

OGBESỌN: AN “EXECUTIVE VILLAGE”

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ABSTRACT

Ogbesọn, a village to Benin City’s northeast beyond the Ikpọba River, was originally a settlement about a mile from Egbaẹn village.¹ The two communities were combined under the rule of Ogiegbaẹn, an *ẹnogie* whose direct line continues to rule on behalf of the Ọba. Some oral traditions suggest Ogbesọn originally was part of neighboring Ohovbe, since both settlements were surrounded by the *iyá* earthwork wall-and-ditch system. The remains of Ogbesọn’s bounding *iyá*, despite its long degradation and near-disappearance, basically still define its borders. A barrier clearly already separated Ogbesọn from Ohovbe in the distant past, but the community’s independence or outgrowth from Ohovbe is still unclear. This paper considers Ogbesọn’s founding, its unwritten early history, its position as one of the strings of communities who worship the *ihẹn* deity Okhuaihe, and other historical and cultural aspects, including its considerable growth in population and prosperity.

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Introduction

Ogbesọn and Egbaẹn¹ began as two settlements outside Benin, both located across the Ikpọba River along the pathway to the east and the River Niger. Just eleven kilometers from the heart of Benin City, both former communities were later combined on the site of Ogbesọn

¹ The Egbaẹn discussed here should not be confused with the Egbaẹn who rules in Ọvia North East LGA.

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under the rule of its *Enogie*, whose title is Ogiegbaɛn. Most visitors to the metropolis would consider Ogbesɔn part of the capital since the homes and businesses that line Benin City’s Akpakpava Road continue uninterrupted on the Agbor Road highway once the river is crossed. Indeed, Ogbesɔn was formerly part of Oredo Local Government Area (LGA), but, like other parts of Benin City east of the river (sometimes called Iyekikpoba), Ogbesɔn is now formally part of Ikpoba-Okha Local Government Area (LGA), and Oredo LGA is now home to the city’s historical core. While today Ogbesɔn might be deemed a suburb, from at least the fifteenth to the nineteenth century, it was merely a provincial village that required more than two hours of foot travel from the palace. Like many other villages in the capital’s outskirts, Ogbesɔn’s population has grown significantly in the last century and a quarter, as has its prosperity. Much of this is due to the creation of major roads that have cut through the community, but prominent individuals have also raised the settlement’s profile.

PRE-COLONIAL ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF OGBESON

The two villages of Egbaɛn and Ogbesɔn were about a mile apart and did not consolidate for some time. Egbaɛn is said to have been established in the Ogiiso era and was sited in the bush behind Ogbesɔn, not far from the Ikpoba River. Its siting by this abundant source of water was clearly useful for domestic purposes but was uncommon for the Edo, who tended to avoid settling close to rivers.² Benin City itself supplemented its wells with water from

² Archaeologist Patrick J. Darling posited that the Edo distaste for waterside settlements is an ancient legacy from their savannah origins, when mosquitos, tsetse flies, and select parasites were linked to rivers and their nearby bush (*Archaeology and History in Southern Nigeria: The Ancient Linear Earthworks of Benin and Ishan* [Oxford: B.A.R., 1984], 20–21; 31–33). Nevadomsky pointed out that this distaste has symbolically turned rivers into “insurmountable obstacles” in traditional histories (“Kingship Succession Rituals in Benin. 3: The Coronation of the Oba,” *African Arts* 17 [3, 1994]: 91).

the Ikpọba, but city girls had long walks to fetch pot loads of water there. The date Egbaẹn was transformed from a generic village to a dukedom is uncertain, but the Ẹnogie’s title of Ogiegbaẹn (“Lord of Egbaẹn”) rather than a name related to Ogbesọn provides strong internal evidence that Egbaẹn’s status was elevated before the two villages were consolidated.

Ogbesọn (as a village, not as a dukedom³) also appears to date from Ogiso times, when some oral traditions claim it was part of Ohovbe, its neighbor.⁴ Both settlements were surrounded by the earthwork wall-and-ditch system known as *iyā* that, in this part of Iyekikpọba, expanded in several phases from the ninth through the thirteenth centuries. The primary impetus for *iyā* in Esan and Ẹdo communities appears to have been territorial agricultural demarcation.⁵ The remains of Ogbesọn’s bounding *iyā*, despite its long degradation and near-disappearance, basically still define its borders. While this consistency of territory in and of itself does not guarantee independence, Ohovbe may have controlled Ogbesọn at some

³ “Dukedom” is the English term the Ẹdo commonly employ for villages that have had *enigie* appointed to rule them, rather than the more communal village government headed by its eldest male, the *ọdionwere*. It is an appropriate adoption, since the Ọba has often granted these positions to his brothers or sons who are not in the line of succession. Like Britain’s system, the title can also be accorded to others for meritorious service.

