

History of

The Urhobo People

of Niger Delta

Other Books from Urhobo Historical Society

Ekeh, Peter P., editor (2004), *Warri City & British Colonial Rule in Western Niger Delta*. Lagos, Nigeria: Urhobo Historical Society.

Ekeh, Peter P., editor (2005), *Studies in Urhobo Culture*. Lagos, Nigeria: Urhobo Historical Society.

Urhobo Historical Society's books are distributed in the United Kingdom and Europe by

African Books Collective
P. O. Box 721
Oxford, OX1 9EN
UK
Tel:/Fax: +44(0)1869-349110
orders@africanbookscollective.com
www.africanbookscollective.com

In North America, they are distributed by

Michigan State University Press
1405 South Harrison Road, Suite 25
Manly Miles Building
East Lansing, MI - 48823-5245
Phone: 517/355-9543
FAX: USA 517/432-2611- International 800/678-2120
msupress@msu.edu
www.msupress.msu.edu

History of
The Urhobo People
of Niger Delta

Edited by
Peter P. Ekeh

©Urhobo Historical Society

Published by
Urhobo Historical Society
www.waado.org

Nigerian Contact Address:
Urhobo Historical Society
P. O. Box 13675
Ikeja, Lagos
Telephone: 234-080-2309-3105

USA Address:
Urhobo Historical Society
P. O. Box 1454
Buffalo, New York 14226

© Urhobo Historical Society 2007

ISBN: 978-978-077-288-8

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Cover Design by Anne Warner,
Wanner Design Graphics, USA

Preface

Knowledge of Urhobo history is considered by many students of Urhobo history and culture to be inadequate at several levels. For instance, there are no standard texts on Urhobo history, even at the stage of elementary and secondary school education. Years ago, individual efforts produced locally manufactured pamphlets on topics that their authors considered to be urgent. Such publications, some of which provided significant information and analysis, usually had restricted circulation and poor life spans. Even that limited tradition of what was sometimes unfairly labelled as “pamphleteering” has now gradually died away.

Happily, Professor Onigu Otite’s recent (2003) revision of his important and pioneering volume, *The Urhobo People*, has met with widespread acclaim for providing vital and usable information on Urhobo institutions and values. Needless to say, there is pressing need for other volumes that will specifically address problems of historical scholarship in Urhobo studies. In the view of many students of Urhobo history and culture, there is now a critical shortage of reading material on significant events in Urhobo social development, both ancient and recent.

It must not be imagined that Urhobo’s experience is unique in this matter of shortfall in the histories of Nigerian peoples. During colonial times, the majority of books on Africa were on ethnographic studies of African peoples, who were then tagged as tribes. African nationalist sentiments questioned the value of those books. Moreover, dominant scholars of modernization theory of the 1960s and 1970s chose to focus on the emerging states of Africa, rather than on their ethnic fragments, as their preferred units of analysis. At the Nigerian national level, there has been a silent policy which encourages the dissemination of historical material that has Nigeria-wide significance, while it frowns on the genre of books that appear to focus on local or ethnic histories. Less silent is a restrictive endorsement of what is considered national. Only three of Nigeria’s ethnic groupings -- Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba – now appear pre-qualified by public policies for inclusion in Nigerian national history.

The net result of these downward trends in the study of smaller ethnic nationalities in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa is a critical shortage of material in the histories of numerous peoples of the continent. Apart from their obvious value for local communities, whose citizens yearn to be informed of their own histories, the historical experiences of these people have great significance for a deeper understanding of national histories and for a more balanced appreciation of the histories of international events and movements. It is therefore the case that international scholarship, including particularly the discipline of history, is poorly served by the loss of focus on the human experiences of vast numbers of ethnic nationalities in Africa. Just as many of their languages are now endangered, so is the historical retention of their valuable human experiences in danger of being lost.

We believe that the right way to advance the frontiers of learning in the histories of Africa is to deal with local and regional problems that ultimately have human value. The Western Niger Delta, whose hinterland is largely occupied by the Urhobo people, is a region of Africa that poses many significant questions for the understanding of the human condition. The conquest of its difficult rainforests and swamps in prehistoric times is of huge significance for history, but it is basically unstudied. The continuing dilemmas that the Niger Delta faces in these global times are defined by the regrettable fact that the world urgently needs the petroleum oil that this difficult region has in abundance while the

international community and indeed Nigerian authorities fail to understand the history and the people of the region.

Measured by the depth and length of experiences of the authors of the research papers and essays assembled in this volume, this publication is liable to be unique in the amount and quality of information that it provides. We are encouraged to hope that those who seek to understand Nigerian history and British imperial history of the 19th and 20th centuries will find several of our authors' essays illuminating. We also trust that those who seek to gain insights into the local dimensions and consequences of the Atlantic world in the Niger Delta will find this book rewarding. In addition, we are persuaded that the varied experiences of our authors will please local readers of this volume for providing uncommon authority in their scholarship.

