

MUSIC AND ASSOCIATED CEREMONIES DISPLAYED DURING *UGIE* (FESTIVAL) IN THE  
ROYAL COURT OF BENIN KINGDOM, NIGERIA

by

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I declare that \*Music and Associated Ceremonies Displayed during Ugie (Festival) in the Royal Court of Benin Kingdom, Nigeria is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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## SUMMARY

This study examines the *Oba of Benin Royal Ugie* ceremonies, which is an annual religious and cultural event celebrated by the *Benin* speaking people of Edo State, Nigeria. As a communal and spiritual activity, the *Oba* and people of *Benin* kingdom mark the Ugie festivals with Musical and dance performances. Within this context, the study adopts the historical and participant approaches as its method of contending that some events during the *Oba of Benin Royal Ugie* festival ceremonies are colorful theatrical performances.

The organizational structure of the *Oba of Benin Palace* as it relates to the observance of Ugie festival ceremonies is also discussed in this research. This study also examines the role *Ewini* music plays in the various *Oba of Benin Royal Ugie* festival ceremonies, thereby looking at its origin, socio-cultural context, formation procedure, instrumentation, and organizational set-up.

This research also recommends different ways in which music practitioner can benefit by applying a theatrical approach to the study of these royal *Ugie* ceremonies and its music and also the ability of the festival ceremonies to continue to act as an instrument of stability and unity for the people of *Benin* kingdom, by bringing people from different walks of life together during the performance at *Ugie* ceremonies. For clarity, all non-english words are defined in the glossary section on page 73.

## **Keywords**

Festival

Music

*Ewini* music

African music

Traditional festivals

*Igue* festival

Rituals

*Oba* of *Benin* kingdom

*Ugie* festivals

Chiefs

*Benin* kingdom

Culture

Costume

*Igue* Dance

*Edo* people

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## ABSTRACT

This work takes an overall look at *Ugie* (festivals) ceremonies in the Royal Court of *Benin*, and shows in chronological order the various constituents of the *Ugie* ceremonies. The project is broken into five distinct chapters for segmental appraisal of the subject matter. Chapter one takes a general view at the topic term “*Ugie*” in an introductory note, as well as the statement of problems, objectives, scope, significance, research questions and methodology employed for the study. Chapter two x-rays the *Benin* palace as it relates to these *Ugie* festivals in terms of structure, composition, societal groupings and their functions. And it also looks at the political organization and the administration of the *Benin* kingdom. Chapter three examines and analyses the festival in terms of content, music, song, dance, audience, costumes, extent of participation and theatrical contents, such as the *Ugie* rituals and plotting. Chapter four examines and analyses, the *Ewini* music in *Ugie* festival. In concluding, the fifth chapter pieces together the musical implications of these elements and how they could be useful to the music practitioners, their advantages and inter-dependability on one another (Music and *Ugie*). Furthermore, this research recommends the different ways in which music and its practitioner can benefit by applying a theatrical approach to the study of these royal *Ugie* (festivals) and also the ability of the *Ugie* to continue to act as an instrument or agent of stability and unity for the people of Edo State, Nigeria, by bringing people from different walks of life together during the performance at *Ugie* ceremonies.

## CHAPTER ONE

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Every community has its own cultural norms and values that are imbedded in its beliefs. Within each culture lies a set of values and norms that are ingrained and inculcated as religious acts through which particular people attempt to relate to the Supreme Being. *Benins* are no exceptions in that they have within their culture and customs rich festivals that make them quite an interesting cultural group. One such ceremony that has remained with them for quite some time is the *Oba of Benin Royal Ugie* festivals that have continued to be a phenomenon and experience where traditional beliefs are at play and have withstood the test of time.

The various *Ugie* ceremonies commemorated by the *Benin* people sees the blending and marrying of the traditional religion and significant cultural practices in an attempt to relate these to the distant ancestral being; the ancestors though so distant, yet ever present in this life, are recognized as the sustainers of all things. There is no doubt that the religious functions attributed to the *Ugie Igue-Oba* festival itself are quite inspirational to the adherents as well as enriching as humanity attempts to relate to the divine being using the human's cosmological experiences.

Festivals are common features in world religions and cultures. They are occasions for commemorating certain events which are of vital importance to the celebrating community.

*Benins* religiously observe the *Ugie* festival ceremonies as part of the physical attempt to communicate to their ancestors seeking for blessings, good health and prosperity. *Benin* people should not be disregarded for their own attempt to relate to god through the various

*Ugie* festival rituals. Rather such festival as part of ancestral veneration is in itself central to their life and worldview that will go a long way in enriching the discourse of African traditional festivals.

Festivals in general are joyous occasions celebrated with specific aim or aims in view and, as such, they have beliefs attached to them. In African festivals and their celebrations, the connection between sacred symbols of culture, myths and ritual are put into practical expression. Some festivals occur at specific periods and follow certain calendar of event. Rites and rituals of festivals are expressions of the people's deep religiosity which is culturally transmitted in the process of celebrating festivals.

*Ugie* festival is important in the life of the *Oba* and the people of *Benin* kingdom, the *Oba's* continued health and prosperity as well as that of the people, which are firmly enshrined and founded on the various *Ugie* sacred ceremony and rituals. The focus of the *Ugie* feast is entrenched in the core foundation of ancestral reverence that can be best described as the religious life of the *Benin* people.

*Ugie* is a general term in *Benin* kingdom for royal or palace ceremonies or festivals. At the end of each year the *Oba* (king) of the *Benin* kingdom celebrates *Ugie* festivals in accordance with the *Benin* custom. As a religious and cultural festival, it is celebrated with pomp and grandeur; it marks the end of the *Benin* year and ushers in a new year with renewed hope for peace and prosperity.

Of all the important royal *Ugie* ceremonies, the *Igue-Oba* ceremony is not only considered as the most acclaimed. It is one singular event that creates a general sense of participation for all *Edo* people. The *Igue-Oba* activities do not only involve members of the palace societies, but also the whole *Benin* community.

*Ugie* festival ceremonies are characterized by ritual activities performed at some shrines in the *Oba's* palace. It is part of an old ceremony that *Benin* people find to be refreshing and deeply fulfilling to those who take part in the ceremony. Various artistic performances during the ceremony show that the *Benins* have relatively kept their past in terms of dancing the traditional dance steps, singing of *Ewini* music during *Ugie* festivals and performances of the rituals. While there are individual performances, much of the performances are of group nature.

Music is an essential ingredient in African traditional festivals. Music and dance are basic in Africa traditional festivals; a festival without music and dance is not complete because they are part of the daily living of the African.

Music, dance and rituals form very vital part of the *Ugie* festivals. It was also instituted for the offering of thanks annually to the gods for sparing the lives of the people of *Benin* kingdom, and also to ask for blessings; it was also the period for traditional offerings at some shrines in the *Oba's* palace. *Ugie* festival has its own special songs that are only sung in honour of the events and cannot be repeated elsewhere for other festivals or ceremonies.

During *Ugie* festivals, dance is performed by all important chiefs. *Ugie* dance is a ceremonial palace dance performed during the annual festivals in honour of the *Oba*. It is also an ancient dance by chiefs who perform sacrificial and priestly functions in the shrines at the end of a successful year while soliciting for a happy new year. The *Ugie* dance is a definite dance style that is performed at *Ugie* festival ceremonies.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

Over the years the studies on *Igue* festival have not been in-depth. This study takes a critical look at totality of *Ugie* ceremonies from the very beginning to the end, and also points out the

stabilizing and unifying effects of the royal *Ugie* festival on the people and society. It will also give writers and scholars the opportunity of knowing the beneficial elements in the *Oba* of *Benin* royal annual *Ugie* festivals.

## **1.2 Objectives of the study**

The researcher intends to undertake:

- A detailed study on the role and place of *Ugie* music in defining the socio-cultural, entertainment and religious meanings among *Benin* people.
- A probe into the various *Ugie* ceremonies of the Royal court of *Benin*, to educate people that the *Igue* is not celebrated without the other *Ugie* ceremonies. And also to educate people and the society on how the *Ugie* in the Royal court is celebrated.
- Documentation of the various *Ugie* festival ceremonies in *Benin* kingdom Edo State, Nigeria, thereby contributing to the growing knowledge of festivals in Nigeria, Africa and the world.

## **1.3 Scope of the study**

This study covers the *Ugie* music, dance, costumes and some other factors, which inform the structure and nature of the *Ugie*. The research will be limited to the *Benin* community and the *Oba*'s palace in *Benin* City, Edo State Nigeria.

## **1.4 Significance of the study**

The necessity for this work is to research the structure of *Ugie* in the royal court of *Benin*. The study will help to create a clearer picture on the role of music and dance in the *Oba* of *Benin* annual *Ugie* festival and also serve as basis for further research.

## 1.5 Research question

The primary research question, around which this study revolves, asks.

- Is music an important element in the observance of the *Oba* of *Benin* Royal *Ugie* festivals?

In an attempt to answer the primary question, the secondary questions address:

- What are the various social, political, religious and economic constituents of *Ugie* festival?

What role do the various palace societies play during the observance of *Ugie* festivals?

- What role does *Ewini* music play in *Ugie* festival?
- Can *Igue* festival be observed without the various *Ugie* ceremonies?

## 1.6 Research Methodology

This research was predominantly qualitative. Neuman (1997:419) maintains that, the difference between quantitative and qualitative research is that while the former deals with numbers, for the latter, data are in form of text, written words, describing or representing people's behaviours and events in societal life. While Patton (2002:161) states that, qualitative research is appropriate because it has the ability to assess programs implementation. In addition to this, Leedy (2005:135) regard the qualitative approach as a valuable tool to evaluate and provide means through which a researcher can appraise the effectiveness of particular policies, practices or innovations. Carole and Chris (2005:109) assert that, qualitative approach is a text-based or non-mathematical analysis and interpretation of information. This approach aims to identify the who, what, when, why, and how of certain phenomena.

## 1.7 Data Collection

In this study, data was collected through

- Personal involvement and experience. The researcher carried out intensive investigation into the *Benin* palace, (physical) structure of the palace, and the different palace associations and their functions. The researcher also used participant observation method to run a documentary on *Ugie* festival, and analytically looking at the music, dance, costumes, instruments and the general events of *Ugie* annual festival, and also made use of data such as recorded tapes and books on the *Ugie* festival.
- Oral interviews were conducted amongst some members of the society directly involved by virtue of their officiating capacities in the *Ugie* ceremonies. According to Nagy and Biber (2005:119) this research approach has got the advantage of being a dialogue between the researcher and the respondent. It also allows the latter to express his views freely.

## 1.8 Review of Related Literature

Music in traditional community is an integral part of life in the African society. Blacking (1977) contends that, music confirms what is already present in the society and culture, adds nothing new except patterns of sound. Similarly music in *Ugie* festivals expresses the norms and values of the *Benin* people.

Music in an African society is an aspect of human behaviour; in the same way that music in *Ugie* festivals is used as a medium to inform and to educate the people of *Benin* kingdom. Okafor (2004) observes that the effect of music is the most important feature and the very reason for its existence.

Nketia (1975) argues that music making has relationship with the aims and purposes of specific social events and to the needs of performances. Music in *Ugie* annual festival of *Benin* is used to communicate message to people, and the music is also used to appease the gods of the land. In this regard, the music of *Ugie* annual festival does not act as an avenue for the release of emotion only but, it is also a means of communication to the people of *Benin*. Miller (1964) says that music probably metamorphosed from primitive modes of communication. Those modes include the use of traditional drums or similar objects, calls or howls, among others. The use of some musical instruments such as talking drums and metal bells by town criers is still evident in some rural communities in Nigeria in particular.

Fortes (1973:89) states that, "From whatever angle music is viewed, it is only embedded in the matrix of the culture and thus, shares the general trends which the general culture development follows." This attests to the fact that music is part of culture, and that any change in the culture affects it. Changes in some aspects of *Benin* culture have triggered changes in the *Ugie* festival music, for instance, some of the phases are no longer performed according to traditional customs due to western influences.

Music is an ever-present phenomenon in any given festival, and it plays a number of roles in the celebration of *Ugie* royal festivals of the people of *Benin kingdom* in Edo State, Nigeria. Taiwo (1985), in this regard tells us that through the rendering of songs during festival, people demonstrate their honour and commitment to the object of worship or reverence. Music embodies all levels of meaning (manifest or latent) that a community desires to convey in performance contexts. In light of this James (1992:15) maintains that "music-making is such an important part of African social and cultural life that it is performed regularly in a wide diversity of social settings, when communities come together, music usually forms an integral part of the activities".

It is in this regard that Agordoh (2005:49) opine that, festivals in Africa are nearly always great occasions for music-making as well as occasions for public re-enactment of beliefs and values on which the solidarity of the state depends. Generally, *Igue-Oba* festival is characterized by music and dances. Music is provided with such traditional instruments like the *Emma*-drums, *Ukhuse*-maracas, *Egogo*-gong, native flutes and the elephant tusks.

Omojola (1999) elaborates on the meaning of Nigerian music as follows: social meaning can be communicated when structural elements [rhythm, melody, harmony, texture, etc] are interpreted within social situations in which they are performed. Even when not performed within specific social situations, musical performance in *Ugie* royal festival of *Oba* of *Benin* arouses feelings and reinforces social values usually associated with the contexts of their performance. There are various music types that are performed during *Ugie* ceremonies, but *Ewini* music is held to due to its sacred nature in the ritual proceedings.

The performance of *Ewini* music is one of the elements people look out for in the celebration of *Ugie* festivals. This is because it helps the people to get into the mood and character of the festival, and to be able to participate actively. According with *Benin* custom, *Ewini* music is reserved for solemn and important rites during *Ugie* festival ceremonies.