⁴ The Enogie of Ohovbe told Darling that “Ohovbe gives land to Ogbesan [sic] as they were starving during the grandfather of Ehengbuda’s time” (i.e., during Ẹsigie’s sixteenth-century reign). Ogbesọn also shares a border with Oregbeni (Jan. 7, 1975 in Darling’s *Archaeology and History*, 441–442).

⁵ Darling, *Archaeology and History*, 113–118 and “Emerging Towns in Benin and Ishan (Nigeria) AD 500–1500” in *State and Society: The Emergence and Development of Social Hierarchy and Political Centralization*, eds. John Gledhill, Barbara Bender, and Mogens Trolle Larsen (New York: Routledge, 1988), 126–127. This eminent archaeologist posited that Ohovbe’s successive patterns of population increase during the Ogiso era were the result of Ẹdo in-migrations from communities further north.

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point in the distant past, a barrier clearly already separated Ogbesõn from Ohovbe in pre-dynastic times.⁶



Fig. 1. The map of Ogbesõn, courtesy of Google Maps.

By at least the fifteenth century (Fig. 1), Ogbesõn was one of the string of communities the culture hero Ọkhuaiḡ visited after he left Ọba Ẹwure’s service in annoyance, shaking the capital’s dust from his feet. While Ohovbe includes an Ọkhuaiḡ shrine, this village is not counted as one of the fifteen or sixteen original shrine sites.⁷ A powerful individual in terms of

⁶ Darling’s *iya* survey demonstrated three phases of construction took place in Ohovbe; it is not simply one community enclosed by a wall. Rather, it went through three phases of expansion and deepening, resulting in more than nineteen separate *iya* enclosures (Darling, *Archaeology and History*, 113).

⁷ In 1975, the Enogie of Ohovbe mentioned the community’s shrine to Ọkhuaiḡ, but other Ọkhuaiḡ villages do not include Ohovbe in their list of villages whose shrines were initially established (Darling, *Archaeology and History*, 441–443). Eweka excludes Ohovbe in his list of Ọkhuaiḡ shrine locations, but includes Ogbesõn (*Evolution*, 143).

both physical and medicinal prowess, Ọkhuaihe had served his monarch for years, completing seemingly impossible tasks. Ẹwuare began to fear Ọkhuaihe's abilities and plotted to get rid of him. The Ọba persuaded Ọkhuaihe and other supernatural adepts to enter a small, thatched building, then locked its only door and set it ablaze. Ọkhuaihe and the others used their mystical powers to escape.

Ẹwuare wanted to become immortal. He asked Ọkhuaihe to travel to *ẹrinmwin*, the spirit world, and persuade the High God Osanobua for the medicine that would enable the monarch to reign forever. Ọkhuaihe inquired what his reward would be if he accomplished this task, and Ẹwuare answered, "I will create a domain for you with regalia and power like mine, and you can rule in your own place." Satisfied, Ọkhuaihe prepared for the journey. He first traveled to Ughoton, the settlement near the Benin River where the departed are said to enter the other world (*Ughoton n'ẹrinmwin la ye owa*; "Ughoton the gateway to the spirit world").

At Ughoton, Ọkhuaihe entered a spiritual canoe and proceeded to *ẹrinmwin*. He spoke to Osanobua about the secret of immortality, and Father God told him there was no such thing. Osanobua, however, advised Ọkhuaihe what to tell the Ọba when he returned. While still in the other world, he visited Olokun's palace and left with bronzes that magically spoke, their cry of "Ise!" ("let it be so") empowering pronouncements to manifest. He also collected red *ododo* cloth and coral beads, including the special bead known as *ivie okpa i gba urhu* ("one bead does not complete the neck"). When worn, this powerful object would make everyone tremble in the Ọba's presence. When Ọkhuaihe returned to the human world, Ẹwuare was eager to know whether immortality was within his grasp. Ọkhuaihe told him yes. He instructed the Ọba that in seven days, the ruler should sit down in the open and expect something to happen. On that day, Ọkhuaihe secretly used a powerful rain medicine. Ẹwuare sat in the open, and it began to pour. Lightning struck, and thunder rumbled. Ọkhuaihe instructed Ẹwuare that if the monarch could

resist the onslaught without shaking, the medicine for everlasting life would enter him. If he shook, however, his opportunity would be lost forever. The Ọba agreed. Lightning struck just a few feet away, and Ẹwuare shook.

