Chapter Seven

The Relationship between Early Forms of Literacy in Old Calabar and Inherited Manuscripts of the Cuban Abakuá Society[1]

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"Arán arán Efik abeson kanyo nyuge afenyipa makaro ngomo: The Efik people sent 'a declaration of war' in writing (through signs drawn) on a white piece of paper."

Cuban Abakuá phrase referring to literacy in Calabar[2]

Introduction

Oral tradition has long been — and remains — the main engine of cultural transmission in West Africa, but for several centuries, literacy in many forms has played an important if secondary role. The Cross River area of Nigeria and Cameroon for example is famous for its old and indigenous *nsìbìdì* scripts or pictograms, as well as for the Efik elites of the Atlantic port of Calabar who became proficient in alphabetic English in the 1700s. Building on these precedents, this essay presents enough circumstantial evidence to ponder the influence of forced migrants from this region who entered Havana and Matanzas, Cuba, on the production of manuscripts in the Spanish colony from the early 1800s. These texts contain historical-mythi-

cal information about the Abakuá society that were codified in its initiation language, employing a mix of pictograms and alphabetic script, as well as detailed "mythic" maps of the Calabar region.

Abakuá had been founded on institutions of the Cross River region, including the Ékpè "leopard" society, and its members preferred to protect all information about themselves from observation by colonial authorities and other outsiders, hence these manuscripts have been hidden from non-members for two centuries. Today, however, after 20 years of collaborative research with the author, some Abakuá leaders have begun to share pages from their archives, precisely because of new possibilities to communicate directly with their counterparts in Calabar. Thus, although literacy on both sides of the Atlantic is usually associated with European culture and social forms, access to the Abakuá manuscripts allows a comparison of the use of writing in Calabar and Cuba as a tool for emphatically non-European forms of thought and action. These rare documents suggest that Africans enslaved in a plantation economy of the Americas drew on specifically African forms of literacy in order to sustain themselves in an alien environment.

Calabar and its Diaspora: a History of Multiple Scripts

In the lower Cross River region, community leaders have long cultivated several types of literacy, most famously the *nsìbìdì* "communication arts" that include scripts and codes most readily seen on the sacred Ùkárá cloth worn exclusively by titled members of the Ékpè "leopard" society. Ùkárá cloth display *nsìbìdì* symbols using metaphor to express fundamental ideas of the group. As seen in Figure 7.1, an Ùkárá cloth displays the totem animals of the region, including a leopard, a python, a crocodile, a chameleon, a tortoise, as well as a sword for defense, the manila rods (two half circles) representing wealth, the double metal idiophonic bell that symbolizes royalty, and finally the chief who "sits" on Ékpè and therefore is the highest authority in the community. *Nsìbìdì* communication also occurs through signs drawn on objects or the ground, as well as through gestures, drum patterns, chants, and so on.[3] Nsìbìdì codes are also displayed during body-masked performance — each category of costume having specific designs and paraphernalia that are performed with communicative movements to specific rhythms. More recently, the English language and alphabet added to the already existing literacy of Calabar.[4]

All continue to coexist in the region, and since the 1750s have influenced the culture of Cross River peoples, including those who were enslaved and

forcibly migrated to the Caribbean, where they were known as Carabalí, after the port city of Calabar.[5]

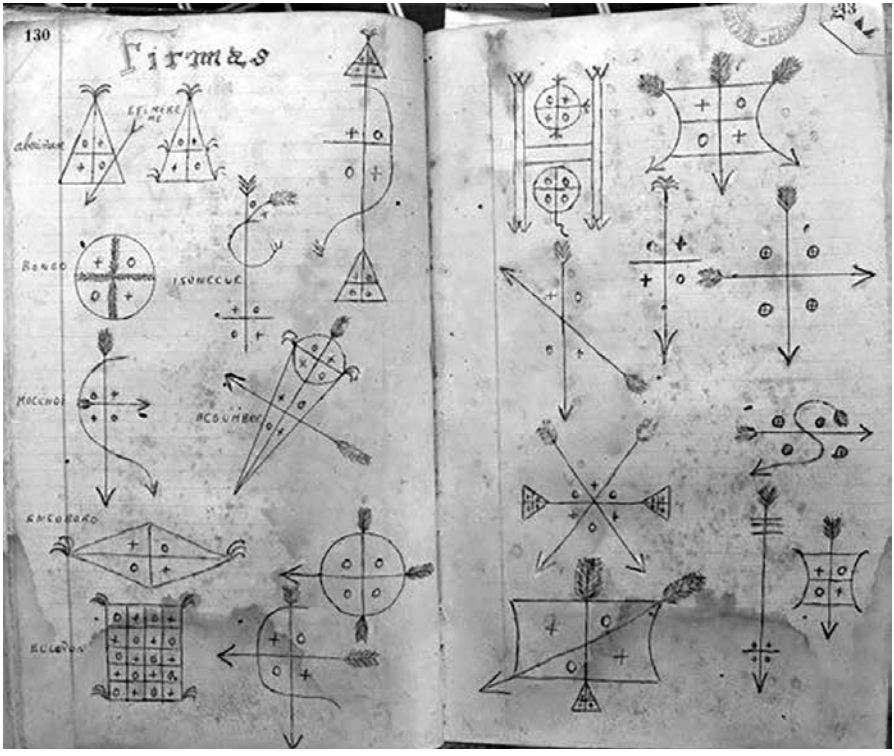
Figure 7.1
Nsìbìdì Symbols from Abiriba

Source: Photograph by Ivor L. Miller, Calabar.

In Cuba, the Carabalí and their descendants created manuscripts documenting mythical-historical narratives about Cross River civilization: historical figures, important communities, trade activities, all within the context of the foundation of the Ékpè "leopard" society, the supreme form of governance for hundreds of communities in the area. The manuscripts were written in the Abakuá ritual language, also known as "Bríkamo-Carabalí," with interpretations in Spanish.

They contain hundreds of examples of drawn *nsìbìdì* (signs) and drawings of body-masks and their symbolic codes. For example, the Abakuá phrase, *Nyuáo magán, mangamanga tereré*, interpreted as "What is written cannot be erased," refers to the signs drawn with chalk on the bodies of initiates, implying that membership is a life-long commitment.[6] Cuban manuscripts document *firmas* "signatures" derived from Cross River region *nsìbìdì* "signs" (Fig. 7.2). Each sign is related to a specific title or ritual object.

Figure 7.2
Nsìbìdì "Signs" from Havana



Source: Cuban Manuscript. Photograph by Ivor L. Miller, Havana.

These manuscripts also contain drawings of masked dancers typical of the Calabar region that were performed in Cuba in past generations. In the example below (Fig. 7.3), a manuscript page reproduces the image of a masked dancer that was originally drawn or witnessed in 1850 in Havana. The caption reads, translated from Spanish: *"Ireme Acanapon. Enlluanza enlluge mocuba* . . . . This was the first masquerade or mokóndo consecrated in Africa in Efi Ubane land. Notebook of Antonio Kandemo, year 1850, Regla." The Abakuá phrase *Enyuánsa* (union) *enyúge* (ritual fee) *mokúba* (ritual drink), means, "the imbibing of the ritual drink of initiation unites the member with the group."

Carabalí literacy has been documented in Havana, Cuba, since the early 1800s. The use of *nsìbìdì* signs in Cuba is strong evidence for continuity from West Africa to Cuba. The use of the Roman alphabet is clearly a weaker argument, since this was also acquired in Cuba. But evidence of Old

Figure 7.3
Masked Dancer, Regla, 1850

Source: Cuban Manuscript. Photograph by Ivor L. Miller, Havana.

Calabar English usage in early Abakuá terms indicates the presence of English- speaking Calabar elites.[7] After reviewing the major historical sources and examining important Abakuá manuscripts in private archives, the author begins the process of interrogating the historiography of these manuscripts: How old are they? Who created them, and why? How have their contents changed or been augmented through the generations? What is the relationship of these texts to oral tradition in the 1800s, and how are they used in contemporary ritual performance? These questions cannot be definitively answered at present, because the manuscripts have only recently been made available for study. These preliminary notes ponder the relationship between literate Carabalí migrants in the early 1800s and early Abakuá literacy, while confirming the scribal contributions of Spanish-descended members who began to join lodges in the 1860s.[8] Part of the circumstantial evidence that African migrants participated in the documentation — whether orally or as scribes — is the fact that the contents of Abakuá manuscripts have shed light on the specific African sources of this ritual language.[9] From available

evidence, it seems that in the 1800s, early Abakuá manuscripts simply documented oral tradition, to be used as teaching aides for initiates, but in the early twentieth century they acquired a *parallel* authority to oral tradition, while in the late twentieth century — after the demise of the African founders — they have attained *superior* authority.

The following four sections review what is currently known about alphabetic literacy in Calabar, the use of multiple scripts by Cuban Carabalí, the Cuban literature on Abakuá manuscripts, and new evidence from the manuscript archives of Abakuá leaders.

The Rise of a Merchant Class with Literacy in English

The English language arrived to southeastern Nigeria with British merchants, starting from 1662-1689, when at least 68 English slaving ships traded at Calabar.[10] By the early 1700s, European merchants, sea captains and their cohorts visiting Calabar documented the English language acquisition of its local merchants and their family members — by and large titled representatives of the Efik-speaking communities known as Àtákpà (Duke Town/ New Town), Òbútòng (Old Town) and Óbiókò (Creek Town) — who acted as middlemen in the trade between the Europeans and the hinterlands. British sea captain Snelgrave described communicating in English with Calabar leaders in 1713 through a local translator.[11] In 1717, a ship's surgeon visiting Calabar reported that, "King Ambo's Son . . . spoke tolerable English, at least enough to make one sensible of what he meant."[12]

Under the care of their British trading partners, the children of some Efik elites were schooled in Liverpool and Bristol. This process led to proficiency in alphabetic English in Calabar itself by the 1750s.[13] After citing many epistolary examples by Calabar merchants, Paul Lovejoy and David Richardson concluded that, "the leading traders at Old Calabar appear to have been both literate and relatively fluent in English or pidgin versions of it as early as the 1750s."[14] In 1776 the Hector's outward cargo to Old Calabar included writing materials,including "Bound journals," "ink powder," and "common quills."