According to Merriam (1980:227) music “provides a rallying around which the members of a society gather to engage in activities which require the cooperation and coordination of the group.” *Ugie* festival is one of the platforms that encourage collective involvement of people from different walks of life to come together to perform *Ugie* music and dance. Concurring with this sentiment, Nzewi (1991:88) asserts that, “the activities of a festival regenerate a society’s consciousness of their socio-political unity through their commitment to enhancing the success of the festival”.

Merriam (1980) states further that in such events music performs a number of functions. With particular reference to festivals, the functions include, but are not limited to;

1. provide aesthetic enjoyment.

1. Providing aesthetic enjoyment
2. Communicating feelings, attitudes, etc
3. Contributing to the continuity and stability of the festival
4. Contributing to the integration of the society through collective involvement in the musical performance
5. Aiding emotional expression in response to visual, aural, and non-sensory stimuli
6. Helping enforce conformity to social norms
7. For symbolic representation
8. As a means of validating the festivals.

Festivals are sacrosanct activities in the life of a people because of the benefits derivable from their performance and, music contributes in a number of ways towards the attainment of the ideals of a given festivals, just like in *Ugie* royal festival. Music - vocal, instrumental, or a combination of both - is one of the arts, which is extensively and intensively employed as an integral part of a festival. Nzewi (1980:10) rightly stated that, “music is the prime agency through which the bond between the living and the gods and ancestors is articulated and reaffirmed during and after satisfactory offerings and sacrifices”.

Oyin (1978:4) defines traditional African festival as an indigenous cultural institution, a form of art nurtured on the African soil over the centuries, and which has, therefore, developed

distinctive features and whose techniques are totally different from the borrowed form, now practiced by many of our contemporary artists.

One of the conclusions that could be drawn from the definition above is that there are as many varied festivals as there are different African peoples in the different nations that make up the continent. This means that, within a given nation, there are different festivals which are instituted as reflections of the people's beliefs and traditions. The content of these festivals is primary indigenous, even when there have been some changes due to exposure and adoption/adaptation of external cultural practices. In similar vein, Bebey (1969) asserts that, a real understanding of African cultures demands hours of attention, the will to look and listen carefully, to reject preconceived ideas, and to avoid hasty judgements.

Omoera (2008:114) observed that, "all festivals and ceremony anywhere in the world represents the experience of human beings, they are either the experiences of a person, a group of people or nation." In this regard the series of events during the *Oba of Benin Ugie* (festival) ceremony could be traced back to the experience of Prince *Ogun* (later *Oba*) and his brother *Uwafiokun* in the forest many years ago.

In *Ugie* festival, dance is an important element that cannot be ignored. Dance is an expression of emotional feelings of joy, grief, and wonders in the face of the incomprehensible. Dance plays a vital role during the celebrations and ritual proceedings in any African traditional festivals. Abolagba (2003) defines dance as any organized body movement in time and spaces to express human feelings, ideal, images and beauty, in relation to musical performance before an audience or spectators. Judith (1979:26) claims that "dance tends to be a testament of values, beliefs, attitudes, and emotion".

According to Peggy Harper (1969) dance is an expression of social organization in that it differentiates and defines the roles of folks, the sexes and groups within the social order. This

can be seen during *Ugie* ceremonies when different categories of chief come out to perform the *Ugie* dance according to their chain of command.

It is an astonishing artistic and exploratory experience to see the people of *Benin* kingdom perform *Ugie* dance during the *Ugie* festivals. Their dance steps and gestures are agile, graceful, admirable, and elegant. They are distinguished by unrivalled charisma and harmony especially with regard to movements in both upper body, arms and legs. The dance steps are coordinated and integrated art of movement controlled by the rhythm of music (*Ugie* festival music). The *Ugie* festival dance tends to express values of *Benin* traditions. Adesin Adegbite (2010) asserts that, dance (in festivals) plays a significant role in the life of the people. For instance, it creates an avenue for communication between the audience and the performers (participants).

The *Ugie* festival dance is a traditional *Benin* dance which is performed only at *Ugie*. The *Ugie* festival dance is observed to add colour to the occasion; this gives the people of *Benin* opportunity to see the *Oba* of *Benin* kingdom and his traditional chief's dance to *Ewini* music.

## CHAPTER TWO

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

#### 2.0 THE *BENIN* ROYAL PALACE AND THE SOCIETIES (CULTS)

The essence of this study is an exposition of the royal *Ugie* ceremonies of the *Oba* of *Benin*. To lay a solid foundation for the task to be accomplished it is imperative to give an exhaustive analytical overview of the social-political structure of the royal palace (*Eguae*) with respect to the societies/cults (*Otu*) that participate during the observance of the royal *Ugie* ceremonies.

The kingdom of *Benin* at present stretches across seven Local Government Areas of Edo State, Nigeria. These are *Oredo*, *Egor*, *Ikpoba-Okha*, *Orhionmwon*, *Uhunmwode*, *Ovia* South West, and *Ovia* North East Local Government Areas. It is located in the forest region. The ancestral seat of this vast kingdom is *Benin* City. Right in the very heart of this ancient city of *Benin* is the *Eguae Oba N' Edo* (*Benin* Royal palace). *Eguae* is the *Benin* name for Royal Palace, the official abode or residence of the *Omo N' Oba N' Edo*, *Uku Akpolokpolo*, *Oba* of *Benin* kingdom.

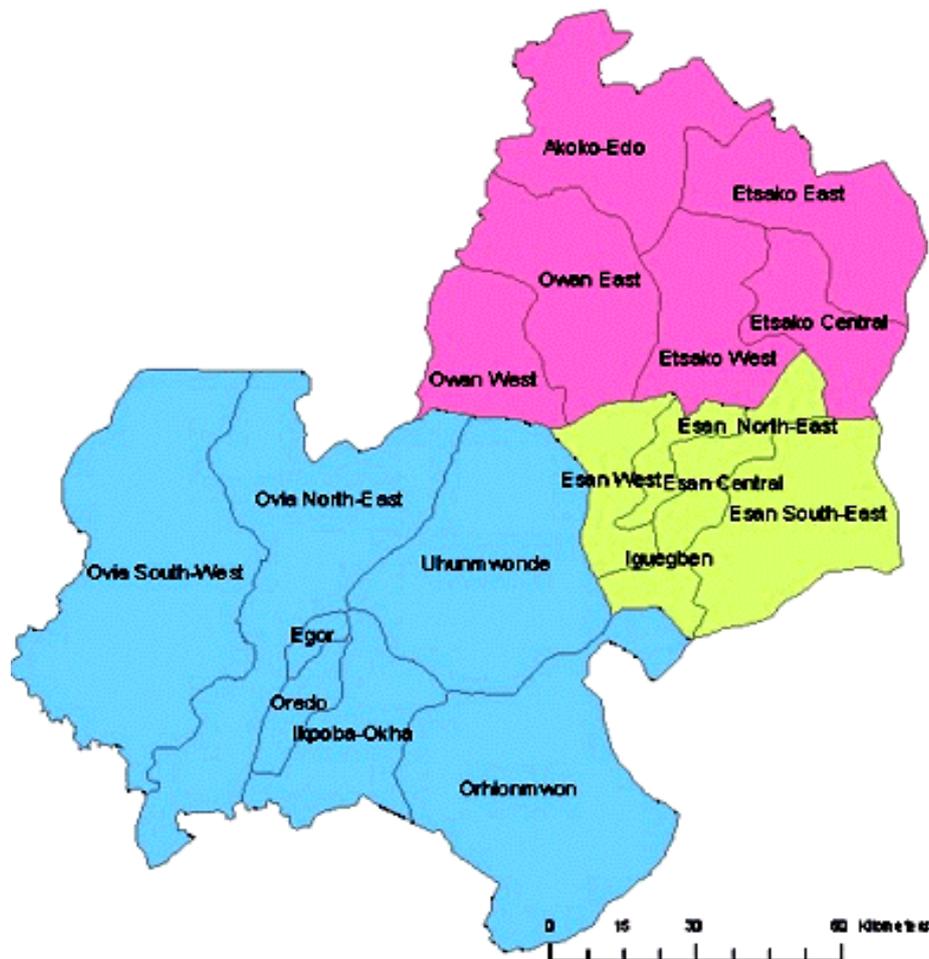


Fig. 1. Map of Edo State, Nigeria, section in blue showing the seven local government areas that make up Benin kingdom (which is the study area).

The *Oba's* palace (*Eguae*) is bound on the North by *Adesogbe*, on the South *Ogbe\_Ezoti*, on the East by *Ogbe N Alaka* and on the West by airport roads. The *Eguae* (Royal Palace) was moved to the present site by *Oba Ewedo* in about 1255 A.D. Before then, the palace had been variously located at *Ugbekun*, *Uhummwun-Idurimwum* and *Usama* communities respectively from where it was moved to the present location.

The *Eguae Oba N' Edo* (Royal palace) contains several *Ugha* (chambers), halls and location where different royal *Ugie* ceremonies take place.

## 2.1 UGHA WITHOUT SOCIETY OR CULT ENTRANCE INHIBITION

*Ugha* denotes rooms or chambers within the royal palace in *Benin* kingdom. At the moment, there are some *Ugha* and locations within the *Eguae\_Oba* (royal palace) without society or cult entrance inhibition. They consist of the following areas: palace wall, *Ugha-Erhoba*, *Ugha-Ozo-Lua*, *Ugha-Ehengbuda*, *Iwowa*, *Okegbudu*, *Urho-Ike* and *Urhokperre*.

- (a) Palace walls: These are made up of mud and brick wall fences around the royal palace. The walls extend through *Adesogbe*, *Alaka*, *Ezoti* and Airport road, beginning from the *Obas* quarter.
- (b) *Ugha-Erhoba*: The *Ugha-Erhoba* is situated on the *Alaka\_Adesogbe* axis of the palace. The *Ugha-Erhoba* is the ‘temple’ or room housing the reigning *Oba*’s departed predecessor ancestors’ important objects. After the death of an *Oba*, the new *Oba* within three years of his accession to the throne must assign craftsmen to fashion out a statue of his predecessor, as well as other paraphernalia. Such as staffs and effigies (*Ukhure* and *Ilao*) to be used in recounting the predecessor’s life history were placed on the altar erected to his memory.
- (c) *Ugha-Ozolua*: The *Ugha-Ozolua* is an open space within the royal palace where several social and traditional ceremonies take place. One notable feature of the *Ugha-Ozolua* is the *Aro\_Ozolua*; alter of *Oba Ozolua*, a great warrior *Oba* who reigned when the Portuguese first visited *Benin*.
- (d) *Ugha-Ehengbuda*: This is another open space within the royal palace where some *Ugie* ceremonies are held. The *Ugha-Ehengbuda* is in memory of *Oba Ehengbuda* who reigned about 1578 A.D. and was reputed for his magical works.

- (e) *Iwowa*: Has been described as the treasure house of arts. According to Agboan-Eghafona and Ikechukwu (2004:4) the importance of *Iwowa* resides in the fact that it was no longer regarded as a collection of objects for religious purposes, but as a treasure house. In this regard, high ranking chiefs in pre-colonial Britain had their own *Iwowa*. Some of the objects in the *Iwowa* were items decongested from the long-standing collections that were used for ancestral worship but kept in other places. Some *Ugie* festival ceremonies take place in the *Iwowa*.
- (f) *Okegbudu*: *Okegbudu* is a large space by the entrance to the main palace building. In this place, the *Oba* performs traditional and social functions.
- (g) *Urho-Ike*: This is a location where the lame porters guarding the *Erie* (abode of the royal wives or queen) stay. Some *Ugie* ceremonies also take place here.
- (h) *Urhokperre*: This is the main gate into the entrance and exit of the *Benin* Royal Palace. Apart from this primary function, many important *Ugie* ceremonies take place at *Urhokperre*. The *Urhokperre* is located near the present Unity Bank plc. In addition to *Urhokperre*, there is another entrance and exit gate of the palace. The gate is located opposite the *Oredo* Local Government works department.

## **2.2 CHAMBERS AND HALLS INSIDE THE *BENIN* ROYAL PALACE**

Basically, there are some chambers and halls located inside the main palace residential building. These include, *Iwori*, *Eguae-Ematon*, *Ugha-Iwebo*, *Ugha-Iwaguae*, *Ugha-Ibiwe*, *Ugha-Ewise* and *Ugha-Erie*.

It is pertinent to state that the aforementioned are distinctive chambers, halls and locations within the *Benin* Royal palace where the *Omo N' Oba's* royal *Ugie* ceremonies are held.

- *Iwori*: This is a large hall inside the palace where several indoor *Ugie* ceremonies take place. The *Iwori* is also a resting and meeting place for the chiefs. Sometimes the *Omo N' Oba* adjudicates over matters in *Iwori*.
- *Eguae-Ematon*: The *Eguae-Ematon* is an inner chamber where certain *Ugie* ceremonies are done. The *Eguae-Ematon* is one of the most important chambers inside the palace. Apart from serious traditional ceremonies that are held here, it is at the *Eguae-Ematon* that the *Omo N' Oba* performs the mandatory daily customary rituals or observance.
- *Ugha-Iwebo*: The *Ugha-Iwebo* is an inner chamber for members of *Iwebo* palace society. Only initiates into the *Iwebo* cult are allowed into the chamber. The *Ugha-Iwebo* is situated on the right side of the royal palace. The *Iwebo* society is charged with the responsibility of keeping the *Oba's* wardrobe and regalia used during *Ugie* ceremonies.
- *Ugha-Iwaguae*: This is more of the main palace chamber where admittance is only to initiates into the *Iweguae* palace society or cult. Membership of this group constitutes the *Oba's* personal and domestic chiefs and servants.
- *Ugha-Ibiwe*: The *Ugha-Ibiwe* is a chamber located near the *Oba's* wives section within the royal palace. The chamber is open to only members of the *Ibiwe* palace society or cult, who have been initiated in accordance with customary convention.
- *Ugha-Ewise*: This is one chamber that the members are mainly drawn from native doctors or healers. Admittance into the *Ugha-Ewise* is through initiation into the cult of *Ewise*. The group plays vital roles during the royal *Ugie* ceremonies, especially as it relates to *Ugie* rituals.