Ọkhuaiḡe exclaimed, “You reacted!” and Ẹwuare sadly agreed. Ọkhuaiḡe distracted him by presenting the objects from *erinmwin*, and Ẹwuare was amazed. Taking advantage of his improved mood, Ọkhuaiḡe asked Ẹwuare about the promise the latter had made. The Ọba said, “Yes, I said I’d give you a domain. Your house will be a palace, an *ada* bearer will always be at your side. (Fig. 2). Your wife is privileged to wear the *Okuku* -queens’ hairstyle. Your daughter will be called *uvbi*-princess, your son *okoro*-prince, just like the royal children.” Ẹwuare awarded him many privileges, but the monarch began to grow annoyed with each honor, his bitterness at losing immortality settling in. He stopped before giving Ọkhuaiḡe his promised *odigba* coral collar. Ọkhuaiḡe tasked the Ọba with this lapse, and Ẹwuare retorted, “What I initially said wasn’t the *odigba* beaded collar, but the neck of a pig (*odigba esi*). Whenever a bush pig is killed in your new domain, its neck belongs to you.” This trickery angered Ọkhuaiḡe, who left Benin in annoyance.⁸ Stopping in Ogbeson as well as many other places along his route—a string of villages known generally as Ikhuḡe—he settled in Evbiekoi, now part of Uhumwonde LGA. Ọkhuaiḡe’s fury mounted when word reached him that Ẹwuare was bragging that he had gone

⁸ Ikponmwosa Osemwegie recounted this story to me (personal communications, May 11 and July 4, 1994, Benin City), but Ọkhuaiḡe’s role in securing the brass, *ododo*, and corals was supported by T. J. Akagbosu (Bradbury Archives, University of Birmingham Library, UK, R5, p. 3, April 1957), E. B. Eweka, *Evolution of Benin Chieftaincy Titles* (Benin City: Uniben Press, 1992), 141. Aisien credited Ọkhuaiḡe but posited that he traveled to the Portuguese settlement at São Tomé, rather than Itṣekiri or Iḡo territory (Ewuare, Oba of Benin [Benin City: Aisien Publishers, 2012], 57–58). This seems unlikely, as the settlement was not founded until 1493, when his third son Ọzọlua was likely already on the throne. Jacob Egharevba likewise attributed the *erinmwin* finds to Ọkhuaiḡe in *The Okhuaiḡe of Ikhuḡe* [Benin City: Aguebor Printers, 1974]), but in his *A Short History of Benin*, 2nd ed. (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1953, 19), he credited Ẹwuare for bringing *ododo* and coral to Benin, which Nevadomsky mentioned is the general Benin belief (“Kingship Succession,” 48).

to *ẹrinmwın* himself, there directly acquiring the divine possessions. Ever since, Ọkhuaihe’s descendant, known as the Ohẹn Nukoni⁹ or Ọba n’Ikhuẹn, is considered a formal enemy of the Ọba. He only comes to the palace for his installation,¹⁰ and should he approach the border of the Ikpọba River, palace messengers will rush there to beg him to turn back, bribing him with gifts.¹¹ When he was about to die, Ọkhuaihe transformed himself into a river, and his heir became his priest.

⁹ Eweka stated the title began when Ọkhuaihe rested at Idunmungha near Evbiekoi. There he impregnated the Enogie’s daughter, leaving her a protective medicine that she kept in a kitchen niche. Ọkhuaihe’s posthumous son was known as “priest of the kitchen,” an allusion to the medicine (*Evolution*, 142); *ukoni* is the Ẹdo word for kitchen.

¹⁰ Nevadomsky stated that the Edaikẹn had to visit Evbiekoi before his installation, one of a series of shrine visits that endorsed his coming rule. There he achieves the status of an *ediọn* at the Ọkhuaihe shrine (“Kingship Succession,” 49).

¹¹ In 2019, the police arrested the Ohẹn Nukoni and brought him into the city. Citizens blamed a violent storm on this breaking of the taboo. A news report stated, “Before he was released, three dogs were reportedly slaughtered as sacrifices near the police headquarters. However, to completely cleanse the kingdom, a list of other items has been given to the police which include 14 native cows, tortoise, sheep, goats, cocks, among others.” The policemen involved were themselves arrested afterward, according to sources (Alemma Ozioruva Aliu, “Lightening, thunder strike as police detain chief priest of shrine,” *Vanguard*, May 11, 2019. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2019/05/lightening-thunder-strike-as-police-detain-chief-priest-of-shrine/>).