Three [books] 4 Qters 1/1 Bound Journals Letter'd	15s
Three 3 ditto	12
1 ream course fools Cap	9

1 box of wafers	1
6 Papers Ink Powder	3
100 Common Quills	11[5]

The impressive example of English literacy is the diary of an Efik merchant known by the British as Antera Duke, and as Ntiero Edem Efiom in Efik, who was likely born in the 1730s.[16] The remaining portions of Duke's diary date from 1785-1788, containing 10,510 words and revealing a working vocabulary of 400 English words.[17] As Behrendt, Latham and Northrup note, "Antera Duke, like his father and grandfather, learned to write and speak trade English to communicate with British sailors . . . as the trading community . . . began brokering shipments of slaves and ivory for overseas markets."[18]

Primarily geared towards bookkeeping and communication with British merchants, this form of literacy was also applied to internal communication amongst community leaders. Antera Duke, who was a title-holder in the Ékpè "leopard" society — the supreme institution of governance of the region — referred to Ékpè activities in several entries, including the use of Ékpè sanctions for community and inter-community disputes, thus providing "the first written evidence about the Ékpè society."[19]

Indigenous Calabar Schools

The first Europeans allowed to settle on land at Calabar were the Scottish Presbyterians, who arrived in 1846 at the invitation of Efik merchant-kings of Óbiókò (Creek Town), and Àtákpà (Duke Town). Common belief holds that these missionaries created the first schools in Calabar, yet the accounts of visiting British merchants from the 1790s to the 1820s refer to indigenous schools organized by local merchants to teach reading, writing, and arithmetic to their families.[20] In the 1820s, British merchant John Adams wrote:

> Many of the [Calabar] natives write English; an art first acquired by some of the traders' sons, who had visited England, and which they have had the sagacity to retain up to the present period. They have established schools and schoolmasters, for the purpose of instructing in this art the youths belonging to families of consequence.[21]

According to William Hutton, who also wrote in the 1820s, "At Old Calabar different European languages are understood, the English language is spoken, taught, read, and written; they keep regular mercantile accounts in our language."[22] Before the arrival of the missionaries in Calabar, literacy in

English was used to document trade activities, specifically bookkeeping, communication with European merchants, and as well as noteworthy events of the Ékpè society and other indigenous traditions.[23] According to Lovejoy and Richardson,

> Literacy at Old Calabar developed and was maintained despite the absence of literate Muslims, a resident European population, or the presence of mulattoes. The spread of English was directly related to the dominance of British trade, yet no foreign English speakers appear to have resided at Old Calabar for longer than a few months, at least not before the Presbyterian Mission established a station in the 1840s. The adoption of English, therefore, appears to have been a conscious decision of the Old Calabar merchant families. Knowledge of English was partially a protective measure as well, sometimes preventing the enslavement of pawns or securing the return of relatives from the Americas.[24]

Only after the official end of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in 1842, with the arrival of Rev. Hope Waddell to Calabar in 1846, did literacy in English become associated with Biblical studies. Therefore in the early Cuban manuscripts, one would expect to find concern with Ékpè tradition, as opposed to Biblical references, as is the case.

West Africans with Alphabetic Literacy in the Americas

Sometimes literate residents of Calabar were deported to the Americas. As noted by Lovejoy and Richardson, "the presence of a few literate individuals from Old Calabar in the diaspora has to be taken into consideration in discussions of literacy and its spread wherever people identified as Ìgbò or Moko (Ibibio and other Cross River peoples) were to be found."[25] Lovejoy further observes

> The merchants and their extended families who facilitated the deportation of the enslaved, were not immune to enslavement, as correspondence from the time reveals, such as a letter from Duke Ephraim to Richard Rogers in 1789. There were various ways that members of the literate elite might end up in slavery. For example, people were sometimes simply "panyarred" [seized] for some debt or abuse that was being dealt with in a collective fashion.[26]

The available evidence suggests, however, that the Efik-speaking merchants jealously kept alphabetic literacy to themselves, i.e., to the exclusion of Ibibio and Ìgbò-speakers who were their competitors. Therefore in this es-

say, the literate merchants refer to a small group of men in Àtákpà, Óbiókò, and Òbútòng. For example in 1790, a British merchant visiting Calabar reported that a local "king" named Ephraim had sold one of his wives to a British slaving vessel, and that she "could speak English, and very good English too."[27]

In the Yorùbá-speaking diaspora, abundant evidence shows that literate Africans who were enslaved in the Caribbean created manuscripts in their language. J. Matory has demonstrated that literate Africans influenced Yorùbá-derived manuscripts in Brazil and Cuba.[28] In Matanzas, Cuba, Lydia Cabrera reported that, "in 1800, or maybe earlier," Sixto Samá, a Yorùbá-speaker who was educated in an English mission in Sierra Leone, wrote a glossary in Yorùbá that was copied by his Cuban disciples who could read and write.[29] Cabrera also documented the case of Andrés Monzón, who learned to read and write in an English mission in Nigeria. "His [Cuban] descendants inherited proof of his wisdom expressed in an impeccable script, in which we learned the Our Father prayer . . . in Yorùbá."[30] These two examples show influence from Christian schools in coastal Yorùbáland. Each African port city has a distinct historical relationship to alphabetic literacy and missionaries. The case of Calabar (Àtákpà and Óbiókò) is exceptional in that alphabetic literacy pre-dated the arrival of missionaries.

Carabalí in Cuba

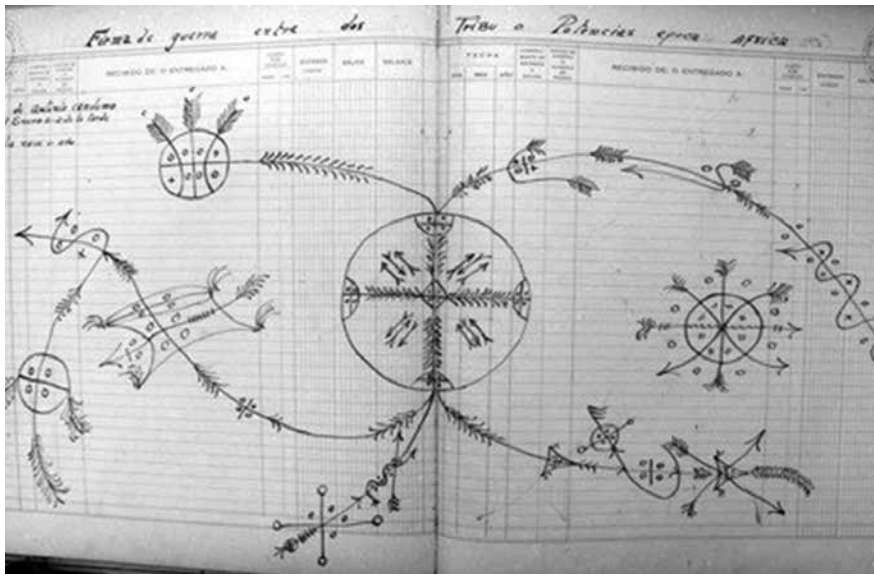
Enslaved Africans were in Cuba for four centuries, while a large population of "free black artisans" lived in the cities of Havana and Matanzas in the early 1800s. This essay is primarily concerned with the period from 1750 to 1841: from the emergence of literacy in English in Calabar (Àtákpà, Óbiókò and Òbútòng) to the official end of the trans-Atlantic slave trade from this port. In urban colonial Cuba, Africans regrouped in order to defend their interests and perpetuate their homeland customs.[31] These groups were often authorized by colonial authorities, who interpreted them in Spanish as *cabildos de nacion*, or African neo-ethnic councils, because colonial authorities sought to divide Africans into "tribal groups" to control their activities.[32] In Havana in 1755, Bishop Morell, "officialized the cabildos created spontaneously by the Africans since the 16th century."[33] Out of the 21 African Cabildos Morell documented in Havana, five were Carabalí (i.e, Calabar).[34] Their members would have been people from the Cross River region generally, who had left the ports of Bimbia, Bonny, Calabar, Duala, and others along the nearby coast.

The arrival of Carabalí in the nineteenth century is necessarily undocumented and obscure, particularly because following the Anglo-Spanish agreement of 1817 that prohibited the slave trade in Spanish colonies, Cuban planters increased the illegal trade.[35] For example, in 1828 in Àtákpà (Duke Town), British anti-slavery agent James Holman described a slave ship receiving cargo for Havana: "we anchored off Old Calabar, or Duke's Town. We found . . . a Spanish schooner, from the Havannah, waiting for slaves."[36] Once in Cuban urban centers, the internal organization of Africans was necessarily covert. Matt Childs has found evidence that the African *cabildos* were formed by migrants from a vast array of sources in Africa; only when enough migrants from a particular language group or source region were gathered, would they tend to break off into a separate group.[37] One example is a Carabalí *cabildo* in colonial Havana called Ingré, a mispronunciation of "inglés" in Spanish, indicating that this *cabildo* name referred to English-speaking Carabalí or "Efik gentlemen" (i.e., "caballeros ingleses" in Spanish).[38] The fact that a *cabildo* was created with this name implies that there were enough "English gentlemen of Calabar" to form such a group.

Another Carabalí *cabildo* was called Ultán, likely a Spanish mispronunciation of "Old Town," i.e., the Òbútòng community of Calabar, from where several leaders were enslaved in 1767 during a battle with the leaders of Àtákpà, who were supported by British merchants.[39] There is no known documentation that victims of this battle arrived to Cuba, but some did arrive to Dominica, a British free port where Cubans frequently bought slaves.[40] In any case, Abakuá manuscripts document that the first lodge was created in the early 1800s in Havana and called Efí Butón, after the Òbútòng community of Calabar. More evidence, albeit circumstantial, that African founders of Cuban Abakuá influenced manuscript writing is the accuracy of their contents. For example, the following terms used in this essay are found in Cuban manuscripts; they are still used in the Calabar region: Àtákpà,[41] Moko,[42] Mukarará,[43] Ntiero,[44] Óbiókò[45] and Òbútòng.

Cuban Abakuá manuscripts refer to literate Efik leaders in Calabar, as in this phrase: "*Arán arán Efik abeson kanyo nyuge afenyipa makaro ngomo*: The Efik people sent 'a declaration of war' in writing (through signs drawn) on a white piece of paper."[46] This idea is illustrated in an anonymous Cuban manuscript, copied from an original drawing in 1877, relating to a mythic-history that occurred in Calabar (see Figure 7.4). Above the symbolic drawing is a caption in Spanish that translates as: "Symbol of War between two tribe[s] or Lodges, African era. From Antonio Kandemo 1877, 6 January." The symbols depict inter-community conflict over a sacred object.

Figure 7.4
Cuban Manuscript, 1877



Source: Antonio Kandemo, the Isunékue of Abakuá Efó. Photograph by Ivor L. Miller, Havana.

Abakuá manuscripts also document the use of spoken English in Calabar, for example by a historical figure called Bonerón Tínde, "a King of Old Calabar": "Bonerón spoke English, as did all the Calabarís who traded slaves with the whites."[47] Finally, several ethnic terms documented in Abakuá manuscripts were created by the Efik traders of Calabar to refer to their neighbors, for examples, the Cuban "Efó" are the Efut of Calabar; the "Abakuá" are the Àbàkpà (the "Qua") of Calabar; "Ekoi" was a general term for the people of the hinterlands northwest of Calabar, where Ejagham is the majority language. Even the dress fashion of Calabar elites was brought to Cuba, where Abakuá members traditionally used "dog collar" white shirts, that are clearly based upon the shirt styles of coastal chiefs in southeastern Nigeria, that were in turn derived from aristocratic "English boiled front shirts" used with tuxedos.[48] The photograph in Figure 7.5 shows an Efik royal personage around 1895 wearing a typical Calabar shirt with a buttoned "dog collar," derived from the British "shawl collar."[49] The same shirt style is customary amongst Cuban Abakuá, as seen in a photograph of Reinaldo Brito del Valle (b. 1930), title-holder of the Uriabón Efí lodge, Havana, wearing a "dog collar" undershirt (Figure 7.6).

Figure 7.5
Efik Royal Personage, circa 1895

Source: Macdonald Calabar photographs [c. 1895]**.** EEPA 1996-0019-0120**.** Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Figure 7.6
Cuban Abakuá Title-Holder

Source: Ivor L. Miller photograph, 2011, Havana.

Nsìbìdì Signs in Cuba: 1812 and 1839

So far, the earliest reference to Calabar literacy in Cuba dates to 1812, when *nsìbìdì* signs (in Abakuá known as *firmas* "signatures" or *gandó* "pathways") were used during the first movement for both abolition and independence, known as The Conspiracy of Aponte. Cuban- born José Antonio Aponte was a retired first corporal of the free Black militia, who helped create a multi-ethnic movement that used a protocol of secret oaths to pass along information. After Aponte and his cohorts — many of them being free black artisans —were discovered by colonial authorities, his private manuscripts were examined during the trials. Among them was, "a conventional sign used as a signature by the Abakuá," according to José Luciano Franco.[50] The content of Aponte's papers has been a subject of great controversy; they were "lost" after the trial, while authorities classified other information from the trial for over 150 years.[51] Such manipulation of archives was the rule, and exemplifies why this period of Cuban history is especially obscure. Nevertheless, the presence of Cross River *nsìbìdì* in the early nineteenth century in Cuba is not controversial, since they would have been used within the Carabalí *cabildos* and appear in other documents of the period, as discussed below.