The oldest of our authors was born in 1906, just about the time when British colonial agents were pouring into Urhobo country. Like many in his generation, Chief T. E. A. Salubi was therefore an eye-witness of British colonial rule in Urhoboland and Nigeria. Unlike his age-mates, he alone in his generation of educated Urhobo men chronicled the history of the coming of the white man. Two of Chief Salubi's seminal accounts of Urhobo experiences under colonial rule are republished in this volume. In addition, Chief Salubi faithfully recorded the dramatic history of Urhobo College, which was founded in the 1940s by Urhobo Progress Union for the development of education in Urhoboland. Chief Salubi was a major actor in that memorable achievement that is cardinal in Urhobo history and in the history of education in colonial Africa. We are pleased to publish that manuscript in this volume.

We are also most pleased to publish from the remarkable contributions of Professor P. C. Lloyd in his productive encounter with the Western Niger Delta in the 1950s. Lloyd's pioneering ethnographic and historical studies of the Itsekiri and their relations with the Urhobo people have enduring value. They have been celebrated and cited in newspapers, courtrooms, and university halls. We republish in this volume his sociological study of Warri Township in the mid-1950s. It is a rare publication that was prescient in its predictions. Now a grand old Emeritus Professor of Anthropology at the University of Sussex in England, Lloyd's scholarship from his years at the University of Ibadan in the 1950s-60s will continue to inform studies of the Western Niger Delta.

Collectively, more than ten Urhobo and Isoko authors of chapters of this book share more than two hundred years of teaching and research experiences in many universities around the world. They have authored leading publications on the Western Niger Delta and on Nigeria and Africa. These university professors approach the study of Urhobo history from a unique perspective. Many of them have been participants or witnesses to the events and historical problems that they seek to analyse in the chapters of this book. Their scholarship has the value of benefiting our quest for understanding Urhobo history through the employment of the canons of their individual disciples which they have wisely used to aid the formulation of historical trends in Urhobo and the Niger Delta. Many of these authors, already climbing into their seventies, have now retired from active university teaching and research. Some of them have resettled into the demanding chores of living in Urhoboland and the Western Niger Delta. We trust that their scholarship will continue to be of benefit to the historical appreciation of the Urhobo past.

There are three Urhobo leaders in the world of business and community affairs who have contributed to our efforts of offering an analysis of Urhobo history. Senator David Dafinone and Olorogun Moses Taiga, both frontline international businessmen of enormous capabilities, have fully participated with Urhobo Historical Society in advancing the

understanding of Urhobo history. We are pleased to publish the wise lectures which they gave at our previous conferences. In addition, Chief Daniel Obiomah has given a cogent eye-witness account of British colonial era in Urhoboland in his short autobiographical statement which we now publish here.

Lastly, we acknowledge with great pleasure the contributions of three of our authors who have looked at the issues of Urhobo and Isoko history from the vantage point of outsiders. First, Dr, Uyilawa Usuanlele is the founding Coordinator of Institute for Benin Studies. His well-informed chapter on the fortunes and problems of Urhobo migrants in Benin Division of colonial Nigeria is a spectacular demonstration of the benefits that will flow from collaboration between Institute for Benin Studies and Urhobo Historical Society. Second, we have an excellent piece on pre-modern Isoko-Urhobo cultures from Whitney Foster, a dedicated member of President Kennedy-era Peace Corps Volunteers. Foster employed his period of service at St. Michael's College, Oleh, in the mid-1960s to research the traditions of origins of the Isoko people, Urhobo's not-so-distant kinsmen. Third, we have from Professor Terisa Turner of Guelph University, Canada, an exciting and rare account of two uprisings against the oil industry in the mid-1980s by provoked Urhobo women of Oghara and Ekpan-Uvwie. These three unique studies have separately added enormous value to the contents of this study of Urhobo history.

One more note of explanation about the first three chapters of the book is in order. These three chapters by Peter Ekeh, Whitney Foster, and Onigu Otite, constitute the introduction to this book. All three of them undertake the challenging task of assessing Urhobo-Isoko history in pre-modern times when there were no contemporaneously written records to cite in support of any claims made for the occurrence of events. It is a tricky challenge. Yet it is one that needs to be met because without clearing that background, modern Urhobo history will be formless. The remaining sections and chapters of this book, beyond that introductory section and its three chapters, deal with events of the history of Urhobo and the Niger Delta that followed from the arrival of British colonial rule – a period for which there are more ample records.

