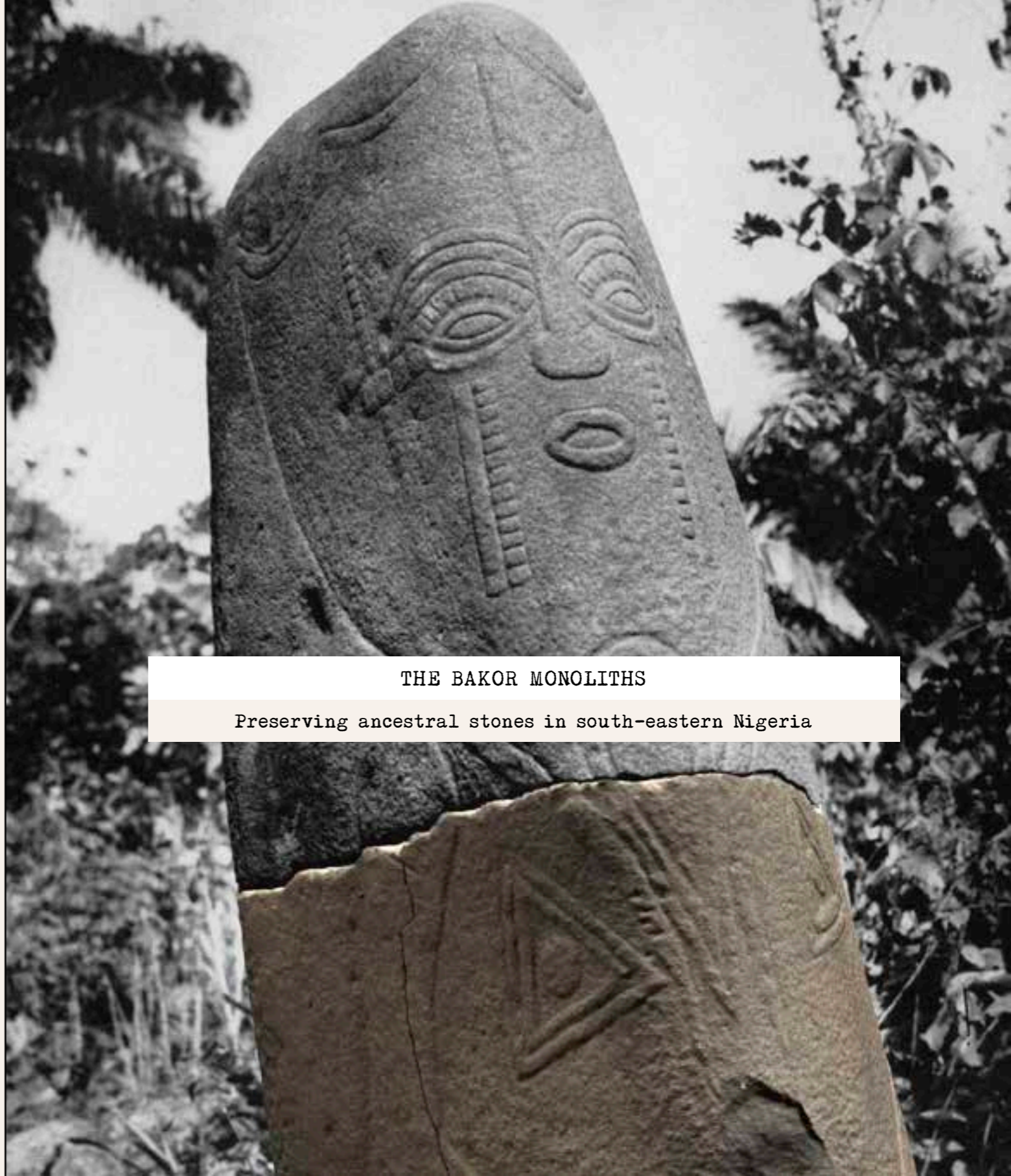




We have to let the world know that
we have things like this here.

THE BAKOR MONOLITHS



THE BAKOR MONOLITHS

Preserving ancestral stones in south-eastern Nigeria



Unwrapped texture map
of the top half of
the Ntito monolith
in The Metropolitan
Museum of Art.

THE BAKOR MONOLITHS

Preserving ancestral stones in south-eastern Nigeria



CULTURAL STONES IN THE CROSS RIVER REGION AND ITS ATLANTIC DIASPORA

IVOR L. MILLER¹

Research Affiliate at Boston University and Researcher
at the Department of History, University of Calabar

Údúṅ ómù, údúṅ ómù, údúṅ ómù; èènònú ònwì ọ̀nyí?

‘This country, this country, this country; is it not someone who owns it?’

song of the Ékpè 'leopard' society

INTRODUCTION

The Cross River region of south-eastern Nigeria and South West Cameroon has specific categories of cultural stones, including:

1) ‘Akwanshi’ monoliths, in the majority “a hard medium textured basaltic rock”, carved anthropomorphically and placed in circle formations, but in some cases carved from limestone.² In this essay, they are referred to as Bakor monoliths.

2) Ékpè stones, primarily volcanic rock with columnar joints. Anthropomorphic Ékpè stones are found in South West Cameroon and southeastern Nigeria, from the coastal Rio de Rey and Calabar moving northwards to Boki and as far as Fontem, Cameroon.³

3) Okwa stones in circle formation, used as seats by village council members when deliberating. Okwa council stones were primarily used in Éjághám-speaking communities, from Okuni to the Kúò-Éjághám [colonial spelling “Qua”] of Calabar.⁴

The Cross River region is characterized by cultural unities within great linguistic diversity. Shaped through the migrations of small groups over centuries, Cross River heritage developed through a process of cultural diffusion resulting in shared or ‘multi-ethnic’ gendered institutions to administer community justice and the division of labour. Among the regional traits is a focus on ritual stones which current inhabitants refer to in order to distinguish themselves from their neighbours in ways to be described below. From the Upper Cross region featuring elaborately carved monoliths of the Bakor people (formerly known as the Íkóm

1 For help in research for this essay, the author is grateful to: Maurice Alobi Ojong, Ayuk Raphael Ayuk, ‘Engineer’ Bassey Effiong Bassey, Nasako Besingi, Dr. Bruce Connell, Nanji Cyprian, Dr. Abu S. Edet, Dr. Jordan Fenton, Dr. Ngoe Fritz, Dr. Victor Manfredi, Dr. Keith Ray, Dr. Ute Röschenhalter, Jill Salmons, Ferdinand Saumarez Smith, Anne Spier-Mazor, ‘Mbe’ Philip Tazi. Thanks to Esther Peter for interview transcriptions.

2 “The great majority of all the stones are carved in a hard medium textured basaltic rock, identified as dolerite . . . Some fifty stones have been carved in a shelly limestone ... [and there are a] few specimens carved in sandstone.” (Allison 1968a, 24).

3 Fontem village, Lebialem division, South West Region, Cameroon (cf. Brain 1967, 1).

4 “The cultural, linguistic, and economic links between the Qua clans in the lower Cross River area and their Ejagham relations in the forest hinterland have been zealously kept alive for the past four centuries” (Ekpo 1984, 60). Kúò is phonetically correct for the colonial “Quä” or “Kwa” (Talbot 1912: 153).

or Cross River monoliths), to the Middle Cross region where the Yakurr and their neighbours have un-worked ritual stones, to the Lower Cross region of Calabar and its estuaries, cultural stones are organized in shrines for collective ancestor reverence and group defence.⁵

The region’s extraordinary linguistic diversity required the creation of common institutions to enable communication through trade networks along the great river and its tributaries, which in the 1600s were extended by coastal traders into a global exchange of commodities. About this region, historian I. R. Amadi reported: “By 1800 the social and political picture had largely crystallized to what it is today. ... Even though the area may not be seen as a cultural unity, it has subsequently acquired a measure of commercial unity within which the port of Calabar had become an important focal point of the trade originating both from the coast and the hinterland.”⁶

The shared institutions include the Ékpè ‘leopard’ society for community justice, the Iban Isong or Ékpá women’s councils, the Nka age-grade system that organizes youth, and the Mònénkím (Nkughọ) coming of age rites for girls and young women.⁷ British archaeologist Keith Ray identified a shared practice of cultural stones; his study “Decorated Stones of the Cross River Region” surveys practices regarding cultural stones from the Bamenda plateau to the south, “that marks this huge area out as distinct from those surrounding it.”⁸ Ray’s article is essentially a call for further research into this phenomenon: “The recurrence of the use of stones in this way . . . provides a subject for further research at the supra-community or regional level that maps the co-histories of stone usage, without necessarily seeking an origin or linking theme for the practice.”⁹ After reviewing highlights of the cultural stones of this region of Africa, the conclusions discuss the impact of this heritage in the Caribbean — a tradition brought by enslaved Cross Riverians in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries — whose living legacy is found in the cultural stones of the Abakuá initiation society, modelled after the West African Ékpè society.

METHODOLOGY

Fieldwork in the region from 2004-2018 benefited from various methodologies, including reviews of the historical literature and learning from local museum specialists, archaeologists, historians, lineage leaders, and initiated community members. While residing in Calabar since 2004, local elders supported my research by initiating me into the Ékpè ‘leopard’ society, thus enabling my participation in

5 The division of Upper/Middle/Lower Cross regions was created by historian Monday Abasiattai and colleagues based upon geographical perspectives (Abasiattai 1990; Afigbo 1990, 134). Meanwhile, linguists refer to either Upper or Lower Cross regions, placing Yakurr in the Upper Cross category (Connell & Maison 1994, Connell 2022).

6 (Amadi 1989: 73).

7 The rites for puberty and preparation for marriage have various stages, while this institution is named differently in each language community: Mbòpó (Ìbìbìò), Nkugọ (Èfịk) or Mònénkím (Éjághám = Mmọn ‘child’; é ‘in’; nkím ‘circumcision’). Cf. Imeh (2009, 3).

8 (Ray 2004: 209).

9 (Ray 2004: 210).

community rites where stones were primary references. Following the regional paths of diffusion of Ékpè culture, I learned about stone cultures first-hand, their historic uses, as well as the contemporary destruction of them and their associated practices. Their destruction is the result of many factors, but at the lead are members of Pentecostal churches, who have attacked cultural stones as representative of the perceived ‘backwardness’ of the region and the ‘dark forces’ of local heritage.¹⁰

One productive research method was to share with local specialists the early historical literature, mainly written by colonial officers. Colonists and missionaries made careers through accusing locals of ‘idolatry’ through the ‘worship of fetishes’; Percy Amaury Talbot, the first District Officer of the Oban Hills region in the Calabar hinterlands, wrote a chapter called “Stone worship” in his book “The Peoples of Southern Nigeria” (1926). Cross Riverians are acutely aware of the erroneous perceptions expressed in colonial reports that sought to humiliate their traditions. This awareness became evident while reviewing Keith Ray’s survey: “... a number of anthropological studies of material culture carried out in and immediately north of the Bamenda plateau refer to the presence of stones used in a variety of ceremonies, but venerated as representative of ancestors.”¹¹

In response, Calabar author Engineer B.E. Bassey declared that stones are not venerated or worshipped as gods or ancestors, but instead represent the concept of ‘stability’ or ‘eternity’.¹² As consecrated and active objects, the stones represent the core identity of the lineage community using them, and it is taboo for non-members to approach them without consulting with the lineage heads for permission. Local specialists taught that Cross River stones, carved or not, have several shared qualities:

- 1) They are anthropomorphic, often having an identified head and base.
- 2) They represent founding ancestors, named or unknown.
- 3) In Ékpè culture, they represent the autonomy of the community (or principality).
- 4) They are activated during ceremonies through libations of hot drink (alcoholic spirits), palm wine and even pounded yam.
- 5) They are marked in chalk or paint in ways that correspond to initiation marks made on the bodies of neophytes.

While the famous carved Bakor monoliths are the ‘crown jewels’ of the region’s cultural stones, those of many other communities share conceptual features and ritual treatment.

The lack of archaeological studies in the region, coupled with the unwillingness of colonial writers to accept that the people they invaded and enslaved were not savage brutes, has enabled fantastic claims. The colonists

devised self-serving prehistorical frameworks which allowed them to dismiss indigenous cultures. Some British writers attributed the arts of southern Nigeria to Mediterranean migrations and influences, inspiring a legacy of unfounded and unprovable migration stories. P.A. Talbot thought that the angles “cut out” on some Ékpè stones “Point to the possibility of a Carthaginian origin.”¹³ Such speculation led to a practice of far-fetched fables about origin and migration in local ethnic history publications and court cases.¹⁴ The only group with a substantive dictionary and literature are the Èfìks of Calabar, whose early trade relationships with Europeans led to the prevalence of their perspectives in the literature. Contributing to these problems are the balkanized ethnic histories written by colonial anthropologists, aimed at understanding community structures for the purposes of taxation and government re-organization. In response, locals sought ‘strength in unity’ by creating ethnic organizations like the Ibibio Union founded in 1928¹⁵; the Éjághám Improvement Union in 1937¹⁶; the Bakor Union created in 1963.¹⁷ Previously, following an Èfìk perspective, all groups north of Calabar towards Íkóm were known as Ekoi. P.A. Talbot described the Éjághám as a “Clan” of the Ekoi “Sub-Tribe”, and wrote: “The name Ekoi itself is an Èfìk world applied to the Ejagham of the northern part of Calabar Division.”¹⁸ The term Éjághám derives from the deity of a lake near Mamfe, Cameroon, considered a point of migration into present-day Nigeria for many Éjághám-speaking groups, who stretch down to the Kùò-Éjághám [“Qua”] of Calabar.¹⁹ Bakor itself is considered one of many variants of Éjághám. Through trade networks extending north from Calabar, the Èfìk language became the regional trade language; most locals communicate in several languages, while today Nigerian Pidgin is the *lingua franca*. Given this historical complexity and obscurity, this essay avoids speculation about ‘origins’ of a group or their practices, with the exception of some examples from the Ékpè society, which has a generally accepted diffusion pattern, evidenced in the type of ritual stones used by a given community.

The process of critically reviewing the colonial literature and learning from local specialists has resulted in the following three sections regarding the major cultural stone categories of the region, and a fourth on the Cross River region diaspora in Cuba:

13 (Talbot 1912, 172).

14 (cf. Afigbo 1965, 1971; Aye, 1967, 1990, 2005, 2006; Jeffreys 1966).

15 cf. Noah (1987).

16 “The Ejagham Improvement Union, 1937-61. The founding of the Ejagham Improvement Union (EIU) was predicated on the emergence of ethnic nationalism in the Cross River area in the 1920s and 1930s. The formation of ethnic unions such as the Oron Improvement Union (1925) and Ibibio State Union (1928) . . .” (Tangban 2008, 279). “[T]he meeting members of the Union held with J.V. Dewhurst, D.O. of Calabar Division during which they raised objection to the name ‘Ekoi’ being applied to the Ejagham. They insisted on the people being referred to as ‘Ejagham’. Thereafter, the sub-groups the Union represented became officially known as Ejagham.” (Tangban 2008, 283. See also Röschenthaier 2011, 489, note 16).

17 Chief Sylavvus Eko Akong, ‘Orlando’ (personal communication, September 12, 2014).

18 (Talbot 1926/1969, 62, 94).