The story of Aponte demonstrates that in the early 1800s, free black artisans were in a good position to transmit their literacy skills to their captive brethren. The three major institutions of Cuba in that period, the sugar industry, Atlantic slavery and the military, all required literate artisans to sign contracts and keep accounts, because much of the economy operated on credit and keeping track of credit and favors. Childs found several examples from the early 1800s of "free persons of color" in Havana who used their literacy to forge travel passes, "for slaves and free people of color to travel between Havana and the countryside."[52] Meanwhile many African *cabildos* kept record books, for example the "nations" Karabali Osso, Karabali Umugini, and Karabali Induri recorded payments on several occasions.[53] Furthermore, a list of the "Slaves and Free People of Color Arrested and/or Punished for Involvement in the Aponte Rebellion of 1812" included 29 literate people, the great majority of them were artisans living in Havana.[54] Aponte's subversive use of literacy ensured that colonial authorities would classify his documents.

In 1839 in Havana, colonial authorities surprised a meeting of the Carabalí *cabildo* Ultán, arresting its members and confiscating their papers, written in Spanish with a Cross River *nsìbìdì* sign to represent the authority of Abakuá title-holders.[55] From his research in the Cuban archives, Pedro Deschamps Chappeaux presented a page with an "Abakuá signature confiscated from the 'Ocongo of Ultán', the free black Margarito Blanco, of the

Carabalí Apapá nation, in Havana, July 1839" (Fig. 7.7). The name Ultán derives from "Old Town," the English name for the Òbútòng community of Calabar.[56] Pedro Deschamps wrote that Ultán, also known as Papaultán, was a principal figure in the foundation of the new group Arupapá or Oru Apapá and appears to have sponsored the Abakuá lodge Oru-Apapá or Uruapapá, names that according to those arrested, correspond to regions or tribes in Africa.[57] The Cuban terms Urua or Oru may derive from Úrúán, the name of a group of communities along the Cross River, from whence the Efiks claim to have migrated to Calabar.[58] In the police raids of 1812 and 1839, we find evidence of literate free black artisans and military leaders who wrote in Spanish and used Abakuá titles, group names, and "firmas" to authorize their statements.

Figure 7.7
Abakuá signature, 1839, Havana

Source: Pedro Deschamps Chappeaux, "Margarito Blanco 'Osongo de Ultán'," *Boletin del Instituto de Historia y del Archivo Nacional* 65 (1964), 106.

Literacy in Cuba in the Early Nineteenth Century: Its Limits and Dangers

The literacy of free black artisans and Black Battalion leaders in early nineteenth century Cuba is in itself remarkable, given that literacy on the Iberian peninsula and its colonies was a privilege associated with clergy, colonial administrators and merchants. Hobsbawm reported that in 1840, Spaniards and Portuguese could be described as "almost illiterate."[59] Writing on inde-

pendence movements of the early 1800s, A. del Valle noted "the intellectual superiority of many Cubans, obliged to subordinate themselves to the inferior mentalities of the Peninsulars ["the Spaniards"] who were nearly illiterate."[60]

In Havana, colonial officials kept tight control over information; in the first half of the 1800s, the frenetic international economic activities of the ports of Havana, Matanzas and Cárdenas were juxtaposed by the colonists' use of both censorship of the press and martial law to keep workers and slaves there ignorant.[61] There is no surprise that many of Havana's early writers went into exile.[62] In 1872, a New York journalist reported the interrogation of a young Cuban by authorities because he was reading: "In Cuba, a man who reads is held to be dangerous, and authority keeps its eye upon him."[63] Nevertheless in 1842 and 1856, two newspapers were created in Havana specifically for African descendants, a sign of the high literacy rates and collective identity of this population.[64]

Cuban Social History in Abakuá Manuscripts

Deschamps found evidence from 1820-1845 of a group of wharf captains who were free black artisans and military leaders, literate, property owners, as well as participants in African *cabildo* activities.[65] In 1844, known as "The Year of the Lash," many of these community leaders were implicated in a wave of repression known as the "Conspiracy of the Ladder." Because the population of free and enslaved Africans and their descendants was then 60 percent of the total population, the "plantocracy" (the elites) feared "another Haiti," and disbanded the black and mulatto battalions.[66] Among the victims was Cuba's first "mulatto" poet, Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés, known as "Plácido," who was executed in 1844.

According to an Abakuá manuscript, "Plácido" was initiated as an Abakuá member in 1839-40. Those who know Cuban history well will be surprised with this information, because it is not part of the known biography of "Plácido." Nevertheless, Cuba's celebrated Africanist Rogelio Martínez-Furé has reflected that there is no reason to doubt Plácido's membership in Abakuá.[67] In February 2014, when the author visited "Plácido's" former home in Matanzas city, he learned from current residents, whose family members are Abakuá lodge leaders, that Plácido's Abakuá membership is common knowledge amongst Abakuá in Matanzas. This example demonstrates that in addition to Abakuá internal information, the Abakuá manuscripts discuss other matters, such as Cuban colonial history. Literacy was therefore not a merely passive appendage or supplement of oral tradition, but had become a general-purpose technology applicable more broadly.

Cuban Manuscripts from the 1860s Onwards

With each generation, African-derived culture was consistently adapted to the Cuban context. A watershed process began in Havana from 1857-1863, when the first lodge for whites, called Okobio Mukarará ("white brothers"), was founded by Cuban-born Abakuá leader Andrés Petit. These phenotypically "white" Cubans were the scions of wealthy Cuban families; because they identified with Abakuá as a symbol of "cuban-ness" (or "being Cuban"), Petit initiated them so that they would defend the brotherhood from attacks by authorities. Present-day Abakuá leaders believe that many manuscripts were created by these initiates in order to document the knowledge of African founders, so as to use them as primers. In one example, a manuscript page from the late nineteenth century depicts a procession by a lodge in the "Okobio Mukarará" lineage. The accompanying text (Fig. 7.8) is an Abakuá phrase that begins with "Efori sisi efori nandiba," alluding to a procession to the river. In addition to the West African-styled masked dancer, drums, staffs, is the crucifix, introduced into Abakuá practice by Andrés Petit in the 1860s.

Figure 7.8
Cuban Manuscript, Late Nineteenth Century

Source: Cuban Manuscript. Photograph by Ivor L. Miller, Havana.

Abakuá practice is based upon many long passages called "treaties," that contain information about the process of Ékpè's foundation in Africa, de-

tailing how Ékpè functioned as a "united nations" for interactions between distinct ethnic communities throughout the Cross River region. All Cuban lodges belong to specific ethnic lineages; therefore each group must have knowledge of their lineage treaties to asset their legitimacy. As far as we know, the "treaties" refer exclusively to indigenous African tradition; they contain the most extensive passages of Abakuá language documenting the earliest narratives of the African founders. In Abakuá manuscripts, Biblical references begin to appear only with the presence of "white" lodges, whose members identified parallels between Spanish Catholicism and Abakuá ideas and practice. These references are separate from the "treaties" and do not effect the Abakuá narratives; they are merely applied to the interpretation of some Abakuá phrases.

Evidence of manuscripts from the Okobio Mukarará lineage emerged when they were confiscated by colonial authorities in the late 1870s-1880s. Because authorities assumed that European civilization would overwhelm that of the Africans, the white lodges were viewed as a dangerous trend. Police reports from the 1880s document the persecution of Abakuá members, largely from lodges within the Okobio Mukarará lineage.[68] After their arrest, several Abakuá leaders delivered their lodge's sacred objects and manuscripts to the authorities.[69] One such manuscript, kept in the National Archives of Cuba as a *Causa criminal* ("Criminal case" 1884), documents the internal affairs of the Ekoria Efó II lodge of Havana, founded in 1880, listing the names of members, including their fines or suspensions for transgressions, with historical notes on the lodge's lineage.

In 1881 another manuscript emerged from an unknown source, containing a history of Abakuá's foundation in Cuba, a list of lodge names with examples of their representative *nsìbìdì* "seals," an Abakuá word list and some ceremonial chants. Authored by Rodríguez (1881) and kept in the National Archives, this work appears to be the report of a colonial authority with access to Abakuá manuscripts. In 1882, Havana Police Chief Trujillo published *Los criminales de Cuba* (*The Criminals of Cuba*), with a section on Abakuá history, language and *nsìbìdì* drawings that were obviously gleaned from captured manuscripts. Following this format, in the early twentieth century Roche y Monteagudo published three editions of *La policía y sus misterios en Cuba* (*The Police and Their Mysteries in Cuba*) in 1908, 1914, 1925, with a section on Abakuá history and language that reproduced fragments of Abakuá treaties, and *nsìbìdì*- derived Abakuá signs.

From this evidence, a picture emerges of early manuscripts developing from simple word lists into larger works with longer passages used for ceremonial performance, and finally those that documented longer treaties de-

scribing the foundation of lineages in Africa. According to contemporary Abakuá leaders, in the early twentieth century further treaties were documented by lodge leaders who learned them from the remaining African-born Abakuá members. Because each Abakuá lineage has its own treaties, no single manuscript contains all the treaties. Even the word lists have variations, apparently due to Abakuá's diverse sources in Africa.

In response to police vigilance, Abakuá leaders claim that manuscripts began to be written with "tricks," codes, and half-truths, so that their contents would be indecipherable by non-initiates. They point to the non-chronological order of a manuscript, to Abakuá passages that tell a half-story, and also to the partial interpretation of key passages. The manuscripts are therefore part of a constellation of data about Abakuá history and practice that are best understood by trained leaders. Juan-Luis Martin alluded to this point in the 1940s:

> Regarding the [Abakuá] verses that have been preserved, there is sometimes a resistance [by members] to translate them, because the original verse had enigmatic allusions only understood by initiates. The meanings of these enigmas were explained in the process of a member's rising through the ranks of the secret society.[70]

Intentional codification may be true in some cases, but there are other explanations: that the early oral narratives were partially understood by the scribes, or that there were inconsistencies in the process of copying/transcription; only further study of the manuscripts can solve these riddles.

Cuban Scholarship on Abakuá Manuscripts

Scholars often assume that the lore of African-derived initiation systems, including Abakuá, is based primarily upon ongoing oral transmission, therefore subject to the creative process of each generation. Instead, Abakuá manuscripts appear to have been created since the 1860s to document inherited lore, in order to teach new generations of initiates. As African-born narrators passed away, these manuscripts only grew in importance. In relation to oral tradition then, the manuscripts were of parallel importance in the nineteenth century, while in the twentieth, they became primary as guides to the living practice. When the owners of manuscripts passed on, they would often bequeath them to title-holders of their own lineage, as is described below.

Because of this inheritance, many Abakuá leaders have their own manuscript archives, pieces of which they share with apprentices who demonstrate an ability to learn. When Abakuá apprentices copy portions of their teacher's manuscripts, the practice is that the teacher will review the copy to assure

fidelity to the original. In the 1940s in Havana, Juan-Luis Martin compared older and newer manuscripts, finding that the copies were accurate:

> We have had in our hands notebooks and vocabularies made by different Abakuá lodges, and in this material we have encountered very few differences with the more ancient books, indicating that the copy was faithfully passed through the generations, conserving in the recent version the same incoherent language of the African slave, with light modifications made by a hand guided by a more cultivated mind.[71]

Martin observed that "the more ancient books" were copied faithfully by Abakuá students in order to preserve their contents. His opinion that the language of the African founders was "incoherent" may have derived from the propensity of Abakuá leaders to codify, rather than clarify, the fundamental concepts of their initiation society. Another reason for the "incoherence" is the sheer complexity of Abakuá language and practices that were created through the confluence of multiple Cross River region languages and traditions in Havana.