- *Ugha-Erie*: Membership of this chamber is made up of the royal wives or queens (*Iloi*) and their servants who are actually females. Membership is also through initiation

### 2.3 PALACE SOCIETIES/CULTS: COMPOSITIONS AND FUNCTIONS

This work will proceed further with the analysis of the various palace societies or cults, their structure, compositions and functions. However, by way of introduction, it is imperative to mention that there are no honorary titles in *Benin* kingdom. All *Benin* titles confer responsibility. This is to say that for anybody to be conferred with chieftaincy title in *Benin*, the person must come in by way of one of the traditionally entrenched cult or societal divisions. The system is made in a way that it is not possible to take a title without first belonging to one of the existing chieftaincy societies or cults (*Otu*).

Traditionally titles serve specific functions. In accordance with laid down convention, tradition assigns certain customary responsibilities to every *Benin* chieftaincy position specially, as it relates to the observances of the Royal *Ugie* ceremonies.

The most important political and ceremonial offices in the *Benin* Kingdom are linked with chiefly titles of which are a very large number, organized into a complex system of grades and ranks.

Three orders of chiefs stand out from the rest in terms of rank and degree of authority. There are *Uzama*, *Ighaevbo-N' Ore* and *Ighaevbo-N' Ogbe* chieftaincy societies or cults also known as *Otu*. However, in addition to these titles grouping, there are also other affiliated titles and guilds. Apart from performing specialized duties, they (chiefs) also perform specific functions during *Ugie* ceremonies.

## 2.4 The *Uzama* Chiefs

The *Uzama* N' *Ihinron*, -the seven-*Uzama*- titles, in order of rank, are (i) *Oliha*, (ii) *Edohen*, (iii) *Ezomo*, (iv) *Ero*, (v) *Eholo-N' Ire*, (vi) *Oloton*, and the heir apparent to the throne of *Benin* kingdom, the (vii) *Edaiken*. The group is headed by *Oliha*. The *Uzama* are the most ancient and highest ranking order of chiefs in the *Benin* kingdom, though for a long period prior to British rule they had as a body less influential roles than the *Eghaevbo*.

The first five titles are generally ascribed to the period preceding the present era; it was their holders who sent to the *Oni* of *Ife* for a king. The seven titles are hereditary; the first six titles descend on the eldest surviving son of the holder on his death who must, however, be ceremonially inaugurated at the *Oba's* palace. The *Edaiken* title becomes vacant when the holder is installed as *Oba* and remains so until his oldest son is considered mature enough to take his place as the *Edaiken*.

All the *Uzama* have their own settlements outside the inner wall on the western side of *Benin* City. These settlements are *Uzebu*, *Urubi*, and *Uselu*, overseen by the *Ezomo*, *Ero*, and *Edaiken* title holders respectively, these settlements are considerable villages. Each *Uzama* enjoys a large degree of independence in his own village. He keeps a court with palace associations organized on similar lines to those of the *Oba*, though on a smaller scale, and he can confer titles on his own subjects. This does not apply to *Oloton*, however; titles at *Idumwoloton* are conferred by the *Oba* at the time of his installation.

Apart from their political functions, the chief duty of the *Uzama* as a body is the installation of a new *Oba*. The *Edaiken* is pronounced *Oba* by the *Oliha*. *Oloton* is in charge of the site at *Usama* where the installation takes place, and of arrangements for the ceremony. The seniority of the *Uzama* chiefs is recognized in the position which they take up at this and other ceremonies.

Other functions of the *Uzama* are as follows. The *Ezomo* was the senior warrior chief who waged all major campaigns on the *Oba's* behalf. In the past he was undoubtedly the wealthiest and most influential of the *Uzama*. Like the *Oba* he is referred to as *Omo* (child). His wives are known as *Iloi* and, like the *Oba's* wives, are subject to strict limitations in their contacts with other men; he alone, apart from the *Oba*, is allowed to wear a coronet of coral beads. *Ero* was the guardian of the north-western gateway to *Benin* City and had some responsibility for the *Edaiken* and the Queen-mother, near whose court his own village is situated. *Oloton* is the keeper of the shrine of *Azama* at which special sacrifices take place at the naming of the *Oba's* eldest son and on *Ugie* ceremonies. He and *Edaiken*, as the junior members, convey messages and share out any benefits which accrue to the group.

The *Uzama* meet together at *Oliha's* compound where the shrine of their collective ancestors is located. The *Oba* and the *Uzama* make special sacrifices to their accession, *Oliha* being the chief priest.

#### **2.4.1 Affiliated Titles to *Uzama N' Ihinron***

Customarily, it is the *Uzama N' Ihinron* title holders that officiate at the coronation of a new *Oba*. The *Uzama N' Ibie* traditionally performs the functions of the *Uzama N' Ihinron* at any ceremony from which they are absent. Apart from standing in for the *Uzama N' Ihinron* in any *Ugie* or function, the *Uzama N' Ibie* title holders also have their various specialist responsibilities within the guild system. The *Uzama N' Ibie* chiefs are seven in number. They are: *Ine N' Igun-Eronmwon*, *Ihama N' Igun-Eronmwon*, *Ogie-Egor*, *Elema*, *Ogamien*, *Eholo N' Igbesanmwan* and *Eholo N' Igieduma*.

## 2.5 *Eghaevbo N' Ore* Chiefs

Are the “town chiefs” as distinct from the “palace chiefs” (*Eghaevbo N' Ogbe*). Benin City is divided into two parts separated by a broad street. The smaller south-western part which contains the *Oba's* compound (*Eguae-Oba*) is called the *Ogbe*, the rest *Ore N' Ugha* (literally “the big town”).

There are twenty-eight *Eghaevbo N' Ore* titles, of which the most important, in order of seniority, are *Iyase*, *Esogban*, *Eson*, and *Osuma*, sometimes known as *Ikadele N' Ene Ore* “the four pillars of *Edo*” who perform specific functions during *Ugie* ceremonies.

*Oba Ewuare* is said to be the founder of the *Eghaevbo N' Ore* hierarchy order, which at first consisted of the four titles named above, though an *Iyase* is named in the reign of his father, *Ohe*. Later *Oba* added more titles and with one exception they all rank in order of their antiquity. The composition of the *Eghaevbo N' Ore* category of chiefs is as follows: *Iyase*, *Esogban*, *Eson*, *Osuma*, *Iyoba* (*Oba's* mother), *Esama*, *Ologbosere*, *Osula*, *Ima*, *Obobiafo*, *Obarisiagbon*, *Obaraye*, *Obasuyi*, *N' Oghaevbo*, *Obaseki*, *Obasyagbona*, *Aiwerioghene*, *Ewekaguosadoba*, *Obaruyiedo*, *Aihieoba*, *Osayuwanoba*, *Obakozuwa*, *Ekhoreguae*, *Obazuganmwen*, *Osagiobariase*, *Obaghayomwan*, *Ohe*, *Obasogie* and *Ogiesoba*.

Before British rule only one town title -*Ologbosere*- was hereditary. The remaining titles were theoretically open to free competition. Qualification for and manner of appointment to these titles and their position in the political organization will be described below. There are now more hereditary titles, *Osula* and *Obaruyiedo*, which are now included in both the “town” and “palace” orders, though held by one man.

The *Iyase*, who together with the *Ezomo* was one of the two senior warrior chiefs, is the leader and spokesman of the *Eghaevbo N' Ore*, *Ologbosere*, and *Ima* are the other war

captains. The *Esogban* is known as *Odionwere Edo* and is the priest of the *Edo* people to whom sacrifices are made by the *Eghaevbo* in times of national catastrophe. He also performs the functions of the *Iyase* at any ceremony from which the *Iyase* is absent. It is the *Eghaevbo N' Ore* who, on behalf of and in the presence of the *Oba*, confers titles on all chiefs other than the *Oba* himself. The *Iyase* or the senior *Eghaevbo N' Ore* present makes the actual pronouncement.

Town chiefs should not live in *Ogbe*, if resident there when title is bestowed upon them, they should remove to *Ore N' Ugha*. For some purposes the *Iyoba*, who is the actual mother of the reigning *Oba*, is ranked fifth among the town chiefs. She has her own court at the village *Uselu*, just outside *Benin City*, where the *Edaiken* also resides.

### **2.5.1 Affiliated Titles to *Eghaevbo N' Ore***

A major element that necessitated the development of several chieftaincy groups and their affiliated titles was the confrontational attitude of the earliest chieftaincy groups toward the *Oba*. The aftermath of this confrontational and non-cooperative attitude of these title groups affected the smooth observance of certain rites and aspects of *Ugie* ceremonies and other functions. To curtail the further occurrences of any likely disruptive tendency, especially during *Ugie* and other important traditional functions, a number of titles, groups and guilds evolved as a check against existing title groups. One of such groups is the *Ibiwe N' Ekhua* title groups. The emergence of the *Ibiwe N' Ekhua* group is to curb the excesses of the *Eghaevbo N' Ore* (Town chiefs). When there are no *Eghaevbo N' Ore* chiefs to function, the *Ibiwe N' Ekhua* step into their shoes to perform the functions of the *Eghaevbo N' Ore*. The bulk of *Ibiwe N' Ekhua* titles holders are mostly composed of *Ekhaewen*. The *Ekhaewen* are the descendants of past *Oba* daughters who are also by custom married to the *Eghaevbo N' Ore* (Town chiefs). The *Ibiwe N' Ekhua* group is made up of seventeen members. The

*Edogun* is the leader of the group. The composition of the group is as follows: *Edogun, Oza, Eso, Ezomurogho, Edaza, Obaloza, Esogun, Ikegua, Arala, Ana, Edamaza, Obasogie, Ezoba, Derogho, Uso N'Ekhua, Ine N'Ekhua, and Zelebi*. The group leader, *Edogun* is a hereditary war chief who ranks only after *Iyase* and *Ezomo*.

## **2.6 *Eghaevbo N'Ogbe* Chiefs**

The *Eghaevbo N'Ogbe* “palace chiefs” evolved out of a quest to have reliable and trusted people around the *Oba*. The *Eghaevbo N'Ogbe* is composed of a class of title holders known as palace chiefs or privy councillors. The *Eghaevbo N'Ogbe* are the senior officials of the *Oba's* household, this group is further divided into three palace societies. The three subdivisions are *Iwebo, Iweguae, and Ibiwe* societies. However, the leader of the entire *Eghaevbo N'Ogbe* society is the *Uwangué*. At the moment, the *Eghaevbo N'Ogbe* society is made up of thirty-eight members, twelve in *Iwebo*, fourteen in *Iweguae* and twelve members in *Ibiwe*.

## **2.7 The *Oba* of *Benin* Palace Association**

The palace associations (*Otu-Eguae*) are, in order of seniority, *Iwebo, Iweguae, and Ibiwe*. Each has special duties which its members perform in the royal household. The members of *Iwebo* are in charge of the *Oba's* ward-robe and regalia, making and repairing the coral bead garments and ornaments used by the *Oba* on the various *Ugie* ceremonies. *Iweguae* provides the *Oba* with his personal and domestic services and the *Ibiwe* are the caretakers of the *Oba's* harem; the welfare of his wives and children.

Each association (*Otu*) has its own section of the palace which members of the others are not allowed to enter. The *Oba's* own living and sleeping quarters are in *Iweguae* section.

Membership or affiliation to the *Otu-Eguae* is to be understood in two senses. First, any *Benin* man in the town or the villages will claim to belong to one or other *Otu* and to have inherited this affiliation from his father. This does not, however, imply participation in the society's activities which he claims to belong or even the right to enter its apartments which is only obtained by an initiation ceremony. Each *Otu* has two senior grades, in which the members have individual titles, and three untitled grades.

Admission into an *Otu-Eguae* and promotion through its grades are at the discretion of the *Oba* and the *Eghaevbo N' Ogbe* of that *Otu*. At each stage the candidate must pay fees and entertain his colleagues. When he is being enrolled as an *Ibierugha* (attendants), a young man spends seven days in the palace at the end of which he is led home in procession by other *Ibierugha* (attendants). He then becomes liable to perform menial duties and to deliver messages for the *Oba* and chiefs of his *Otu*. In the past *Ibierugha* were organized into companies that spent a few days on duty in the palace in rotation.

By promotion to the *Edafen* the individual gains more freedom and no longer sleeps at the *Eguae* (palace). In *Iwebo* this grade provides the *Enisen* (junior title holders) who are skilled in stringing coral beads and who are in charge of the palace stores. The *Imoukpan*, bearers of sacrificial offerings at *Ugie* and other ceremonies are chosen from the *Edafen* and *Edion* (elders) of *Iwebo* and *Ibiwe*. Others supervise the work of the *Ibierugha*. The *Enobore*, who supports the *Oba's* arms when he is standing or walking, are selected from the best physical specimens among the *Edafen* and *Ibierugha* of *Iwebo* and *Iweguae*. The *Emuada* (sing. *Omuada*), the royal sceptre-bearers, who are recruited at a very young age of between eight and sixteen years, but majority are always less than 10 years, are attached to the *Iweguae*.

The *Uko* (emissary chief) rank is preliminary to the achievement of an individual title. Its holders perform important services for the *Oba*, such as presenting a village chief to his

subjects, and they are the official royal messengers; and they do not live in the palace. They are distinguished from lower ranks by a hair-style which they share with all men of higher rank.

When a man has reached the rank of *Uko* (emissary chief) he becomes eligible for an individual title, either among the *Ekhua* or *Eghaevbo N' Ogbe* of any *Otu* or among the *Eghaevbo N' Ore*. Whenever one of these titles becomes vacant through the death of the previous holder any *Uko* may ask the *Oba* to bestow it upon him. It is the *Oba's* prerogative to confer the title upon him whom he pleases, though he normally consults the members of the association or order to which it belongs. Once the title has been awarded the candidate must pay fees (formerly in cowries—now in currency) to the *Oba* and both grades of *Eghaevbo* and individually to a long list of chiefs before the title can be ceremonially conferred upon him at *Eguae* (palace).