Fig. 2. The late Ohen Nukoni with his *ada* bearer. Photo Kathy Curnow, 1995.

Historians see this story as an allegory relating to Benin’s early encounter with the Portuguese and their trade goods. They posit Ọkhuaihe boarded an Ijo or Itsekiri canoe at Ughoton, then traveled to Ode Itsekiri or another Delta settlement where trade with the foreigners had already been established.¹² There, he would have obtained samples of their brass, cloth, and coral and picked up intelligence that may have later led to Portugal’s direct contact with Benin City.

The Ọhen Nukoni is still said to be Ọkhuaihe’s direct descendant. He tends Ọkhuaihe’s main shrine, deep in a forest grove (Fig. 3). Each Ọkhuaihe village also has its own priest and sacred grove, including Ogbesɔn, whose shrine is known as Igie (Fig. 4). Like all Okhuaihe shrines, it presumably contains this *ihen’s* emblem: a water pot(s) filled with small river stones,

¹² R. E. Bradbury, *Benin Studies* (London: International African Institute, 1973), 34.

surrounded by chalk, iron staffs, and perhaps an *ada*. Annually, when the Ọhẹn Nukoni gives the command, preparations ensue for the Ikpoleki festival that celebrates Ọkhuaihe. The latter's old resentments resurface during the festival with the phrase "today the priest will be going to the sea,"¹³ reminding Ọkhuaihe's supporters that he, not Ẹwure, visited the spirit world.



Fig. 3. Okhuaihe's main shrine near Ikhuẹn. Photo Kathy Curnow, 1995.

¹³ Personal communication, Ikponmwosa Osemwegie, Benin City, July 4, 1994.

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Fig. 4. Igie, Ogbesɔn’s Ọkhuaihe grove. Photo courtesy Google Maps.

Ogiegbaɛn Aduwa told British researcher R. E. Bradbury that a past Chief Eɔn from Benin City had founded Ogbesɔn as a farming village for his slaves during the undetermined past. By the eighteenth century, Ọba Akɛgbuda (r. ca. 1750–97) appointed Ediae as Egbaɛn’s first *enogie*.¹⁴ Bradbury recorded a story relating to Ediae’s birth:

Up to the time of Akengbuda the Oba’s eldest son was not allowed to have a full brother. When a second child was born to Obanosa’s mother it was thrown away in the Ugonerie vb’lyekowa in the Oba’s Eguae. It was there for seven days. Then one of the maidservants in the Eguae went there to throw away some rubbish and found the baby was still crying. She went and reported it to her mistress who sent a message to Akengbuda. He, in turn, sent to Obanosa and asked him what should be done. Obanosa said the child should be allowed to live because no-one could know what children planned before leaving erimwi. So the child was taken

¹⁴ Ogiegbaɛn Aduwa to Bradbury, Bradbury Archives, University of Birmingham Library, UK, BS435.3, Jan. 1, 1961. When Darling’s assistant visited Ogbesɔn in 1975, the Enogie was not at home. The Ọdiɔnwere and his own assistant stated: “Akengbuda founded the village and became the first Onogie” (*Archaeology and History*, 441), an example of the natural distortions that can affect oral history.

back to its mother and brought up. This was Ediae. When he grew up Akengbuda himself gave him many things and sent him to Egbaen.¹⁵

Sometime after Ediae's appointment, the villagers of Egbaen packed their belongings and relocated to Ogbeson under their Enogie's leadership. While the reason for this migration is unknown, the Egbaen party dominated the population consolidation. Further historical uncertainty centers not on Ediae's undisputed royalty but on his parentage. Was he Oba Akengbuda's son, as Ogiegbaen Aduwa claimed, or his brother? In 1975, an elder told Darling that Ediae was Obanosa's son, but agreed Eresoyen sent him to rule Ogbeson.¹⁶ Residents of the village believe Oba Eresoyen (r. ca. 1737-50), Akengbuda's father, had a hand in Ogbeson's founding. The local primary school was named after him, and the colonial reports consulted by E. B. Eweka agreed that Eresoyen established Ogbeson's new headship.¹⁷ Eresoyen's ancestral altar occupies the royal courtyard, which further suggests Ediae may have been Eresoyen's son. However, in 1975, the Enogie of Ohovbe stated that "Akengbuda's son [Obanosa?] give different [different from Ohovbe] Onogie to Ogbeson."¹⁸ Regardless of the founding monarch's precise identity, most indigenes of Ogbeson use "*Lamogun*" as their morning greeting, a salutation they share with the Oba and other descendants of past monarchs. The village's Ediṣon shrine is located in between the homes of two descendants of Ediae (Fig. 5).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Darling, *Archaeology and History*, 442.