Throughout the twentieth century, Cuban intellectuals have made brief references to Abakuá manuscripts. According to Deschamps,

> Since the colonial period, it has been of interest to many who have studied the diverse manifestations of the black cultures in Cuba to decipher the so-called *ñáñigo* [Abakuá] language. They have tried to identify its sources and the influence of other African languages on it. Police and sociologists have attempted on more than one occasion to interpret the Abakuá language, symbols and ceremonies. The police carried out their research through the manuscripts and documents captured from the so-called Abakuá groups or "lodges," while the sociologists have contributed with information given by some [Abakuá] members who never revealed the deeper meaning of the words.[72]

Juan-Luis Martin used Abakuá manuscripts to compare their vocabularies with languages of the Calabar region. He observed that,

> The first [Abakuá] materials were gathered by the police . . . The individuals arrested revealed little about the rites, conducting themselves like their religious counterparts in Africa. But [the police] confiscated the notebooks, the exercise books with liturgical notes, the ritual objects and the so-called "koria Abakuá" vocabularies. From the liturgical writing at least we got the symbols, with the lessons given by the Africans to the [Cuban] initiates, in disjointed translations that were complemented with what was taught during the ritual acts. All of this is undoubtedly defective, because due to the stammering Castilian translations, or in the transcriptions, the loss has been profound. The phonology has almost disappeared, and the musicians can only partially restore it. Thus, with all the errors, what careful and

> critical linguistics can do and has done, the [Abakuá phrases] collected in [police publications by] Urrutia, Rodríguez Batista y Roche Monteagudo are valuable works, and not as insignificant as one may think.[73]

Martin went on to create his own comparative vocabulary using dictionaries of African languages.

In the 1950s, Fernando Ortiz made several passing references to information contained in Abakuá manuscripts.[74] Similarly, Lydia Cabrera described how two title-holders — Saibeké and Tankéwo (both names are titles) — helped her critically analyze Abakuá manuscripts during her research:

> Saibeké, sometimes alone, or in the company of Tankéwo, revised with me the many notebook manuscripts brought by Abakuá members who wanted to help me, anonymously. They were careful to clarify their contents by refuting what they considered fundamental errors that parted from the cannons or the truth of the Abakuá tradition. These constituted what Saibeké called "nyangaliana" or "anankuéma," that is, editing, falsehoods and slangs invented by the creoles of Guanabacoa, in their desire to sell such notebooks to neophytes, who would pay them well. "They have spread many foolish ideas" . . . my wiseman told me.[75]

As Cabrera discovered, Abakuá tradition contains a complex body of data that is contested even among its leadership. Cabrera mentioned the sacred and esoteric nature of the manuscripts: "the old notebooks - *afonyipán* - that constitute the contradictory and fragmented bible of the Abakuá."[76] Cabrera uses the term "bible" to signal the Abakuá view that the words of the African founders are sacred and can transmit spiritual power. What Cabrera viewed as "contradictory and fragmented" in Abakuá manuscripts may reflect diverse narratives from a wide variety of Cross River sources.[77]

According to Cabrera the meanings of Abakuá narratives contained in manuscripts are impossible to grasp without the support of Abakuá leaders:

> Without a guide to conduct us through the agitated sea of news contained in these "bibles" that the *abanékues* pass mysteriously amongst themselves, we non-initiates will never be able to understand. It would be difficult to determine the chronological order of events. — "All is entangled in the notebooks," Saibeké conceded resignedly. . . . "The *nkámes* [chanted histories] in the Abakuá notebooks are memorized, and most often what is learned is repeated parrot-like, without understanding what is said[;] . . . yet these chants contain the logic for each movement – rite – that happened in Africa."[78]

Cabrera confirmed an Abakuá intellectual tradition whereby leaders may spend a lifetime interpreting the narratives contained in manuscripts, in order to perform them in ceremony. In the process, they become critically engaged in the history and philosophy contained in the passages.

Beginning with Andrés Petit in the 1860s, many manuscripts were written by known authors. After citing an Abakuá phrase, Cabrera wrote: "This was read in an old notebook – a venerable notebook, because it belonged to Semanat."[79] Jacinto Semanat was a nineteenth century title-holder in a Havana lodge who worked with Andrés Petit.[80] A contemporary Abakuá leader reported that "several inherited Abakuá manuscripts refer to the Semanat brothers. Jacinto Semanat and his brothers were renowned Abakuá experts who directed the Erón Ntá lodge of Guanabacoa."[81] This is further evidence of the documentation of Cuban social history Abakuá manuscripts. In 1967, Deschamps published his own Abakuá vocabulary, "compiled from the works of Fernando Ortiz, Lydia Cabrera, Israel Castellanos, Juan Luis Martín and from an old Abakuá manuscript, laboriously elaborated by an elder initiate."[82]

In 1968, the Cuban Communist Party's military magazine published a detailed statement on Abakuá manuscripts:

> The little we know of the history of the cult on the African continent was passed along verbally from one generation to another until the end of the nineteenth century, a period when some Abakuá who had learned to write began to transcribe the famous "notebooks." These are nothing more than notebooks in which are gathered the history of the association, the titles, ritual phrases, etc. They are usually written in separate paragraphs, first in "language," that is, in the African slang or dialect and, after that the translation of this paragraph into Spanish. One should not think that these notebooks are a type of Rosetta Stone, through which one could decipher the Egyptian hieroglyphics; nothing of the sort. The paragraphs in "language" are the phonetic representation of a language that lacks a written form, and to make things worse, passed along from fathers to sons whose [first] language was Spanish. Some linguists affirm that these [Abakuá] words, carried and brought through the centuries, conserve a certain affinity with dialects that are still spoken on the black continent.
>
> Knowing that history, even in more cultivated nations, is always written by men with political agendas, we have no option but to consider the notebooks with great caution, since the oral traditions are still quite vulnerable to imagination or convenience. .. . It is necessary to emphasize that, according to the same notebooks, that the kings and chiefs of the region were merchants who sold their brothers captured in multiple local wars to the Europeans.[83]

The essay reports a nineteenth-century origin to the manuscripts, noting that they document historical figures in Calabar.

The long list of published vocabularies in Cuba shows two trends: the attempts of colonial, Republican and Revolutionary authorities to understand

Abakuá texts in order to police its membership, and the attempts of Cuban intellectuals to understand the relationship of Abakuá language to its African sources, as well as Abakuá as a symbol of "cimarronaje" (the continual struggle to express an historically informed Cuban identity in alliance with rebels for independence). In 1974, Argeliers León referred to the Abakuá history as recorded in manuscripts as secondary to oral tradition:

> The histories are conserved by oral tradition, although the writings of some elder title- holders in notebooks reflect what remains of these traditions, [as well as] the enormous variants that have resulted from their orality and the fantastic causalities that each one has imagined. In essence, all the ceremonies performed by these sects imply the 'representation' of events that they believe occurred in Africa.[84]

As argued earlier, the "enormous variants" in Abakuá tradition also derive from their multiple sources in West Africa's Cross River region, where dozens of languages were spoken. The view of León, as well as that of many Cuban intellectuals, is that oral tradition is primary, therefore that the manuscripts are derivative. The evidence presented here, however, indicates that this view may have been correct for the 1860s, but by the 1970s was not, because the Abakuá language documented in manuscripts emerged as primary in comparison to orality.

Lukumí Manuscripts

In 1971, León argued for the primacy of oral tradition in his essay, "A case of written oral tradition" that examined manuscripts used in Lukumí (Santería) practice, with passing reference to those of Abakuá and Palo Monte.

> Together with the oral transmission of all this Afroide popular culture, an instrument of conserving this in written form was produced in Cuba, that doesn't supplement the original orality, but that works as a metonymic resource for the devotee, these are known as *libretas de santería* [Santería notebooks].[85]

Each full-initiate of Cuban Ocha (Santería) keeps a notebook of data related to their individual profile as determined through divination. This is quite different in form and function to the collective and historical nature of Abakuá manuscripts. Unfortunately, León did not have access to Lydia Cabrera's work demonstrating the existence of manuscripts written by Yoruba speakers who learned to write in Africa, then migrated to Cuba. This was because Cabrera published this work in Miami, from whence it reached few readers on the island; the few in Cuba who were able to read Cabrera's Miami publications rarely cited them, since she was a taboo figure for leaving the

Revolution in the early 1960s, and for including critiques of the new system in her publications.

In 1986, León made further references to manuscripts, with the suggestion that they derived from orality and were merely references, not "sacred" books:

> Notebooks [are] a generic name for the old exercise books, manuscripts, that many officiants wrote, to gather many aspects of their cultural practices, without using them as "sacred books," but as mnemonic devices for many circumstances apart from their beliefs.[86]

In the case of Lukumí tradition, this may be correct. But Abakuá manuscripts are indeed repositories of knowledge that are studied by Abakuá intellectuals during debates on their history and cultural practice.[87] Because Abakuá practice is based upon a manuscript tradition that is studied in private, and then performed publicly during lodge rites, the *illusion* of an oral tradition may be perceived by outsider observers. León described the ledgers and notebooks used by Lukumí initiates:

> [T]he Santería notebooks are written in manuscript form, preferably on the unused pages of an old book like those prescribed by the old Spanish commercial code to register accounts or to register the records of proceedings to establish laws, all of them with a rigid cloth binding, with numbered pages. Otherwise, student notebooks were used.[88]

According to Rogelio Martínez Furé,

> In the notebooks, we find hundreds of myths and fables, lists of proverbs, Yoruba- Spanish vocabularies, ritual formulas, recipes for incantations and sacred foods, tales about the Orichas [Yoruba gods], songs, divinatory systems and their secrets, names of the gods' herbs and their use in rites and in folk healing, etc. In sum, the entire knowledge of the Yoruba and their culture.[89]

Martínez Furé agrees with León that, "many manuscripts with Abakuá, Lukumí, and Kongo contents were written on the ledger (or record) books used by the Spanish merchants in early twentieth century Cuba."[90] He cautions that their longevity as claimed by initiates is uncertain:

> It was an act of intellectual heroism that the African descendants in Cuba used Spanish grammar to document their oral traditions. But the initiates will always try to legitimize the authenticity of their knowledge contained in manuscripts by saying that they are older than they actually may be. It is unlikely that many manuscripts could have survived the Wars of Independence (1868-1898). Most worrisome is the low level of education of the people who wrote these manuscripts.[91]

The views of Martínez-Furé and León are the same as the police view, that the notebooks are initially secondary sources, whereas the oral tradition is primary. It is true that the manuscript tradition has expanded in the twentieth century, but scholars in Cuba have lacked access to important information on Abakuá manuscripts, because these are reserved for Abakuá leaders exclusively. I am arguing that at some stage of development generations ago, the Abakuá manuscripts acquired a *parallel*, and now have obtained a *superior* authority to oral tradition.