It is normal to hold one or more junior titles before securing one of the highest ranks. An individual who acquires prominence and wealth through war, trade, “medicine,” or some other pursuit, however, or attracts *Oba's* favour by some other means, may be given a higher title even though he has not been initiated into any of the societies. Qualifications of this nature are more characteristic of aspirants to “town” titles. In such instances the candidate is allowed to pay the fees and complete the ceremonial qualifications for passing through all the grades immediately.

With the exception of initiated members of *Iweguae* (i.e., those who have become *Ibierugha*), an individual may transfer from one *Otu* to another in search of advancement. An *Otu* member who becomes an *Eghaevbo N' Ore* retains membership of his previous *Otu* but he no longer plays an active part in its activities. Most of the *Eghaevbo N' Ore* titles can be held by members of any society but *Osuma* cannot belong to *Ibiwe*, or *Eson* to *Iweguae* and *Obobaifo*

and the three hereditary titles are associated with *Iweguae*. The *Uzama*, except for *Oloton* who belongs to *Iweguae* are formally admitted to *Iwebo*.

It is customary for the sons of an initiated and especially a titled member of an *Otu-Eguae* to be distributed between the three *Otu*, a majority, including the senior son, entering their father's *Otu*. Distribution may take place before or after the father's death, the *Oba* having the final decision in the latter case. The senior son of a prominent man might immediately be raised to *Odafen* on the death of his father without going through the *Ibierugha* stage.

The system is not a closed one, however. Any freeborn Edo can enter the palace as *Ibierugha* if he can afford the necessary expenses of initiation and most *Edo* villages contain a few individuals who have reached the *Uko* grade. In particular hereditary village chiefs (*Enigie*) must be initiated into one of the *Otu* before taking up their titles and in the past applied to vassal rulers farther afield. There are thus hundreds of initiated members of each association.

## **2.8 Leadership of the *Oba* of *Benin* Palace Associations**

The *Eghaevbo N' Ogbe* are the leaders of the *Otu-Eguae*. There are twelve (12) titles in *Iwebo*, fourteen (14) in *Iweguae*, and twelve (12) *Ibiwe*. The members of *Iwebo* are grouped into twelve (12) "apartments" (*Ugha*), ten (10) of which are headed by *Eghaevbo N' Ogbe* and the other two (2) by *Ekhaewen Uko N' Iwebo*. Each apartment is responsible for a portion of the palace stores, and formerly had its own rooms where the stores were kept and where its members could meet. *Ibiwe* is divided into two (2) branches, *Ibiwe* proper, with eight (8) titles and *Eruerie* with four (4).

Within each *Otu* the *Eghaevbo* titles rank roughly according to their supposed antiquity. However, any *Oba* has the recognized right to create a new title and advance it in the hierarchy, provided he does not disturb the first two titles in each list. The holders of these six

(6) titles, together with *Osodion*, the head of *Eruerie* are the most important *Eghaevbo N' Ogbe*. They are:

<i>Iwebo</i>	<i>Iweguae</i>	<i>Ibiwe</i>
<i>Uwangué</i>	<i>Esere</i>	<i>Ine Osodion</i>
<i>Eribo</i>	<i>Obazelu</i>	<i>Obazuaye</i>

*Uwangué* as the senior title-holder of this order plays a leading role in *Ugie* ceremonies, and during the interregnum between the death of one *Oba* and the succession of his son he is the leading personage in the palace. *Osodion*, known as “the father of the *Oba*,” has jurisdiction over all matters concerning the *Oba*'s wives (*Iloi*) while *Ine* has responsibility for the princes (*Okoro*).

The title-holders of *Iwebo* and *Iweguae* formerly resided in the *Ogbe* half of the town but since only the *Oba* could be buried there they usually built a second house in *Ore N' Ugha*. The *Ibiwe* chiefs, on the other hand, had their own ward in *Ore N' Ugha*.

## **2.9 Other Title Orders in the *Oba*'s palace**

Apart from the *Uzama* and *Eghaevbo* there are three subsidiary orders of state titles. Two of these are associated with the palace associations while the third has closer connections with the town chiefs.

The *Ekhaewen-Uko* (emissary chiefs). There are about sixty-eight (68) of these titles divided between *Iwebo*, *Iweguae*, and *Ibiwe* proper. With the exceptions of a few priestly titles (*Egie-Ebo*), they are non-hereditary and are acquired in the same manner as *Eghaevbo* titles, though with smaller fees. Their holders perform household, administrative, and ceremonial functions and some of them are closely associated with the duties of ward-guilds in *Benin City*. Of special interest are the “body-titles” (*Egie-Egbe*), most of which belongs to this order. The holders of these titles represent different parts and qualities of the *Oba*'s person such as his

torso (*Erhalonye*), head (*Ohonba*), feet (*Ehana*), belly (*Esa*), longevity (*Otoven*), sense of judgment (*Enwaen*), and eyes (*Aro*). They form a kind of bodyguard for the king and are present on ritual occasions when they are anointed with sacrificial blood and treated with medicines in the same way as the *Oba* himself. In the past some of this title-holder were killed when the *Oba* died and if the title holders *Otoven* (longevity) died before his master (*Oba*) his body was walled up in a standing position until the king's death.

*Urhehakpa*: this order, in which there are eleven (11) titles, draws its members from the *Iwebo* and *Iweguae* associations. Eight (8) are held in *Iwebo* and three (3) in *Iweguae*. The senior "body-title," *Ehioba*, representing the *Oba*'s personal counterpart in the spirit world belongs to this order but the head of the *Urhehakpa* is *Ihaza*. The *Urhehakpa* are closely connected with the *Ogbelaka* ward of *Ogbe* which provide musicians for *Ugie* ceremonials and some of the titles may be taken by men from that ward.

*Ibiwe N' Ekhua*: these titles stand in much the same relation as the *Ekhaewen* to the *Eghaevbo N' Ogbe* but the head of the order is a hereditary warrior chief ranking after the *Ezomo* and *Iyase* and equal in rank to the *Ologbosere*; he formerly acted as second-in-command in campaigns waged by the *Iyase*. Most of the other titles are taken by descendants, through males or daughters of the *Oba* though they are not hereditary in any strict sense. They are an alternative to *Ekhaewen* titles as a stepping-stone to the *Eghaevbo N' Ore* titles.

### **2.10 The *Oba*'s Wives (*Iloi*)**

The most senior of the *Oba*'s wives (*Iloi*) have titles which fall into two groups, *Eghaevbo* headed by the senior wife, *Eson*, and *Egie-Egbe* (body-titles), headed by *Ehioba*. They do not, however, play any overt role in the affairs of the kingdom outside certain ritual contexts and during *Igue* festivals.

### **2.11 The *Oba* Place as a Political and Ceremonial Centre**

The *Oba's* palace (*Eguae-Oba*), which before the British conquest covered several acres of ground, was the centre of political and ceremonial life of the *Benin* people. As will be clear from the above its internal organization was complex, its population large, consisting as it did of the *Oba* and his multifarious attendants and his numerous wives and children and their servants. Persons, who had reached the rank of *Uko* in one of the palace organizations, all chiefs with individual titles, did not live within the palace, however. They had their own houses distributed throughout the city and in the villages, where they were in touch with the commoner population. Each village or chiefdom and each ward in the central capital had its own political organization but the dominating influence of the central political organization was such that any person of high rank living within one of these unit would have considerable authority there.

Political deliberations at the palace were attended only by those of chiefly rank but the public rituals which took place in its outer courtyards or shrines of the past kings were open to commoners. The most important of them were attended by large numbers from the capital and the villages. Moreover, many of the wards of the capital and some villages outside had indispensable parts to play in these rituals and also during the *Oba's* royal *Ugie* ceremonies.

### **2.12 The *Oba*: Sacred Associations/ their Role in Social Politics**

The sacred kingship is the focal point of *Benin* political system. As the latest in the line of kings descending from *Eweka* 1, and the reincarnation of one of them, the *Oba* has his own divinity. His person is surrounded with mystery. Before the coming of the British rule he left the palace only on important ceremonial occasions. It is forbidden (formerly under penalty of death) to say that he dies, sleeps, eats, or washes, all these ideas being expressed through metaphorical circumlocutions. The *Oba* is credited with all kinds of magical powers and the members of certain wards in *Benin* City are expressly concerned with maintaining these.

Formerly most of his time was taken up in state rituals, of which the most important were the annual sacrifices to his ancestors and to his own head. His head is equated with his good or bad fortune and with the well-being of the kingdom, and the sacrifices to it are followed by treatment of all parts of his body with medicines designed to strengthen him against the coming year (all these are performed during the various *Ugie* ceremonies). The procedure at state rituals dramatizes the order of precedence between and within chiefly and other ranks in the state; groups and individuals make obeisance to the king in order of rank and seniority. He himself is set apart from and above the rest on a raised dais occupied only by himself, his wives and children and the *Ihogbe* who are priests of his ancestors and his own head.

Apart from the state rituals in *Benin City* the *Oba* maintains control over the cults of hero deities, performed by many village communities ostensibly on his behalf. These cults are directed to the spirits of former heroes in the kingdom and in a few cases to particular aspects of past kings. The dates of annual festivals (including the *Oba* royal *Ugie* ceremonies) in their honour must be approved by the *Oba*, who frequently provides regalia and sacrificial offerings and in the case of the more important ones sends someone to represent him. He fixes, too, the dates for the performance of the annual rites in connection with domestic cults at all of which the final prayer is for the *Oba* himself.

Succession to the kinship is by primogeniture, the senior son validating his claim by performing his father's mortuary rites and having himself installed by the *Uzama* at the site of the palace of *Eweka I*. The *Oba*, once installed, cannot in principle be deposed. Wars of succession that occurred in the past are explained in terms of uncertainty as to which of the deceased *Oba's* sons was the senior. It is the custom for each new *Oba* to make two or three of his immediately junior brothers the hereditary chiefs of villages within or outside the kingdom. In the absence of sons the *Oba* may be succeeded by a brother.

The *Oba's* court was formerly most highly structured, with hundreds of retainers living in the palace. One section of it is devoted to the king's wives, *Iloi*, who in the past, are said to have numbered several hundred. The harem, *Erie*, has its own entrance, guarded by cripples. The wives are kept in strict seclusion except when they are sent outside to be cared for when ill or during pregnancy. They leave the palace only at night, under strict guard, and great care is taken to prevent them coming into contact with any man or even passing between two men. The *Oba* could claim any woman as his wife without marriage-payment, though it was customary for him to make presents to the parents. Men seeking the king's favour betrothed their daughters to him, that is gave the right to marry them himself or to give them in marriage to any other person. Marriages with the daughters of vassal chiefs were arranged as a political measure.

### **2.13 Administration**

In the past most of the day-to-day administration of the kingdom appears to have been conducted by private consultation and negotiation between the *Oba* and the senior title-holders, for more important matters, such as the promulgation of new laws, the decision to conduct war, fixing of the dates of important festivals, (like the *Oba* royal *Ugie* festivals), the creation of new titles, the raising of special levies, and the taking of ritual measures to prevent epidemics, etc., a full state council was called. This consisted of the *Uzama*, both groups of *Eghaevbo*, and in a subsidiary capacity, the minor ranks of title-holders. When the *Oba* intended to announce an important decision he summoned this council and put his views before it. Each group met separately to discuss its attitude, and then a second meeting was called at which the leaders of each group expressed their views.

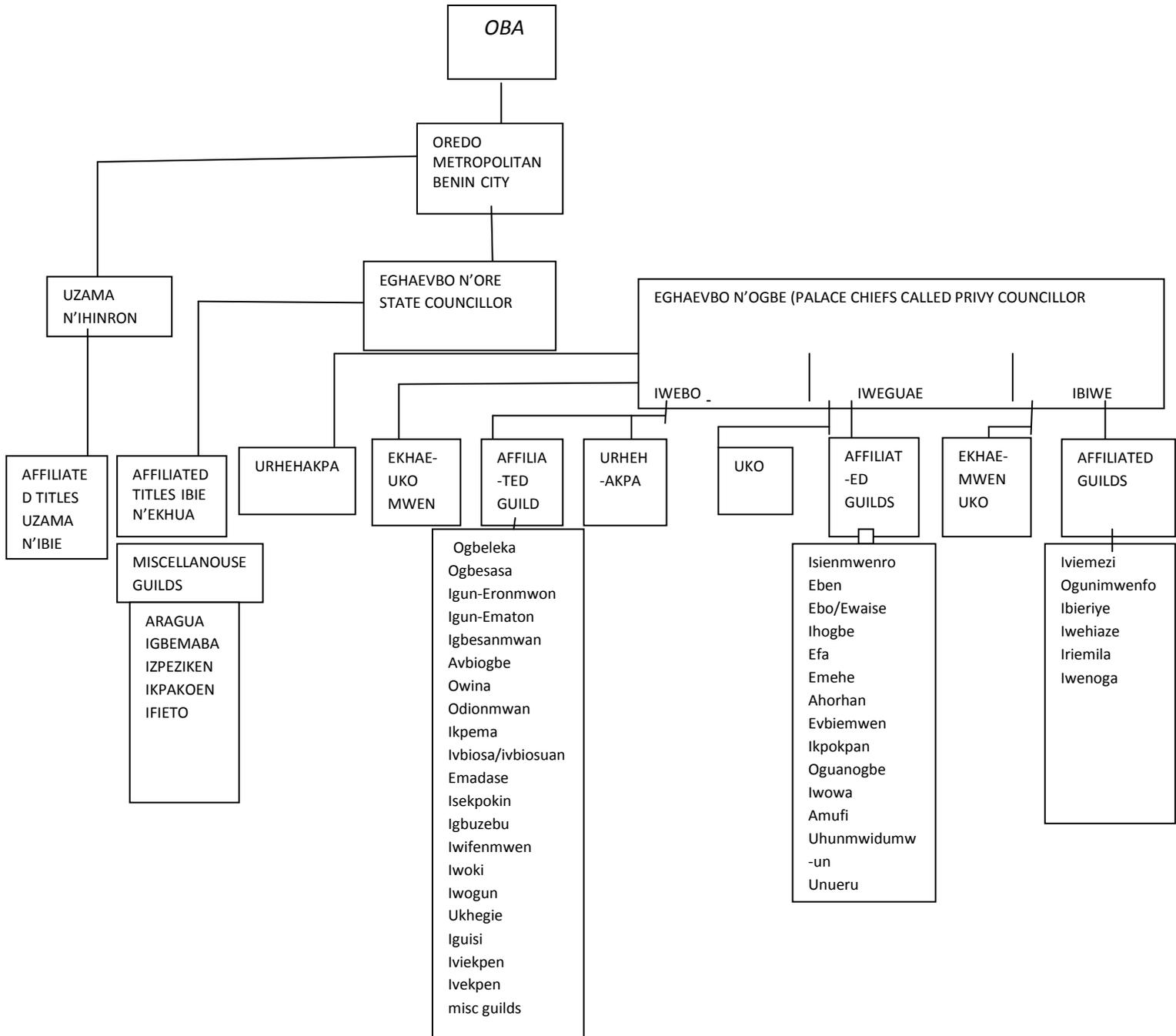
Generally speaking the *Eghaevbo N'Ogbe*, and, in particular, their six senior members, appear to have been the *Oba's* closest advisers. They were the group who had the closest ties with the palace and who depended most on the *Oba's* patronage. The *Eghaevbo N'Ore*, on