19 “Lake Ijagham, the sacred lake of the Ekoi”; “The word ‘Ijagham’ bears a strong affinity to ‘Ejagham’, the name by which the Ekoi call themselves” (Talbot 1912, 150, 153).

10 The role of Pentecostalism in attacking Ékpè practices in the Calabar region is discussed by art historian Jordan Fenton (2022, 97 ff.).

11 (Ray 2004: 209).

12 (Bassey 2015 personal communication).

1. 'AKWANSHI' MONOLITHS (A.K.A. BAKOR MONOLITHS)

Ákúânshì is an Éjághám term for a carved monolith, meaning ‘ancestors in the ground’.²⁰ The earliest known photographs of these Upper Cross Region carved monoliths were taken by Charles Partridge at the Agba site on Ekajuk land (figure 1), during his tenure as Acting District Commissioner of Obubura Hill district in 1903-1904; they were published in his *Cross River Natives* (1905), subtitled “a description of the circles of upright sculptured stones on the left bank of the Aweyong River.”²¹ Figure 1 reproduces an edited photograph by Partridge, with both monoliths displaying carved human faces, a large protruding umbilicus, multiple designs on the face, chest and belly that represent cicatrix marks, while one also has arms. Of the designs, Partridge observed that: “Some of the stones at Alok have plain coils on both sides of the abdomen, and a rough sketch of one of them shows a horizontal row of dots between each ear and eye, and a vertical row of the same running down each cheek. A careful survey of all such marks within the district, accompanied by photographs or drawings, would probably yield very interesting results, which might perhaps throw light upon the descent and history of the different tribes.”²² From 1961-62, Philip Ashby Allison surveyed nearly 300 other monoliths with similar features (figs 2A,B,C,D,E), some with coil designs that were reproduced in cicatrix marks on the faces of contemporary people and skin-covered dance masks of the region (figures 3A,B,C). Near Mamfe, Cameroon, similar coils were documented on an anthropomorphic basalt stone of the Ékpe ‘leopard’ society, in a cicatrix mark of a decorated face, and the face of a skin-covered dance mask, as photographed by German colonial officer Alfred Mansfeld in the early 1900s (figures 3D,E,F). A colonial report on the Éjághám-speaking peoples of Íkóm, Nkum and Etung (all of whom are discussed in this essay), claims that “The only tribal markings are a series of concentric rings on the temple,” apparently the same design as on the monoliths.²³ The idea of ‘tribal marking’ is a random guess, while the coils could be simple decorations or a mark of status.²⁴

A parallel relationship between ritual objects and culturally marked bodies was observed in the Upper Benue valley to the north, where Marla Berns documented correspondence between cicatrised incisions on the torsos of women and designs on clay pots created for shrines.²⁵ Regarding the Bakor monoliths, were the carved designs inspired by cicatrix marks on human bodies, or vice versa? There’s no way

20 (cf. Allison 1968a: 22). ákú ‘ancestors’; kâ ‘in’; ñshì ‘ground’.
21 Figures 70 and 71 feature carved monoliths, between pages 268-269 (Partridge 1905).
22 (Partridge 1905, 170-171). Allison observed that Partridge wrote “Anopp” instead of “Alok”; I have corrected the error with “quiet copyediting”.
23 Fellows (1934, 2). Fellows referred to Ikóm, Nkum and ‘Obokum’ “clans”. ‘Obokum’ is correctly “Agbokim”, a community in northern Etung L.G.A. Each of the three communities speaks a different language, so the idea of ‘tribal markings’ is erroneous.
24 In his study of facial scarifications of an Igbò-speaking group, Jeffreys also concluded: “It/i scarification is not a tribal mark, but a sign of status, rank, or nobility” (Jeffreys 1951, 96).
25 (Berns 2011, 509, figure 17.13).



Figures 2A,B: circle designs on monoliths in Alok circle. I. Miller photos, 2014, 2020.



Figure 2C: circle design on monolith in Njemetop-Nselle, Íkóm L.G.A. I. Miller photo, 2015.



Fig. 71. Three of the stones at Agba.

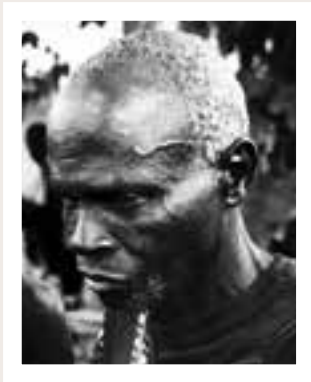
Figure 1: "Stones at Agba." Charles Partridge photo, 1905. B&W.



Figure 2D: circle design on monolith in Emangebe, Íkóm L.G.A. I. Miller photo, 2015.



Figure 2E: Bakor monolith on grounds of National Museum, Oron, Akwa Ibom State I. Miller photo, 2020.



Figures 3A,B: circle designs on faces of local elders. Bodleian Library.

Figures 3C,D: circle designs on face of Mamfe woman and skin-covered mask. Alfred Mansfeld photos, 1928.



Figure 3E: A rare performance of a skin-covered mask with a round cicatrize mark on the face. Ohafia community, Ofahia L.G.A., Abia State. I. Miller photo, 2012.



Figure 3F: Circle designs on sides of an anthropomorphic Ékpè stone, Mamfe, Cameroon. "Eta-ngbe: Altar, meaning Prayer and Sacrifice Place inside of the Palaverhouse (Keakaland) Alfred Mansfeld (1928, 218).



Figure 4: Elder woman paints the carved channels of an Alok monolith. Ivor Miller photo, 2014.

to test this question, but clearly generations of humans living around the monolith sites have had a cultural relationship with the carved monoliths.

In the Bakor region, local specialist Chief Sylvanus Eko Akong, alias ‘Orlando’, spent decades curating the monolith circles of Alok, the site of an Open-Air Museum. Akong learned about the monoliths from his father and other elders, who reported several generations of ritual interactions with the monolith circles and trees therein, principally during the New Yam harvest festival. When Charles Partridge visited in 1903, the “head-chief” of Agba told him: “We still give fufu to every stone and also to the big tree. Our forefathers said to us, ‘These stones are your forefathers, your great chiefs; every year you must sacrifice to them’.” Nearby in Alok, Partridge was told: “Once a year we give the stones food, namely, when we eat new yams.”²⁶

Over a century later, Akong reported:

“As we learned about the monoliths traditionally, we were told of the great role they played during the New Yam festival. Whenever our communities want to celebrate a New Yam festival, they start their actions in the monolith sites, to appease the ancestors. Every September 14, the elders will go there to pour libation and pray, saying, ‘tomorrow we are eating our new yam’. The libation is always up-wine [palm wine], kola nut, fresh water from the stream, palm oil and dry mud fish; there is no blood. They will say, ‘We are about to celebrate our New Yam Festival for the labour we have done for nine months, and there should be peace’.

26 (Partridge 1905, 270-271, 273).

After the Chief Priest and elders pour libation, post-menopausal women will begin to paint the monoliths [see figure 4]. The painting is done with special materials to create five colours: white chalk, red camwood, yellow camwood, green and blue. Each colour has significance: white is for peace; red is for war; yellow is for victory; green is for agriculture; and blue is for fertility.”

The Bakor community New Yam festival celebrates the fertility of the land, the harvest, and the people, as Akong reported:

“After painting on the 14th, the community celebration starts in the early morning of the 15th.²⁷ The ancestors are appeased with fresh yam brought from the farm that is boiled and pounded, then divided in two: one part is mixed with palm oil and turns yellow, and the other is not and remains white. Then the male and female children gather outside the monolith site, along with some elders. The group ties wrappers around their waists, while their chests and faces are decorated with designs in white chalk; all will enter the monolith circle in a procession to sing and dance.

An iron gong will be hit to make traditional music, as they call out the names of the elders, both those who are late [deceased] and the present ones who are administering the community, male and female. The singing calls and honours those who care for the community, to praise them, as in ‘Chief So and So, you are the person controlling your community today, hold your community well and let there be peace’. The youth and elders have white chalk marked on their chests as a symbol of peace, and they dance inside the circle of monoliths to appease the ancestors with the red and the white yam, the water, the palm wine and fish. They go to each of the monoliths and dance. While the chief priest and I use those smashed yams to place the sacrifice on each monolith, we will pray against epidemics, accidents, and pray for peace and a good harvest. We carry up-wine in the native horn, and we pour it on the stones, along with water [see figures 5, 6, 7]. Then we dance till we come to the middle of the town, where we sit together under the old tree to drink palm wine; that must happen before we could eat the pounded new yam.”

Chief Akong’s narrative shows a continuous practice of feeding the community monoliths for over a century, with the participation of local youths to teach them the process.

Regarding the use of ‘oral tradition’, Philip Allison cautioned that, “Certain dangers may arise from the premature publication of detailed records of oral evidence, and collectors of such evidence have learnt to beware of recording ‘traditions’ which may in fact be based on earlier published sources.”²⁸ Allison referred to P.A. Talbot’s (1912) discussion of Nsibidi, the coded symbols used throughout the Cross River region that are also exhibited on the ùkára cloth worn by Ékpè members; he suggested the monoliths may feature such codes.²⁹ Chief Akong developed this idea to identify examples of Nsibidi on the monoliths, and described the Alok monolith circle as the



Figure 5: With palm wine in the left hand and yam in the right, decorated youth 'feeds' the monoliths in Alok. I. Miller photo, 2014.



Figure 6: Monolith in Alok, painted and fed during the New Yam Festival. I. Miller photo, 2014.



Figure 7: Ékpè stone in Alok, painted and fed during the New Yam Festival, with manilla coils and bars at its base. I. Miller photo, 2014.



Figure 8: Ékpè stone in Alok, surrounded by òpòti trees. I. Miller photo, 2014.

centre of Ékpè authority in the Bakor region. But because the dating of the monoliths is unconfirmed, and the foundation period of the Ékpè society is unknown, their correlation is impossible to know. Nevertheless, Chief Akong articulates an active relationship between the Bakor people, their monoliths, and the Ékpè society:

“In the monolith circle here, next to the Ékpè stone, there is a record of when somebody in the past committed a crime, and he was fined money, which at that time was in the form of curved manila rods [see figures 7 & 8]. Only those who were wealthy could afford them. So, one can see that they were using the authority of Ékpè till today and tomorrow. My late uncle Nsofal Ogbo had committed a crime, and Ékpè said, ‘come and pay’. He now started quoting law [i.e., refusing the customary fine by quoting British colonial law], so the order came from the elders, saying, ‘Okay let them carry the Ékpè costume, get to the playground, to catch any of the biggest goats.’ They started playing the Nyàmàngbè [i.e., Ékpè], and dancing with the gun; they saw the biggest goat and shot it; it was my paternal uncle’s own goat, whereas my maternal uncle had committed the crime.³⁰ They prepared the goat and ate it, and he had to pay for it because that is what the law stated. Ékpè law had a meaning. The stones also have meanings, and they are related to Ékpè. For example, some of the inscriptions one sees on the Ékpè cloth called ùkára are also found on the monoliths.

In this part of the world, the community laws were created and enforced by Ékpè chiefs. With British colonization, the laws of the customary courts were based upon

²⁷ Chief Akong reported that with the creation of the Bakor Union in 1963, the New Yam Festival was revived the same year and its rituals were expanded.

²⁸ (Allison 1968a, Forward).

²⁹ Regarding an “Old Nkrigom” monolith, Allison observed that, “The hooped decoration above the navel resembles the Nsibidi sign denoting wealth” (Allison 1968a, figure 32).

³⁰ Ékpè society has various regional names. In Èfìk, Ékpè; in Bakor, ‘Nyàmàngbè’ or ‘Nyàngbè’. Èfùts call it ‘Mgbè’. In the Upper Cross region, “Nangbei” and “Nankbei” (Partridge 1905, 215). In the Mamfe region, “Ngbe or Nyangbe” (Mansfeld 1928, 26).

many of the Ékpè laws, and these also influenced the magistrate court, and from there the higher authority. This is why when anything happens, lawmakers look to the lower court judgments, to capitalize on the tradition, the norms of the people. Even today in the Bakor region, if someone wants to foster a new idea, it may not work because some will say: ‘It is not part of Ékpè law’. In the whole of Íkóm, from here to Okuni, and south into Ákámkpà, and among the Kùòs [“Quas”] in Calabar, we are all from one source of Éjághám people, who came with Ékpè from Cameroon.”

In the Alok monolith circle, an Ékpè stone is surrounded by òbòti trees (*Newbouldia laevis*) that demarcate a ritual space; in this region they are the banner of the Ékpè ‘leopard’ society (see figures 7 & 8).³¹ Chief Akong refers to the material culture of the Alok monolith site to narrate a centuries-old relationship between the carved monoliths, the Ékpè society, and the migration of Éjághám-speaking peoples. But were these monoliths met by his ancestors upon arrival, or did they create them afterwards?

Chief Akong reported that Ékpè titleholders instructed local youths organized into age-grades to bring the monoliths from a local riverbed to be carved and placed in circles:

“It seems likely that most of these monoliths were carried from a mother quarry or riverbed called Ndi Nto in Nnam [see figure 9].³² From there, they were carried to different communities wherever they settled. The system used to convey them was logging. They would get a rope in the forest and tie it to a particular stone. Then they would hit a gong to evoke the authority of Nyàmàngbè [i.e., Ékpè], because all of them respected the Nyàmàngbè society, to enforce compliance of young men in a particular age-grade to roll the monoliths on logs into the village. Nyàmàngbè was used to govern the people with rules and regulations that guided the entire community. Some activities are meant for women only and are taboo for men; there are others for men only and are taboo for women, and our ancestors lived by those kinds of laws.

In our communities, all people, both men and women, belong to age grades, which are named Monkóm, Efík, Amon, and Aribo, and the names rotate through the generations. Monkóm is the most senior age grade; Monkóm are the elders of Efík; Efík are the elders of Amon; Amon are the elders of Aribo. When the Aribo age-grade members have their children, they will become part of the age-grade Monkóm, which is recycled every four generations.

In this area, it is believed that Nyàmàngbè is where the customary laws started; they were not formed by one person, but in council by seven representatives, one from each of the leading families in the community.”

31 The ‘Ékpè tree’ (*Newbouldia laevis*) is called ‘òbòti’ in Èfík: “Ö-böt’-i, v., Äbäti, q. v.” (Goldie 1862/1964, 245); “Ä-bä-ti, n. A tree having a red flower. Frequently planted in Isü Abasi, or before a palaver-house. The leaves are used medicinally” (Goldie 1862/1964, 2). In Bàlón dó the tree is called ‘ikení’ (Nanji Cyprian 2021 personal communication); in Yorùbá called ‘akòkò’, it is used when investing traditional titles (Verger 1995, 343, 484).

32 Partridge reported that the ‘head-chief’ of Agba told him: “Yes, the stones came from the bottom of the Nawa Creek” (Partridge 1905, 271).



Figure 9: Riverbed called Ndi Nto in Nnam with basalt stones. Bodleian Library.