¹⁷ Eweka, *Evolution*, 143

¹⁸ The Enogie of Ohovbe to Darling, Jan. 7, 1975 in Darling's *Archaeology and History*, 441.



Fig. 5. The village’s Ediḡ shrine backs onto the Ekhatḡ Ḡbasḡie compound on the road to the Eḡḡie’s palace, a short distance away. Photo courtesy Google Maps.

The genealogy of *eḡie* that followed Ediae is not without controversy. According to Ogiegbaen Aduwa, descent was direct from father to son, and proceeded as follows: Ediae, Ḡdiḡvba, Ighile, Ḡkoḡo, and Aduwa,¹⁹ with Osato (the current titleholder), following. Other family members suggest the line of succession shifted unfairly at Okoko’s death. They recount that Osiḡie was Okoko’s heir. He already had at least two sons from the same Itsekiri princess, Ogunbor and Ekhatḡ. Both Osiḡie and his son Ogunbor died while Okoko was still Ogiegbaen; Ogunbor already had a child, Luke Benson Ogiegbaen. While Luke Benson would have continued Osiḡie’s line had his father lived, Ekhatḡ Osiḡie was his father’s next son, also eligible to inherit the Eḡḡieship. He, however, was working outside of the Benin region when his father died. Communications were poor, and there were also those who felt an Eḡḡo mother should trump an Itsekiri mother despite the birth order. Aduwa, a younger son of Osiḡie from an Eḡḡo mother,

¹⁹ Ogiegbaen Aduwa to R. E. Bradbury, Bradbury Archives, University of Birmingham Library, UK, BS435.3, Jan. 1, 1961.

then inherited the Ẹnogieship at his grandfather's death. Complex succession and situations like this can be found both in the Ọbas' historical pasts and in those of many *ẹnigie*; whatever claims relate to birth, he who buries a ruler and conducts the full funeral rites will inherit.

In the 1960s, the large ancestral shrine courtyard at the Enogie's palace had the following configuration (Fig. 6). The back wall included the altars to (from left to right): Ọdionvba, Ighile, Ọkọkọ, and Ediae. The altars to Ọbas Ẹresoyen and Akẹgbuda stood on the back wall of an adjacent room. A small altar to Ọba Ọbanosa (r. ca. 1797–1815/17) was located on the right wall of the main courtyard; its presence was attributed to the fact that this ruler and Ediae shared the same mother. These clay altars all took hemispherical forms, an altar type reserved for the Benin royal family. The left wall included a rectangular altar dedicated to both Olokun, deity of the sea and wealth, and Ogun, god of metal, war, and accomplishment. The small additional Olokun shrines may have belonged to women in the household. The palace, under Aduwa's son, Samuel Osato E. Aduwa Ogiegbaen, has grown into a story building, but the former shrines are still present.