the hand, included a portion of men who had achieved prosperity and influence independently of the palace and, in a sense, formed an opposition group. Their leader, the *Iyase*, frequently appears in opposition to the *Oba* in *Edo* historical traditions and his office was undoubtedly the most influential in the state, after the kingship. Traditionally the *Oba* wields over the *Iyase* the sanction of sending him to war, in which case he is not expected to return but to settle down at some distance from *Benin* City. The *Uzama* as a group, do not appear to have had great political power immediately before the British conquest though the *Ezomo*, *Ero*, and *Oloton* all had considerable influence. The *Ezomo* as the regular generalissimo of the state is pictured in *Edo* traditions as being essentially loyal to the *Oba* and appears to have supported the latter in opposition to the *Iyase*.

Below is the organizational structure chart of *Oba's* palace chieftaincy hierarchy in the royal court of *Benin* kingdom in Edo state Nigeria.

# ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE CHART OF OBA'S

## PALACE CHIEFTAINCY HIERACHY



## CHAPTER THREE

### 3.0 UGIE IN THE ROYAL COURT

Through the ages, man has recorded his personal life experiences and sojourns in drawings, paintings, artefacts, sculptures, weaving, drama, music, songs, festivals and other forms of art. These expressions form part and parcel of the cultural heritage of mankind, and in many ways help to articulate human history, norms, customs and way of life.

To the *Edo* society, festivals constitute an essential appendage to their accomplishments. These festivals are usually celebrated with music and dance, which provide entertainment throughout the period of the celebrations. Apart from their entertainment value, festivals provide an opportunity for the memories of our forebears to re-assert themselves in the consciousness of the people, with the hope of leaving the world a better place. Festivals also form a part of the heritage of humankind and have traditionally been passed on for posterity. These festivals constantly remind people of their past which is usually compared with the present so as to ascertain whether communities are progressing or not and to document other dynamic changes. Furthermore, festivals enable celebrating communities to devise programmes to improve the areas in their culture where these has been neglected.

The main focus of this study is on the royal *Ugie* (festival) of the *Omo N' Oba N' Edo Uku Akpolokpolo, Oba* of the *Benin* kingdom. There are cycles of *Ugie* rituals held periodically within the confines of the *Benin* royal palace. Some of these ceremonies are of a private nature, while others are public. During these *Ugie* ceremonies, the palace is always the centre of ritual activities aimed at the well-being and prosperity of the *Omo N' Oba* and the *Edo* people.

In this work some *Ugie* ceremonies are analysed. This study presents the celebration of each event in the sequential order of its occurrence. It is relevant to note that most of the annual

royal *Ugie* ceremonies occur in the month of December; however, there are a few that take place in other months. This study focuses on three of the most relevant *Omo N' Oba's Ugie* ceremonies held in December.

### **3.1 *Otue Ugie-Erhoba***

The *Otue Ugie-Erhoba* precedes the other royal *Ugie* ceremonies. The chiefs accompanied by their individual dance groups dance to the palace to pay homage to “*Umogun*” (the Oba, who dresses in his full traditional regalia of beads) and pray for his longevity on the throne. This event is usually a spectacle to behold as chiefs in their complete ceremonial robes (white robes from the waist down with bare chests, and beads around the neck and hands), according to the hierarchy in the palace, display their artistic prowess to the admiration of all.



*Figure .2. Oba Erediauwa of Benin (1923-) in his traditional bead regalia.*

The rituals of these ceremonies are used by the *Omo N' Oba* to notify his ancestors of the commencement of the annual *Ugie* (festival). According to Chief Nosakhare Isekhure, the high priest of the Benin kingdom, 'the Otue Ugie- Erhoba feast offers an opportunity for the *Omo N' Oba* to request his ancestors to be part of his annual ritual or observance'. The ceremony is held at the *Ugha-Erhoba* (ancestral hall); it is often celebrated in memory of the departed *Obas*.

However, the *Otue Ugie – Erhoba* commences with the appearance of the *Omo N' Oba* from the palace chambers. Before the emergence of the *Oba*, the various categories of chiefs, guilds, and functionaries at the ceremony are expected to arrive at the palace to commence the whole process of the *Otue Ugie – Erhoba*.

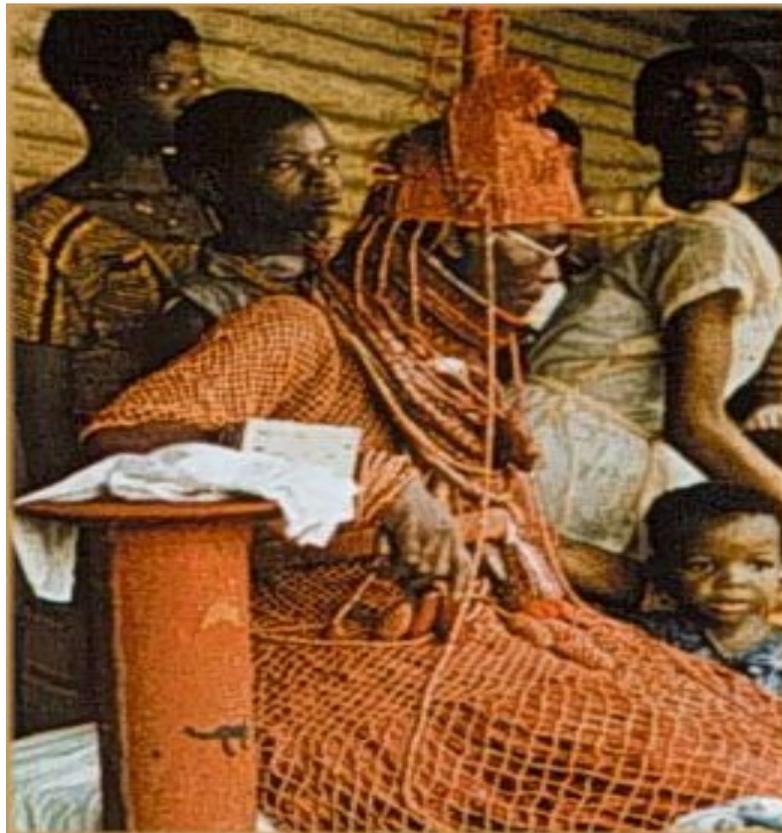


Figure.3. Oba Akenzua II of Benin (1899-1978) in his traditional bead regalia

The appearance of the *Omo N' Oba* is heralded by a retinue of palace functionaries. On his way to *Ugha-Erhoba*, the *Omo N' Oba* stops and collects the *Eben* (ceremonial sword) from the *Ukue-Eben* (sword bearer) to pay homage at the altar of *Oba Ozolua*: a great warrior king who reigned from about 1480 A.D. and during whose reign the Portuguese first visited *Benin*.

On arrival at the *Ugha-Erhoba*, the *Omo N' Oba* performs the first ritual, which is the invocation of the power of the Almighty and the spirit of the ancestors to guide the day's events. Next, the *Ewaise* (traditional doctors) perform the ritual of purification of the *Omo N' Oba*. The essence of this ritual is the spiritual cleansing of the *Omo N' Oba*, so that contrary spirits would not obstruct his *Ugie*. The next ritual is performed by the *Ohen-Awan*, a sectional priest along with chief *Isekhure*, high priest of *Benin*. This ritual proceeds by the *Ohen-Awan* and his group stepping forward to the middle of the ceremonial ground in front of the *Omo N' Oba* holding a *Ukhure* (ancestral staff) to pray for the *Omo N' Oba* and the *Benin* kingdom. The ritual is then concluded by chief *Isekhure* who collects the *Ukhure* from the *Ohe-Awan* to seal the prayer. The climax of the *Otue Ugie – Erhoba* occurs when the *Isekhure* offers a prayer at the altar of the ancestors, after which he pours libation on the altar. As a follow-up to this rite, three chiefs, each representing the three chieftaincy groups of *Uzama*, *Eghaevbo N' Ore*, and *Eghaevbo N' Ogbe* respectively, receives a piece of kola nut. The first to go forward is the *Uwangue*, head of the *Eghaevbo N' Ogbe* (palace chief) group. The *Uwangue* kneels and receives a kola-nut from an officiating member of the *Isekhure* group. He places the kola-nut on the ground and pours libation on it for the departed elders. Secondly, the *Oliha*, who is the head of the *Uzama* (king makers), receives a piece of kola-nut, places it on the ground and pours libation on it for all living elders. Third, the *Iyase*, head of the *Eghaevbo N' Ore* group, receives a kola-nut and pours libation on it: in the absence of the *Iyase* the most senior person in the *Eghaevbo N' Ore* group could perform the rite for the

*Iyase*. After the whole pouring rite is completed, the chiefs and other functionaries come to pay homage to king *Omo N' Oba*. This signals the end of the day's events. But before retiring to his palace chambers, the *Omo N' Oba* once again pays homage at the altar of *Oba Ozolua*.

*Otue Ugie-Erhoba* does not involve the use of specially designed costumes. The costumes range from simple robes to *Eyon* (tying of a cloth from the waist downward).

### **3.1.1 FINDINGS**

The *Otue Ugie-Erhoba* has no elaborate rituals or rites and observances, but one important peculiarity of the festival is that the *Oba* can add and remove ceremony programmes at his discretion. A social night vigil is also held in the palace. Members of the various palace societies and general public entertain the *Oba* with a number of dances. The interesting part of this is that the *Oba* takes part in the dancing. Another specific feature of this ceremony is that the *Oba* can confer titles on his people and also exhibit kind gestures to the public by presenting them with gifts.

### **3.2 Ugie – Erhoba**

The *Ugie-Erhoba* ceremony is a memorial anniversary of the ancestors, especially of the reigning *Oba's* father. The *Ugie-Erhoba* ceremony encompasses a number of elaborate activities with the active and full involvement of the *Omo N' Oba*, the different categories of chiefs, palace functionaries and several guilds. The *Ugie-Erhoba* ceremony is held at the *Ugha-Erhoba* (ancestral hall), a mud building reputed to be the largest hall within the Royal Palace Courtyard.

On a *Ugie-Erhoba* festival day, all categories of chiefs are robed in full ceremonial regalia. It is pertinent to mention that the wearing of ceremonial regalia is at the discretion of the *Omo*

*N' Oba*, which he normally grants to an individual chief at the confirmation of his chieftaincy title.

The *Ugie-Erhoba* ceremony commences after the arrival of the different categories of palace groups. These include: *Isekhian/Emehe* (palace women functionaries who sing the praises of the *Oba* at ceremonies), *Ifieto* (traditional escorts that herald the appearance of the *Oba* at every ceremony), *Ogbelaka* (royal musicians who supply music at every ceremony), *Ehondo* group (royal butchers who slaughter sacrificial animals), the different guilds that officiate and the chiefs that enter with the ceremonial dance procession bearing the *Eben* (ceremonial sword) to pay homage to the royal ancestors.

The appearance of the *Omo N' Oba* from the palace chambers is announced by several instrumental musicians supplied by the *Igbemaba* (royal drummers), the *Ikpeziken* (royal flute players), the *Ikpakon* (Elephant tusk blowers), and others who constitute the royal instrumentalists and are all part of the *Ogbelaka* quarters. It is customary for the *Oba* to pay homage at the altar of *Oba-Ozolua* bearing the *Eben*.

The journey to the *Ugha-Erhoba* normally takes the *Omo N' Oba* through the *Urhokperre* (palace main entrance gate) into *Adesogbe* Road, entering the *Ugha-Erhoba* through the main entrance of the *Ugha*.

However, at the *Ugha-Erhoba* the *Oba* sits on the throne placed at the ancestral altar for the commencement of the day's events. Firstly, the power of the Almighty and the spirit of the ancestors are invoked to guide the ceremony, after the *Ewaise* group perform the purification rituals of the *Omo N' Oba*. Following this is a ritual of sanctification by a special class of palace functionaries. This ritual involves the offering of an animal whose blood is spilled around the ceremonial ground.



