

BOOK REVIEW: *OUR FAMILY TREE: FIVE GENERATIONS OF AKPATA DESCENDANTS*

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Publisher: Narrative Landscape Press, Lagos, Nigeria

Year: 2019

Pages: 63

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Our Family Tree: Five Generations of Akpata Descendants is a short family biography on the Akpata Family of the Benin Kingdom written by a descendant of the Akpata family. The foreword by HRH (Prof.) Gregory I. Akenzua, (the Enogie of Evbuobanosa, Benin Kingdom). He described the book as “an inspiring insight into the life and times of some prominent Nigerians of Benin extraction”, which he hopes will spur many youths to strive for a noble cause and encourage other Benin families to document their family history.

The book is divided into five chapters, with a basic theme of describing the genealogy Akpata family and enabling all the descendants of the family to trace their ancestral roots. The author takes Oshodi n’Emoni, who lived in the early 19th century as the starting point of his description. The first chapter is divided into two sections, a brief historical background of Benin and the family tree. He discussed the dynastic origin of Benin, the expansionist activities of various warrior kings and the impact of Benin on her neighbours until the fall of Benin in 1897. An obvious structural lapse in this section is that ends with an explanation of the origin of Benin people. The origin of Benin people should have come at the beginning.

The second section outlined the descent from Oshodi n’Emoni in three stages of five generations and a central figure, Abraham Okoro Oviawe, who he says is a branch of the descendants of

Oshodi n'Emoni family.¹ The first level of the family descent was represented by a figure of the family tree showing descent from Oshodi n'Emoni to Abraham Okoro Oviawe. This figure dealt with three layers of the earlier generation amongst which the author identifies the grandmother of Okeaya Inneh. The second figure show the fourth generation being the children of Abraham Okoro Oviawe and their maternal relation the child of Madam Efomo, a sister of Ariehor, wife of Abraham Okoro Oviawe. Figure three treats the descendants of Abraham Okoro Oviawe and his grandchildren as the fourth and fifth generation of the Akpata family.²

In chapter two, more detailed biography of Abraham Okoro Oviawe was discussed. He traced his birth to the era of Benin war of reconquest of Akure. The discussion of Abraham Okoro Oviawe relies on family archives dating as far back as 1925. Abraham Okoro Oviawe is identified as a renowned Benin warrior and foremost entrepreneur who traded between Benin kingdom and Yoruba commercial towns. It reveals that he was nicknamed Akpata (a rock) by his Yoruba clients or customers to affirm his firm and formidable personality. Also, the notable descendants from Oshodi n'Emoni lineage were identified and some consanguine relationships with other prominent Benin people like Okeaya Inneh (SAN), Chief Uwensuyi-Edosomwan, the Obasuyi of Benin kingdom and General Godwin Osagie Abbe (rtd). The other section of this chapter was the photographic story, which makes all the biographical accounts narrated by the author animated and explicit.

In chapter three, the author uses the family salutation as a tool in tracing the earliest descendants of the Akpata family to Elawure of Usen, the traditional head of Usen Town, Benin kingdom. The Akpata family salutes *Delahe (Dela Uhe)*, which is also the salutation of the Elawure. The photographic story here identifies the leading academics and entrepreneurs including the former Commissioner of Education of the defunct Mid-West State in 1972, Omotayo Osayande Akpata, who later became the Ima of Benin Kingdom.

¹ Akpata, E. S. (2019), *Our Family Tree: Five Generation of Akpata Descendants*. Lagos, Narrative Landscape Press, p. 5

² Akpata, E. S. (2019), *Our Family Tree: Five Generation of Akpata Descendants...* pp. 6-8

In chapter four, a cursory list of achievements by the descendants of Akpata family are discussed. Members of this family like their progenitor made successful venture in commerce, such that they were among the first to establish public transportation, timber and rubber export businesses in Nigeria generally and Benin in particular. Also, some were recognized by the Oba of Benin and given chieftaincy titles like the Ayobahan (non-hereditary title) and Aihioba (hereditary title) of Benin Kingdom. Like the previous generation, the fifth generation of Akpata family maximized the foundation laid by their predecessors in the field of education. Remarkably, the author mentioned the sterling achievements in sports, education and international affairs, administration, medicine and dentistry, nursing, law, forestry, and agriculture, as well as having the honour of respected traditional titles in the Benin kingdom. It is imperative to state that the current President of the Nigeria Bar Association, Olu Akpata is a descendant of this family.

Overall, the book is interesting to read as it incorporates photographs (thirty-four pictures) in its descriptions to easily identify the most prominent descendants of the Akpata family. The book also leaves several critical questions unanswered. The author stated that Abraham Okoro Oviawe was head of a troop during Obadan war, there is no historical evidence if such a war occurred and when it was fought. Obadan is historically a war camp built by Oba Ovonramwe in preparation to launch an attack against the Agbor territories. There is a need to explain the relationship between Late Chief Dr. Jacob Uwadiae Egharevba, a grandchild of Ariehor, and the Akpata family.

The historical accounts narrated in chapter three should have formed part of the introduction or chapter one. This should have been discussed as part of the history of Benin, as it establishes a connection between the family and the foundation of the present dynasty of kings. Therefore, an obvious gap exists in this account which further historical research on Usen can help to fill. Overall, this account of the Akpata family tree reveals the necessity for a wide range of prosopography in Benin City, Nigeria. Finally, this seminal monograph points to the vast understudied aspects of the historical development of the Benin kingdom.