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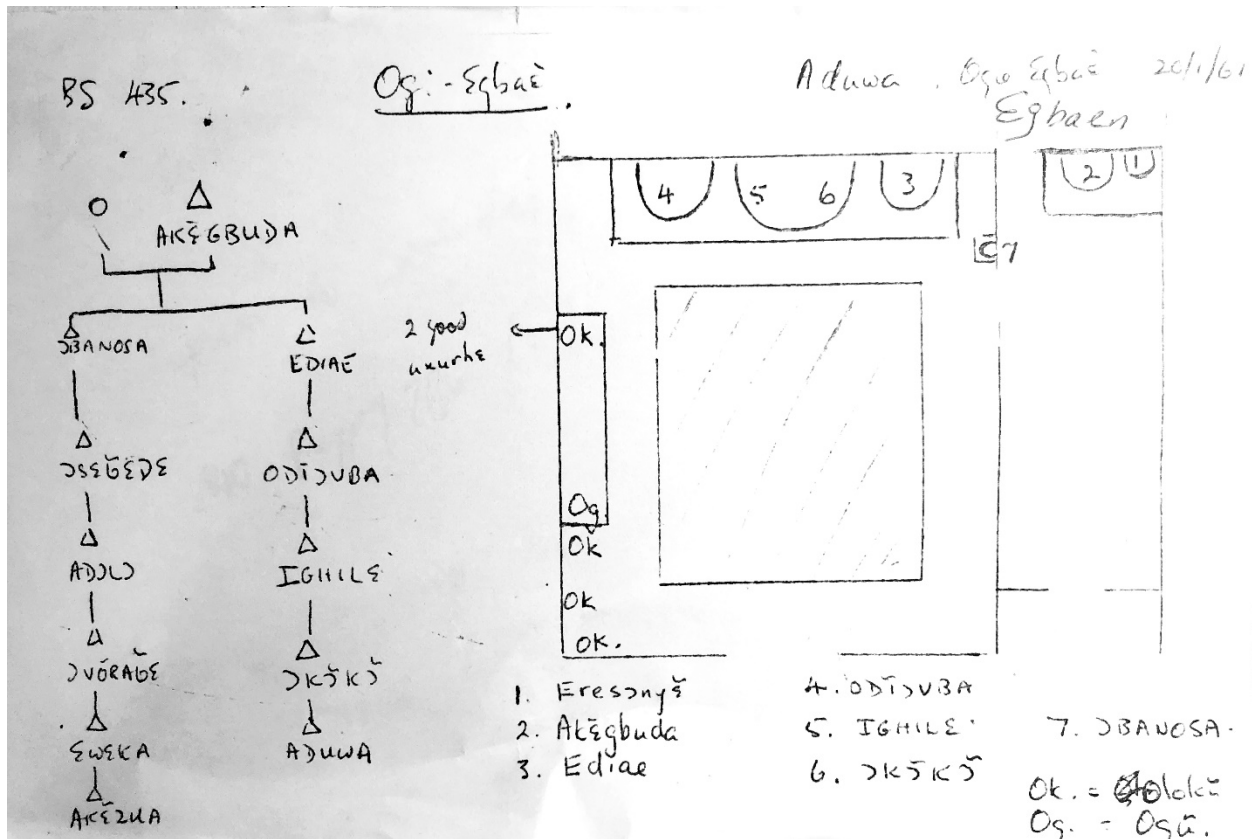


Fig. 6. R. E. Bradbury sketched and labeled Ogiegbaen's ancestral courtyard shrines when he visited in 1961. Bradbury Archives, University of Birmingham Library, UK, BS435.

Several major events annually have involved large numbers of Ogbesoh's population. The first is the Ikpoleki festival, the annual celebration held by Okhuaihe's followers. This is preceded by months of preparation that center on the sacred grove, off-limits to non-initiates. Located on Old Agbor Road—parallel to the current Agbor Road and occupied by many residences and small businesses—this grove has thick vegetation and maintains its secrecy (Fig. 4). Through this preparatory period, the boys and young men who are the main participants in the upgoing festival "close the road" to non-initiates, particularly women. When the signal is given, all must stay inside their houses until the following day. Today, if they are caught unaware, they can be safely escorted home by initiated males if they cover their face with cloth,

blinding them to the sight of the participants. Mysterious sounds, including those produced by the bull-roarer, can be heard throughout these designated nights.



Fig. 7. Akaba-wearing dancers at Ogbeson's Ikpoleki Festival. Photo by Kathy Curnow, 1995.

The Ikpoleki festival itself includes large numbers of bare-chested initiates, wearing their distinctive accoutrement, *akaba*, hung at the waist (Fig. 7). This band of metal ornaments jangles as the performers dance in *ukpukpe* marching style. Their origin purportedly originated in the repudiation of a curse the Ore of Ikpoba placed on Okhuaihe himself after the latter had seduced Ore's wife. Insanity was to befall Okhuaihe, but this master of medicine revoked it, saying that the Ore's curse would bounce back on the sender, and be replaced by the *akaba* dance—a beautiful performance his own children would share.²⁰

Once the *akaba* performance has excited the crowd, the chief priest, or Ohen Igie, appears with his attendants. He wears *adaigho*, a handwoven *ebuluku* skirt washed in medicine.

²⁰ Eweka, *op.cit*, 142-3

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At one stage of the festival, his torso and face are painted half-white with chalk (Fig. 8), and he bears a red parrot’s feather stuck in his hair at the forehead. At another stage, he is half-reddened by camwood powder and half-blackened with charcoal, allusions to power and death. In this dress, he is fully fortified, wearing a cowrie-covered medicine band around his torso, brass containers hanging from his neck, and small medicine calabashes strapped to one arm. He dances with his *ada* ceremonial sword, then supplicants approach him with personal requests, and he prays for them (Fig. 9).