Cabrera, the foremost authority on Abakuá tradition, published two books on Abakuá culture outside of Cuba and hence remain largely unknown to islanders. Based upon her fieldwork in Cuba from the 1930s through the 1950s, the first contains some 500 examples of Abakuá sacred signs, published in Madrid (1975); the second is a dictionary of Abakuá language with Spanish interpretations, with 6,300 entries filling more than 500 pages, published in Miami (1988). Cabrera may have had limited access to manuscripts, but her informants certainly referred to them while teaching her. In one entry, Cabrera supported the contents by writing, "according to a prayer in an old notebook."[92]

An important part of evaluating the history of African-derived manuscripts in Cuba would be an analysis of the books themselves: the age of the paper, ink, and the styles of handwriting. This type of analysis would only be possible with the cooperation of those initiates who hold copies.[93] But the likelihood is that early manuscripts from the 1860s are lost or turned to dust. With each generation, their contents were copied into new ledgers and notebooks, and embellished with drawings of *nsìbìdì* signs and masquerade performance, depending on the skills of the author. This type of documentation of oral and performance tradition with artistic embellishments is reminiscent of the generations of Monks in mediaeval Ireland who copied and embellished illuminated manuscripts, resulting most famously in the *Book of Kells*, a national treasure of Ireland.[94] One example is a Cuban manuscript that reproduces the cover of a manuscript originally drawn in 1877, with information about the Efí Obane lineage of Cuba; its title is "Abakuá in territory of Efí Obane, 1877" (Fig. 7.9).

Ethnographic Research in Calabar and Cuba

In the 1990s, two members of Abakuá lineages had much to say about the role of the manuscripts. In Havana, Andres Flores claimed to be the direct descendant of a Calabar migrant who was an Ékpè member. Flores was not an initiate, but for generations the males in his family were members. At the time in his eighties, Mr. Flores claimed that,

Figure 7.9
Cuban Manuscript, Redrawn from the 1877 Original

Source: Cuban Manuscript. Photograph by Ivor L. Miller, Havana.

> I've been studying the Abakuá religion since a young man. I learned from elder Abakuá who were descendants of Africans. I also had the opportunity to read some notebooks with information written by my ancestors, especially the memories of my great-grandfather and his African *okóbios* [lodge brothers] gathered by my eldest brother. This is how I learned the stories of the founders of the Abakuá and all their treaties.[95]

The experience of Flores demonstrates the mutual support of oral and manuscript traditions for learning; he had access to both because he was raised in a Cuban family of Cross River descent.

Gerardo Pasos, the Mokóngo title-holder of the Kamaroró Efó lodge of Havana, was from a family of Spanish-descent. He had inherited a large leather-bound book containing African treaties written by renowned leader Jesús "Chuchú" Capaz before the mid-twentieth century. At the time in his 70s, Mr. Pasos observed that the manuscripts are the foremost guides on any debate about cultural practice:

> According to the treaty of Eforisún [as documented in manuscripts], eleven lodges were founded in this African territory. Many Abakuá say that no lodge may found more than seven other lodges, but I think that our opinion is of no value compared to the manuscripts, which contain the stories brought by the Africans. Therefore, the limit should be eleven lodges.[96]

Pasos reported that the early manuscripts with African treaties are of primary importance over later oral traditions and the interpretations of those born in Cuba.

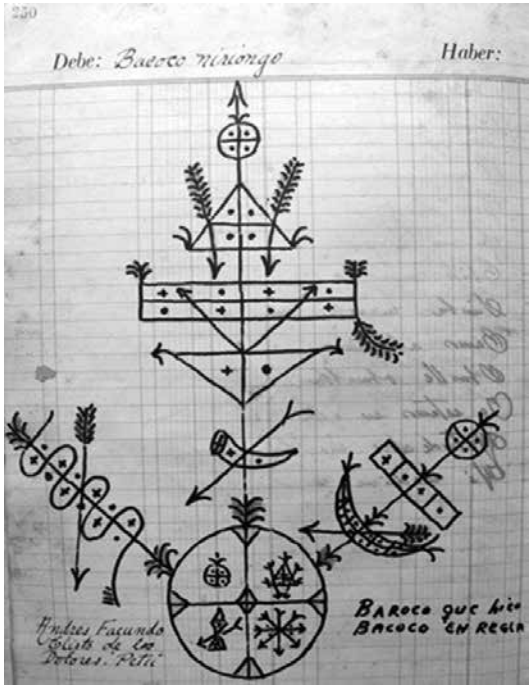
In 2004, the author traveled to Calabar. In reunions with leaders of the Ékpè "leopard" society, about one third of the Abakuá language in the author's possession was readily translated into both Efik and the "initiation dialect" used by Ékpè members. Responding to the matter-of- fact facility of Calabar chiefs to understand Cuban Abakuá language and performance, the author was invited by leaders of the Ékpè society to become an initiate, since in-depth conversations are off limits to non-initiates. When the author returned from Calabar to Cuba, contemporary Abakuá leaders demonstrated an unprecedented openness towards evaluating their inherited lore, by pointing to Abakuá narratives contained in their inherited manuscripts. This process indicates that Abakuá leaders understand their ritual language as derived from Calabar, instead of as a "creole" language invented in Cuba, and that they are eager to learn new information about Ékpè practice in Africa.

Conversations with Cuban Abakuá leaders began the process of research into the history and contents of the manuscripts themselves. One Abakuá title-holder narrated his understanding of the history of Abakuá manuscripts and their importance for the Abakuá institution. At the time 68 years old with at least forty years of experience, Isunékue (the name is a title) told me:

> What we know of the manuscripts is that starting with Andrés Petit — who in 1863 initiated the whites and began to teach them about Abakuá — the whites began to copy this information down. The manuscripts contain histories that were narrated by the Africans from Old Calabar, who arrived here as slaves and began to teach their languages and tell their stories. The information in these manuscripts was used to organize the initiation rituals of the Abakuá institution.[97]

Information about Andrés Petit, the Isué title-holder of the Bakoko Efó lodge of Havana is documented in manuscripts, for example a ceremonial sign used by the Bakóko lodge in the second half of the nineteenth century, with the following text translated from Spanish: "Bakóko Niriongo. Andres Facundo Cristo de los Dolores Petit. Baroko made by Bakóko in Regla." (Fig. 7.10).

Figure 7.10
Cuban Manuscript, Redrawn from the Original



Source: Cuban Manuscript. Photograph by Ivor L. Miller, Havana.

Isunékue described how the cultural knowledge of Africans formed the basis of the Cuban Abakuá ritual language, which is used to interpret the treaties (mythic-historical narratives) that contain the history of Ékpè in Africa. Isunékue continues by describing two renowned leaders of the early twentieth century who, although scions of Spanish and Chinese families, became acculturated as "Carabalí."

> 'Cuco' Sotonavarro (1881-1978) the Ekuenyón title-holder of the Ebión Efó lodge, was an eminence; he was from an aristocratic Spanish-derived family with noble titles. 'Cúco' learned from the Africans and wrote this information in books that are now in my possession. 'Cúco' was initiated by 'El Chino' Hermenegildo around 1901.
>
> Hermenegildo Pérez 'El Chino' (1860s-1947), the Isué of Ebión Efó, was a Chinese descendant who learned with the Africans in the former *barracones* [the slave quarters] of Havana. He became an eminent Abakuá leader who created lodges in the Marianao region outside Havana city. I have manuscripts written by him. 'El Chino' composed this chant in homage to

> Efik Ebúton, the first lodge in Cuba that represents the birth of Abakuá in Cuba: 'O-Efik Efión, Efik Ebutón, Efik Ebutón! O-Efik Efión, Efik Ebutón, Anamerutón!'[98]

The story of these two leaders describes how initiates have used inherited knowledge to compose new chants. This narrative reports that members of the Mukarará "white" lineage contributed to the documentation of the knowledge of Africans in manuscripts. But there were other sources of information, as Isunékue reports:

> After Andrés Petit came Manuel 'Platanal', an African descendant from Matanzas city; he was the first Iyámba of the Efí Irondó lodge [founded 1917]. Manuel taught Celesinto Gaitán [an African descendant], the Isunékue of Efí Etéte [founded 1913] and Jesús Capaz 'Chuchu' [a Spanish descendant], the first Iyámba of Nyegueyé [founded in 1910]. 'Chuchu' began to copy all the Abakuá manuscripts he could find. Nevertheless, there were other manuscripts from other people like 'Pico-pico', the founder of the Itá Amana Enyuáo lodge [founded in 1940], like 'Pinta Copa' the Mokóngo of Efori Nandibá Mosóngo [founded 1924], and like Félix 'Dulce Coco' — the Iyámba of Ápapa Efó of Matanzas [founded in 1963] — who left us important manuscripts with information from the Africans.[99] After studying all the manuscripts, Abakuá leaders made vocabularies, one for Abanékues (members) and another for the title-holders, and they constructed the process of consecrations. Unfortunately many old Abakuá manuscripts were lost, because some elders burnt them before dying. But many others were saved and still exist in Cuba, but they are held by only a few people.[100]

Isunékue describes the process of manuscript creation through the first half of the twentieth century, indicating the diversity of their contents, as well as their primacy compared to contemporary orality.

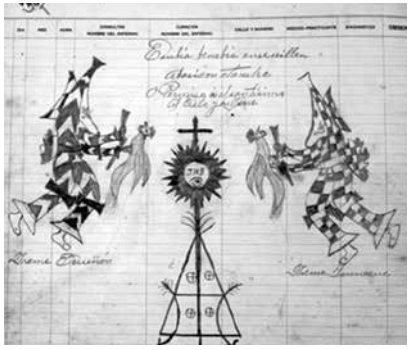
Another manuscript with over 100 pages emerged through Frank Cabrera "Obeché," the Cuban representative of Ilé Tuntun, an organization that promotes African civilization in Latin America. Cabrera reported that the manuscript had been confiscated by the police before the Revolutionary period, and that he had received it from a family member. After evaluating its contents, Isunékue reported that:

> This manuscript appears to be authentic. The book itself is a hospital ledger from the early twentieth century. Its contents suggest that it was written around 1905. There is no named author; a man named Julio signed one page, but using a different style of writing than appears at the beginning of the page. The manuscript has some poorly written words, indicating the low educational level of the writer. Some pages have been torn out of the book; it appears that when the manuscript owner was arrested, he tore

> them out before the police could see them. I deduce that this manuscript was written in Havana by members of the lineage that includes the lodges Eforisun, founded in 1840, Efori Komó, also founded in 1840, and Ita Amana Nyuáo. It contains many good passages about the Isué title that come from "El Chino" Hermenegildo Pérez, and from Tomas D'espaine (i.e., "De España"), the Isué of Kamaroró Efó. There's also a very good version of the treaty of Eforisún in Africa. There are sacred signatures used in Matanzas, and others that are used in Havana; some of these are from the colonial period. Several of these signatures appear in Lydia Cabrera's books *Anaforuana* and *La sociedad secreta Abakuá*, confirming that the majority of information given to Cabrera was correct.[101]

Isunékue's evaluation indicates a continual process of manuscript creation. One of the pages of this manuscript (Figure 7.11) documents two masked dancers called "Ireme Ekuenyón" and "Ireme Isunékue." It records Abakuá language related to the Isué title: "Embia benabia enseniyen, Abasi kon etambre," interpreted as "Asking for the blessing of the most sacred, of the sky and of Isué." In the center is drawn the *firma* of Isué, with a Catholic Santísimo "Monstrance" emerging from its summit. This is a reference to the legacy of Isué title-holder Andrés Petit, who in the 1860s in Havana initiated the first white lodge members. In order to teach them the meaning of the Carabalí symbols, he identified clever parallels between Abakuá symbols and those of the Church. Here, Isué became the "bishop," while the Eribó drum that represents the body of the female founder Sikán became the "Monstrance." Because Isué works with the Eribó drum, Isué's *firma* represents the Eribó drum. The two Íreme "masquerade dancers" guard the Eribó drum, as they would in a ceremonial procession of a lodge.

Figure 7.11
Cuban Manuscript, Early Twentieth Century



Source: Cuban Manuscript. Photograph by Ivor L. Miller, Havana.