Figure .4. Ancestral altar

The main rites of *Ugie—Erhoba* commence with a prayer which the *Omo N' Oba* personally says. He holds the offered animal as he says the prayer. As a follow-up, the *Omo N' Oba* personally performs another sacrifice at the shrine of *Aroto* (mother earth) to appease the earth deity. At the shrine, the *Oba* prays with a bowl of kola-nuts, after which the *Isekhure* also takes his turn to pray with the bowl of kola-nuts. After the prayers, tradition requires that the *Isekhure* pick one nut from the bowl and break it. From this broken nut, the *Omo N' Oba* then picks one piece and places it on the ground. Following this act the offered animal for this rite is slaughtered by the *Omo N' Oba*; *Ahe* (goat) is used for this rite. With this rite concluded, the *Omo N' Oba* returns to sit on the throne and await the chiefs' homage and dances.

In accordance with customary, the chiefs' homage and dances commence with the junior group of chiefs who come with their *Eben* to dance and pay homage to the royal ancestors. They approach the throne in an ascending societal order of seniority to pay homage and dance to *Ewini* music. A cross-bar is placed in such a position so as to act as a barrier which

dancers have to pass under before they commence their dancing. Only chiefs who are fully robed and wear a ceremonial hat are permitted to cross under the bar.

The first of the senior group of chiefs to dance are the *Ibiwe N' Ekhua* chiefs, the leader of the group is *Edogun*. Thereafter, the *Eghaevbo N' Ogbe* chiefs, a group headed by *Uwangué* follow. This group comprises the *Iwebo*, *Iweguae* and *Ibiwe* societies.

Next, the *Eghaevbo N' Ore* chiefs, whose leader is *Iyase* take part in the dance. As each of the *Eghaevbo N' Ore* performs his own dance and touches the ground with the tip of his *Eben* (ceremonial sword), he signals with the left hand to ask the *Omo N' Oba* (king) about the whereabouts of their leader, *Iyase* of *Benin*, who was killed during the reign of *Oba Ohen* in about 14<sup>th</sup> century, to which the *Oba* also responds by signalling that he does not know. The homage and dances of the chiefs are concluded by the *Uzama* chiefs. The *Uzama* (king-makers) are also known as *Edion* (Elders) and their group is headed by *Oliha*.

After the various groups of chiefs' dances, another set of chiefs, who would have performed the four stages of the chieftaincy ceremonies (*Iyan-Ehien*), appear to dance for a second time. As they dance, they kneel before the *Omo N' Oba* and make some signs with their *Eben* lying in front of them to which the *Omo N' Oba* responds with similar signs on his *Eben*.

With the *Iyan-Ehien* chief's dance, the *Ugie* dance is concluded and *Iyase* dancing with his *Eben* comes to clear the sacred cross-bar. The *Ugie* dance is closely followed by a rite, which *Okaeben* and his group come to perform. It is one of the rites associated with *Ugie-Erhoba*. During the rite, the *Okaeben* and his group offer prayers for the well-being of the *Oba* and the people of the *Benin* kingdom.

In preparation for the anointment of the *Oba*, the *Ihogbe* group under *Isekhure* screen off the ancestral altar from the viewing public to perform some secret rituals at the ancestral altar.

While *Ehondo* and his group, the royal butchers, arrange the sacrificial animals. Tradition demands that the *Omo N' Oba* hold a bowl of kola-nuts and the rope which will be tied to the sacrificial animals, as he prays at the altar of his ancestors before the animals are slaughtered. Moreover, *Isekhure* pours out libation on the ancestral shrine. In the same manner, *Uwangué* comes to kneel, receives a piece of kola-nut, places it on the ground and pours libation on it for the departed elders.

With the libation rites over, *Ehondo* and his group proceed with the slaughtering of the offered animals, which include cows, goats and fowls. With the blood of the offered animals, *Isekhure*, high priest of the *Benin* kingdom, comes to anoint the *Oba*. This paves the way for the climax of the *Ugie-Erhoba* ceremony which occurs when the *Omo N' Oba* comes down from the altar to dance round the sacrificed animals with his *Eben*. He dances round four times, and then twirls his *Eben* in homage to the ancestors. With this, the ceremony ends. The chiefs and all the other people then take their turn to greet the *Omo N' Oba*.

The *Oba* returns to the palace chambers by the same route along which he arrived, along *Adesogbe* Road. On his way, he once more pays homage at the altar of *Oba Ozolua* and then he retires.

The *Ugie-Erhoba* ceremony offers an opportunity to the display the emblem of the *Benin* chieftaincy title *Eben* during the *Ugie* dance. During this ceremony the chiefs appear in traditional dress in accordance with the type of costume the *Oba* bestowed on each chief at the time of confirming his title. As the chiefs dance at *Ugha-Erhoba* they freely display their *Eben* and make some graceful and stylish steps. Here again, the chiefs individually perform a regal dance called “*Esakpaide*” with the royal sword (*Eben*). This elegant display is usually welcomed with “*Iyare, Iyare...*” songs by the people as the *Oba* twirls his *Eben* in the air. While this is happening, the *Omo N' Oba* is majestically seated on the *Eketé* (royal chair)

placed on the *Ogiukpo* (platform) of the ancestral altar from where he admires the dance steps. One could easily deduce that the chiefs' dance steps epitomise great nobility, which the chiefs confer.

Another spectacular dance-drama during the *Ugha–Erhoba* ceremony is that of the *Uzama Nihiron* (king makers) and the *Eghaevbo N' Ore* chiefs. This is actually a re-enactment of an incident in the past. It involves many verbal and non-verbal or paralinguistic actions. Each of the chiefs questioningly gestures with his left hand at the *Oba* who sits on the royal chair and the *Oba* similarly responds with the right hand. This symbolic exchange re-enacts an event that led to the death of *Iyase Emuze* during the 14<sup>th</sup> century at the time of *Oba Ohen*.

The highlight is the dancing of the *Omo N' Oba*. The *Oba* dances majestically and gracefully with his *Eben* round the sacrificial offerings amid shouts of *Iyare! Iyare!* from the chiefs, members of the royal family, palace functionaries and the crowd, then stops and twirls the *Eben* in homage to the ancestors. Basically, the *Ugie-Erhoba* rituals are used to make propitiation to the spirits of the departed *Obas*.

### **3.3 Ugie Igue-Oba**

Several theatrical materials are entrenched in the *Igue-Oba* ceremony. These include: music, dances and rituals. This ceremony began in *Oba Ewuare's* suzerainty about 1440-1473 A.D. It tells the story of a prince in exile in the forest due to the hard-heartedness of his father. He was said to have woken up one day to discover that he was sitting on a boa constrictor. Blood was dripping on his head and he then noticed a leopard resting on a tree branch above him, feeding on its prey.

Prince *Ogun* was said to have killed the two creatures and anointed his head with their blood to thank God for his safety. This was the beginning of the *Igue-Oba* festival, which is now

celebrated among the *Edo* people of Nigeria. One notable feature about *Igue-Oba* is that the ceremony encompasses the active involvement of all the palace guilds and chieftaincy groups. These include: the *Efa* led by *Ogiefa N' Omuekpo* (sanctifier and purifier of the *Oba*), *Ihogbe* under *Isekhure* (high priest of the *Benin* kingdom, who anoints the *Oba*), *Ehondo* and his group (royal butchers), *Ogbelaka* (royal musician), the *Ewaise* (native doctors/diviners), *Igbemaba* (drummers), the *Ikpakon* (elephant tusk blowers), the *Ikpeziken* (flute players), the *Ifieto* (traditional escorts), the *Isekhian/Emehe* (palace women functionaries who sing praises of the *Oba*) and the different categories of chiefs.

Before the commencement of the ceremony, all eligible chiefs dance with their followers from their homes to the palace. Each of them dresses in the ceremonial regalia which the *Oba* granted him to wear on the day of the confirmation of his chief's title.



Figure .5. Chief paying homage to Oba of Benin during Igue Oba festival

As a chief moves from his home to the palace, he dances with two men holding his hand at shoulder level on each side. He dances into the palace courtyard, while a sword bearer carries his *Eben*. Meanwhile, the *Igue-Oba* ceremony is held at the palace grounds at the *Ugha-Ozolua*, an open space within the royal palace, where several social and traditional ceremonies take place. The appearance of the *Omo N' Oba* from the palace chambers is heralded by the *Ifieto* group and several instrumental sounds supplied by the *Igbemaba*, *Ikpakon* and *Ikpeziken*, the royal instrumentalist. Accompanied by chiefs and palace functionaries, tradition demands that the *Oba* pay homage with his *Eben* at the altar of *Oba-Ozolua*, a great warrior king who reigned around 1480 and during whose reign the Portuguese first visited the *Benin* kingdom.

At the venue of the ceremony, the *Oba* sits on the throne at the *Ogiukpo* (platform) of the *Ugha-Ozolua* and proceeds to invoke the power of the Almighty and the spirit of the ancestors to take charge of the ceremony, after which the *Ewaise* group performs the purification rituals of the *Oba*.

The *Igue-Oba* ceremony is ritualistically intensive. However, worthy of note is the sanctification and purification ritual performed by the headship of the *Ogiefa N' Omuekpa*. Fourteen different kinds of herbs are used for the purification rituals. Each of the fourteen herbs has its own accompanying song and incantation for the well-being of the human body. After each herb is applied on the *Omo N' Oba's* body, part of the herb is ground on a wooden grinder for *Ogiefa*, while the other portion is grinded for the *Omo N' Oba* on a grinding stone. In accordance with tradition, the young girl who performs the grinding of the herb must be below the age of puberty.

When the sanctification and fortification ritual is over *Ogiefa N' Omuekpa* rubs the *Oba* with the *Ukhure* from side to side. This action is a symbolic demonstration that he has successfully

sanctified and fortified the person of the *Omo N' Oba* and the king is certified completely strong and healthy.

Following this ritual are the dance performances by the various groups of chiefs as *Ihogbe* takes charge of directing the rest of the ceremony.

The rituals of the *Igue-Oba* ceremony is brought to an end with the second appearance of the *Oton* group who have come to pray for the *Omo N' Oba*. After the whole ceremony, the *Omo N' Oba* again pays homage at the altar of *Oba-Ozolua* and retires to his palace chambers. According to chief *Nosakhare Isekhure*, the *Isekhure* of *Benin*, the *Igue-Oba* ceremony offers *Omo N' Oba* an opportunity for self-renewal and serves as the beginning of a new calendar year for the *Edo* people.

The cultural norms and values of the *Edo* people are best seen during *Igue-Oba* ceremonies. The *Igue-Oba* festival is celebrated annually with pomp and ceremony. Furthermore, it is an occasion for offering thanks to Almighty God and the ancestors for sparing the *Oba's* life, as well as asking for God's blessings and protection on the *Omo N' Oba*, his household and the entire *Benin* kingdom.

This festival has endured and continues to retain its main features despite modernisation in all aspects of political, economic, sociological and technological development. The *Benin* kingdom still pays so much attention to traditional matters because, according to the *Iyase* of *Benin*, Chief Sam *Igbe*, 'tradition is supreme'.

### **3.3.1 *Igue-Oba* Dance**

At the palace during the *Igue-Oba* ceremony, the *Oba's* ensemble joins with the chiefs' ensemble in their performance; a distinct sound which makes *Igue-Oba* music easily identifiable and different from other *Ugie* ceremonies. The instruments mostly used are

*Emma-Edo*, consisting of small drums, *Egogo* (gongs) and *Ukuse* (maracas). These are musical instruments that are played to give an original perception of royal music during the ceremony and merriment. Instrumentalists accompany the chiefs with songs in a dance procession to the palace to perform at the festival. The dominant dance is the *Ugie* dance, which is performed by all the chiefs including the *Iyase*, leader of the *Eghaevbo N' Ore* and head of all the palace chiefs.



Figure.6. Chiefs performing during Igue festival

The chiefs' dances commence with the junior group and later the senior group. The *Oba* receives homage from his chiefs during the dance, which reassures him of their loyalty. The chiefs' dances are in an ascending societal order of seniority. There are two distinctive chiefs' dances and they are different in form and style: the *Eghaevbo N' Ore* dance and the dance performed by chiefs who have performed the four stages of the chieftaincy ceremonies (*Iyen-Ehien*) in the *Benin* kingdom.

As the *Eghaevbo N' Ore* chiefs appear for their dance, each of them performs his own dance and touches the *Eghaevbo N' Ore* chiefs' group with the tip of his *Eben*. He then signals with his left hand to ask the *Omo N' Oba* about the whereabouts of their leader, the *Iyase* of *Benin*, who was killed during the reign of *Oba Ohen* in about the 14<sup>th</sup> century, to which the *Oba* responds by signalling that he does not know.

On the other hand, when the chief who has performed the four chieftaincy rites comes out to dance, he kneels before the *Omo N' Oba* and makes some signs with his *Eben* lying in front of him to which the *Oba* responds with similar signs on his *Eben*. During this dance, every effort is made to prevent the *Eben* from falling during the display. If it falls, there is a heavy penalty for profanity which involves sacrifices to certain shrines at the palace.

One spectacular feature of the *Ugie Igue-Oba* dance is the use of gestures and signs to communicate wisdom, pay homage, and ask and answer questions. It is however not easy for someone who does not belong to any of the palace societies to understand these signs.

The chiefs' dances are concluded by the *Iyase*. Dancing with his *Eben*, he comes to clear the sacred cross-bar under which the senior robed chiefs pass to commence their dance, and then consecrates the dancing arena.

The climax of the *Igue-Oba* dance is the performance of the *Omo N' Oba*. Dancing with his *Eben* round the sacrificial offering, the *Oba* goes round four times and positions himself to twirl his *Eben* in homage to the ancestors.

The *Igue-Oba* ceremony is an occasion where local instrumental *Benin* music is played for the *Oba* and his chiefs, to dance with their *Eben* and show their dancing prowess.

### 3.3.2 *The Ohogho* dance in the *Igue-Oba* festival

During the observance of the *Igue-Oba* festival, the *Ohogho* dance is also featured to add glamour to the ceremony. This dance is a religious dance often performed in a revolving circle; the troupe that performs it belongs to certain physicians called the *Ebo* group of the *Benin* culture.