Fig. 8. The late Ohen Igie (d. 2021) at the Ikpoleki Festival. Photo by Kathy Curnow, 1995.



Fig. 9. The late Ohen Igie (d. 2021) attending to a supplicant at the Ikpoleki Festival. Photo by Kathy Curnow, 1995.

A second major occasion is that of *Ehoema*, the Enogie’s royal version of *ehọ*, the time when the royal family’s ancestors (*Erinmwindu*) are served. Because this is an elevated version of the ordinary ceremony, cows are slaughtered in addition to yam, and the Ogiegbaen

entertains the community outdoors with food, drink, and entertainment. It usually takes place around September in Benin's dukedoms.

The third major event was instigated by a recently deceased leader and personality, Chief Eduwirofor Ekhatör Qbasogie, the Qbasogie of Benin Kingdom (d. 2020). For over three decades, the Qbasogie hosted the village at his December celebration of Iguę. While once all prominent chiefs celebrated their Iguę publicly, Christianity and the economy have precluded this for most. Preparations involved repainting, lining the street to the entry with international flags, and preparing food. Chief Qbasogie and his family fed hundreds of people each year on this occasion, from palace chiefs to social clubs, to petty traders and farmers (Fig. 10).



Fig. 10. The late Qbasogie of Benin exiting his ancestral shrines at his Iguę ceremony. Photo by Kathy Curnow.

All enjoyed the traditional drummers that accompanied the Qbasogie dancing and that of his followers, as well as the live band that supplied music for dancing after the traditional rites were completed. The latter followed the format of other aristocrats' Iguę celebrations: prayers at the ancestral shrine, the sacrifice of a bull, goat, duck, and other animals, their ropes held in the

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celebrant’s hand, and the application of sacrificial blood to the chief’s head and other critical parts of the body, accompanied by prayers. Afterwards, both the chief’s wife and senior son knelt before him and swore fealty (Fig. 11) .



Fig. 11. The late Ọbasogie of Benin dancing at his Igue ceremony. Photo by Kathy Curnow.

Ogbesɔn’s growth in the early twentieth century was steady but slow. By 1938, a Christian church had already been established by Rev. E. E. Ohuoba, Benin’s first indigenous Anglican priest.²¹ It remained a somewhat sleepy community in the first half of the century, but began development with Ẹrẹsọyen Primary School, its land donated by Ekhatɔr Osigie Ogiegbaɛn. Ekhatɔr (Fig. 12), a hunter and trader who traveled extensively, served as a Native

²¹ Ohuoba, Imafidon. “Early Missionary Activities of Rev. E. E. Ohuoba (1885–1950): First Benin Indigenous Priest.” n.d. https://www.academia.edu/34596653/Early_Missionary_Movements_in_Benin_Contributions_Of_Rev._Emmanuel_Egiebor_Ohuoba_1885-1950

(now Customary) Court policeman. His Renault was one of Ogbesọn's first cars in the 1960s when motor vehicles began becoming more numerous outside Lagos. Among Ekhatọr's wives was the successful trader Madame Victoria Oghomwọnyi Ezomo, one of Chief Ezọmọ's daughters, who bore him five children who lived to adulthood: three sons and two daughters.



Fig. 12. Pa Ekhatọr Obasigie Ogiegbaẹn. Photo courtesy Eduwu Ekhatọr Ọbasogie.

Ekhatọr's generation saw significant change from the colonial period to independence, as well as shifts in religion, education, new forms of commerce such as rubber plantations, and connectivity to other parts of the country. His sons attended secondary school, the eldest at St. Patrick's in Asaba, and the youngest at the College of Science and Commerce, Lagos. Old Agbor Road, which ran past Ekhatọr's home, was replaced by a newly paved highway to Agbor, and this new road's (now the second metropolitan axis of development)²² growing traffic led to the

²² Emman Funmilayo Ogunbodede and Toju Francis Balogun. "An Integrated Remote Sensing and GIS Approach in Monitoring Urban Expansion in Benin-City, Nigeria," *International Journal of Scientific & Engineering Research* 4 (5, 2013), 749.

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establishment of Agbor Motor Park on Ekhatɔr’s land, enabling long-distance traders to conveniently travel back and forth to the east.