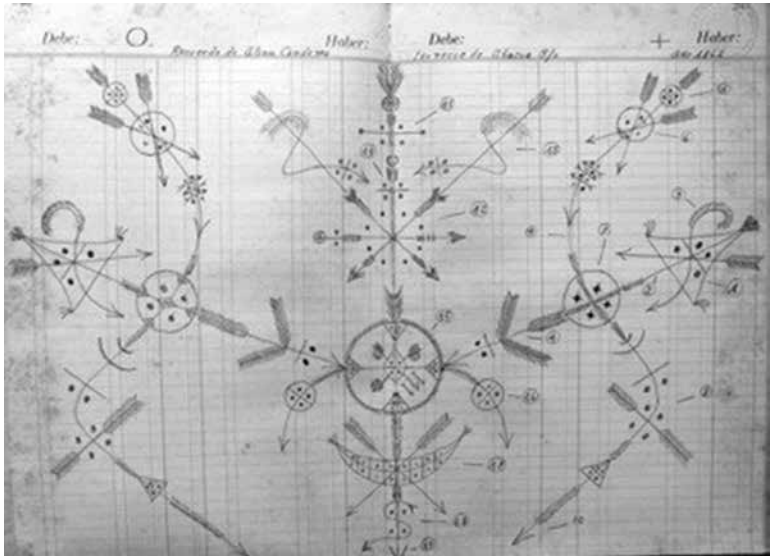
Another Abakuá leader in Havana, at the time 84 years old, reported how he acquired a library of manuscripts over the years:

> I began to study Abakuá in 1942 and to date have studied for 71 years. I have inherited 36 notebooks and 11 manuscripts. I received my first Abakuá notebook in 1942 from Don Vicente Domínguez, the Iyámba of the Uriabón lodge. Vicente had received it from Antonio "Kandemo," the Isunékue of Abakuá Efó [founded 1875]. Vicente gave me a total of five notebooks; two of them written in 1883 by members of the Abakuá Efo and Nyegueyé Efó lodges. [All but Uriabón are in the Mukarará "white" lineage]. In 1944, Gustavo Leal, the Isunékue of Abakuá Efo, gave me three notebooks, one from Quirino Valdés, the Isué of Abakuá Efó, and another from Nicolás Fuentes, the Iyámba of Otan Efo, and another from Molina, the Mosóngo of Nchenebión. [All are from the Mukarará "white" lineage]. In 1950, "Cuco" Sotonavarro gave me five notebooks; two written by the first two Iyámbas of the Akanarán [Mukarará] Efó lodge in the 1860s and 1882. "Garabito," the last remaining member of Ekoria Efó Taibá, gave me two notebooks, one from Eduardo Cardevilla, the Iyámba of Ekoria Efó First; the other from Cristóbal Nobo, the first Iyámba of Ekoria Efo Taibá, from 1887. In 1950, Reinaldo Ramírez, the Isué of Munyóngo Efo [founded in 1930], José Capaz "Chuchu," and Mario Vinajera gave me manuscripts from Manuel "Platanal," from Semanat, from Don Diego Nyanga Ípo, the Isué of Uriabón [in the nineteenth century], and from Andrés Petit, the Isue of Bakokó. In 1951, I received manuscripts that belonged to Andrés Petit, the Isué of Bakoko Efó.[102]

This elder confirms the existence of manuscripts from the 1860s onwards. These were inherited because as a young initiate, he behaved properly towards his elders, while displaying a great talent for learning as well as passion for the traditions. Many of these books were created by renown Abakuá leaders: Andrés Petit created the first lodge of "white" men [1863]; Quirino Valdés (1859-1937) was a Mambí warrior for independence; José Capaz "Chuchu" was a member of the Regla Town Council in the early twentieth century, as well as a boss on the wharves who gathered a lot of information about Abakuá from the descendants of Africans. These manuscripts emerged from a variety of sources and lineages, both Efí and Efó, from historically black as well as white lodges.

One of the manuscript pages reproduces *nsìbìdì* "signs" originally drawn in 1862 (Figure 7.12) Translated from Spanish, its caption reads: "Memory of Antonio Kandemo, Isunékue of Abakuá Efó lodge, 1862." Note that many of the symbols are numbered, because their meanings are explained on another manuscript page.

Figure 7.12
Cuban Manuscript, Redrawn from the 1862 Original



Source: Cuban Manuscript. Photograph by Ivor L. Miller, Havana.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of multiple literacy in the Calabar region, including the indigenous *nsìbìdì* scripts, bears directly upon the Cuban Abakuá practice of drawing sacred signs, as well as masked dance performance with symbolic gestures. The earliest extant document with an Abakuá sign was created in 1839. Circumstantial evidence presents the possibility that the alphabetic English of Efik merchants from the 1750s onwards was a factor in the Abakuá practice of manuscript writing, which may have been influenced by literate free black artisans in Havana in the early 1800s, and certainly developed from the 1860s onwards as primers for a lodge of phenotypically white initiates. Cuban manuscripts contain information about groups of Calabar chiefs (Ápapa Efí, Ápapa Efó) who arrived to Havana and guided the foundation of Abakuá. They also refer to literate Efik chiefs of Calabar, as well as the use of spoken English in Calabar.

Because colonial authorities persecuted Abakuá since the early 1800s, many documents have been lost. Nevertheless, subsequent generations of Abakuá leaders have documented key narratives in the Abakuá language, as well as aspects of Cuban social history pertaining to Abakuá members. The strong "collective consciousness" of Abakuá leaders has done much to

safeguard their inherited manuscripts from non-members.

Throughout the twentieth century, Cuban intellectuals have referred to Abakuá manuscripts, particularly their vocabulary lists. As non-members of the practice, they did not have access to the lengthy manuscripts with detailed passages reserved exclusively for the highest levels of Abakuá hierarchy; misunderstandings of African-derived literacy are therefore to be expected in the Cuban literature. Cuban intellectuals are aware of written Abakuá phrases in the 1880s in police publications. But contemporary Abakuá leaders have brought forth evidence of existing manuscripts written by educated Cuban-born Abakuá leaders from the 1860s onwards.

Even if some of their contents have been creatively adapted to the Cuban context, these Cuban documents are rare sources for gleaning "insiders" views into the cultural history of the Cross River region of West Africa, as well as the transmission of the cultural manners of this region into nineteenth century Cuba. The likelihood of allowing scholars to examine these texts remains slim, unless meaningful negotiations are held between contemporary Ékpè leaders from West Africa and Abakuá leaders from Cuba, who would be among the leading participants in the process of their interpretation for educational purposes.

Notes

1 For help during research, thanks to the following: Zana I. Akpagu (Vice Chancellor of the University of Calabar), Peter F. Appio, Isabela Aranzadi, Engineer B.E. Bassey, Frank Cabrera- Suarez "Obeché," Matt Childs, James Epoke, Patricia González, "Prince" Ijekpa Urum Ijekpa, "Ndabo" Etim Ika, David Imbua, Christopher Krantz, A.J.H. Latham, Paul Lovejoy, Victor Manfredi, David Northrup, Pandrillus Foundation, Okon E. Uya, and to several Abakuá leaders who wish to remain anonymous.

2 Lydia Cabrera, *La Lengua Sagrada de los Ñañigos* (Miami: Colección del Chicherekú en el exilio, 1988), 67. In Havana, an Abakuá leader interpreted: "This is a phrase from the colonial days: Abesúnkányo, 'transmission'. Nyúge, 'fee'; Npánipé, 'paper'; Makaró ngómo, 'to write'." Anonymous 1 (personal communication, Havana, 2013).

3 There exists a large body of literature on *nsìbìdì*, yet the topic remains to be studied thoroughly, because *nsìbìdì* has many regional variants, and Ékpè *nsìbìdì*, the most developed and complex, is known fully only by a few gifted high level chiefs. The literature on *nsìbìdì* seems to have started with a reference in Hugh Goldie, *A Dictionary of the Efik Language, in Two Parts. 1. Efik and English. 2. English and Efik* (Westmead, England: Gregg Press, [1874] 1964), 225). See also Ute Röschenthaler, *Purchasing Culture: The Dissemination of Associations in the Cross River Region of Cameroon and Nigeria* (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2011), 158, 328; Paul Lovejoy, "Transformation of the Ékpè Masquerade in the African Diaspora," in Christopher Innes, A. Rutherford, and Brigette Bogar, eds., *Carnival: Theory and Practice* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 2012), 137.

4 Information on Ékpè and Abakuá body-masks as signs is found in Bassey Efiong Bassey, *Ekpe Efik: A Theosophical Perspective* (Victoria, B.C.: Trafford Publishing,

2001), 26-27; Bárbara Balbuena-Gutiérrez, *El Íreme Abakuá* (Havana: Editorial Pueblo y Educación, 1996); Ivor L. Miller, *Voice of the Leopard: African Secret Societies and Cuba* (University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 196-97; and Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African & Afro- American Art & Philosophy* (New York: Vintage, 1983), 260-62.

5 The *nsìbìdì* signs of the Cross River region were among the sources for ritual signs used in Cuba, Haiti, Brazil, and Trinidad. For examples, see Fernando Ortiz, "La 'tragedia' de los ñáñigos," *Cuadernos Americanos* 52:4 (1950), 85; Alfred Métraux, *Voodoo in Haiti* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959); Grey Gundaker, *Signs of Diaspora, Diaspora of Signs: Literacies, Creolization, and Vernacular Practice in African America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Amanda Carlson, "Nsibìdì: Old and New Scripts," *Inscribing Meaning: Writing and Graphic Systems in African Art* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2007); Bárbaro Martínez-Ruíz, *Kongo Graphic Writing Systems and Other Narratives of the Sign* (New Orleans: Temple University Press, 2013).

6 Rafael Roche y Monteagudo, *La policía y sus misterios en Cuba* (3rd ed. Havana: La Moderna Poesía, 1925), 91. See also Cabrera, *La Lengua Sagrada,* 441.

7 For examples, Ortiz documented a Carabalí Cabildo called Ingré, interpreting this term as a Spanish mispronunciation of "English"; Fernando Ortiz, *Glosario de afronegrismos* (Havana: El siglo 20, 1924), 253. Deschamps referred to the Carabalí cabildo called Ultán, likely a Spanish mispronunciation of "Old Town," the English name for the Òbútòng community of Calabar. Pedro Deschamps-Chappeaux, "Margarito Blanco 'Osongo de Ultán'," *Boletin del Instituto de Historia y del Archivo Nacional* 65 (1964).

8 Until more evidence appears, I am ruling out the influence of literate Yorùbá-speakers from Lagos and Freetown, who were certainly present in Havana and Matanzas in the 1800s. This is in part because the trans-Atlantic traffic of Yorùbá-speakers peaked later than that of arrivals from the Cross River (Carabalí), and the literate Yorùbás were Christianized, an influence not found in foundational Abakuá narratives.

9 See Ivor L. Miller, "Cuban Abakuá Chants: Examining New Evidence for the African Diaspora," *African Studies Review* 48:1 (2005), 23-58; Miller, *Voice*, 201-13. Lydia Cabrera's *La Lengua Sagrada,* a major source of Abakuá language, is currently being examined by linguists specializing in Cross River languages.

10 "The creation of the London-based Company of Royal Adventurers (1660) and its successor the Royal African Company (1672) encouraged British commercial endeavors in the Lower Cross River. Surviving company papers document that at least sixty-eight English slavers traded at 'Old Calabar' from 1662 to the outbreak of King William's War in 1689. . . . We assume not only that some of these captains steered up into the Calabar River but also that daily contact between British mariners and African traders stimulated English language acquisition among some Efik and their neighbors." Stephen Behrendt, A.J.H. Latham, David Northrup, *The Diary of Antera Duke, an Eighteenth-Century African Slave Trader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 49.