The dancers are dressed in a *Ebuluku*-gown and carry a bowl alight with burning medicinal leaves and wood splinters. The dancers also carry gongs or bells that initiate the musical aesthetics of the ceremony. It is a protective dance to ward off evil from the land, so as the smoke is dispersed into the air, so also are epidemics, wars and calamities dispersed from the land. Below is a song that is often rendered during the dancing spree:

*“Agha yo Okuo*

*a mai khon, iyeke*

*a yarrie”*

Translation: if someone goes to war and he suddenly becomes lazy he should retreat.

The *Ohogho* dance is considered as an art that forms a part of the *Igue-Oba* ceremony. The dancers play bells without clappers that is, *Egogo* or gongs with sticks.

A soundless bell is one of the most common musical instruments used during the *Ugie* festival ceremonies. It comprises two pieces of iron welded together into a conical shape. It is oval in its cross-section and its length may vary in size.

Single soundless iron bells are used in different types of music to produce a basic accompanying rhythm or a melody, but in the *Ohogho* dance the *Egogo* produces the main melody for the songs. *Ohogho* music is very rhythmic and the dancers moves swiftly in

circles. Only men perform the dance, which is entertaining to watch the men perform during the *Igue-Oba* ceremonies.

In its broadest sense the *Ohogho* religious dance includes all forms of belief in the existence of superior beings which exercise power over human beings with future rewards or punishments. The *Ohogho* dance assists the forebears to eliminate despair and create in them confidence and hope that enable them to cope with their aspirations during their lifetime. This dance is also performed during the *Eho* festival and sometimes during funerals.

### **3.3.3 COSTUME AND DÉCOR**

The *Igue-Oba* ceremony offers a very wide variety of ceremonial regalia. The most distinctive thing about this ceremony is the rich and colourful nature of all the different kinds of costumes.

The *Oba's* costumes/regalia depend very much on the type of costume he decides to appear in for a particular festival. But one notable feature about his various costumes is the dominance of the coral beadwork. There is the coral head dress (*Ewuivie*); this goes with a beaded crown, (*Erhuivie*) and the beaded footwear (*Ibativie*). These are complemented by several neck and leg beads and numerous paraphernalia. In addition, there are also the coral beads and cloth regalia. All in all, these costumes are very attractive.

From the aforementioned, the theatrical excellence of the *Igue* ceremony cannot be doubted. This theatrical nature stems from the fact the *Igue* combines all the paraphernalia of what may be considered as African theatre. A true theatrical performance must assemble the arts of music, dance, mime, drama, scenery and language among others in order to communicate certain messages to spectators. With regard to the foregoing, this chapter explored the events that take place during the various royal *Ugie* ceremonies.

In other words, African theatre is likely to bring together different aspects of activity and communication, including dance, music, mime and song, among others, and its language can be verbal, musical or physical (Banham 1976). Therefore, the various theatrical performances abounding in the *Igue-Oba* ceremony make it consistent with an African theatre.

In fact, the *Igue* presents a chain of events that reinforces common values, shared bonds and common taboos among *Benin* people. It confirms what *Enekwe* (1981) identifies as: “links with the past” which “compels the living to participate in hilarity and comradeship of a communal happening”.

It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the *Igue* as a socio-religious ceremony contains conceivable theatrical performances. Besides, these performances present as well as embody in more than one way, the common aspirations and ancestry of the *Benin* race.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### 4.0 THE *EWINI* MUSIC

Royalty in *Benin* traditional society is accorded inestimable prominence; therefore every community in the *Benin* culture enjoys being identified with such a celebrity-oriented establishment. This chapter unravels the suitability and functionality of the *Ewini* as a type of royal music genre in the *Ugie* festival, taking into consideration its (i) socio-cultural context, (ii) formational procedure, (iii) instrumentation, (iv) organisational set-up and (v) analysis of *Ewini* music in the various royal *Ugie* festivals. This will go a long way to support the fact that *Benin's* or rather Africans do not simply make music for the sake of music but their music is culturally and philosophically imbued.

Nwamara (2006), states that before a person can understand the music of a particular people, he or she must fully understand the culture of the people and the relationship of the music to that culture. Similarly, *Ewini* music can only be understood if aptly viewed from the point of cultural peculiarities of the *Benin* people as divorced from the polarity of opinions enmeshed in the cultural diversity of African societies. The usefulness of any *Benin* traditional music is highly dependent upon its functionality and suitability. *Ewini* is the kind of music typology that has stood the test of time in royal affairs in *Benin* kingdom. The genre has a lot to say about the culture of its owners as Oguno (2006) rightly stated that “the traditional music of a people is to a great extent, a mirror of their culture”.

#### 4.1 The socio-cultural implication of the music

An investigation into the functionality of music in the *Ugie* festival reveals that:

1. *Ewini* music is for royal affairs only.

2. According to Chief *Isekhure Ewini* music takes precedence in any royal function in the kingdom.
3. The music is sacred, and only those initiated into the *Ogbelaka* group can perform it.
4. Its performance is limited to festivals including the *Ugie* and other important occasions in *Benin* kingdom.
5. The music is performed by men only.

As a result, *Ewini* music assumes the highest priority in royal *Ugie* festivals and nobody dares violate its tradition.

#### **4.2 Formation of the music**

*Ewini* music was traditionally instituted into the *Ugie* festivals by *Oba Ewedo* in 1255 A.D. and it has continued to evolve from generation to generation within the *Ogbelaka* guilds (royal drummers and singers) of the *Iwebo* society in the *Oba* of *Benin* palace.

*Ohonba Ero*, who was one of the partakers of *Ewini* music during the period of this research, narrated how the music had been in his lineage right from his great grandfather to this present generation. He informed the researcher of his efforts to ensure that his successors continue to participate in this music to avoid it going extinct. The *Ogbelaka* group accomplishes this through exposing new initiates to different musical situations where they can both observe the music and also participate.

#### **4.3 Instruments used in performing the Music**

The instruments mostly used for the music are: *Emma Ewini*, made up of small drums; *Egogo* (gongs), made of pieces of iron welded together into a conical shape; and *Ukhuse* (maracas), a percussion instrument, usually played in pairs, consisting of a dried calabash or gourd shell.

The *Emma Ewini*-drums are membranophone instruments, the sounds of which are produced by the vibration of a stretched membrane. Drums are performed using hands or stick or a combination of both hands and sticks.

The generic term for *Edo* drums is “*Emma*” such as *Emma Ewini* used in the performance of *Ewini* music along with the *Egogo* and *Ukhuse*. There are specific functions for the drums, such as *Iye Emma*, the leading or mother drum of the ensemble; the primary drum for imitating the tones *Ovbi Emma*, which is the smallest drum of the ensemble; and the reply drum *Emma Ewannien*, the drum making a response to the other drums in the ensemble.

The indigenous names for the different parts of the drums are indicated, thus, the body is called *Erhan Emma*, meaning ‘wood of the drum’, and to designate the membrane, *Ohian Emma* meaning ‘skin for the drum’. Drumsticks are called *Okun* or *Ukuen* if made from willow cane. During performance, the left hand is often used to control the pitch.

If the fingers do not press any part of the membrane while the drum is being beaten, the pitch is deep and sonorous but when any part of the membrane is pressed and the remaining portion vibrates partially, the pitch is higher. If the skin is fastened with pegs and the fastening is reinforced by stringing and drawing a cord in loops over each peg, the pitch can be changed by pushing or pulling the pegs in or out. With regard to tuning the drums, a higher pitch can also be produced by exposing the skin to heat and a lower pitch can be obtained by cooling or moistening the skin.

#### **4.4 Organisation of the *Ewini* Ensemble**

The *Ewini* is a small ensemble organized by the *Ogbelaka* Association in the *Oba* of the *Benin* royal palace. The people of *Ogbelaka* are said to have come from *Ugbo-Maghan* originally, *Oba Ewedo*’s mother home town.

The music is performed by a soloist, a chorus and an instrumentalist playing the drums, *Ukhuse* and the *Egogo*. The performer of the *Egogo* is the master instrumentalist. He introduces the music and dictates the rhythms. He extemporises at will. In other words, he controls the music. The maracas complement the rhythms supplied by the drums thereby enriching the texture of the music. The number of the instruments does not affect the rhythmic complexity, which is the main characteristic of African rhythms. There is normally a serious rhythmic dialogue between the drums. They send messages which only the community members can understand, based on the social orientation, historical origins of the music and cultural knowledge.

#### **4.5 *Ewini* Music in *Ugie* Festivals**

*Ewini* music came into being during the reign of *Oba Ewedo* in 1255 A.D. *Oba Ewedo* whose real name was *Efabo*, was born at *Ugbo Maghan*, a *Haje* town along the West African coast, which the British colonialists referred to as *Mahin*. The mother of *Efabo* was said to have been the wife of a chief in *Benin*. The son of *Eweka I* called *Ehenminhen* impregnated her and in order to avoid trouble with the chief, she was sold as a slave. An *Ilaje* man from *Ugho-Mahin* (*Mahin*) who bought her soon discovered that she was pregnant and when asked who had impregnated her, she said it was prince *Ehenminhen*, the son of *Oba Eweka I*. The man then freed her and she gave birth to a son and named him *Efabo*. *Efabo* grew up at *Ilaje* where he came into contact with the *Eneha* who were the singers of the *Ewini* dance group.

When prince *Efabo* became *Oba* with the title *Ewedo*, he brought the *Ewini* dance to *Benin*. He was a member of the *Ewini* dance group at *Ugho-Mahin*. The group was placed at the *Ogbelaka* quarters in *Benin City* and since then, every *Oba* has used *Ewini* music for every important occasion, ceremonies and festivals. It is during the performance of the *Ewini* music

that the *Oba* of *Benin* can dance his steps and strike the drums. This can be seen during the *Ugie-Emobo* festival when the *Oba* strikes the drums to start his dance.

*Ewini* music can be described as the music that the ancestors can respond to, because people see the emotion it manifests and they go into ecstasy. It used to quake, shake and make people quiver and tremble in ancient times when it throbbed in the air with its sounds, particularly during the *Ugie-Erhoba* and *Igue-Oba* festivals when human beings were among the sacrificial victims. Although this is no longer practised, the music still moves vivaciously, and is irrepressibly spirited and forceful indeed.

*Ewini* is an important religious music for the spirits of the past *Obas* of the *Benin* kingdom. The *Ogbelaka* chanting accompanied by the rhythm of the drums, gongs and rattles seems to transform those who are troubled and those who can dance following *Ewini* music. If one understands and translates some of the incantations and songs, one realises that it is intended to bring good luck and to drive away evil spirits from the town, particularly at the time of the *Ugie-Erhoba* and *Ugie-Emoba* festivals.

#### **4.6 *Ewini* Music at the *Ugie-Erhoba* Ceremony**

*Ewini* music features prominently during the *Ugie-Erhoba* ceremony. It is a colourful ceremony during which homage is paid to the spirits of the departed *Obas*. It takes place in the *Ugha-Erhoba*, a large walled enclosure containing altars dedicated to past *Obas*. It is also an ancestral hall that is able to hold thousands of people at the same time.

During the *Ugie-Erhoba* ceremony, the *Oba* is fully robed. He is seated on the throne placed at the ancestral altar from where he receives the chiefs according to rank. They come to pay homage to him. *Ugie-Erhoba* provides an opportunity for chiefs to renew their loyalty and reaffirm their allegiance to the *Oba* and to seek his favours.

The *Oba* prays with kola nuts and personally slaughters a goat as an offering. The chiefs then dance twirling their *Eben*. Thereafter, the *Oba* also comes out to dance with his *Eben* amid a great clamour of *Ewini* music and shouting *Iyare! Iyare! Iyare!* (Safe journey!).

#### **4.7 *Ewini* Music at *Igue-Oba***

*Ewini* music also dominates other music in the *Igue-Oba* ceremony. The *Igue-Oba* is an occasion for offering sacrifices to guardian spirits conjured up by the *Oba*. Meanwhile, all the titled chiefs and their groups dance from various parts of the City to the palace to commence the event. It is a colourful spectacle, an occasion for the *Benin* chiefs to enhance their prestige. It is also a central ritual performed in honour of the divine kingship in the *Benin* kingdom.

The *Oba* comes out to *Ugha-Ozolua* followed by *Ewaise*, *Ikpeziken*, *Igbemaba*, and the *Isikhian*, followed by the arrival of the queen or the *Iloi*. He is royally enthroned and receives his chiefs rank by rank, from the lowest to the highest. They come forward to salute the *Oba* and *Uzama* (king makers). The chiefs then display their *Eben* tossing and twirling them in the air, trying to put up a good show and always mindful that they do not slip from their hands. The chiefs who have previously performed the *Iyare-Ehien* will then perform their rituals. Next, the *Ogiefa* appears with the ritual materials for the sanctification and fortification of the *Oba*.

After the *Ogiefa*, the *Ihogbe* group appear who also perform their rituals for the *Oba* while he prays holding a bowl of kola nuts and a rope that is later tied to all the sacrificial animals. Following the prayers, chief *Ehondon* slaughters all the animals and the blood is used by chief *Isekhure* to anoint the *Oba's* head and body. This procedure is extended to his queens.

At the climax of the *Igue* ceremony, the *Oba* steps down from the throne, walks slowly round the bodies of the sacrificed animals and raises his *Eben* in salute. During this time, *Ewini* music throbs throughout the air.

*Ewini* music is also very prominent in the *Emobo* ceremony. It plays a vital role during the ritual proceedings in this festival ceremony. *Ewini* music usually concludes all the musical ceremonies, drumming and horn blowing in the palace. The *Emobo* ceremony takes place on the third day after the *Igue-Oba* ceremony. This festival is celebrated outside the palace gate (*Urhekperre*). The *Oba* sits on a red pavilion, specially constructed and made of red cloth, a threatening colour to ward off all evils. At the same time, *Ewini* musicians stand at the centre of the ceremonial ground (*Urhekperre*) singing.