* * *

It now remains for me to offer warm words of gratitude to several people who have aided the work of putting this volume together for publication. First, I must thank two individuals who have followed the planning of this book from its inception. Chief Simpson Obruche, in London, United Kingdom, and Mr. Andrew Edevbie, Secretary of Urhobo Historical Society, have been my constant companions in our common campaign to establish a strong foundation for Urhobo history. Remarkably, we are in daily contact on matters associated with Urhobo Historical Society but more especially on issues related to work on the production of this book.

In Lagos, Nigeria, two busy Urhobo professionals working in very demanding corporations have found space from their spare time to work on the affairs of Urhobo Historical Society. We thank Mr. Peter Ishaka of Nigerian International Biographical Centre and Mr. Atete Ighoyivwi of Oceanic Bank, Lagos, for their uncommon dedication to UHS affairs. We have especially benefited enormously from Peter Ishaka's knowledge of the book industry in Nigeria. We must also thank two other individuals in Olorogun Moses Taiga's Excon Holdings Limited: We owe Mr. Ejiro Arigi and Miss Seyi Lahan enormous gratitude for paying close attention to the affairs of Urhobo Historical Society within their organization.

Olorogun Moses Taiga's generosity in the matter of producing this book cannot be adequately described with mere words of gratitude. The truth of the matter is that he encouraged us to work on the history of Urhobo on the firm assurance that he will pay for the cost of producing the book. That assurance allowed us to be rather expansive in our planning for the book. And he has carried out his full promise. Our gratitude to Olorogun Moses Taiga as the Chief Patron of Urhobo Historical Society is deep. His help to the Society has been widespread and substantial. We thank him for his large love of all matters Urhobo.

Our Annual Conferences have emerged to be important venues for expression of support for activities undertaken by Urhobo Historical Society. In the 2005 Annual Conference, we were most pleased by the tremendous support that Olorogun Oskar Ibru, Group Executive Director, Ibru Organisation, offered to us as chief launcher of our 2005 publication, *Studies in Urhobo Culture*. At the same venue, Mr. Simeon Ohwofa, an enthusiastic supporter of Urhobo Historical Society, launched our annual calendar. We thank both of these businessmen for their goodwill towards Urhobo Historical Society. Their support has helped us in many ways, including preparation for publishing this new volume on Urhobo history.

We must, finally, thank the UHS family for its encouragement as the work on producing this book continued. We thank members of the Society's Editorial and Management Committee. And we thank Chief Johnson Barovbe for his encouragement and for looking after the affairs of Urhobo Historical Society in Nigeria.

Peter P. Ekeh

State University of New York at Buffalo, USA

August 8, 2006

Postscript

Books published by Urhobo Historical Society in Nigeria have been kindly marketed by African Books Collective in Europe in partnership with Michigan State University Press in North America. African Books Collective recently introduced Print-on-Demand standards that required special imprints of books published in Africa for reissuing of new editions in this format. I am immensely grateful to Justin Cox, of Michigan State University Press and African Books Collective, for walking me through the new process and for putting together this edition of *History of The Urhobo People of Niger Delta*.

Two professionals at the State University of New York at Buffalo helped me enormously with meeting the requirements of this edition of the book. Thomas Slomka, Managing Director for ETC Projects of University of Buffalo's Teaching and Learning Center, redesigned the page specification and patiently put me through the process of reducing the Nigerian edition of nearly nine hundred pages to less than seven hundred and forty pages for this edition. Glendora Johnson-Cooper, Social Sciences Librarian of University Buffalo's Undergraduate Library, helped to retrace the new pages of the book to which indexed items refer. I am most grateful to both Tom Slomka and Glendora Johnson-Cooper for their help.

Peter Ekeh

September 2, 2007

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	v
<i>Table of Contents</i>	ix
<i>A Map of Western Niger Delta</i>	xiii

INTRODUCTION

1. Imperialism, Nigerian Historiography and the Nature & Outline of Urhobo History 3
Peter P. Ekeh
2. Pre-Twentieth-Century Isoko: Its Foundation and Later Growth 37
Whitney P. Foster
3. Development of Okpe as Exemplar of Urhobo History 51
Onigu Otite

BEGINNINGS OF BRITISH COLONIAL RULE IN URHOBOLAND

4. The Establishment of British Administration in Urhobo Country, 1891-1913 67
T.E.A. Salubi
 5. British Treaties of Trade and Protection with Urhobo Communities, 1880s-1890s 87
Compiled and Introduced by Peter P. Ekeh
 6. The Origins of Sapele Township 103
T.E.A. Salubi
- Document: Planning for the First School in Sapele:
Request for a Teacher from Great Britain, 1903 119