To conclude, Chief Akong narrates an observable relationship in the Alok monolith circle between the Ékpè stone and seven leading families of Bakor-speaking people:

“In the Alok stone circle, where the Ékpè stone is, one can see seven major stones around it; each representing a family. The relationships between the monoliths and the Bakor people were discovered through the tattoo marks on the seven major stones surrounding the Ékpè stone, which were the same marks that the Bakor people used on their bodies. They looked at the marks on the stones and identified some as from the Shamuyun, Shampe or Nobafon families. When they identified a tattoo mark given to Nobafon family, for example, they all believed that anybody carrying that kind of tattoo or tribal mark belongs to that family; that was how they were able to identify themselves.”

Chief Akong devoted his life to promoting the history and culture of the monoliths as he learned it from his elders, Allison’s reports, and his own research. His vision places them at the centre of a widespread ritual stone culture in the Cross River region, represented spectacularly through anthropomorphic stones of the Ékpè society.

2. ANTHROPOMORPHIC ÉKPÈ STONES



Figure 10: carved monolith in Okuni in front of Ékpè hall. E. Dayrell photo, 1913.

A remarkable meeting point for the Bakor monoliths and the Ékpè volcanic rocks of the Lower Cross region is the Okuni community, known by locals as Òlùlùmò, on the southern bank of the Cross River near Íkóm.

In 1905 Charles Partridge wrote: “I have noticed in the neighbourhood of Okuni several small conical stones with roughly-cut human faces.”³³ In 1913 Elphinstone Dayrell published a photograph from Okuni of a carved monolith, similar to the Bakor monoliths to the north, placed in front of a carved wooden pillar on a plaza in front of the Ékpè hall (see figure 10).³⁴ Dayrell’s caption was: “Stone Ju-ju and carved wooden pillar: Egbo House in background.” By ‘juju’ he meant ‘ritual object’; by Egbo he meant Ékpè.³⁵ Allison made no mention of Dayrell’s monolith, but reported: “A carved stone mentioned by Partridge at Okuni was subsequently removed to the District Office at Íkóm and later to the Lagos Museum.”³⁶ In 2015 when I visited Okuni, community elders reported that they



Figures 11A,B: Ékpè hall with monoliths and iron staff, Omon group, Okuni village, Íkóm L.G.A., 2015. I. Miller photo.



Figure 12: Paired large/small anthropomorphic monoliths in Bakor. Bodleian Library.

had no knowledge of such carved monoliths, but that British authorities had once destroyed their Okwa stones for council meetings (as described below), while the later Biafra (or Civil) War had also destroyed much of their material heritage.³⁷ They led me to a large monolith commemorating the hunter who discovered the current location of their community, with a smaller one for his wife. Okuni town is comprised of four lineage groups that migrated in different periods from what is today Cameroon, each represented by an Ékpè lodge. The first group to settle was Omon, whose Ékpè lodge features a basalt monolith representing the hunter who identified this ideal location near the river (figures 11 A & B).³⁸

Mr. James Okongor, an educator and historian from Okuni, narrated the story:

“The monolith standing beside the Mgbè [Ékpè] hall in Omon community represents Tata Eruk Monse – an elephant hunter who founded this settlement. On either side of the Eruk Monse monolith, there are iron ‘okuta’ staffs, representing the summit of spiritual power in Okuni. This monolith came from our previous settlement, and is kept at the Mgbè hall for protection. This most revered monolith of Okuni was exposed to sun and rain, so there was a fear that the monolith would lose its form with time. Therefore, in 1998, Òlùlùmò community decided to protect it further by constructing a shed over it, and then coating it with cement. The cement cover maintains the original shape of the stone. A smaller monolith representing Eruk Monse’s wife is next to his, and given the same protection. Our myth states that the wife encouraged him to go after the elephant for as long as possible, leading to his discovery of our present settlement.”³⁹

The legend tells of a great hunter who followed an elephant through the bush, killing it at the site that would later become Okuni through subsequent migrations to this place. The status of the hunter was elevated in his community, to the point where he was memorialized next to the Ékpè lodge. This narrative is consistent with many others of the region that describe the elevation of high achieving community members through titles in the Ékpè society, normally reserved for members of the founding lineage of the community. Dayrell himself photographed around 1910 “Ostum Ofang, Chief hunter of Akparabong”, an Éjàghám-speaking community near Íkóm.⁴⁰ The hunter wears a leopard’s tooth around his neck, holds a staff of authority, and has an ùkàrà cloth of Ékpè membership over his shoulder, a sign of elevated status. Historian Ojong Echum Tangban documented the recognition of a great hunter in the traditions of Éjàghám-speaking peoples:

National Museum, Lagos.

37 For example, as documented in Calabar, much of the traditional architecture was destroyed during the Biafra War; the destroyed palm thatched compounds were rebuilt with cement blocks. (cf. Edet 2017). So too in Okuni, what were once palm thatched compounds are now cement block structures.

38 To the north of Okuni and Íkóm, in an Éjàghám-speaking community of Akparabong clan, Keith Nicklin documented a carved stone representing “the first chief of Opu when they found the land” (Nicklin field notes, March 1978 in Opu village). Thanks to Jill Salmons.

39 The hunter Tata Eruk Monse was a slave of Etuk Oba. The wife of Eruk Monse is unnamed (James Okongor, personal communication)

40 Photograph 400_004753, Elphinstone Dayrell archives, Royal Anthropological Institute.

33 (Partridge 1905, 276).

34 Dayrell was “Assistant District Commissioner in charge of Okuni” (Partridge 1905, 126-127). “In 1903 Mr. Dayrell, Acting District Commissioner, was stationed at Okuni which became, for a time, the local Government Head Quarters” (Fellows 1934, 13).

35 The British colonial spelling ‘Egbo’ was a blended label confusing the Ékpó (ghost) mask performance society of Ibibiò-speaking people with the Ékpè (leopard) mask performance society of Calabar (cf. Waddell 1863: 314; Goldie 1890/1901: 30; Talbot 1923: 170).

36 (Allison 1968a, 21-22). The author was unable to find evidence of this monolith in the Nigerian



Figure 13: Monolith custodian communicates with the community ancestors. Òwòm, Íkóm L.G.A., I. Miller photo, 2016.



Figure 14: Upright Ékpè stone and wooden pole wrapped in copper coil, with round basalt stone at its base. Efi group, Okuni village, Íkóm L.G.A., 2015. I. Miller photo.



Figure 15 & 16: Upright Ékpè stones in community meeting halls, Mamfe region, South West Cameroon. Hans Wildi photos, 1924-28? Basel Mission Archives.



Figure 17A: Drawing of an Ékpè stone, Ojok, Ákámkpà L.G.A., Cross River State, Nigeria. Talbot (1926/1969 vol 2 : 346).



Figure 17B: Drawing of an Ékpè stone, Ndebeji, Ákámkpà L.G.A., Cross River State, Nigeria. Talbot (1926/1969 vol 3: 346).

(see figure 13). Next to this monolith was a smaller rounded rock, carved with a human face, a brass manilla rod lying in front of it. This arrangement corresponds to the pairing of large/small, male/female stones found throughout the region (see figure 12).

In Okuni, the interior of each of the four Ékpè lodges features an elongated volcanic rock, akin to those of other lodges throughout the Cross River region. The Ékpè stone of the Efi lodge of Okuni stands upright, attached to a wooden pole of the same height, with copper coils around them.⁴⁵ At the base of the upright stone is a rounded basalt stone, where libations are poured at the commencement of any Ékpè activity (see fig. 14).

The earliest known photographs of Ékpè stones are from the Mamfe region, taken between 1924-28 by a Swiss employee of the Basel Mission in Cameroon (figs. 15 & 16), and by Alfred Mansfeld in the same period (figure 3F).

These photographs show a central post with an upright stone before it, typical of the Ékpè hall architecture of the region.⁴⁶ In figure 15, the stone is capped, with two eyes rendered in white paint and horizontal bands of white and red paint down its shaft. Figure 16 shows a capped stone with a raffia fringe and eagle feather. The base of the monolith is also bound in raffia fringes and rope, while the body, like the pillar behind it, is marked in broad stripes of white chalk. Ékpè stones are treated similarly throughout the Mamfe region, as well as to the south in Ngólóland, in coastal Isangele (Usagaré) in Cameroon and also Calabar, Nigeria. Such upright stones are regarded as ‘guardians’ of the lodge hall, believed to discipline unauthorized persons who enter the space.⁴⁷ P.A. Talbot published a drawing of an Ékpè stone in Ojok, an Éjághám-speaking community in Ákámkpà L.G.A., Cross River State (figure 17A). The capped monolith stands in front of a wooden pillar supporting drums. Expressing the Éjághám and Èfik terms for stone (*etai* and *ítiát*), Talbot wrote: “The Etaí Ngbe, the Efík Itiatt Ekkpe, is the principal symbol belonging to the secret society.”⁴⁸ Another drawing published by Talbot shows a lodge pillar in the Éjághám-speaking community of Ndebeji, with a Nyámkpè body-mask drawn on one side and a goat on the other, both key symbols of Ékpè. In front of the pillar is a capped monolith with brass rods curving up its face (figure 17B).⁴⁹ Alfred Mansfeld described the Ékpè stone (“*Eta-ngbe*” in Éjághám) as an “altar, i.e. place of prayer and sacrifice inside the Palaver House (Keakaland).” Mansfeld wrote: “The fact that the *Eta-ngbe* is the most important part of the whole house of God is also clear from the fact that the laying of the foundation stone is connected with festivities, just as it is when we build a church.”⁵⁰

45 Talbot published a photograph of an ‘Etaí Ngbe’ in an Ékpè hall in Okuni, possibly the same stone photographed by the author in 2015. (Talbot 1912, facing p. 172).

46 These are identified as ‘Isango stones’ in the Basel Mission Archive records. An author and Ékpè member from Ekondo Titi, South West Cameroon, identified these as ‘Dikòkì’ in the Bálóndó language, in which Ékpè is known as ‘Matamu’. (Mr. Nanji Cyprian 2021, personal communication)

47 Jordan Fenton reported the same idea, wherein “the ancestral energies of the stone travel to the offender’s stomach and mystically ‘sounds or talks’ within their belly. A painful death then follows” (Fenton 2012, 67).

48 (Talbot 1926/1969 v2, 347). In another volume he wrote: “The most important part of the club-house is the Itiatt Ekkpe or, in Ekoi, Etaí, or Ta, Ngbe — the cut stone pillar” (Talbot 1926/1969 v3, 782).

49 Talbot wrote “Ndebjiji”, which is “Ndebeji” on contemporary maps. This is likely Old Ndebeji, closer to the Cameroon border, while New Ndebeji is closer to Oban along the same road.

50 (Mansfeld 1908, 218). Translation by Anne Spier-Mazor. Palaver House means Ékpè lodge house. Keaka are an Éjághám-speaking people.

41 Ntúfàm ‘village head’; therefore Ntúfàm Oroom would be ‘chief of the brave’.

42 (Tangban 2008: 101).

43 Local elders of the Eting Nta village, Íkóm L.G.A., reported that the monolith named Ebi Abu was stolen in the decade of 1970, and they brought the matter to court in Ogoja. (Video interview by Dr. Abu Edet and Ferdinand Saumarez Smith, September 2019). This monolith is now in the collection of the Musée de Quai Branly.

44 A colonial report states: “Nkum . . . do not recognize their name as being appropriate or correct. . . They maintain that their correct name is Iyala and this points to their connection with Iyala in Ogoja Division” (Fellows 1934, 6).



Figure 18: Upright Ékpè stone in Ékpè hall, Kembong community, Mamfe region, South West Cameroon. I. Miller photo, 2011.



Figure 19: Upright Ékpè stone in Bachou-Akagbe meeting hall, Mamfe region, South West Cameroon. I. Miller photo, 2011.



Figure 20: "The Ngbe Stone." Drawing of stone in a Banyang community near Mamfe, Cameroon. Malcolm Ruel 1969, p. 222. Reproduced with permission.

Near Mamfe, the Ékpè lodges of both Kembong and Bachou-Akagbe feature a central pillar with an upright monolith in front, capped and painted in bands of white, yellow and red (figures 18 & 19). These monoliths have a curved rod of brass or copper alloy undulating upwards from the base, where oracular equipment is placed. Throughout the Cross River region, brass and copper alloy signify ‘wealth’ or material abundance. From the Bachuo-Akagbe monolith are hung two bags of woven raffia with small animal horns attached, used by a lodge member during ceremony to collect leaves that fall from the performing body-mask that holds a branch of ‘the Ékpè tree’ (*Newbouldia laevis*).

British social anthropologist Malcolm Ruel lived from 1953-1954 in the Kenyang-speaking community of Besongabang, near Mamfe, where he wrote about the Ngbè [Ékpè] ‘leopard’ institution. Ruel described one of the Ngbè stones of this community (see figure 20):

“The ‘stone of Ngbe’ is usually placed in front of the central pole-support in the aca or meetinghouse of its owner⁵¹; when formally set out, a variety of objects cover or surround it, including: an inverted satchel forming a kind of ‘head’ on which are fixed a collection of feathers, twisted copper or brass rods of the type that was formerly used as currency, two chains with padlocks holding the stone to the ground, a tortoise-shell, decorated calabashes, certain seeds, a white

51 ‘Aca’ is written incorrectly. Local specialists report ‘ochaah’ as the Éjághám term, from which derives ‘achaah’, the Upper Banyang term (‘Mbe’ Philip Tazi 2021 personal communication; Ayuk Raphael Ayuk 2021 personal communication).



Figure 21: Ékpè house, 1924-25. "The Njamkwe house in Besongabang with the Njamkwe stone, in front of the house of the chief (1926)." Mr. Eduard Wunderli photograph. Basel Mission Archives.

cloth around the ‘waist’ of the stone in which is fixed a knife, and so on. In general, these objects have emblematic reference to the various sections and activities of Ngbe: the ‘stone’ then forms a kind of visual ‘charter’ for the association (of which, however, only its members have exact knowledge, and then only to the extent of their membership). The setting up of an ‘Ngbe stone’ is one of the most elaborate of all Ngbe procedures. I was told by one senior elder and Ngbe leader how he had previously helped a senior relative (then the formal owner of the lodge) to do this, taking care to provide all the items required and to arrange them exactly; then on completion other Ngbe leaders in the village and neighbourhood were invited to come to ‘test’ his work and knowledge. He reported, proudly, that they could find no fault with him – he passed his ‘test’ and no one could surpass him.”⁵²

As Ruel readily admits, his description of the materials lacks insight into their meanings. Nearly three decades earlier, a Basel Mission employee photographed one of several Ékpè halls in the Besongabang community, with an Ékpè stone planted upright on the front porch, between two doorways (see figure 21). The stone is painted with a design reminiscent of the curved brass coils in figures 17-20. An elder man holding a staff of authority, wearing a cap, with a wrapper around his waist and a European-styled jacket, stands at the entrance; he is the lodge leader, or Seseku.

Cultural anthropologist Ute Röschenthaler conducted extensive research from 1987 onward in the Cross River region on the dissemination of initiation clubs. She observed local variations in treating Ékpè stones:

52 (Ruel 1969, 22-223).

