
- O.H.T. #147 Chief Felix Aisabor, (75), Ozalla, September 27, 1990.
- O.H.T. #148 Madam O. Aisabor, (63), Ozalla, September 27, 1990.
- O.H.T. #149 Mr. M. Atairo Avbehi, (62), Ozalla, September 28, 1990.
- O.H.T. #150 Mr. Ifije Ebida, (65), Ozalla, September 28, 1990.

### Iuleha

- O.H.T. #151 Mr. O. A. J. Enahoro, (68), Uzebba, February 28, 1991.
- O.H.T. #152 Mr. J. U. Aigbeloga, (53), Avbiosi, February 28, 1991.
- O.H.T. #153 Mrs. E. Aigbeloga, (40), Avbiosi, February 28, 1991.
- O.H.T. #154 Mr. Abraham Alukpe, (54), Mr Christopher Alukpe, (32), Okpuje, March 17, 1991.
- O.H.T. #155 Chief Eduke Ogedengbe, (80), Avbiosi, March 18, 1991.
- O.H.T. #156 Mrs. Olozuanmorin Eduke, (72), Avbiosi, March 18, 1991.
- O.H.T. #157 Chief Okanigbuan Aigbirhio, (86), Avbiosi, March 19, 1991.

- O.H.T. #158 Mr. Adewole Aigbirhio, (48), Aviosi, March 20, 1991.
- O.H.T. #159 Chief Ohiowere Obazu, (86), Chief Ojomogba, (70), Avboisi, March 20, 1991.
- O.H.T. #160 Chief Oghuan Aitalegbe, (78), Mr. Ideho Omage, (75), Avbioghola-Okpuje, April 8, 1991.
- O.H.T. #161 Madam Juana Aitalegbe, (65), Avbioghola-Okpuje, April 8, 1991.
- O.H.T. #162 Mr. Airodion Oikelome, (56), Avbioghola-Okpuje, April 9, 1991.
- O.H.T. #163 Chief B. Ojeaburu Eguaoje, (55), Oah-Okpuje, April 12, 1991.
- O.H.T. #164 Chief Ayeni Ikaga, (87), Chief Omole Imonikhe, (76), Iloje-Okpuje, April 13, 1991.
- O.H.T. #165 Mr. Omokhoje Ukpebo, (65), Iloje-Okpuje, April 13, 1991.
- O.H.T. #166 Mr Usiobaifo Okugbe, (72), Mr. Imona Iruobe, (55), Ukhuse-Osi, April 15, 1991.
- O.H.T. #167 Mr. Smart Imogan, (59), Mr. Felix Ohiorenuan, (65), Obola-Iuleha, April 15, 1991.
- O.H.T. #168 Chief James Bello, (68), Ukhuse-Osi, April 16, 1991.
- O.H.T. #169 Chief H. H. A. Esechie, (75), Uzebba, April 23, 1991.
- O.H.T. #170 Chief J. A. Okun, (78), Uzebba, April 24, 1991.
- O.H.T. #171 Chief George Airende, (73), Uzebba, (73) April 25, 1991.

**Otuo**

- O.H.T. #172 Chief Ilaebor Ikhiafe, (71), Chief T. Udueo Ekhenerua, (70), Oluma-Otuo, February 15, 1991.
- O.H.T. #173 Chief T. Ohiomanuwa Igbafe, (73), Oluma-Otuo, February 15, 1991.

- O.H.T. #174 Mr. Maji Uloko, (65), Oluma-Otuo, February 16, 1991.
- O.H.T. #175 Chief Omokhagbo J. Ebofuai, (58), Ighera-Otuo, February 16, 1991.
- O.H.T. #176 Chief S. Uadia Unuekhai, (76), Iyeu-Otuo, February 17, 1991.
- O.H.T. #177 Chief M. Igiehoi Igaga, (76), Iyeu-Otuo, February 17, 1991.
- O.H.T. #178 Mr. Thomas Esele, (53), Olila-Otuo, February 19, 1991.
- O.H.T. #179 Chief Edeki Odeyenuma, (75), Orake-Otuo, February 20, 1991.
- O.H.T. #180 Mr. D. Udukpegheme Aigboiviosa, (58), Olila-Otuo, February 20, 1991.
- O.H.T. #181 Pa. Omole Ijavbare, (85), Pa. Imafen Ohiobode, (87), Amohon-Otuo, February 22, 1991.
- O.H.T. #182 Mr. Jimoh Omoareoje, (60), Mr. Uadamen Chifuemen, (57), Amohon-Otuo, February 22, 1991.
- O.H.T. #183 Mr. Ebaho S. Agbi, (55), Imafun-Otuo, February 23, 1991.
- O.H.T. #184 Mr. S.O.J. Ojo, (40), Ekpoma, April 30, 1991.
- Ivbi-Ada-Obi**
- O.H.T. #185 Chief Alhasan Ogegere, (90), Warrake, January 15, 1991.
- O.H.T. #186 Mr. G. Dauda, (55), Warrake, January 15, 1991.
- O.H.T. #187 Capt. Abu Ani (Rtd.) (78), Mrs. E. Ani, (58), January 16, 1991.
- O.H.T. #188 Madam Adiza Ogegere, (80), Mrs. H. Ogegere, (72), Warrake, January 16, 1991.
- O.H.T. #189 Mallam Abdurahaman S. Umoru, (60), Warrake, January 17, 1991.
- O.H.T. #190 Alhaji A. Ojiefu, (70), Warrake, January 17,