In the last few decades of the twentieth century, two members of the ducal family became prominent, spreading awareness of Ogbesɔn to many Benin citizens. One is the current Ogiegbaɛn, His Royal Highness Professor Samuel Osato E. Aduwa Ogiegbaɛn (Fig. 13), who ascended the throne as a youth in 1970. He became the most educated of the kingdom’s *ɛnigie*.



Fig. 13. His Royal Highness Professor Samuel Osato E. Aduwa Ogiegbaɛn, the ɛnigie of Egbaɛn/Ogbesɔn, 2020. Single frame from Dr. Ize-Iyamu’s visit to Ogbesɔn; <https://www.facebook.com/Profidiaizeiyamu/videos/my-visit-to-ogbeson-community-in-ikpoba-okha-local-government-area-in-edo-state-/323737428845055/>

While on the throne, he finished secondary school and progressed to a bachelor’s degree from the University of Ibadan, a master’s degree in Mass Communication from Wayne State University in the United States, and a Ph.D. from University of Benin in Curriculum Studies, specializing in instructional technology. He was a faculty member of the University of Benin’s Department of Educational Psychology and Curriculum Studies for many years, publishing numerous academic papers. He later moved into administration and became the Deputy Vice-

Chancellor of the university, and presently serves as Vice-Chancellor of the Tayo Akpata University of Education, Ekiadolor. He renovated his father's palace and surrounded it with extensive landscaping (Fig. 14), updating the surroundings of the family shrines. His eldest daughter, Ẹgbẹ, became the Crown Prince's second wife, bearing him a daughter before her demise.



Fig. 14. Ogbesọn's royal palace can be seen through the trees to the right, hedges, bushes, and trees planted in the large open space before it. Photo courtesy Google Maps.

The Enogie's cousin, Chief Eduwuirofor Ekhatọr Ọbasogie, became one of Benin's best-known personalities, prompting visits by several governors, many *ẹnigie*, U.S. ambassador William H. Twaddell and members of his staff, and the then-Edaikẹn Ehẹnẹdẹn. As the Ọbasogie of Benin Kingdom, he was a member of the kingdom's distinguished Eghaẹvbo N'Ore, and often hosted their meetings in Ogbesọn. An international businessman with bases in Lagos and London, he represented the Ọba at many occasions—local, national, and global. He served as chairman of numerous state and palace commissions and task forces, and his frequent television appearances made him a household name. Known for his spectacular performances with the *ẹbẹn*, he often featured in documentaries about palace festivals, some shown on

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Nigerian television, others broadcast in the United States and Britain. The Ọbasogie established the first borehole in the community, and also created two shopping plazas there. His architectural taste drew attention to the village (Figs. 15 and 16).



Fig. 15. The Ekhator Ọbasogie compound. Photo courtesy Google Maps.



Fig. 16. The Ekhator Ọbasogie personal guesthouse, Ogbesón, built in the early 1990s. Photo by Kathy Curnow.

Both the Ọbasogie and the Ẹnogie patronized Benin builders and artists for their exteriors and interiors. Their elevated tastes spread, bringing new forms of architecture and beautification to the community, including the Ọkhuaihe priest's home adjacent shrine (Fig. 17)



Fig. 17. The Oheṅ Igie's shrine, adjacent to his home. Photo by Kathy Curnow, 1995.

and significant new domestic construction (Fig. 18). Development in Ogbesṅ in the past twenty years includes both industry and small businesses, aided by the growth Agbor Road engenders; unfortunately, the road's erosion problems in Ogbesṅ continue to threaten businesses and homes with flooding. The village's borders enclose the NNPC depot (soon to be the country's largest supplier of natural gas), as well as numerous banks, churches, and filling stations (Fig. 19). These features and personages have led some of Ogbesṅ's inhabitants to refer to their hometown as an "executive village," birthplace of medical doctors, lawyers, businesspeople, musicians, civil servants, and others, as well as the farmers and traders who have sustained it over the centuries.

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Fig. 18. Recent domestic construction deep inside Ogbesón. Photo courtesy Google Maps.



Fig. 19. Recent development along Agbor Road. Photo courtesy Google Maps.

NOTES

Special thanks go to the following sons and daughters of Ogbesọn's soil: the late Chief Eduwu Ekhatọr Ọbasogie, Margaret Iyore Michaels, Hon. Prince Osahon Ekhatọr Ogiegbaen, JP, and Leo Benson Ogiegbaen.

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