“The Ekpe stone underwent changes as Ekpe spread from the coast to the hinterland. Near the coast of Isangele, in the Balundu [“Bàlondó”] villages, there were two stones: one, a meter high, placed under a shed or inside the hall, and a shorter one, in front of the hall, without a shed.⁵³ The larger stone was decorated with black, red and white paint. After the Ekpe chief’s death, the smaller stone was uprooted, and a goat killed. At the installation of the new chief, another stone had to be planted. Lianas or chains were tied around some of them, or their ‘necks’ were pinned to the ground with two liana chains. A red hat with a feather was placed on some; others had a painted face on their upper part.”⁵⁴

Röschenthaler refers to the known sources for Ékpè culture in Isangele, the French colonial name for what locals call “Usagadet” or “Usagaré”, a coastal community contacted by early Portuguese traders.⁵⁵ The practice of uprooting the stones at the death of a titleholder implies that the descendants of the deceased who want to assume his mantle must equally be prestigious community members who have acquired wealth through industry and discipline, in order to pay for the subsequent rites of ‘planting’ the stone with a goat sacrificed to feed the community. In a Bangwa-speaking community to the north, the author was present at the rite of ‘planting’ an Ékpè stone. On this occasion, ‘Mbe’ Philip Tazi replaced his late father as the Seseku or head of Ékpè in a lengthy ceremony from late December, 2011 to early January, 2012.⁵⁶ He describes the processes:

“[I]n my culture [this] is called ‘the planting of the Ékpè Stone’ (the Monolith). Ékpè is bought in stages, in grades. An Ékpè chief who buys the highest grade or rank of Ékpè typically has a monolith planted at the entrance of his Ékpè Lodge or the ‘achaah Ngbè’. When the chief passes on, the monolith is uprooted and placed on its side, pending the day when the new chief would officially assume his place in the lodge. This occurs in the presence of fellow Ékpè chiefs, ranking members of lodges in the area, and the entire village. During this event, rituals are performed to replant the monolith in a ‘hail to the king’ sort of way [see figures 22A & B]. Ékpè members convene in the Ékpè Forest, where the Sesekou and new titleholders of the lodge are subjected to advanced education by Ékpè elders and philosophers over a certain period. I was instructed in Ékpè decorum and my role as the Ékpè Chief, the Nfor Ngbè of my lodge [see figure 23]. Most important, one takes an oath to safeguard Ékpè and its secrets, and then is anointed by the elders with special herbs to enable one to perform

53 Londo speakers call themselves Bàlondó, while Europeans erred in rendering this “Balundu” (Nanji 2019, 1).
54 (Röschenthaler 2011, 106). Röschenthaler documented three Ékpè stones (figures 3.13, 3.14, 3.15).
55 In 1902, a German map by Paul Langhans rendered three versions of this place name: “Isangilli, Nsaharet, Usaharet”, rendered as Isangele by the later French colonial regime, and used officially into the present. Meanwhile locals call their home “Usaghadet”, pronounced “Usagaré” as per Cuban Abakuá usage. In Calabar, Èfìks render this term “Usak-edet.”
56 ‘Mbe’ Tazi’s great-grandfather Fontem Asonganyi of Lebang-Fontem and Folewoh Agendia of Lewoh had brought Ékpè into the Bangwa-speaking region. Tazi’s father purchased Ékpè for the Ngbè Mbe Tazi lodge of his family (Tazi 2021, personal communication).



Figure 22A&B:
A: Ékpè stone with machete at each side and copper wire, before the rite of 'planting'. Njeh-Mveh village, Fontem, Cameroon, Mbe Tazi photo, 2011.
B: Ékpè stone after the rite of 'planting'. Njeh-Mveh village, Fontem, Cameroon, I. Miller photo, 2012.



Figure 23: Mbe Tazi (left) sits next to the Ékpè stone and his Ékpè teacher. Njeh-Mveh village, Fontem, Cameroon, January 2, 2012. I. Miller photo.

functions without inhibition. Following this, a huge celebration takes place with the processions of other societies under Ékpè, including Angbu, Mboko, Bakundi, and so on. All those processions emerged from the forest and performed in front of the hundreds of people assembled. Finally, I emerged from the forest ahead of a procession followed by an ‘ark of the covenant’ of sorts (Nsuk, or ‘Elephant of Ngbè’) from whence emerged Mutama, ‘the Voice’. I was dressed in a white sarong cloth around my waist and held the commanding staff of the Sesekou (i.e., Munyong). My torso was decorated in white paint with Nsibìdì signs. Dancing to the tune of Obungbu, I left the procession that made its way slowly into the dance arena. We came to a stop, and the Mutama ‘Voice’ subjected me to several questions that I had to respond to, not unlike the way a Ph.D. candidate defends a thesis. All this is happening in front the entire community. If a question is not answered, the Mutama repeats the question. It is a nerve-racking exercise. Some people forget the answers and therefore fail the test. They must return to the Ékpè sacred forest and start their training again.”⁵⁷

All sources point to the diffusion of the Ékpè institution over past centuries from Usagaré northwards into Mamfe and Bangwa, and westwards into Calabar and its

57 (Miller 2018, 133-134).



Figure 25: Nyàmkpè body-mask with characteristic symbols: a plumed rod attached to the head; a whip in the right hand; Ékpè leaves in the left. Íkóm urban. I. Miller archives.

hinterlands. When the rights to practice Ékpè are purchased by one community from another, the seller brings the entire institution, including stones, to instruct the purchasing community on their uses. As a source community, the practices of Usagaré should be the model that others follow.

In Ndian Division, South West Cameroon, the Ékpè hall of Oron village in Isangele (Usaghadet / Usak-edet) features a volcanic rock placed upright, and decorated to evoke an initiated body. Marked with red and white stripes, it has a white sash and bell at the waist, machetes on either side for defence, a branch of Ékpè leaves in front, and is capped, with a feathered plume pointing forwards like an antenna (see figure 24). The stone represents an initiated ancestor who stands to defend the ritual space from trespassers. Chalk marks, red for energy and power, white for peace and health, mark an initiate’s body. The plumed rod, bell and leaves evoke Nyàmkpè, the Ékpè body-mask that represents a founding ancestor who performs in ceremonies, to observe that only initiates are present, and that the rites are accurately performed. Nyàmkpè is the defining Ékpè mask throughout the Cross River region. In Calabar, it’s referred to as ‘night mask’ that appears only in the presence of initiates. In the hinterlands of Calabar, Nyàmkpè is often the only mask used by rural lodges, which explains why the Ékpè institution is referred to as Nyàmkpè in many regions. Figure 25 features a Nyàmkpè mask in



Figure 24: Ékpè stone with cap and bell at waist, Oron village, Isangele Sub-Division, Ndian Division, South West Cameroon. I. Miller photo, 2008.



Figure 26: Ékpè stone with cap, painted with the three primary colours of initiation. Tòkó, Tòkó Subdivision, Ndian Division, South West Cameroon. I. Miller photo, 2012.



Figure 27: Ékpè stone with top hat and bàsònkò. Ikot Ansa, Calabar Municipality I. Miller photo, 2008.



Figure 28: Ékpè member greets the capped stone in front of the lodge. Ikot Ansa, Calabar Municipality. I. Miller photo, 2008.

the hinterlands, where it may appear during the daytime. In this image the bell at the waist is not seen but a white sash hangs from the waist; the chest piece and body-suit are made of dyed and woven raffia, resulting in the three primary colours of red, black and white, like the Ékpè stone in figure 26. Two attendants block the path of the body-mask, to contain the ‘wild forest spirit’ that is prone to chase and sometimes beat irreverent non-initiates.

The use of capped Ékpè stones are also found in Calabar, where the hall of Ikot Ansa community (a.k.a. Nkonib in Kúò-Éjághám) features a guardian stone with an 1800s-style British top hat, reflecting local pride in early contact with British merchants (figure 27).⁵⁸ Referred to in Calabar as ‘London’s finest’, the top hat represents a titleholder — and is greeted as such by a living dance specialist (see figure 28) — as confirmed by the bàsònkò ‘plumed-rod’ at its summit, also seen on the guardian stone in Usaghadet (figure 24). This Kúò-Éjághám [“Qua”] community has its own variations of Ékpè practice, distinct from the neighbouring Èfùts and Èfìks.

The earliest known reference to an Ékpè cap was written by pioneering Presbyterian missionary Hugh Goldie, who wrote the first dictionary of the Èfìk language. He referred to: “Mo’-bri, n. A sort of cap with cockade put on top of a stick or stone in front of the palaver house in great Egbo [Ékpè] ceremonies. It and *esak* [a cap] are said to be made in the country behind Èfut.”⁵⁹ This reference seems to describe the Ékpè stone, cap and plumed-rod of Ikot Ansa in figure 27, while “the country behind Èfut” refers to Usaghadet in Cameroon, from where Ékpè culture was diffused into Calabar centuries ago.

While Goldie’s dictionary is generally authoritative, Europeans who relied on wordlists failed to translate metaphysical and other abstract concepts and this problem was compounded whenever the concepts in question appeared to clash with Christian ‘religion’.⁶⁰

Some of Goldie’s errors were reproduced by later writers, both visitors and locals. In Ìbìbìò and Èfìk traditions of the Lower Cross region, Ñdèm is ‘deity’. Yet Goldie wrote “N’-dem, n. Plural of Idem”, confusing two unrelated terms.⁶¹ This was clarified by the custodian of traditional culture of Ùtìt Óbíò Clan, ‘Òkúkú’ (Dr) Ìmé Ùdóúsòrò Ìnyàng, who reported: “Ídèm is not singular for Ñdèm. In Èfìk, ‘mme Ñdèm’ is plural of Ñdèm. In Ìbìbìò it is ‘ofid Ñdèm’, while the Èfìks call it ‘ofri Ñdèm’ (all Ñdèm). ídèm ‘body’; Ñdèm ‘deity.’ We have ídèm Ékpè (body-mask of Ékpè), which is physical and seen, while Ñdèm is spiritual and unseen.”⁶²

A generation after Hugh Goldie, P.A. Talbot repeated Goldie’s error in the following:

58 Ikot Ansa is the Èfìk name, while Nkonib is the native Kúò name for this community.
 59 (Goldie 1862/1964: 193). “E’sak, v., Esak inim, n. A cap covered with the red feathers of the parrot.” (Goldie 1862/1964: 90).
 60 Northcote Thomas was an honorable exception to this fieldwork style, and his nonconformity in this regard earned his dismissal by the Lugard regime in favor of more conventional — i.e., incomprehending — interpretations of ‘native’ patterns of thought. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northcote_W._Thomas>
 61 (Goldie 1862/1964: 200). This error was later reproduced by E.U. Aye: “ídèm, deity or god; ndem, gods” (Aye 1991, vii, also 49, 87). See also Lydia Cabrera (2020, 404 note 28).
 62 (Dr. Ìmé Ùdóúsòrò Ìnyàng, personal communication, 2019).



Figure 29: Ékpè hall with cement figure representing a monolith. Biakwan village, Boki L.G.A., CRS. I. Miller photo, July 2010.

“The word for the collective body of dead members is Idemm; for instance, the Idemm Ekkpe connotes all the past members of the Ekkpe Society, and is generally represented among Eastern Ibibio by the tall, cut phallic stone, Itiatt Ekkpe, embedded in a small clay mound and often surmounted by a cap.”⁶³

By Eastern Ibibio, Talbot meant the Èfìks of Calabar, whose *ítíát* ‘stones’ are described below. Perhaps in the past, Èfìk Ékpè stones were capped, but the author found no evidence of this in the present. Instead, capped stones were found in Cameroon communities with Ékpè, in the Éjághám-speaking regions of Nigeria, and among the Kùò-Éjághám of Calabar.⁶⁴

In Ikot Ansa, the *etae* Mgbè (Ékpè stone) with top hat at the front of the lodge is referred to by local specialists as “Ékpó Dibó” (ghost of Dibó), while the *bàsònkò* ‘plumed rod’ represents the Nyàmkpè grade.⁶⁵ In figure 28, a dance specialist greets Ékpó Dibó while performing Nsibìdì related to Nyàmkpè while holding its characteristic whip.⁶⁶ The handkerchief represents the bunch of *òbòti* leaves held by the Nyàmkpè body-mask; they are held in the left hand to greet fellow members, or to ward off any negative influences as the mask points the bunch of leaves in all directions.⁶⁷

63 (Talbot 1923: 128)

64 Jordan Fenton also observed a distinction between Èfìk/Èfùt Ékpè stone treatment and that of Kùò [“Qua”] communities, where “The stone is adorned with a ‘cap’ and is firmly planted into the ground near the entrance of the lodge” (Fenton 2012, 66).

65 Jordan Fenton also reported a Kùò [“Qua”] lodge stone as “Ekpo Dibo, meaning ghost of Dibo” (Fenton 2012, 67).

66 The performer is Chief Emmanuel Bassey Edim ‘Bozo’ (1946-2020), an Ékpè Nsibìdì specialist from Kasuk Qua community. Thanks to Dr. Jordan Fenton.

67 “The bunch of *òbòti* leaves is called Afu Mbè in the Kùò-Éjághám language” (Abu Edet 2021,

Another ‘guardian’ stone is found in Boki L.G.A., the northernmost region of Ékpè practice along the Cameroon border.⁶⁸ Figure 29 depicts the Ékpè hall of Biakwan village with the eldest Ékpè initiate in the village, held to be 105 years old at the time.⁶⁹ Another sign of heritage conservation, this elder sits upon a special three-legged chair (partially visible here) identical to that documented by Alfred Mansfeld in the Mamfe region a century earlier.⁷⁰ In front of the central pillar is a cement representation of a monolith, which locals call ‘buká-Mgbè’, or ‘stone of the leopard’.⁷¹ The entire set up, with pillar, rope, cement block, stone and calabashes on the floor are part of Dibó, a code for the Nyàmkpè body-mask.⁷² Normally, the statue would sport a red knitted cap, but at the time the Ìyámbà-Ribó, or lodge leader, was deceased and his position vacant. The Ìyámbà titleholder calls the Voice of Ékpè to authorize ritual action, therefore the missing cap indicated that the lodge may not function until this position is filled.

Equipped with this information, one may understand the social contexts of communities with Ékpè by observing their cultural stones. For example, the Ékpè stone in Okuni village is unpainted and without a cap (see figure 14), suggesting the demise of their Ìyámbà, thus a dormant lodge. In fact, Ékpè titleholders of Okuni reported a reduced membership, since youths are hesitant to join because local church pastors have been openly attacking the community’s heritage as ‘satanic’.⁷³

The innovative cement ‘monolith’ in Biakwan with outstretched arms is arguably reminiscent of Jesus of Nazareth on the cross, while the bulbous head recalls – to the author at least – the C3PO robot of the Star Wars franchise. Cement sculpture, a phenomenon documented since the early 20th century in the region, seems to be a symbol of modernity and progress for locals. D.R. Rosevear served with the Forestry Department in Nigeria from 1924-1954; in the Íkóm region he documented cement tombstones from 1929-1931, reporting that: “Tombstones of this type came into common fashion along the upper Cross River in the 1920s, though one seems to bear an earlier date, 1911.”⁷⁴ The tombstones are generally human figures with symbolic hairstyles for women, and gestures of power for men. In addition to tombstones, cement memorial statues of prominent figures have become popular throughout the region (figure 30).

personal communication).

68 Thanks to Mr. Louis Nkonyu of Ogoja, an educator at the Cross River National Park, for introducing the author to the Biakwan community of the Boki region.