- 1991.
- O.H.T. #191 Mr. Adem. Igie, (58), Mrs. M. Igie, (43), Warrake, January 18, 1991.
- O.H.T. #192 Mr. Asone Musah, (35), The Priest of Ada-Obi Shrine, Ivbiaro, January 24, 1991.
- O.H.T. #193 Mallam Abu Elakhame, (87), Ivbiaro, January 25, 1991.
- O.H.T. #194 Chief Sule Elabor, (67), Ivbiaro, January 25, 1991.
- O.H.T. #195 Pa. Suma Arebun, (88), Ivbiaro, February 25, 1991.
- O.H.T. #196 Alhaji Yesufu Imolofi, (85), Ivbiaro, February 25, 1991.
- O.H.T. #197 Mr. Martin A. Oshiokhale, (56), Ivbiaro, February 26, 1991.
- O.H.T. #198 Mrs. E. Oshiokhale, (43), Ivbiaro, February 26, 1991.
- O.H.T. #199 Madam Amina Elakhame, (70), Ivbiaro, February 27, 1991.
- O.H.T. #200 Mallam Kasimu Kadiri, (50), Ivbiaro, February 27, 1991.
- O.H.T. #201 Mallam Abudu Erhawere, (81), Ivbiaro, February 27, 1991.
- O.H.T. #202 Mallam Yesufu Aigboje, (62), Ivbiaro, March 7, 1991.
- O.H.T. #203 Mallam Shaibu Sule Aigboje, (59), Ivbiaro, March 7, 1991.
- O.H.T. #204 Pa. Garuba Ikhekheakhe, (87), Ivbiaro, March 8, 1991.
- O.H.T. #205 Mrs Aminatu Ikhekheakhe, (72), Ivbiaro, March 8, 1991.
- O.H.T. #206 Mallam Usman Udevbure Ukpedeka, (80), Ivbiaro, March 9, 1991.
- O.H.T. #207 Mallam Isa Aidokhai, (76), Ivbiaro, March 9, 1991.

- O.H.T. #208 Mallam Aliu Asekome, (68), Ivbiaro, March 10, 1991.
- O.H.T. #209 Mallam Audu Imoge, (69), Ivbiaro, March 10, 1991.
- O.H.T. #210 Mr. Abu Igbewomie, (70), Ivbiaro, March 10, 1991.

**Ihievbe**

- O.H.T. #211 Mr Romanus O. Gbadamosi, (58), Mr Andrew O. Isunuoya, (55), Ihievbe, September 13, 1990.
- O.H.T. #212 Mr. Mosaidu Sedenu, (62), Ihievbe, September 13, 1990.
- O.H.T. #213 Chief Adebayo Dogo Esechie, (74), Ihievbe, September 14, 1990.
- O.H.T. #214 Chief Aliu Ikpekhia, (82), Ihievbe, September 14, 1990.
- O.H.T. #215 Mr. Odion Ahenmokhai, (65), Chief Priest of Akatamina, Ihievbe, September 14, 1990.
- O.H.T. #216 Mr. Aliu Iseghohime, (61), Mr. Abikhu Omozuanvbo Alibi, (62), Ihievbe, September 15, 1990.
- O.H.T. #217 Madam Asimawo Isunuoya, (83), Madam Mamuna Badamosi, (74), Ihievbe, September 15, 1990.
- O.H.T. #218 Madam Abibat Sadoh, (72), Madam Abibat Atubazi, (73), Ihievbe, September 15, 1990.
- O.H.T. #219 Chief Yakubu Momodu, (75), Ihievbe, December 6, 1990.
- O.H.T. #220 Chief Jamah A.J. Imonikhe, (73), Ihievbe, December 6, 1990.
- O.H.T. #221 Pa. Igazi O. Akharama, (86), Ihievbe, December 6, 1990.
- O.H.T. #222 Alhaji Momoh Obokhuai, (72), Ihievbe, December 10, 1990.
- O.H.T. #223 Mr. Maliki Oisalavbia, (63), Ihievbe, December 10 1990.
- O.H.T. #224 Madam A. Imonikhe, (61), Ihievbe, December

11, 1990.

- O.H.T. #225 Mr Andrew O. Isunuoya, (55), Ihievbe, December 11, 1990.
- O.H.T. #226 Mr. Dauda Ohiosumuan, (74), Madam M. Ohiosumuan, (60), Ihievbe, January 20, 1991.
- O.H.T. #227 Mrs. Imazenu Edion, (62) Ihievbe, January 20, 1991.
- O.H.T. #228 Mallam Isabemon Oyakhire, (83), Ihievbe, January 20, 1991.
- O.H.T. #229 Madam Asimawo Oyakhire, (74), Ihievbe, January 21, 1991.
- O.H.T. #230 Mr. Umoru Ailoje, (60), Ihievbe, January 21, 1991.
- O.H.T. #231 Pa. Alu Ikhanaran, (80), Ihievbe, January 21, 1991.
- O.H.T. #232 Chief Braima Omokhua, (62), Ihievbe, January 22, 1991.
- O.H.T. #233 Mr. S.M.O. Alegbe, (59), Ihievbe, January 22, 1991.
- O.H.T. #234 Alhaji M.I. Momoh, (63), Ihievbe, January 22, 1991.

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