11 When speaking with, "The chief King . . . called Acqua [Akwa]," Snelgrave recalled, "I bid the Linguist tell him." William Snelgrave, *A New Account of Some Parts of Guinea and the Slave-Trade* (London: Frank Cass, [1734] 1971), Introduction.

12 T. Aubry, *The Sea Surgeon, Or the Guinea Man's Vade Mecum. In which is Laid Down, the Method of Curing Such Diseases as Usually Happen Abroad, Especially on the Coast of Guinea; with the Best Way of Treating Negroes, Both in Health and Sickness. Written for the Use of Young Sea Surgeons* (London: John Clarke, 1729), 113-14.

13 "Intricate and long-standing personal relationships between African and European families, forged through commerce and language communication, distinguish Calabar from other communities in Atlantic Africa" (Behrendt et al., *Diary*, 79).

14 Paul E. Lovejoy and David Richardson, "Trust, Pawnship, and Atlantic History: The Institutional Foundations of the Old Calabar Slave Trade," *American Historical Review* 104:2 (1999), 341.

15 See Behrendt et al., *Diary*, 123.

16 "Antera Duke — Ntiero Edem Efiom to use his full Efik name — probably was born in the 1730s" and died before 1809; see Behrendt et al., *Diary*, 2. According to Engineer Bassey Efiong Bassey, "Ntiero is not a royal Efik name; it could be a nick-name meaning 'let me be there.' Edem Efiom was supposed to be elder brother to Okoho Efiom, the mother of the twins who founded Àtákpà long ago. Today Edem Efiom is a common name" (personal communication, 2014). Also see "The Ntiero House of Etim Efiom" and "Etim Efiom House Duke Town, Calabar," in Nath Mayo Adediran, "Old Calabar in Retrospect" (Exhibition Catalogue, Calabar: National Museum, Old Residency, Calabar, 1996), 23-24. There exist other manuscripts written in the nineteenth century by Efik family leaders that are kept by their descendants (O. E. Uya, personal communication; and Engineer Bassey Efiong Bassey, personal communication).

17 According to Behrendt et al. (*Diary*, 3), "the diary of Antera Duke is the most extensive surviving African text from precolonial Calabar. It contains 10,510 words and reveals that Antera Duke had a working vocabulary of 400 English words." The original text was sent to Edinburgh in the 1850s-60s, where a missionary copied portions of it by hand in the early twentieth century. The original text disappeared in the 1940s and appears to be lost (Behrendt et al., *Diary*, 4-5).

18 Behrendt et al., *Diary*, 2.

19 The first entry, dated January 18, 1785, discusses a dispute between Efik traders Egbo Young Ofiong and Little Otto, which was resolved by the Ékpè society; see Behrendt et al., *Diary*, 3, 27. Antera Duke mentions Ékpè throughout the diary.

20 According to Paul E. Lovejoy and David Richardson, "Letters of the Old Calabar Slave Trade, 1760-1789," in Vincent Caretta and P. Gould, eds., *Genius in Bondage: Literature from the Early Black Atlantic* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 114 n. 32, "there appears to have been a school at Old Calabar at least two decades before the first missionaries settled."

21 Captain John Adams, *Remarks on the Country extending from Cape Palmas to the River Congo; including Observations on the Manners and Customs of the Inhabitants* (London, 1823), 143-44.

22 William Hutton, *A Voyage to Africa: including a Narrative of an Embassy to One of the Interior Kingdoms, in the Year 1820 with Remarks on the Course and Termination of the Niger, and other Principal Rivers in that Country* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1821), 398. In 1828, Holman reported: "the people, who are very desirous of receiving every kind of instruction, more particularly a knowledge of writing, which, at present, the headmen teach each other in an imperfect manner." See James Holman, *Travels in Madeira, Sierra Leone, Teneriffe, St. Jago, Cape Coast, Fernando Po, Prince Island, etc.* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries, [1840] 1972), 399.

23 "In the 1780s, according to Mathews, Penny and Norris, 'the Education of these Children here [Liverpool] is confined to Reading, Writing, and a little Arithmetic, with as much of Religion as Persons of their Age and situation usually receive from their School Masters'. Other evidence suggests that not much, if any, of the religion was transferred. Christianity had no presence at Old Calabar before the 1840s," as cited in

Lovejoy and Richardson, "Letters," 96.

24 Ibid., 98.

25 Ibid.

26 Lovejoy, "Transformation," 142.27 Testimony of James Morley, May 13, 1790. Sheila Lambert, Editor, *House of Commons Sessional Papers of the Eighteenth Century* (Vols. 72-73. George III. Minutes of Evidence on the Slave Trade 1790. Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 1975), 156, vol. 73. Ephraim had accused his wife of adultery. Ephraim was a common Anglophone version of the Efik name Efiom, e.g., "Efiom Edem ("Great Duke Ephraim")" who died in 1834 (Behrendt et al., *Diary*, 18).

28 J. Lorand Matory, "The English Professors of Brazil: on the Diasporic Roots of the Yorùbá Nation," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41:1 (1999), 72-103; J. Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton University Press, 2005).

29 Lydia Cabrera, *Yemayá y Ochún: Kariocha, Iyalorichas y Olorichas* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, [1974]1996), 179.

30 Lydia Cabrera, *Anagó; vocabulario lucumí (el yoruba que se habla en Cuba)* (Havana: Ediciones C.R., 1957), 16-17. Cabrera's Lukumí Vocabulary has nearly ten references to Lukumí manuscripts, for example, "Akedé: chief or 'functionary' of a community, according to an old notebook" (Cabrera, *Anagó*, 43).

31 During this period, from 1762-1838, Aimes estimated that 400,000 enslaved Africans entered Cuba. Hubert H.S. Aimes, *A History of Slavery in Cuba, 1511-1868* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1907). In 1841 in Cuba, "the official census reported a permanent population of 1,007, 624 persons, of whom 418, 291 were white, 152,838 were free persons of color, and 436,495 were slaves." Franklin Knight, "The Transformation of Cuban Agriculture, 1763-1838," in Hilary Beckles and Verene Shepherd, eds., *Caribbean Slave Society and Economy* (New York: The New Press, 1999), 77-78.

32 The term *cabildo* refers specifically to a council or what in Nigeria is still called a "meeting." 33 Levi Marrero, *Cuba: Economia y sociedad* (Madrid: Editorial Playor, 1972), Vol. 8, 159-160. Also see John K. Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd ed., 1998).

34 From the 1750 to 1820s, the number of *cabildos* grew to at least 50. Matt Childs, "'The Defects of being a Black Creole': the Degrees of African Identity in the Cuban Cabildos de Nación, 1790-1820," in Jane Landers and Barry Robinson, eds., *Slaves, Subjects, and Subversives: Blacks in Colonial Latin America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 215-16.

35 Aimes, *History*, 171; Knight, "Transformation," 78.

36 Holman, *Travels,* 389.

37 Matt Childs (*The 1812 Aponte Rebellion in Cuba* [College Park, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006], 216) has described the tendency of Africans in Havana to group in *cabildos* under wide umbrella terms (Yorùbá and Bambara), but when enough members of a single group arrived, the *cabildo* split into two or more groups based on more specific ethnic identities.

38 Ortiz, *Glosario,* 253.

39 Deschamps, "Margarito." For the Òbútòng "massacre," see Lambert, *House of Commons,* Vol. 72, 515, 517, 528, 633; and Vol. 73, 385.

40 Randy J. Sparks, "Two Princes of Calabar: An Atlantic Odyssey from Slavery to Freedom," *William and Mary Quarterly* 59:3 (2002), 568-69; Knight, "Transformation," 71.

41 Atakua or Natakua (Cabrera, *La Lengua Sagrada,* 384). Also, "Atakuá." Lydia Cabrera,

La Sociedad Secreta Abakuá: narrada por viejos adeptos (Havana: Ediciones C. R., 1958), 132, 133.

42 Moko (Cabrera, *La Lengua Sagrada,* 347). The Obolo (Adoni) people use the term Moko to refer to the Ìbìbìòs. N.C. Ejituwu, "The Lower Cross Region: Andoni Migrations and Settlement," in M. Abasiattai, ed., *A History of the Cross River Region of Nigeria* (Enugu: Harris Publishers, 1990), 36-37.

43 Mukarará; see Cabrera, *La Lengua Sagrada,* 364.

44 Ntiero; see ibid., 415.

45 Ubioko; see ibid., 503.

46 Ibid., 67. The term "afenyipa" means paper. Other variants are "afenipá" (p. 28); efunyipán (p. 162); nfunyipán (p. 195); nfunyi (p. 393); perupé (p. 472). In Abakuá, Fonipán is "notebook, book" (Cabrera *La Lengua Sagrada,* 227). There seems to be no relation with the Efik term *bábrù* "paper," deriving from the English term; or *öfön bábrù*, "white paper" (Goldie, *Dictionary,* 20, 249).

47 Cabrera, *La Lengua Sagrada,* 338.

48 For an example of this shirt-style from a Kalabari community, see Catherine Daly, Joanne B. Eicher and Tonye V. Erekosima, "Male and Female Artistry in Kalabari Dress," *African Arts* 19:3 (1986), 51.

49 The EEPA description of this photograph is: "Portrait of African man." In Calabar, the individual was identified as "Efiom Edem Tete, of the Etim Efiom House of Àtákpà, which produced the former Obong of Calabar, E.E.E. Adam V" (H.R.H. Etubom Archibong Edem Ironbar, personal communication, 2015)

50 José Luciano Franco, "La conspiración de Aponte, 1812," in J.L. Franco, ed., *Ensayos historicos* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1974), 179. "Under a secret oath - whose reach and gravity only the Abakuá knew - the brigadier Narciso [of Santo Domingo] agreed with Aponte to lead the rebels once they had weapons in their power" (Franco "Conspiración," 154).

51 See Stephan Palmié, *Wizards and Scientists: Explorations in Afro-Cuban Modernity and Tradition* (Durham: N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002); Jorge Pavez O., "El *Libro de Pinturas*, de José Antonio Aponte," *Anales de Desclasificación* (Vol. 1: La derrota del área cultural n° 2, 2006); Childs, *Aponte Rebellion;* Matt Childs, "The 1812 Aponte Rebellion," in L. Dubois and J. Scott, eds., *Origins of the Black Atlantic* (New York: Routledge, 2010); "Expediente sobre José Antonio Aponte y el sentido de las pinturas que se hayan en el Libro que se le aprehendió en su casa. 1812," *Anales de Desclasificación* (Vol. 1: La derrota del área cultural n° 2, 2006). Part of the scholarly debate centers on the fact that Franco used data from oral tradition among the descendants of Africans in Havana, including Abakuá members, to understand the conspiracy. Since these data are not included in the archives used by other scholars, they are doubted by contemporary professional historians.

52 The "free person of color Juan Bautista Lisundia . . . extended his mastery of literacy to the illiterate by providing licenses for slaves and free people of color to travel between Havana and the countryside" (Childs, *Aponte Rebellion,* 62). "The free mulatto Estanislao Aguilar . . . as a literate artisan . . . Estanislao Aguilar regularly forged passes for himself and others to facilitate travel between Havana and the countryside" (Childs, *Aponte Rebellion,* 120). In 1835, a statement by Cuba's Captain General Tacón published in a Havana newspaper confirmed that many fugitive slaves were using false papers. Pedro Deschamps-Chappeaux, "Cimarrones urbanos," *Revista de la Biblioteca Nacional "José Martí* (Año 60. 3ra. época-vol. XI, número 2, 1969), 147.

53 "The nation Karabali Osso"; "the 'cabildo' Karabali Umugini"; "the king of the Karab-

ali Induri nation" (Childs, *Aponte Rebellion*, 109, 116, 117).