69 The Biakwan Ékpè hall is called Ocham Mgbè, as per Éjághám language. In Biakwan, the Boki language is not used in Ékpè songs; Ékpè language is a mixture of both Èfìk and Éjághám, due to the influence of each source group at varying periods.

70 (Mansfeld 1908, 38).

71 “buká (N) any stone” in Boki (Bruns 1975, 63).

72 Jordan Fenton photographed a similar cement ‘guardian’ stone in an Ékpè hall in Bendeghe, Northern Etung L.G.A. (Fenton 2012, 93, figures 2-5).

73 Starting in 2010, Okuni heritage specialists created an annual “Òlùlùmò Day” event to promote their heritage, but after two years local church members attacked it as ‘satanic’, leading to its cancellation (Okim Nyambi Obaji Akpet, February 8, 2015.)

74 Rosevear (1984, 44). An analysis of similar gestures in funerary sculpture in coastal west Africa and the Americas is found in Thompson (1974, 1983), Thompson & Cornet (1981).



Figure 30: Cement tombstones with women's hairstyles. Alok Open Air Museum with monoliths in background, Ikom L.G.A., CRS. I. Miller photo, 2015.



Figure 31: Volcanic rock on an Ékpè lodge patio, Èfùt Ibonda, Ódúkpání L.G.A. I. Miller photo, 2010.

Returning to the use of volcanic rocks with columnar jointing as Ékpè stones, as seen in the Cameroon communities of Isangele (Usagaré/Usak-edet) (figure 24), in Mamfe (figures 15 & 16) and in Tòkò subdivision (figure 26), they are also present in the Calabar region, for example the Ékpè lodge of the Èfùt Ibonda community of Creek Town, along a tributary of the Calabar River (figure 31). Like most Ékpè lodges of the region, its patio has a miniature ‘sacred forest’ represented by a grove of ‘Ékpè trees’ (*Newbouldia laevis*). During annual ceremonies, the patio is cordoned off with a fence of fresh raffia leaves, while red, white and yellow strips of cloth are tied around a tree trunk, emulating those tied around the waist of an Ékpè body-mask. At the foot of the trees, an Ékpè stone is surrounded by empty bottles of gin and Fanta that had been emptied through pouring libations. Taken during the annual purification ceremony of the lodge and its members, this image shows a native bowl of woven palm leaves filled with edibles, presented to the ancestors of the community and its Ndèm ‘guardian deity’. In this context, the volcanic rock acts as the *ísó* ‘face’ of the deity, as expressed in the Èfìk phrases *ísó Àbàsi* (‘face of the sky god’) or *ísó Ndèm* (‘face of the land or water deity’).⁷⁵

In the centre of Creek Town, the Ékpè hall of the Àdàk-Úkò Ward was once presided over by Eyo Honesty II, the protagonist of Rev. Hope Waddell’s 1863 diary, *Twenty-Nine Years in the West Indies and Central Africa*.⁷⁶ After arrival in Creek Town in 1846, Waddell built the first Presbyterian church in Nigeria, a stone’s throw from this Ékpè hall. At the front of the Àdàk-Úkò Ékpè hall, which

75 (Goldie 1862/1964, 137-138; Aye 1991, 58; Urua 2012, 141). Goldie wrote ‘isụ’, while Aye and Urua wrote ‘ísó’. This concept was the focus of Professor Thompson’s study, *Face of the Gods* (1993.).
76 The British name is Creek Town, while in Èfìk this community is called *Ésịt ẹ̀dẹ̀k* (literally ‘inside creek’) as well as *Óbiókò* (literally, *Óbiò* ‘town’, *ókò* ‘that’: ‘that town there’).



Figure 32: Stone and canon at the Efe Ékpè Àdàk-Úkò, Creek Town, Ódúkpání L.G.A. I. Miller photo, 2018.

Waddell called “the ‘Palaver House’, or Town Hall ... were two upright pentagonal stones, ‘pillars of remembrance’, of basaltic appearance, which had been brought originally from the Camaroon country.”⁷⁷ Waddell’s report confirms the diffusion of Ékpè from present-day Cameroon to the Èfìks of Calabar.

A volcanic rock in the ‘sacred grove’ of this contemporary lodge patio is positioned to parallel an iron cannon facing the Calabar River, gifted by a European merchant who traded with locals like Eyo Honesty (figure 32). The three phenomena: church, cannon and ritual stone, represent the colonial process in a nutshell. The Presbyterian Church brought reform to Calabar society, in the 1840s a full-blown slave society, while the British imported arms into the region, now among the most militarized societies on the planet. Meanwhile, locals dug in their heels to maintain their heritage, since Ékpè practice confirms their status as owners of the land. Indeed, this is among the few regions of coastal African forest belt where local lands were not converted to European plantations. Many Ékpè lodges of Calabar seem to have existed on their current sites for hundreds of years, since the establishment of settlements by Èfìk-speaking migrants from Úrúán and Èfùt migrants from what is today Cameroon.

From southern Úrúán, early Èfìk-speaking ancestors migrated down the Cross River to establish Creek Town. Until the second half of the twentieth century, during the capping of the Èfìk paramount ruler, the Obong of Calabar, it was the practice that a

77 (Waddell 1863, 250).



Figure 33A: Úrúán elder prays at community stone, Ùsé Urúán, Akwa Ibom State. I. Miller Photo, 2008.



Figure 33B: Kaolin offering for stone, Ùsé Urúán, Akwa Ibom State. I. Miller Photo, 2008.



Figure 34: Community stone at Ùsé Urúán, Akwa Ibom State. I. Miller Photo, 2008.

representative of Urúán royalty was required to commemorate links between the two communities. To learn about Ékpè history, I accompanied a group of Èfík Ékpè from Calabar to the village of Ùsé Úrúán on the Cross River. As the seat of the deity Àtâkpò Inyang Úrúán, or ‘Àtâkpò the river deity of Úrúán’, Ùsé is considered at the heart of Úrúán heritage. During our visit, elders instructed youths to clear brush from the roadside to reveal an upright volcanic rock. To inform the ancestors of this visit, elders then poured libations and marked the stone with kaolin (figures 33A & B). Afterwards, an Èfík Ékpè titleholder from Creek Town poured libation to announce our presence and intentions to the spirits of the land (figure 34).

More volcanic Ékpè stones are found to the northeast of Calabar in Abiriba, a community of Ìgbò-speakers who were and are great traders. The group of Abiriba merchants who owns Ékpè received it from the Calabar region centuries ago, likely from the Èfíks, with whom they created trade networks extending as far as Douala, Cameroon.⁷⁸ While each of the seventeen villages of Abiriba community has their own Ékpè lodge, during important events, all gather as Abiriba-Umong or ‘federal Ékpè’.⁷⁹ During a recent Ékpè funerary event, an Abiriba mask known as Inyàmkpè performed, saluting the volcanic rock in the village plaza in front of the Ékpè hall (figures 35 & 36). The columnar jointed rock indicates a source along the Cameroon border or beyond, where such rock is quarried. Crowning the monument, a white, red and black ski cap indicates that the cement pillar represents an upright Ékpè

78 The group called Abiriba-Bende traded in southwest Nigeria, while the group called Abiriba-Umong traded in the southeast. In Abiriba, *umong* means ‘water’ or ‘maritime’, a reference to both the Umon community of the Middle Cross region (from where Abiriba claims to have migrated centuries ago), as well as to the Èfík term *mmong* ‘water’. (Professor Mkpa Agu Mkpa, interview in Abiriba, 2015).

79 Interview with Chinedu Agwara in Abiriba, 2015.



Figure 35: Ékpè mask greets ritual stone. Amogodu community, Abiriba, Abia State. I. Miller photo, 2015.



Figure 36: òbó Ékpè ‘house of Ékpè’. Amogodu community, Abiriba, I. Miller Photo, 2014.

stone, while the volcanic rock is its junior companion. Figure 36 shows the òbó Ékpè ‘house of Ékpè’ of Amogodu community, Abiriba, with volcanic rock at the base of the white pillar. As seen throughout the Cross River region, the hall features a central pillar, in this case adorned with wooden sculptures, accompanied by others peering out from the ground floor windows. A brass bell hangs from the ceiling on the top floor of the hall, while ‘Ékpè trees’ grow around the stairway to the left of the building. This review of anthropomorphic Ékpè stones demonstrates volcanic rock as a central feature of Ékpè culture throughout the Cross River region, apparently diffused from South West Cameroon where such rocks exist naturally.

3. OKWA COUNCIL STONES

Placed in circle formation as seats for lineage heads who meet in council, Okwa stones are another cultural practice of the Upper to Lower Cross regions of Nigeria. Examples are found from the Bakor region to Okuni, and south to the Kúòs [“Quas”] of Calabar, that is, fully within a region called “Ekoi” on colonial maps.⁸⁰ In Okuni, three Okwa stones are visible in front of the monoliths representing the founding hunter and his wife (figure 11A). Another section of Okuni features a six-foot-long rounded basalt stone, standing in front of the Ékpè hall of Efí group (figures 37A,B,C). Formerly laid down in the centre of the council stone circle, this Okwa monolith has recently been placed upright to protect it from damage.

Okwa stones are mentioned in the historical literature, including a series of folktales collected in the Íkóm region by Elphinstone Dayrell (1869-1917), District

80 An example is the “Cross River Area” map in Northcote (1914, frontispiece). “Ekoi” was an early Èfík term for Èjágám-speaking communities in Calabar and its hinterlands.



Figure 37A: Ékpè hall with Okwa monolith and iron staff, Efi Ward, Okuni village, Íkóm L.G.A. I. Miller Photo, 2015.

Commissioner of southern Nigeria.⁸¹ One tale depicts how, “The king and his head wife then arrived and sat on their stones in the middle of the square, all the people saluting them.”⁸²

Another reference comes from the Èkpàràbóng community near Íkóm, known on maps as “Akparabong”, where Philip Allison documented a single, “Small, faintly carved, conical stone, at the old meeting place of the Okwa Society.”⁸³ From Èkpàràbóng, novelist Oriri Ekom Oriri (1956-2020) wrote about the institutions of his grandparents, particularly the Ékpè society and Okwa council.⁸⁴ In Oriri’s novel *The Hunt*, Tita Odo was chosen to be the next paramount ruler:

“Tita Odo was carried shoulder high to *Okwa* shrine near the village square. Located between two tall kola trees was a five feet tall monolith called *Ndinda-Okwa*, which means ‘Coronation Stone’. The monolith was surrounded by eight smaller stones which represented the eight founding families of Ekparabong. *Mineni-Mgbe* [Chief of Leopard Society] sat on his family stone. The traditional king maker, *Minen-Okwa*, also sat on his family stone next to *Mineni-Mgbe*. Five of the remaining six stones were occupied by designated family representatives. Tita Odo’s family stone was glaringly vacant. Nna Nenjom, the only woman among the kingmakers, was *Mineni-Bakani*, the chief of women in Ekparabong.

81 Dayrell was stationed in Okuni (1903-1906), after which the headquarters relocated to Íkóm (Fellows 1934, 38). Dayrell’s second book, “Ikóm Folk Stories from Southern Nigeria” has many Òlùlùmò stories with place names from this community. (Maurice Alobi Ojong, personal communication)
 82 (Dayrell 1910, 17). In another tale, “When the king and queen arrived all the people stood up and greeted them, and they then sat down on their stones” (Dayrell 1910, 3).
 83 (Allison 1968a, 43).
 84 Oriri discusses the meaning of the community’s name and details of the novel in Miller & Oriri (2018).



Figure 37B: Maurice Alobi Ojong stands at Okwa monolith, Efi Ward, Okuni village, Íkóm L.G.A. I. Miller Photo, 2015.



Figure 37C: View of the Okwa monolith with circle of stones, Efi Ward, Okuni village, Íkóm L.G.A. I. Miller Photo, 2015.

Now in her seventies, she sat next to *Minen-Okwa*. Fresh fronds of the oil palm tree dangled from branches of the kola trees. More fronds covered the ground in front of the monolith. Everyone at Okwa shrine was solemn.”⁸⁵

Oriri’s narrative describes crowning a paramount ruler through several rites, with Okwa stones in the concluding stage:

“As the people watched in rapt exhilaration, *Minen Emang’s* [the Paramount Ruler’s] retinue continued past the centre of the square towards Okwa shrine. When they entered the shrine, the wooden gong reported the proceedings throughout the eight communities of Ekparabong. Simultaneously, the [mystic] leopard started roaring continuously in the hall. *Minen-Okwa* adorned *Minen-Emang*, who sat in front of Ndinda-Okwa [‘Coronation Stone’], with a red hat. Attached to the hat were eight cowries, an eagle’s feather and strands of a leopard’s whiskers. With a royal spear in his left hand and a sceptre in his right, Tita Odo was complete, the new *Minen Emang* of Ekparabong.”⁸⁶

Oriri’s description of the Okwa stones evokes symbols related to the Bakor monoliths and Ékpè stones of the region: the use of an iron gong, red chief caps, feathers and the leopard. The novel concludes with the total loss of this heritage, now replaced by Christianity. But in reality, Cross River heritage continues in diminished

85 (Oriri 2010, 24-25).
 86 (Oriri 2010, 29-30).

forms, while local expressions of Christianity have not fully replaced the royal traditions of the region. The uneasy, suspicious relationship between the two is expressed by heritage specialists attempting to continue lineage traditions as owners of the land, while church specialists try to obliterate royal lineage practices in an elusive quest for ‘modernity’, interpreted as literacy and white-collar jobs. The result is a class struggle between the fishing and farming communities on the one hand, and Church-educated government administrators on the other.