ADVENT OF CHRISTIANITY IN URHOBOLAND

7. Beginnings of Christianity in Urhoboland and Western Niger Delta 127
Samuel U. Erivwo
8. Establishment of Roman Catholic Mission and Other (non-C.M.S.) Christian Missions in Urhobo and Isoko 159
Samuel U. Erivwo
9. The Catholic Church in Agbon-Urhobo, 1922-2004 185
Imo Otite
10. Evolution of the Urhobo Bible and Some Christian Liturgical Books 191
M.Y. Nabofa

Document: Historical Background to
Anglican (Communion) Diocese of Ughelli 219

COLONIALISM AND THE SCRAMBLE FOR URHOBO LANDS

Introduction 223
Peter P. Ekeh

11. Ownership of Pre-Colonial Warri 233
Onoawarie Edevbie

12. Who Owns Colonial and Post-Colonial Warri? 259
Onoawarie Edevbie

13. Judgement on Warri Land Case between
Itsekiri Claimants *and* Chief Daniel Okumagba
(for Urhobo-Okere Community in Warri) 305
Judgement of the Supreme Court of Nigeria
Delivered by Atanda Fatayi-Williams. J.S.C. on 8/10/1976

14. The Need for Peace in Warri 317
Akindele Aiyetan

15. Itsekiri Land Claims in Sapele and the Jackson Judgement 321
Judgement of the High Court of the Warri Judicial Division
Delivered by J. Jackson, A. J., on 5/5/1942

URHOBO PROGRESS UNION AND THE QUEST FOR EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

16. The Miracle of an Original Thought: A History of the
Origins of Urhobo College 331
T.E.A. Salubi

17. Chief Mukoro Mowoe: Leader of the Urhobo 361
Obaro Ikime

18. The Place of Urhobo College Effurun in Urhobo History 381
David A. Okpako

19. Mukoro Mowoe and Urhobo Destiny and History 393
Peter P. Ekeh

URHOBO AND ITS ETHNIC NEIGHBOURS

20. Ethnicity and the Structure of Inequality in Warri Town
in the Mid-1950s 409
P.C. Lloyd

21. Thoughts on Isoko-Urhobo Relations 427
Obaro Ikime

22. Frank Ukoli's Last Testament: *I Can See Clearly Now* 451
F.M.A. Ukoli

23. In Defence of Frank Ukoli's Honour 461
Ajovi Scott-Emuakpor & Jackson Omene

A Poem: Death? Not Frank 471
Ajovi Scott-Emuakpor

MODERN URHOBO MIGRATIONS AND THE URHOBO DIASPORA

24. Migrating Cultural Performances:
The Urhobo among the Ikale-Yoruba 475
Onigu Otite

25. Urhobos in Benin 1897-1945:
Changing Patterns of Relations under Colonial Rule 483
Uyilawa Usuanlele

OIL EXPLORATION AND ITS VICISSITUDES

26. Urhobo Women's Uprisings against the
Nigerian Oil Industry in the 1980s 499
Terisa E. Turner

27. Petroleum Oil Fire Disasters in Urhoboland, 1998-2000 527
Compiled and Introduced by Peter P. Ekeh

28. Urhobo and the National Question:
Urhobo's Environment and Natural Resources 555
Bright U. Ekuerhare (for Urhobo Study Group, DELSU, Abraka)

29. Some Solutions to Water Problems in the Niger Delta 563
A.B.M. Egborge

FRAGMENTS OF URHOBO HISTORY

30. Urhobo Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow:
Where Do We Stand Now? 569
David O. Dafinone

31. Political Reorganization as a Pre-Condition for
Economic Success in Urhoboland 577
Moses Taiga

32. Urhobo Religious Leaders and the Urhobo Nation 583
Samuel U. Erivwo

33. Urhobo Youth and the Urhobo Future 595
Omafume F. Onoge

34. Fifty Years After Mukoro Mowoe 613
Onigu Otite

35. Urhobo and the Nigerian Federation: Whither Nigeria? 627
Peter P. Ekeh

36. The Place of the Elite in Urhobo Leadership 647
F.M.A. Ukoli

37. An Autobiographical Statement 657
By D.A. Obiomah

38. Understanding Urhobo History through Obituaries 663

History of Urhobo People of Niger Delta

Hope Eghagha. Oghenevware Evwode. Samson Eruvwavwe. David Okpako. Daniel Obiomah. Dafe Omoko. Francis Daniel-Okumagba. John Esangbedo. Urhobo Study Group. Peter Ekeh. Rev. Father Patrick Otor.

<i>Index</i>	693
<i>Biographical Notes on Contributors</i>	707
<i>About Urhobo Historical Society</i>	711