54 In this case, "Literacy here is determined by whether the deponent could sign his or her own testimony" (Childs, *Aponte Rebellion*, 206). Some on the list, like Aponte, were of course highly literate.

55 The papers, written in Spanish and signed with an Abakuá signature, were written by Margarito Blanco, a Cuban-born free black of Havana, who worked as a cook and a dockworker. Blanco was the "Ocongo of Ultán"; Mokóngo is an Abakuá title, while Ultán was an African *cabildo* (Deschamps, "Margarito," 101).

56 David H. Brown, *The Light Inside: Abakuá Society Arts and Cuban Cultural History* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2003), 255, note 9.

57 Deschamps, "Margarito," 106.

58 Among her variants of this term, Cabrera, *La Lengua Sagrada,* wrote: "Urua Apapa" (p. 214); "small towns like . . . Uruana, . . . in Obane Efik territory" (p. 247); "Urua ápapa;" "Uruana. Name of a Carabalí village;" "Uruápaoa" (p. 517). The author has selected the Cross River community of Úrúán as the likely source of these Cuban terms precisely because of the historic importance of Úrúán to Efik migration. There of course are other possibilities.

59 E.J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: Europe, 1789-1848* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962), 169.

60 A. del Valle, *Historia documentada de la consiración de la Gran Legión del Águila Negra* (publiciones de la Academia de la Historia, Havana, 1930), cited in Pedro Deschamps- Chappeaux, *Los batallones de pardos y morenos libres: apuntes para la historia de Cuba colonial* (Havana: Instituto cubano del libro, 1976), 82.

61 Philip S. Foner, *A History of Cuba and its Relations with the United States*. Vol. 1, 1492-1845. New York: International Publishers, 1962), 119; Rine Leal, *La selva oscura: De los bufos a la neocolonia (Historia del teatro cubano de 1868 a 1902)* (Havana: Editorial Arte y Literatura, 1982), Vol. 2, 62; Antonio Benítez-Rojo, "The Nineteenth-Century Spanish American Novel," in R. González Echevarría and E. Pupo-Walker, eds., *The Cambridge History of Latin American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Vol. 1, 434, 440-46.

62 Including Cirilo Villaverde (1812-1894); Juan Clemente Zenea (1832-1871); José Martí (1853-1895), and so on.

63 James J. O'Kelly, *The Mambi-Land or Adventures of a Herald Correspondent in Cuba* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1874), 45.

64 Pedro Deschamps-Chappeaux, *El Negro en el periodísmo en el siglo XIX: Ensayo bibliográfico* (Havana: Ediciones Revolución, 1963), 50, 103; Michele Reid-Vazquez, *The Year of the Lash: Free People of Color in Cuba and the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 169.

65 Pedro Deschamps-Chappeaux, "Agustín Ceballos, capataz de muelle," in P. Deschamps Chappeaux and J. Pérez de la Riva, eds., *Contribución a la Historia de la gente sin historia* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1974), 18-19. Among them were "Antonio José Oñoro, free black, of the nation Carabalí Isuama," and "José María Fuertes, free black, of the nation Carabalí Isuama, first sargeant of the battalion."

66 Knight, "Transformation," 77-78; Deschamps, *Batallones,* 90; Reid-Vazquez, *Year*, 117.

67 Rogelio Martínez-Furé (personal communication, 2015).

68 Roche, *Policía,* 51-59. See also Isabela de Aranzadi, "El legado cubano en África. Ñáñigos deportados a Fernando Poo. Memoria viva y archivo escrito." *Afro-Hispanic Review* (V. 31, n. 1, Spring 2012), 29-60. The lodges named Akanarán Efó, Abakuá Efó,

Ebión Efó, Ekoria Efó, Echenebión Efó, and Makaró Efó were involved; all are from the Okobio Mukarará lineage.

69 "Atributos requisados por Rodríguez Batista," *La vanguardia*, 6 febrero 1889. Thanks to Isabel Aranzadi.

70 Juan-Luis Martin, *Papeles Cubanos*. *Mutiaroco: Sanga Recobebá,* Vol. 6: "Los elementos esotéricos del ñañiguismo;" vol. 7: "Los secretos esotéricos del ñañiguismo" (Havana: Editorial Atalaya, 1945), 19.

71 Martin, *Papeles,* v. 7, 9-10.

72 Pedro Deschamps-Chappeaux, "El Lenguaje Abakuá," *Etnología y folklore* (Havana: Academia de Ciencias de Cuba, 1967), Vol. 4, 39.

73 Martin, *Papeles,* Vol. 7, 9-10. Martin mentions "Urrutia, Rodríguez Batista y Roche Monteagudo." Don Carlos Urrutia y Blanco was a police inspector who worked with Trujillo in the late 1870s, resulting in many arrests of Abakuá; Trujillo's (1882) publication contained many Abakuá phrases and words. Rodríguez Batista was the Civil Governor of Cuba in the 1880s who sent many Abakuá into exile in Fernando Po, and who also sent Abakuá body-masks and other ritual objects to a museum in Madrid. The author Roche y Monteagudo (1925) drew from Rodríguez Batista's archives to create his lists of Abakuá phrases. D. José Trujillo y Monagas, *Los criminales de Cuba y D. José Trujillo: narración de los servicios prestados en el cuerpo de policía de La Habana* (Barcelona: Establecimiento Tipográfico de Fidel Giro, 1882).

74 For example, Ortiz wrote: "We have been informed, based upon an old Abakuá 'notebook', that the three 'enkómo' are also named: First 'enkómo ibá', second 'enkómo baibá', and third 'enkómo eróibá'. These terms seem to have meaning as numbers. In Efik 'ibá' is 'two'. 'Taibá' could be 'two beats'. But amongst Abakuá these are not common terms for the 'drums'." Fernando Ortiz, *Los instrumentos de la música afrocubana* (Havana: Cárdenas y Cía, 1954), Vol. 4, 210. Ortiz wrote: "In one of these 'notebooks' in which are collected Abakuá traditions, I read this phrase in Castellano: 'Eribó or bongó'; they are the same thing, but they do not eat the same food," i.e., both are sacred objects, but they have distinct sacrificial foods; see Ortiz, *Instrumentos,* vol. 4, 50. Ortiz also wrote that "In another Abakuá 'notebook' I read that in Africa the Ekue only 'resounded with a palm reed' (Mora katia embarra jembe); but I do not have another reference;" Ortiz, *Los instrumentos de la música afrocubana* (Havana: Cárdenas y Cía, 1955), Vol. 5, 242.

75 Cabrera, *Sociedad*, 24-25.

76 Ibid, 56 fn 1.

77 Cabrera repeats her observation of camouflaged and non-linear writing in Abakuá manuscripts: "This great event in Abakuá history . . . fills a considerable space in the oral literature that the creole Abanékues have transcribed in their Fonyipán, notebooks, in fragmentary and unconnected form, and in the secret language that makes their interpretations exasperating" (Cabrera, *Sociedad*, 137).

78 Cabrera, *Sociedad*, 137 note.

79 Cabrera, *Sociedad*, 111.

80 There is a reference to Semanat in Cabrera, *La Lengua Sagrada,* 214.

81 Anonymous Abakuá leader (Havana 2014 personal communication).

82 Deschamps, "Lenguaje," 40. Cuban government authority Isreal Castellanos published an Abakuá vocabulary based upon the police reports of Trujillo, *Criminales de Cuba* (1882), Roche, *Policia* (1925) and newspaper reports of the period. Israel Castellanos, "La Jerga de los Nanigos," *Revista de Téchnica Policial y Penitenciaria* 4:2/3

(1936), 205-25; Israel Castellanos, *Medicina Legal y Criminologia Afrocubana* (Havana, 1937), 132-146.

83 "La sociedad secreta Abakuá," *El Militante Comunista* 2:2 (1968), 38.

84 Argeliers León, *Del canto y el tiempo* (Havana: Editorial Letras cubanas, 2nd ed., 1984), 90-91. Emphasis in original.

85 Argeliers León, "Un caso de tradición oral escrita," *Islas* 39-40 (1971), 143.

86 Argeliers León, "De Paleros y Firmas se Trata," *Union* (Havana, 1986), 70 n. 2. Stephan Palmié referred to an Abakuá manuscript, or, "a 'libreta de *abakuá*' (notebook of an initiate) dating from 1931." Following León, Palmié described *libretas* as, "handwritten notebooks used by initiates more as mnemotechnical devices than as repositories of initiatory knowledge which, to this day, is supposed to be acquired orally." Stephan Palmié, "A View from Itia Ororó Kande," *Social Anthropology* 14:1 (2006), 113, 114 n. 36. In fact, *all* writing is a "mnemotechnical device"; what else are such devices used for, if not to consult for guidance?

87 León ignored Cross River *nsìbìdì* as a source for Abakuá "signatures," instead guessing that they derived from contact with western industries: "The denomination of 'firma' [signature], maybe adopted earlier by Abakuá groups, undoubtedly as a literary metaphor, possibly comes from the custom, beginning with the mercantile development of the nineteenth century, of printing the company/signature and rubric of the produce on the label, envelope, and seals of a product" (León, "Paleros," 79).

88 León, "Caso," 144.

89 Rogelio Martínez-Furé, *Diálogos imaginarios* (Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1979, revised ed., 2016), 275.

90 Martínez Furé, personal communication, 2013.

91 Martínez Furé, personal communication, 2015.

92 Cabrera, *La Lengua Sagrada,* 102.

93 León alludes to the off-bounds quality of the manuscripts: "[T]he paleros . . . guard [the notebooks] as a personal secret" (León, "Paleros," 70-71).

94 cf. Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization: The Untold Story of Ireland's Heroic Role from the Fall of Rome to the Rise of Medieval Europe* (New York: Nan A. Talese/Doubleday, 1995).

95 Andrés Flores Casanova, interviews with the author in Havana, Cuba, 1990s.

96 Gerardo Pasos "El Chino" (1925-2002), the Mokóngo of the Kamaroró Efó lodge. Conversations with the author in Havana, 1998-2002.

97 Anonymous 1, personal communication, Havana, 2013.

98 Ibid.

99 Julian Mora "Felix Dulce Coco" (1913-1996), the Iyámba and founder of Ápapa Efó of Matanzas.

100 Anonymous 1, personal communication, Havana, 2013.

101 Ibid.

102 Anonymous 2, personal communication, Havana, 2013.

Calabar on the Cross River:

Historical and Cultural Studies

David Imbua, *Paul Lovejoy*

and *Ivor L. Miller*, eds.

AFRICA WORLD PRESS

Trenton | London | Cape Town | Nairobi | Addis Ababa | Asmara | Ibadan | New Delhi

AFRICA WORLD PRESS
541 West Ingham Avenue | Suite B
Trenton, New Jersey 08638

Book design: Dawid Kahts
Cover design:

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

Names: Imbua, David, editor, author. | Lovejoy, Paul E., editor, author. | Miller, Ivor, editor, author.
Title: Calabar on the Cross River : historical and cultural studies / David Imbua, Paul Lovejoy and Ivor L. Miller, eds.
Description: Trenton : Africa World Press, 2017. | "The papers in this volume were edited as a result of the Calabar Studies Conference held in April 2013 at the University of Calabar, Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria." | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2017018006| ISBN 9781569025710 (hb : alk. paper) | ISBN 9781569025727 (pb : alk. paper)
Subjects: LCSH: Slave trade--Nigeria--Calabar--History. | Calabar (Nigeria)--History. | Calabar (Nigeria)--Social conditions--History. | Calabar (Nigeria)--Social life and customs--History.
Classification: LCC DT515.9.C35 C35 2017 | DDC 966.944--dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2017018006

Table of Contents