In the decade of 1960, historian Rosemary Harris referred to Okwa councils in the past of Íkóm urban: “law and order appears to have been maintained primarily by age-sets, which disciplined their own members . . . especially Ekpe and Okwa, in which wealthy men were dominant.”⁸⁷ Historian Ojong Echum Tangban documented that in the past, Éjághám-speaking communities used three royal institutions, Mgbè (Ékpè), Ntúfàm (Village Head & Chiefs) and Okwa (council), to coordinate peace and order.⁸⁸ He wrote: “Mgbe society was responsible for enforcing legislations and verdicts passed by Ntufam and his council and Okwa court, respectively.”⁸⁹

The most detailed narratives about Okwa stones were presented in Okuni (Òlùlùmò), where ‘Ntúfàm’ Maurice Alobi Ojong reported that the Okwa council stones came through migration. From a royal family, Ojong presents his credentials to speak:

“I am from the Ojong Ebuka lineage in Efi group of Òlùlùmò. I am an offspring of a royal family, because my great-grandfather was an Okim Okwa (‘chief of the judgment stones’). To substantiate this, in Òlùlùmò land today, one can never pour libation without mentioning Ojong Ebuka. I am the eldest son of my late father, who was the Chief of Efi.”⁹⁰

When our ancestors left Onughi and settled at Otumorofa, elderly community leaders, each from a royal family, had a stone in the playground. Each would sit on his stone, forming a circle, and whoever was to be tried was brought to them, so the Okwa stones became ‘judgment stones’. When they left Otumorofa [for our present location] they couldn’t leave those stones behind. How they were able to carry those stones from that distance to this place remains a mystery, because some were the size of the one still standing next to the Mgbè hall of Efi community.” (Figures 37A,B,C)

The migration story of carrying huge stones may not be verifiable, but recall that Bakor monoliths were transported from a river bank many kilometres away to their present locations.⁹¹ In any case, ‘Ntúfàm’ Ojong’s narrative confirms the

Okwa stones as local heritage. He continues:

“The Okwa stones are a symbol of autonomy for each community, because it would be unfair for one community to come and judge somebody from another, except such a judgment is all-embracing for all four communities. For example, if a sacrilege had occurred in Òlùlùmò land, all the Òlùlùmò communities will come together to render that judgment. If someone committed an offence like adultery, a seditious act, or killed somebody accidentally, they would be judged in Òlùlùmò by Okwa, ‘the council of chiefs.’”⁹²

The judgement stones were a warning to potential criminals. But in 1900, when British colonial forces reached Okuni they destroyed these symbols of autonomy. ‘Ntúfàm’ Ojong continues: “Unfortunately, British colonists intentionally shattered many Okwa stones when they bombed them in the early twentieth century, thinking that in this way they would destroy our leadership.” Local historian James Okongor wrote, “when the British Imperial forces captured Olulumo in 1904, they claimed that the Okwa Stones were destroyed.”⁹³ A colonial report by L. E. H. Fellows stated: “The first contact with [British] Government in these parts was in 1900. The area was visited by an Officer and troops who stopped at Okuni and destroyed the Okwa stones.”⁹⁴ The destruction of Okwa councils was followed by the imposition of a “Warrant Chief” who followed instructions of the British administration, while “the Executive power, which had been vested in the Okwa Society, was destroyed and its place taken up by the Native Court.”⁹⁵ Even so, in 1934 Fellows recognized pushback from the locals: “the people have recently been taking an interest in re-organisation and are starting to re-appoint the various [Okwa] officials.”⁹⁶ In 2018, ‘Ntúfàm’ Ojong reported that Okwa stones and other heritage survived only to suffer during the Biafra or Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970):

“Our cultural heritage really suffered damage as a result of the Civil War. But not for the love of God, there wouldn’t have even been Mgbè in Òlùlùmò today. The reason is that those who were carting away property were afraid of entering the

“a carved stone in the square called Ekpoti ... was brought from the first dwelling place The stone is carried from site to site from the place of first migration to here.” (Nicklin field notes, March 1978 in Balep village). Thanks to Jill Salmons.

92 Maurice A. Ojong, interview in Òlùlùmò, January 26, 2015.

93 Okongor (1982), citing this colonial report: NAE OGPROF 7/1/1 (File Ref. EE125/11), “Ikom District Annual Report for the year 1910” by Mr. Haig.

94 (Fellows 1934, 13). Thanks to Ute Röschenhalter, who shared this report with the author.

95 (Fellows 1934, 22-23).

96 (Fellows 1934, 23). Röschenhalter cited Fellows (2011: 74 note 23). Röschenhalter uncritically followed the report by Fellows (1934), which claimed that Okwa was an Arochukwu institution used for the slave trade, and diffused from there into Okuni and Íkóm. Colonial reports must be considered suspect till proven accurate, because British agents sought excuses to bombard the region into submission. Meanwhile, Okuni historian James Okongor reported Okwa councils as part of their centuries-old judicial system: “The basis of the ancient political and judicial system was the Okwa Society. The members were primarily responsible for all political and judicial activities. (Okongor 1982, 43). Okwa councils of Éjághám-speakers are distinct from the Ûkwà warrior society of the Èfìks and Ibibios. In Ibibio, “ùkùà, *n.* sword-fighting; a dance depicting sword-fighting; the society which organizes the dance” (Urua et al. 2012, 307).



Fig. 38: Monument to an Okwa stone initiate, Etayip square, Íkóm urban, Íkóm L.G.A., Cross River State. I. Miller Photo, 2010.

Ékpè halls; that was what saved Mgbè. Every other property that has to do with our cultural heritage was moved or destroyed.”⁹⁷

In response, several community chiefs recently organized an Òlùlùmò Day to showcase their heritage. This idea was partly inspired by the efforts of Governor Donald Duke (1999-2007), whose administration promoted heritage tourism in Cross River State in the early twenty-first century. A professional journalist and chief from Okuni, Okim N.O. Akpet, recounts their activities:

“During Òlùlùmò Day we demonstrated how the chiefs dressed in traditional wrappers in those days, when they hung cloth over their shoulders and carried long staffs as they were moving. Each Chief would bring his own stool to the square. There used to be Okwa stones kept in the square that each chief sat upon to represent the various families, but all those artefacts have disappeared. During the Biafra-Nigeria war, there was a calculated attempt to steal all the artefacts and many of them were carried away, so we reverted to the traditional carved stools carried by a chief or their servants to the square, where libation

was poured before any discussion began.”⁹⁸ Libation was poured by the Head Chief, who would invite all the ancestors, especially those of note, because our people believed that those ancestors, even though of late, were still alive in the spiritual world and were guiding the affairs of the living.”⁹⁹

Across the river from Okuni, Okwa stones no longer exist in Íkóm urban. The last paramount ruler invested at the Okwa monolith site in Íkóm urban is honoured with a cement statue in front of an Ékpè hall, as reported by local elder Mr. Columbus O. Agbor in 2012 (figure 38):

“The statue at Etayip Square memorializes H.H. Chief Emmanuel Nkang Abang, Okim Okwa II, of Íkóm.¹⁰⁰ He was crowned in 1956 as the only Okim Okwa of Íkóm. Since his death in 1963, nobody has come to fill this position. Okim ‘chief’; Okwa ‘the shrine where Íkóm people gather to crown their chief’. A non-indigene cannot enter this place, nor can a slave. This statue was made by the family of the chief.”

A colonial report documents that in 1915, the British appointed ‘Okim Okwa’ Nkang as Warrant Chief of Íkóm, likely the father of the memorialized ‘Okim Okwa II’.¹⁰¹ A marble slab below the statue reports that ‘Okim Okwa II’ “served in the postal and telegraph department [of] the United African Company and John Holt” and was “a member of the Eastern House of Chiefs.” As Warrant Chief, and therefore not a traditionalist, Nkang Abang is remembered through a cement statue that no one pours libation to.

But downriver from Íkóm urban, a rural community that Allison identified as the ‘Nkum tribe’ is situated far off the main road, where they continue a vibrant practice of ritual stones.

Not Éjághám-speaking, Òwòm is one of five villages in the Nkum Iyala group. During my visit, palm wine libation was poured by Paramount Ruler H.R.H. Ogaba Joseph Okojo, who then instructed the monolith custodian to prepare the ancestral shrine. After placing a chief’s cap on the monolith, the custodian used two sticks to beat the wooden gong to inform the ancestors of the peaceful intentions of our visit (figure 13). He then led us up the hill to the temple of a protective deity. The temple is at upper left in figure 39A. On the temple porch was a circle of stones where chiefs sit to deliberate (figure 39B). While Éjághám-speakers call these ‘okwa’ stones, the Nkum Iyala community has their own name for them, indicating a regional, not tribal, phenomenon.

To the south of Íkóm urban in the high forest, the Éjághám-speaking community of Etara, in Southern Etung L.G.A., also used Okwa stones. ‘Ntúfám’ Asam Egbe, the Ìyámbà (chairman) of the Mgbè institution of Etara, reported:

⁹⁸ A photograph of two titled elders “with their stool-carriers” is seen in Forde (1964, frontispiece).
⁹⁹ Interview with Okim Nyambi Obaji Akpet, February 8, 2015.
¹⁰⁰ In 1934, a list of five “Okim Okwa of Ikom”, identified Nkang as the current Village Head. (Fellows 1934, 8). In 1915, Nkang, whose title was Okim Okwa, was appointed the Warrant Chief of Íkóm (Fellows 1934, 39).
¹⁰¹ (Fellows 1934, 39).

⁹⁷ Interview with Maurice A. Ojong in Òlùlùmò, December 6, 2018.



Fig. 39A: Monolith shrine and deity temple in Owòm village in Nkum Iyala, Íkóm L.G.A., Cross River State. I. Miller Photo, 2016.



Figure 39B: Circle of council stones at the patio of the community temple. Owom, Íkóm L.G.A., I. Miller photo, 2016.

“In Etara, the Okwa stones were laid in the palace of an Ntúfàm who was crowned there. The Ntúfàm’s palace used to have Okwa stones, staffs, and gongs. Before entering, a visitor was obliged to place their hands upon a stone at the entrance and greet the Ntúfàm. Upon entering, the visitor would clean their hands before the Ntúfàm, who would give them a blessing with his breath, because an Ntúfàm’s breath is considered to have protective power. But today the pastors are discriminating against that, saying when you offer your hands for Ntúfàm to give you a blessing, he is giving you a curse, which is totally false. Eventually, some church members sent a bulldozer to clear off all the sacred stones from the shrines in our centre square. These sacred stones belonged to the shrines of our societies called Okwa, Ikprampet, Obasinjom, Ekpri Okpa and Ebirambi with their deities.”¹⁰²

Such attacks against material heritage are illegal, according to the Federal acts that established the National Commission for Museums and Monuments of Nigeria, as well as Decrees 77 & 79, which later became Antiquity Laws against the buying, selling or the destruction of cultural properties. To inform local traditionalists about these laws, the author and Dr. Abu Edet published a report titled “Etara Mgbè Burial: age-old legacies attacked by churches”.¹⁰³

To the south in the Middle Cross region of Abi L.G.A., Ediba has a tradition of council stones, in spite of the bombardment of this community by British boats in 1895 and again in 1896.¹⁰⁴ Placed in circle formation, the council stones of Ediba are in active use, surrounding a tree symbolic of the community foundation



Figure 40: Okwa council stones in Ediba community. Abi L.G.A., Cross River State. I. Miller photo, 2010.



Figure 41: Òjòr community Ékpè hall, with a statue for a past leader who brought peace to the community (right), and the remnants of Okwa council stones (bottom). 2015.

(Figure 40). In the same L.G.A., the nearby Igbo-Imabana community has a tradition of council stones, as do neighbouring Yakurr communities.¹⁰⁵

South of Yakurr, the historically related Òjòr community tenaciously maintains a heritage of Ékpè and Okwa council stones. The patio of the Òjòr Ékpè hall features a cement statue to honour a beloved chief who maintained peace in this community, as well as four Okwa stones, the remnants of a traditional council circle (figure 41).¹⁰⁶

Among the Kùò-Éjághám communities of Calabar Municipality, the capping of the Ntòè or paramount ruler culminates as he is seated upon a coronation stone, which locals claim is a tradition that parallels the stone of Scone used for the coronation of Scottish monarchs. In a 1975 coronation, the Ntòè sits upon a stone covered with a leopard skin (or a civet cat skin representing a leopard), while his feet rest upon another stone covered in duiker skin (figure 42).

Throughout the Cross River region, a title can become a family name, for example, Mgbè or Okwa. In Kùò-Éjághám communities, the Oqua royal family has produced several Ntòès. In 1938, Ika Ika Oqua II became the Ntòè of Big Qua Town, as documented by historian Chief E. Imona; a photograph from this occasion shows Oqua II seated upon the Coronation Stone with feet upon leopard skin.¹⁰⁷ In this process, delegates from Mba Akang of the Mamfe District of Cameroon participated to represent the point of migration of Kùò-Éjághám people centuries ago.

The Okwa council stones of Kùò-Éjághám communities are defunct. But a monolith is represented in the Big Qua Town community space by a pillar crowned with the sculpture of a human head (figures 43 A & B), as Dr. Abu Edet reports:

102 ‘Ntúfàm Ìyàmbà’ Asam Egbe, interview with the author, 2015. For details on Ikprampet, Obasinjom, Ekpri Okpa, Ebirambi, cf. Röschenhaler (2011, 93, 194-95, 213, 304-305).
103 <http://www.crossriverheritageafricandiaspora.com/2015/07/etara-mgbe-burial-age-old-legacies.html>
104 (Nair 1972, 243-244).

105 See figure Xb in Darryll Forde *Yakö Studies* (1964), between pages 112-13.
106 Also present in front of this Ékpè hall is a high pole with a crucifix on top, to signify that Christ is above all else in the community; a similar arrangement is seen in front of the Ékpè hall of nearby Ùyàngà; these signs show the use of imported monotheism to abolish collective council practices.
107 (Imona 1957).



Figure 42: Coronation of the Ntòè, Big Qua Town, 1975. Archives of Chief Ekong Edim Imona, used with permission.



Figures 43 A & B: Okwa monolith, Big Qua plaza, I. Miller photo, 2010.



Figure 44A: Bakor Monolith on the LP cover of "Up from the Roots", by Cuban percussionist Mongo Santamaría, 1972.

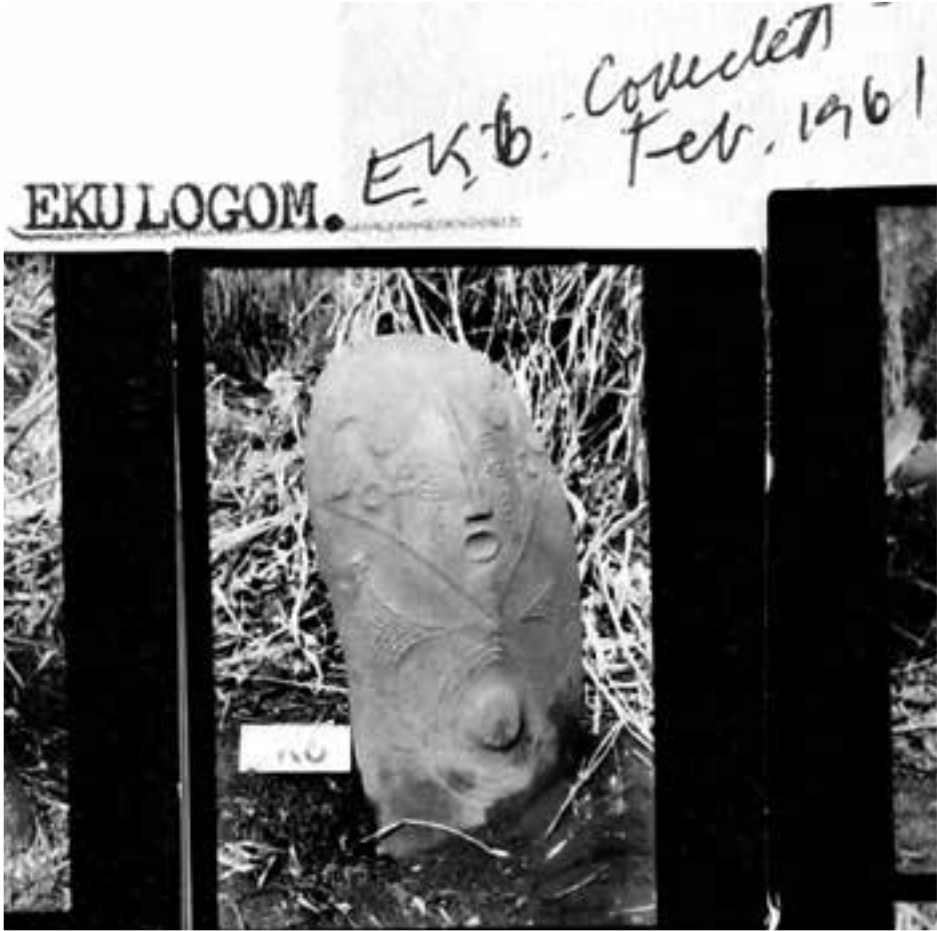


Figure 44B: Monolith as documented by Allison at the Ekulogom site, 1961. Bodleian Library.

“The Ukwa (Okwa in Éjághám) shrine of the Big Qua community where Qua civilization traces its origins, became a focal point. There were found many Ukwa stones surrounding a symbolic pole about 20 feet tall crowned by a symbolic human head, as well as terracotta ritual objects, known for their role in the politics and judicial matters of the community. Similarly, Otung Ukwa sites were identified in other Éjághám communities. It was at such sites that the elders transmitted *nsibidi* knowledge.”¹⁰⁸

Throughout the Cross River region, traditional collective practices are generally stronger in rural farming and fishing communities, where federal and state institutions as well as mission schools have had less impact on social and cultural institutions and ideas.

108 (Edet 2017, 315). Röschenhtaler published a photo of this pillar (2011 figure 2.7, 72).

4. TRANS-ATLANTIC CROSS RIVER STONE HERITAGE

We have reviewed how the centuries-old carved monoliths of the Bakor region are at the centre of a heritage cultural practice maintained by lineage leadership. Meanwhile, the majority of peoples of the Cross River region exhibit an ambiguous relationship with their local heritage, most notably those formally educated who are self-declared Christians and view this heritage as ‘satanic’.

But this story has another angle: from the 1600-1800s, hundreds of thousands of Cross Riverians were forcibly shipped to the Caribbean for plantation labour, making the ports of Calabar and nearby Cameroon the third most active embarkation region in the entire trans-Atlantic slave trade.¹⁰⁹ In the early 1800s in Havana, Cuba, Cross River people organized themselves to recreate the Ékpè ‘leopard’ society, known

109 (Lovejoy, 2017, 23).

there as the Abakuá society for mutual-aid. Abakuá presence is felt profoundly in Cuban popular music, for example Mongo Santamaría’s 1953 recording “Abacua Ecu Sagare” expresses the phrase Ékue Usagaré, meaning “Ékpè from Usagaré”; as discussed above, Usagaré was the source of diffusion for the Ékpè ‘leopard’ society in Africa. From Havana, Mongo was cognoscente of Calabar heritage in Cuba; his 1972 LP recording “Up from the Roots” includes another Abakuá song, while the cover features a Bakor monolith (figure 44A). Photographed and collected by Philip Allison in February 1961 at the Ekulogom monolith site (figure 44B), this monolith was brought to the National Museum, Lagos, where it remains on display.¹¹⁰ Mongo’s 1972 recording brings the impact of Cross River cultural stones to a full circle: the ritual stones that signify ‘stability’ and ‘eternity’ in the Cross River region have been maintained across time and space as an anchor for a trans-Atlantic identity.

Ritual stones of the Cross River region are central to Cuban Abakuá mythology, as documented by Lydia Cabrera in “The Sacred Language of the Abakuá.” As discussed above, in the Èfìk and Ìbìbìò languages of the Lower Cross region, stone is *ítíát*. In Cuba, this term entered Abakuá vocabulary, as in the ritual phrase: “Itia Oru ngomo Sese Eribó: The stone upon which the Sese Eribó [drum] was marked with chalk came from Oru territory.”¹¹¹ The Abakuá society founders also used this term expansively, to identify urban spaces they inhabited, for example, they renamed Havana as ‘Itia Núnkue’, Matanzas as ‘Itia Fondogá’, and Cárdenas as ‘Itia Kaníma Sené’.¹¹² In Calabar and its hinterlands, we have seen that possession of an Ékpè stone or *ítíát* Ékpè is a proclamation of the community’s autonomy in matters pertaining to collective land. The enslaved did not carry stones from Calabar to Cuba, but Abakuá initiates expressed the idea of an *ítíát* Ékpè ‘stone’ to identify their group as an extension of a Calabar homeland.¹¹³

If enslaved people rarely owned property in Cuba, Cross River forced migrants there recreated the idea of a communal ‘sacred forest’ to the best of their ability. Through mutual-aid, several early Abakuá lodges owned property with a meeting hall and patio that effectively recreate the ‘sacred groves’ of Calabar Ékpè lodges. The earliest known example is in the town of Guanabacoa, where the lodge Erón Ntáti secured a collective property in the 1890s, donated by a member soon after their foundation in 1888.¹¹⁴ Because many Abakuá members worked along the wharves of Havana’s bay as stevedores, they accumulated wealth used to benefit their collective. The Erón Ntáti lodge continues to function today on the same property, with trees and plants symbolic of the ‘sacred groves’ of Calabar (figures 45A,B,C).

110 Thanks to Ferdinand Saumarez Smith (2020 personal communication). A photograph of this monolith appeared in *Two Thousand Years of Nigerian Art*, by Ekpo Eyo (1977/1990). The author photographed the same monolith in the National Museum, Lagos, 2009.

111 (Cabrera 2020, 50). Itia ‘stone’; Oru ‘place name’; ngomo ‘chalk’; sese Eribó ‘a drum’.

112 (Miller 2020a, 385).

113 Cf. “itia ‘land’” in Manfredi (2020, 377).

114 (Miller 2009, 187; Castillo Baumí 2020 personal communication)

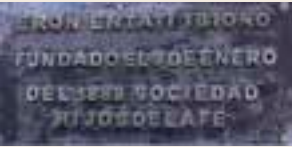


Figure 45C: Erón Ntáti lodge plaque: "Eron Entati Ibiono, founded January 9, 1888. Sons of Faith Society". Guanabacoa, Cuba. I. Miller photo, 2020.



Figure 45A: Erón Ntáti lodge grounds, Guanabacoa, Cuba. I. Miller photo, 2020.



Figure 45B: Erón Ntáti lodge, Guanabacoa, Cuba. I. Miller photo, 2007.



Figure 46: Orú Abakuá lodge hall with patio and trees, Guanabacoa, Cuba. I. Miller photo, 2017.



Figure 47: Orú Bibí lodge with patio and trees, Guanabacoa, Cuba. I. Miller photo, 2020

Several other lodges in Guanabacoa own collective property, like Orú Abakuá, established in 1877, as well as Orú Bibí, established in 1935 (figures 46 & 47).¹¹⁵ On the other side of Havana, the Ekerewá Momí lodge, established in 1863, owns property in Los Pocitos neighbourhood with a temple and ‘sacred grove’, as do several other lodges (figure 48 A,B,C).¹¹⁶ The process of recreating Calabar-style ‘sacred groves’ continues in the present, for example the India Abakuá lodge of Regla, founded in 1961, maintains its property in Regla (figure 49).¹¹⁷

115 (Miller 2009, 186-187).

116 (Miller 2009, 97).

117 (Miller 2020b).



Figure 48A: Ekerewá Momí lodge with patio and trees. Los Pocitos, Havana, Cuba. I. Miller photo, 2003.



Figure 48B: Ekerewá Momí lodge, Los Pocitos, Havana, Cuba. I. Miller photo, 2017.



Figure 48C: Ekerewá Momí meeting, Los Pocitos, Havana, Cuba. Miguel-Ángel Plasencia-Romero archives, 1990s

Following Abakuá myths of ritual stones in Usagaré, several Cuban lodges were named after stones in Africa. In the 1840s in Havana, the lodge Orú Apapá akondomína méfe was established. The phrase Akondomína méfe means, “the stone altar of the Orú” (Orú being a community near Calabar).¹¹⁸ In 1840, the Eforisún Efó lodge was founded to evoke “Eforinsún: ‘Tribe that possessed a stone considered to be precious and worshiped as a Fundamento [ritual object]’.”¹¹⁹ Cabrera further documented: “Isún: Stone. In the rivers of Eforisún land [i.e., ‘Usagaré’] there are some highly polished stones. ‘In memory of that precious stone of Eforisún, in Havana, members of the Eforí Ankomo lodge created a lodge called Isún Efor’.”¹²⁰ In Èfìk, ‘isun’ (i.e. ísó) is face, thus the stone functions as a ‘face’ of the ancestors, where one may communicate with them.¹²¹ These Cuban narratives from the 1800s contribute a historical perspective to the ritual monoliths of the Cross River region.¹²² Established in 1938, the lodge Isún Efó owns property in Los Pocitos, with a temple, patio and sacred grove (figure 50).¹²³

This brief review of Cuban Abakuá references to ritual stones highlights public aspects of a vast oral tradition brought from the Cross River region in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As founders of a neo-African institution that has since expanded to become part of the national identity, Cross Riverians became pioneers of Caribbean communities, based upon the myths of ritual foundation stones in Africa.

118 (Miller 2009, 64; Miller 2020, 398).

119 (Miller 2009, 60; Cabrera 2020, 112).

120 (Cabrera 2020, 176).

121 (Manfredi 2020, 377).

122 Cuban Abakuá narratives have been documented in private manuscripts from the 1800s (cf. Miller 2017).

123 (Miller 2020, 396).



Figure 50: Isún Efó lodge and patio. Los Pocitos, Havana, Cuba. I. Miller photo, 2019.



Figure 49: India Abakuá lodge, with patio and trees. Regla, Cuba. I. Miller photo, 2020.

CONCLUSIONS

Údúṅ ómù, údúṅ ómù, údúṅ ómù; èènnò nù ònwì ònyí?
‘This country, this country, this country; is it not someone who owns it?’
Ékpè song (Ọrọ̀n language)¹²⁴

Professor Eskor Toyo, from a royal lineage in Ọrọ̀n, Akwa Ibom State, identified this song as emblematic of the struggle of his ancestors to defend their communal land in the face of European invasion. He stated:

“I call this song the ‘Ékpè anthem’, because after all the chiefs had come to decide something, the authority of the community was invoked. Those people who owned the community were members of Ékpè, which was the authority of the community. In the past in this region, all free men, that is non-slaves, owned the country. And to plant the authority as co-owner of the country, your father admitted you into Ékpè.”¹²⁵

By extension, the consecrated stones of Ékpè society represent the point of communication between the initiated living representatives of a lineage, the land under their jurisdiction, and their communion with the lineage ancestors, who support the efforts of the living to maintain their land and heritage. This relationship was noted by museum curator Violeta Ekpo, a Cross River cultural specialist who identified carved stone and wood representations of ancestors as a regional phenomenon:

“Another common denominator of cultural unity has been the strong veneration of ancestors, expressed in the artistic reproduction of their images in stone (the Akwanshi in the Íkóm area) or wood (like Oron Ekpu), as well as other forms of ancestral memorials (memorial sheds, shrines, etc.) Ancestral monoliths have been found on abandoned sites on the outskirts of villages in an area of over 300 square miles, among the Nta, Nselle, Nde, Abayom, Akajuk, etc. of Íkóm local government area, and today appear in Ogoja and Obubra areas as well.”¹²⁶

The carved monoliths of the Bakor region are the renowned symbols of a much larger phenomenon extending throughout the Cross River region, where initiated members of lineages that founded communities continue to control communal land as a means of defending their autonomy. Remarkably, the collective ability of enslaved people from the Cross River region who were forcibly migrated to Cuba, where they recreated their systems of governance in the Ékpè ‘leopard’ society,

resulted in a consciousness of ritual stones as a foundation of their heritage. This trans-Atlantic extension of West African heritage is evident today in Cuban lodges that maintain properties that recreate the ‘sacred groves’ of royal lineages of the Cross River region. Our research into the Bakor monoliths has enabled an expansive view of a centuries-old practice of community building based upon volcanic stones as representative of the stability and endurance of lineage solidarity. Despite the myriad obstacles presented by colonial administrations and modern institutions, the carved monoliths of Bakor and the culturally treated stones of the Ékpè society and other initiation groups remain as testaments to a perduring historical narrative, one that heralds lineage elders as responsible for the autonomy of their group into the future.

124 (Miller & Òkôn 2020, 96).

125 (Toyo 2011, personal communication)

126 (Ekpo 1990, 106).

SOURCES

Bibliography

Abasiattai, Monday B., Ed. 1990. *A History of the Cross River Region of Nigeria*. Enugu, Nigeria: U of Calabar P & Harris Publishers.

Afigbo, A.E. 1990. “External Contacts and Relations: an Overview.” *A History of the Cross River Region of Nigeria*. Ed., M. Abasiattai, Enugu, Nigeria: U of Calabar P & Harris Publishers, pp. 122-145.

Afigbo, A.E. 1971. “Ibibio Origin and Migrations: A Critique of Methodology.” *Nigeria Magazine*. n. 107-109 (December-August): 62-69.

Afigbo, A.E. 1965. “Efik Origin and Migration Reconsidered.” *Nigeria Magazine*. n. 87 (December): 267-280.

Allison, P. 1968a. *Cross River Monoliths*. Lagos: Federal Department of Antiquities.

Allison, P. 1968b. *African Stone Sculptures*. New York: Praeger.

Amadi, I.R. 1989. “The Cross River and their Eastern Neighbours: 1800-1913.” *Calabar Journal of Liberal Studies (Cajolis): An Interdisciplinary Journal*. V1, N1 (July) : 73-90.

Aye, Efiong U. 1967. *Old Calabar through the centuries*. Calabar: Hope Waddell Press.

Aye, Efiong U. 1990. “Efik Origins & Migrations Revisited.” *Old Calabar Revisited*. Eds., S.O. Jaja, E.O Erim, B.W. Andah. Enugu, Nigeria: Harris Publishers. Pp. 1-19.

Aye, Efiong U. 1991. *A Learner’s Dictionary of the Efik Language*. vol. 1 (Efik—English). Ibadan, Nigeria: Evans Brothers Limited.

Aye, Efiong U. 2005. “Efik Origins, Migrations and Settlement.” *The Efiks and their Neighbours: Historical Perspectives*. Eds., O. Uya, E. Aye, E. Nsan, E. Ndiyo. Calabar, Nigeria. Pp. 1-30.

Aye, Efiong U. 2006. *Efik Origin: A Refutation*. Calabar. ISBN: 978-8073-64-6.

Bassey, ‘Engineer’ Bassey Efiong. 2001. *Ékpè Efik: A Theosophical Perspective*. Victoria, B.C.: Trafford Publishing.

Berns, Marla. 2011. “Containing Power: Identities in Clay in the Eastern Gongola Valley, the Ga’anda.” *Central Nigeria Unmasked: Arts of the Benue River Valley*. Pp. 502-527. Los Angeles: Fowler Museum at UCLA.

Brain, Robert. 1967. *The Bangwa of West Cameroon: a brief account of their history and culture*. London: University College.

Bruns, Rev. Paul C., Editor. 1975. *Byipang-Byiraa Mbyí Bokyi*. First Edition. Nigeria: Bokyi Books.

Cabrera, Lydia. 2020. *The Sacred Language of the Abakuá*. Trans. Ivor Miller and P. González. Jackson, MI: U P of Mississippi.

Connell, Bruce (2022). “Cross River.” In John R. Watters (Ed). *East Benue-Congo: Reconstructions and Bantoid Classification. Niger-Congo Comparative Studies 4*. Berlin: Language Science Press. 55 pages.

Connell, Bruce, & Maison, Kojo. 1994. “A Cameroun homeland for the Lower Cross languages?” SUGIA (Sprache und Geschichte in Afrika), v15: 47-90. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag (with map).

Cyprian, Nanji. 2016. “Balondo Ba Konja: A Testimony of the Greatness of the Balondo People.” Buea, Cameroon: Bookman publishers.

Dayrell, Elphinstone. 1913. *Ikom Folk Stories from Southern Nigeria*. Occasional Papers, no. 3. London: Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland.

Dewhurst, J. V. 1930. Assessment Report on the Etung Clan. Ikom Division, Ogoja Province. Enugu National Archives, file no. E 1/1929, MINLOC 6.1.173.

Edet, Abu Solomon. 2017. “The Impact of the Nigerian Civil War on Calabar.” *Calabar on the Cross River: Historical and Cultural Studies*. Eds., D. Imbua, P. Lovejoy, & I. Miller. Trenton, NJ.: Africa World Press, Pp. 307-325.

Ekpo, V.I. 1990. “Bibliographical Review of the Upper Cross River People.” *History and Culture of the Upper Cross River*. S.O. Jaja, E.O. Erim, B.W. Andah, Eds. Enugu: Harris Publishers Ltd. Pp. 97-133.

Ekpo, V.I. 1984. “Qua Terracotta Sculptures.” *African Arts*, 18,1, November : 58-96.

Eyo, Ekpo O. 1984b. “Alok and Emangabe Stone Monoliths: Ikom Cross River State of Nigeria.” *Arte in Africa*. Edizioni Panini. Pp. 101-104.

Eyo, Ekpo O. 1986. “Alok and Emangabe stone monoliths: Ikom, Cross River State of Nigeria.” *Arte in Africa*. Ed., Ezio Bassani. Moderna: Edizioni Panini. Pps. 101-104.

Eyo, Ekpo O. 1990. *Two Thousand Years of Nigerian Art*. London: Ethnographica; National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria. [reprint from 1977].

Eyo, Ekpo O. 1995. “Carved monolith (atal).” *Africa: the art of a continent*. Ed., Tom Phillips. Munich: Prestel. Pages 374-75.

Fellows, L. E. H. 1934. “Nkum, Ikom, and Obokum, with Map of Migration.” National Archives Enugu, file No. EP 9641A, CSE 1/85/5297.

Fenton, Jordan. 2022. *Masquerade and Money in Urban Nigeria: The Case of Calabar*. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press.

Fenton, Jordan. 2012. “Take It to the Streets: Performance Ékpè/Mgbe Power in Contemporary Calabar, Nigeria.” Dissertation, University of Florida.

Forde, Daryll. 1964. *Yakö Studies*. London: Oxford UP.

Goldie, Rev. Hugh. 1890/1901. *Calabar and its mission*. Edinburgh: Oliphant. A new edition with additional chapters by Rev. J.T. Dean, 1901.

Goldie, the Rev. Hugh. 1862/1964. *A Dictionary of the Efik Language, in Two Parts. 1. Efik and English. 2. English and Efik*. Westmead, England: Gregg Press.

Harris, Rosemary. 1972. “The History of Trade at Ikom, Eastern Nigeria.” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*. 42. 2. (April) : 122-39.

Harris, Rosemary. 1969. “Unilineal Fact or Fiction.” *Man in Africa*. Eds. Mary Douglas and Phyllis M. Kaberry. London: Tavistock. Pps. 137-150.

Harris, Rosemary. 1959. “A Note on Sculptured Stones in the Mid Cross River Area of South-East Nigeria.” *Man*. V. 59 (July), pp. 113-114.

Imeh, Imo Nse. 2009. *Daughters of Seclusion: the Ibibio Aesthetic in the Staging of a Female Icon*. Dissertation, Yale University.

Imona, Chief E. 1957. “Chieftaincy in Calabar. The Status of Big Qua Town and The Origin of Akim Qua Town. Calabar: St. Therese’s Printing Press, Catholic Mission. 21 pages.

Jeffreys, M.D.W. 1966. “Efik Origin.” *Nigeria Magazine*. Vol. 91 (December): 297-299.

Jeffreys, M.D.W. 1951. “The Winged Solar Disk or Ibo It̩i Facial Scarification.” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Apr., Vol. 21, No. 2 (Apr.), pp. 93-111.

Langhans, Paul. 1902. “Vergessene Reisen in Kamerun. 1. Reisen des Missionars Alexander Ross, von Alt-Kalabar nach Efut 1877 und 1878.” In Dr. A. Petermanns Mitteilungen aus Justus Perthes’ Geographischer Anstalt, by August Petermann, 48:73–78. Gotha, Germany: Justus Perthes.

Lovejoy, Paul. 2017. “Departures from Calabar during the slave trade.” *Calabar on the Cross River: Historical and Cultural Studies*. Eds. D. Imbua, P. Lovejoy, and I. Miller. Trenton, NJ.: Africa World Press. Pp. 23-49.

Manfredi, Victor. 2020. “Cross River Etymologies”. Lydia Cabrera, *The Sacred Language of the Abakuá*. Trans. I. Miller & P. González, U P of Mississippi, 369-383.

Mansfeld, Alfred. 1928. *Westafrika, aus Urwald und Steppe zwischen Crossfluss und Benue*. Munich: Georg Müller.

Mansfeld, Alfred. 1908. *Urwald-dokumente: vier Jahre unter den Crossflussnegern Kameruns*. Berlin: Dietrich Reimer (Ernst Vohsen).

Miller, Ivor. 2020A. “Lodge and Cabildo Names.” Lydia Cabrera, *The Sacred Language of the Abakuá*. Trans. I. Miller & P. González, U P of Mississippi, 385-401.

Miller, Ivor. 2020B. “An Abakuá artist in Regla: Julián González ‘Nfumbe’.” *Calabar Mgbe: International Journal*. 04-02-2020, n. 21. <http://www.crossriverheritageafricandiaspora.com/p/calabar-mgbe-es-una-asamblea-de-grupos.html>

Miller, Ivor. 2018. “The Ékpè ‘leopard’ society of Africa and Its Cuban Diaspora: A Conversation between Cultural Leaders.” With Angel Guerrero & Mbe Philip Tazi. *Afro-Hispanic Review*. V. 35, n. 2 (Fall 2017). Pp. 142-161.

Miller, Ivor. 2017. “The Relationship Between Early Forms of Literacy in Old Calabar and Inherited Manuscripts of the Cuban Abakuá Society.” *Calabar on the Cross River: Historical and Cultural Studies*. Eds. D. Imbua, P. Lovejoy & I. Miller. Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, pp. 177-215.

Miller, Ivor. 2009. *Voice of the Leopard: African Secret Societies and Cuba*. UP of Mississippi.

Miller, Ivor & Abu Edet. 2015. “Etara Mgbè Burial: age-old legacies attacked by churches.” <<http://www.crossriverheritageafricandiaspora.com/2015/07/etara-mgbe-burial-age-old-legacies.html>>.

Miller, Ivor & Margaret Òkôn. 2020. “Ékpè ‘leopard’ association songs from the Cross River region.” *International Journal of Linguistics and Communication*. University of Calabar. V. 7 : 86-121.

Miller, Ivor & Oriri E. Oriri. 2018. “Interview with Author Oriri E. Oriri on ‘Tradition’ and ‘Modernity’ in a Cross River Community.” *Transition: The Magazine of Africa and the Diaspora*. #126. Harvard University, pp. 104-116.

Nair, Kannan K. 1972. *Politics and Society in South Eastern Nigeria*, 1841-1906. London: Frank Cass.

Noah, Monday Efiog. 1987. “The Ibibio Union, 1928-1966.” *Canadian Journal of African Studies*. V. 21, n. 1 : 38-53.

Northcote, Thomas W. 1914. *Specimens of Languages from Southern Nigeria*. London: Harrison & Sons.

Okongor, James Osadim. 1982. “The Evolution and Development of Chieftaincy Institution in Olulumo.” B.A. thesis, Dept. of History, University of Calabar. 95 pages.

Onor, Sandy O. 1994. *The Ejagham Nation: In the Cross River Region of Nigeria*. Ibadan: Kraft Books.

Oriri, Oriri Ekom. 2010. *The Hunt*. A novel. Calabar: Presby Press.

Partridge, Charles. 1905. *Cross River Natives: being some notes on the primitive pagans of Obubura Hill district, southern Nigeria: including a description of the circles of upright sculptured stones on the left bank of the Aweyong River*. London: Hutchinson.

Ray, Keith. 2004. “Boka Botuom and the Decorated Stones of the Cross River Region, Eastern Nigeria.” *African Historical Archaeologies*. Eds., A. Reid and P. Lane. New York: Kluwer Academic / Plenum Publishers. Pp. 189-214.

Röschenthaler, Ute M. 2011. *Purchasing Culture: The Dissemination of Associations in the Cross River Region of Cameroon and Nigeria*. Trenton, NJ: African World Press.

Rosevear, D.R. 1984. “Cross River Tombstones.” *African Arts*. 18. 1 : 44 - 47.

Ruel, Malcolm. 1969. *Leopards and Leaders: Constitutional Politics Among a Cross River People*. London: Tavistock.

Talbot, Percy Amaury. 1926/1969. *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria: a Sketch of Their History, Ethnology, and Languages, with an Abstract of the 1921 Census*. 4 vols. London: Oxford UP.

Talbot, Percy Amaury. 1923. *Life in Southern Nigeria: the Magic, Beliefs, and Customs of the Ibibio Tribe*. London: MacMillan & Co.

Talbot, Percy Amaury. 1912. *In the Shadow of the Bush* London: William Heinemann.

Tangban, Ojong Echum. 2008. *The Ejagham Under Colonial Rule: A study of Socio-economic and political Changes, 1891-1961*. Kaduna, Nigeria: Prudent Printing.

Thompson, Robert Farris. 1993. *Face of the Gods: Art and Altars of Africa and the African Americas*. New York: Museum for African Art.

Thompson, Robert F. 1983. *Flash of the Spirit: African & Afro-American Art & Philosophy*. New York: Vintage.

Thompson, Robert F. 1974. *African Art in Motion: Icon and Act*. Los Angeles: U of California P.

Thompson, Robert Farris & Joseph Cornet. 1981. *Four moments of the sun: Kongo art in two worlds*. Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art.

Urua, Eno-A., M. Ekpenyong & D. Gibbon. 2012. *Nwed Usem Ibibio (Ibibio Dictionary)*. Uyo: Fruities’ Publications Ltd.

Waddell, Rev. Hope Masterton. 1863. *Twenty-Nine Years in the West Indies and Central Africa: a Review of Missionary Work and Adventure, 1829-1858*. London: T. Nelson and Sons.

Verger, Pierre. 1995. *Ewé; the use of plants in Yorùbá society*. Schwarcz: São Paulo.

Interviews

Agbor, Mr. Colombus Oben. 2012. Mr. Agbor lived at 7 Bokomó street, Ikom town, Ikom L.G.A. Thanks to Dr. Mathew Ojong.

Agwara, Chinedu. 2015. Interview with the author in Abiriba, December 20. Revised by Mr. Agwara December 27. Mr. Agwara (1982 -) lives at Ndi Akwu Umueso, in Abiriba, where his father was the Iyámbà Ékpè. Thanks to Prince Ijekpa Urum.

Akong, Chief Sylvanus Eko ‘Orlando’. Interviews September 12 & 15 2014, by Ivor Miller. Interview January 25 & February 18, 2015, by Ivor Miller & Abu Edet, Alok, Íkóm L.G.A., Cross River State, Nigeria. All interviews were revised by Drs. Abu Edet & Frank Enor. Chief Akong (1953-2020) was the Village Head of Ntol Atal and a school director. He was a Principal Technical officer of antiquities

of Nigeria’s National Commission for Museum and Monuments from 1983-2014, stationed at the Open Air Museums of Alok and Emangabe.

Akpet, ‘Ntúfàm’ Okim Nyambi Obaji. Interview by the author in ‘Ntúfàm’ Akpet’s home in the Efi section of Okuni community. February 8, 2015. Revised ‘Ntúfàm’ Akpet on March 5, 2015 & December 1, 2018. ‘Ntúfàm’ Akpet (1945-2019).

Bassey, ‘Engineer’ Bassey Efiog. 2015. Personal communication in Calabar with the author.

Castillo Baumí, Eduardo ‘Orejita’. 2020. Abasóngo of Erón Ntá, born in 1945. Conversations with the author in Guanabacoa.

Cyprian, Nanji. 2021. Email communication with the author. Mr. Cyprian is an author and Ékpè titleholder from Ekondo Titi, Ndian Division, South West Cameroon.

Edet, Dr. Abu. 20201. Interview with the author May 16 regarding the distinction between Òkwà ‘sword fighting’ of Èfik and Ibibio and Òkwà judgement stones of the Éjághám-speaking region.

Egbe, ‘Ntúfàm Iyámbà’ Asam. 2015. Interview with the author February 7, in Etara village, Southern Etung L.G.A. ‘Ntúfàm Iyámbà’ Egbe was born in Etara on August 21st, 1956. Transcription revised by Maurice Alobi Ojong of Okuni, December 6, 2018.

Ìnyàng, ‘H.R.M. Òkúkú’ (Dr) Imé Ùdóúsòrò. 2019. Òkúkú ‘High Priest’ of Ùtiti Óbiò Clan, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Interview with the author.

Mkpa, Professor Mkpa Agu. 2015. Interview with the author in Professor Mkpa’s home, December 28, Achi-Omaghuzo-Ameke village, Abiriba. Professor Mkpa is the former Vice Chancellor of Abia State University.

Ojong, Maurice Alobi. 2015-16. Interviews by the author in Òlùlùmò (Okuni), Íkóm L.G.A. Chief Ojong (b. 1950) is an Ékpè titleholder from the Ojong Ebuka lineage, Efi Ward, in Òlùlùmò. All transcriptions revised by Maurice A. Ojong.

Okojan, HRH Ogaba Joseph. 2016. Clan Head, Iyala-Nkum, Ikom Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria. Born April 10, 1945. Interview May 12, 2016.

Okongor, James. 2015. Interview by Ivor Miller in Òlùlùmò (Okuni), Íkóm L.G.A. January 26. James Okongor (1950-2018) was a retired schoolteacher trained in history. He reviewed the interview transcript on April 26, 2015.

Tazi, ‘Mbe’ Philip. 2021. Conversations with the author by email. ‘Sesekou’ Tazi is the traditional ruler of the Njeh-Mveh village in Fontem, Cameroon.

Toyo, Professor Eskor. 2011. Interview with the author in Calabar. Professor Toyo (1929-2015) was a Nigerian Labor Organizer and a Professor of Economics at the University of Calabar.

Discography

Mongo Santamaria. 1972. “Abacua”. Julito Collazo, lead voice. *Up from the Roots*. Recorded February 22-24, 1972, in the Atlantic Recording Studios, NYC. Atlantic Recording Corporation, SD-1621.

Mongo Santamaria. 1953. “Abacua Ecu Sagare”. *Chango: Afrocuban Drums*. LP-1037. Sonido, reissued in 2002.

-138-

-139-