The *Emobo* festival commemorates an event in *Benin* history which dates back to 1504 A.D. when on the death of *Oba Ozolua* at *Uzea* in *Esan* his two sons *Osawe* and *Idubo*, otherwise called *Arhananran* (the giant of *Udo*), contested the throne. This led to war between the two brothers. In the end, *Osawe* was crowned as *Oba Esigie*. The war fought between the brothers has been described as one of the fiercest civil battles in the *Benin* kingdom.

It was called the *Okwo-Ukpoba* (the battle of blood or bloody battle). Prince *Arhananran* lost his only son on the battlefield. The Prince was driven home and to avoid being caught, drowned himself in a lake at *Udo*. However, before he did so he buried a chest bearing a lace coral bead (*Ivie*), which his father *Oba Ozolua* had given him before his death. This bead was of great significance to the *Oba's* full dress regalia.

*Oba Esigie* decided that he had to retrieve the *Ivie* from Prince *Iduho* at all costs and the Prince was aware of this. So when he decided to drown himself he placed a curse on it that any person who wore it would run amok. No sooner was the bead plundered by *Oba Esigie*,

when he began to behave strangely. He was however later cured of this strangeness; however, this behaviour led to the *Ugie Emobo* festival, in the *Benin* kingdom.

The *Oba* puts on his scarlet or red ceremonial attire and holds an ivory gong or bell with pedants made of carved ivory bracelets (*Ikoru*). The *Oba* strikes the ivory gongs when dancing at the festival to drive away evil forces. The ivory gong is white and very special for this occasion because it illustrates ritual purity reflecting the ideal state of the *Emobo* festival. While the *Oba* holds the ivory gong, chief *Isekhure* holds the *Ukhure*.

Chief *Esogban* then performs his rituals as the *Odionwere* of *Benin*. He dramatically dismisses the evil spirits by calling on *Edo*, *Uselu*, *Uzebu* and all the gods propitiated and unpropitiated to go to *Udo* in *Iyekovia* where they might find food.

Following this, the *Oba* moves to the drummer and he personally strikes the drum to start his dance. The *Oba*, *Isekhure* and *Obamwonyi* of *Ogbelaka* then dance round the drummers. One hears the crowd praying and wishing the *Oba* well and a happy New Year.

It is a joyous occasion for the crowd to see their *Oba* dance the *Emobo* steps. He dances round the drummers seven times and then moves toward the *Edion* shrine, where he raises the *Ukhure* (ancestral staff) and the *Eben* ceremonial sword. He prays that all evil be driven out of the *Benin* kingdom.

At the end of the *Emobo* rites, the *Oba* dances at *Urhekperre* accompanied by *Isekhure*, *Obamwonyi* and other chiefs and functionaries, the *Oba* then dances towards the palace while the *Ogbelaka* group play *Ewini* music. On his way to the palace, he stops four times to face the *Ewini* dance group while each time unfastening the strands of beads that run down from the sides of his crown.

The concept of *Ewini* music in the royal *Ugie* ceremonies is aimed at wishing the people good luck and to drive away evil spirits from their land. These festivals are a storehouse of *Benin* value orientations. However, whether or not these value orientations were strong in the older *Benin* culture, they have unquestionably been challenged by recent acculturation. These acculturative changes have worked in many directions. The arrival of the Europeans has diminished the meaning of some *Ugie* festival rituals and even culminated in the cessation of some of the deep-rooted traditions. As *Ewini* music has very close bonds with most of these rituals, it is an understatement to say that the demise of any ritual means the death of a type of music. *Ewini* music performs particular functions in *Ugie* festivals through the expression of *Benin* values.

Nevertheless, *Ewini* music continues to reinforce its value orientations on *Ugie* festivals, because where *Ewini* music is employed, people seem ecstatic. The reasons for its employment, and especially the broader purpose which it serves, appear to be locked in the sacredness of the music.

The content and form of *Ewini* music is one that has been handed down through generations. The texts used are usually those in praise of the gods, supported by rhythmic accompaniment that is at times strict and at other times flexible, and though this interplay of *Ewini* music and words may sound improvisatory to a casual observer, these same words and rhythms have been used so many times before that in reality they have an unwritten format.

*Ewini* music is of paramount importance to *Ugie* festivals in *Benin* culture. It is therefore not culturally accurate to believe that *Ugie* ceremonies can exist without *Ewini* music. *Ewini* musicians are usually full-time professionals, they receive financial rewards for their services and they receive some formal training. In addition, most of them have no other occupation,

but as musicians, their means of living is supplied by the *Oba* or chiefs whose court they are connected to.

Conclusively, *Ewini* music is a royal music that is central to *Ugie* festival celebrations. It portrays the extent to which royalty is regarded in the *Benin* kingdom, just like in other communities. The songs and instruments used during its performance are not so extraordinary, but their significance depends largely on their cultural implication, orchestrated by the tradition of the *Benin* people. It is gender exclusive, strictly reserved for the *Ogbelaka* group (royal bards) and can only be performed during royal activities. These established traditions made *Benin* culture what it is culturally.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.0 CONCLUSIONS

It is well known that *Ugie* ceremonies or festivals are recognised as an essential part of the *Benin* people's culture. These ceremonies are the bastion of *Benin* tradition and the basis of peoples' self-expression. The different royal *Ugie* ceremonies serve as a rallying point by which the people are identified as an entity. To this end, one can say that *Ugie* festivals have survived the test of time despite modernization encroaching on some aspects of the sociocultural life of the people.

Apart from the entertainment value, and the fact that they provide an avenue for reminiscing about their forebears, these *Ugie* ceremonies also reveal some deep-rooted and salient elements with deep unavoidable theatrical implications. Hence, these elements are gems of good music and are important in *Benin* culture.

Furthermore, an analytical appraisal of these *Benin* royal *Ugie* festivals show that apart from serving as an occasion for religious worship, the celebrants use the different *Ugie* rituals, music, dance and mime to solve practical problems through a rapport with the forces that control them.

*Ugie* festivals are experiences with inherent theatrical efficacy. In these ceremonies, there are some imperatives, which might be useful in planning a new musical order based entirely on the local way of life. Along this line, most Nigerian music practitioners are gradually acknowledging the existence of the art of festivals as a total representation of Nigerian culture. An in-depth study of *Ugie* festivals exposes the fact that like theatre, festivals are

also reminiscent of the *Edo* peoples' past, and as such they challenge people to look critically at their situation in order to change their ways where required.

A careful observation of these *Ugie* ceremonies reveals a glaring similarity between them and other musical forms. They have the following elements: musical performance (events), performers (participants), and an audience. Therefore, the issue now is how do we improve on the state of traditional festival music, looking at the different *Benin* royal *Ugie* ceremonies?

## 5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

In realising the quest for an improved musical form based on the Nigerian local way of life, firstly, one would boldly suggest that there should be a radical departure from the known to the unknown. The *Ugie* festivals music content which is the 'known' element should yield its musical materials which could then be incorporated into a process of unravelling the unknown within the traditional music setting.

As stated, *Ugie* ceremonies are full of songs, music and dance. For example, a study of *Ugie-Erhoba* and *Ugie Igue-Oba*, the two ceremonies that use local indigenous instruments and materials, such as drums and gongs, could enhance indigenous music practice. In this connection, the incorporation of the forms of these *Ugie* ceremonies would not only enhance musical production, it will greatly enrich the African music theatre with music and dance which is inherent in virtually all the *Benin* royal festivals.

Secondly, it is necessary to take that which is available from the previous generation and to pass it on to the present generation in order to preserve it for the future. Undoubtedly, these *Ugie* festivals represent the passing generation, while the documentation of these festivals represents the present which through re-enactment is preserved for the future generation.

Consequently, this can only be achieved through a systematic integration of the forms of these ceremonies into the African music theatre. Some of the important lessons include the skill and order of making musical instruments, learning how to play them, development of costume and decor, preservation of history through oral narratives, exploration of the power of music in heightening cultural activities, creating fancy and ecstasy.

Thirdly, the people need to be acquainted with their cultural environment as a first step towards teaching them about their cultural heritage, through participation in *Ugie* ceremonies or festivals. In this light, Bascom and Herskovits in Akpabot (1975:3) are of the opinion that, “culture involves not only the institutions that frames man’s reaction to fellow members of his society but also the extra-institutional aspects of human behaviour, including language, relation between language and behaviour, between personality and culture, and the system of values that gives meaning to the accepted modes of behaviour of a people”.

Fourthly, there is a need for music scholars and music practitioners to continually tap from the immense knowledge of locally trained musicians, choreographers and several guilds who through hereditary involvement now possess knowledge in traditional cultural norms.

Fifthly, music practitioners should familiarise themselves with the local language, knowing fully that the language medium of communication is a fundamental and essential tool to music scholars and practitioners. For example, all the songs and the incantations during any of the *Benin* royal *Ugie* festivals are rendered in the indigenous *Benin* dialect or language. Therefore, an understanding of the language of communication is a necessity.

Finally, the author would like to state that this dissertation topic has a direct relationship between the development of human powers, body, mind, spiritual being and training on the one hand; and, experiences and other forms such as art, beliefs and social institutions, on the other hand, which form part of the *Edo* society and race. Therefore it is imperative for the

writer to recommend that these *Ugie* festival ceremonies be continued not only for their intrinsic value, but also for their fulfilment of peoples' self-expression, which create in them an enthusiasm for life.

## **APPENDIX I**

Some songs performed during Oba of Benin Royal Ugie festival ceremonies.

### **SONG 1.**

#### **TITLE: OGBE MA VBE DIA WO**

##### **BINI**

##### **ENGLISH**

**CALL-** Ogbe ma vbe dia wo.....We came for happiness this year

**RESP-** Ise lo gbe e ewo.....My god let us see it next year

**CALL-** Ise logbe e.....Its happiness time

**RESP-** Ewo.....People

**CALL-** Ewe e de.....Happiness is coming

**RESP-** Khie ne ewe e.....Open let it come in

### **SONG 2.**

#### **TITLE: IGUE GUA WENYEN**

##### **BINI**

##### **ENGLISH**

**CALL-**Igui gua wenyen.....Today is the day of enjoyment/happiness

**RESP-**Awenyen (2x).....Enjoyment/happiness

**CAL-**Igue nague nomo.....Happiness for the children

**RESP-**Awenyen.....Enjoyment

**CALL**-Igue nague nerha.....Happiness for fathers

**RESP**-Awenyen..... .Enjoyment

**CALL**-Igue nague ni'ye.....Happiness for mothers

**RESP**-Awenyen.....Enjoyment

**CALL**-Igue nague notien.....Happiness for brothers

**RESP**-Awenyen.....Enjoyment

### **SONG 3.**

#### **TITLE: KIE NE EWERE**

#### **BINI**

#### **ENGLISH**

**CALL**- Ewere de.....Happiness is coming

**RESP**- Kie ne ewere {3x}.....Open for happiness

**CALL**- Ewere erramwen.....Happiness is coming to my father

**RESP**- Kie ne ewere.....Open for happiness

**CALL**- Ewere ewere n'omo n'uwa..... I am taking blessings to the children

**RESP**- Ewere ewere n'oyoyo{x2}.....So many blessings

**CALL**- Ewere ewere oo.....Blessings, blessings

**RESP**- N'oyoyo{x3}.....So many sweetness, blessings, happiness etc

**SONG 4.**

**TITLE: EWERE DE**

**BINI**

**ENGLISH**

**CALL-** Ewere de e

Peace is coming

**RESP-** Dene were

Let it come

**CALL-** Ewere de e

Peace is coming

**RESP-** Dene were

Let it come

**CALL-** Ewere rhamwen

Peace of the father

**RESP-** Dene were

Let it come

**CALL-** Ewere' iyemwen

Peace of the mother

**RESP-** Dene were

Let it come

**SONG 5.**

**TITLE: EDO DAMWEN'HO**

**BINI**

**ENGLISH**

**CALL-** Edo o waghi damwe'ho o..... Edo you people should listen

edo o waghi damwe'ho o..... Edo you people should listen

wagia yigbo kunegbe ghe.....let us exaggerate with money

ighonogie eo ighonogie.....money the king, money the king

eta igho nogie.....incomparable money the king

**RESP-** Edo o wagheri damwe'ho o.....Edo you people should listen

edo o wagheri damwe'ho o.....Edo you people should listen

wageri yigho kunegbe ghe.....let us exaggerate with money

ighonogie eo ighonogie.....money the king, money the king

eta igho nogie..... incomparable money the king

## **SONG 6.**

### **TITLE: OMOKPIA 'EWUVBOWANA**

#### **BINI**

#### **ENGLISH**

**CALL-** Omokpiaewu vbowana..... A son will not die in this house

**RESP-** Ise.....Amen

**CALL-** Omokhuoewu vbowana.....A daughter will not die in this house

**RESP-**Ise.....Amen

**CALL-** Igh'igho amievbowana.....This house will be filled with money

**RESP-** Ise.....Amen

**CALL-** Adaze 'amievbowana..... A well-to-do man will be found in this house

**RESP-** Ise.....Amen

**CALL-** Ise o, ise o, ise o.....Amen, Amen, Amen

**RESP-** Ise.....Amen

**SONG 7.**

**TITLE: IGUE**

**BINI**

**ENGLISH**

**CALL-** Igue nima gue e o..... The festival we celebrate

**RESP-** Okhoro ague e..... A peaceful one we celebrate.

**CALL-** Igue nira gue e o.....The festival our fathers celebrate

**RESP-** Okhoro ague e..... A peaceful one we celebrate

**CALL-** Igue niyi gue e o.....The festival our mothers celebrate

**RESP-** Okhoro ague e..... A peaceful one we celebrate

**CALL-** Igue nomo gue e o..... The festival our children celebrate

**RESP-** Okhoro ague e..... ..A peaceful one we celebrate

**SONG 8.**

**TITLE: OVBIGHO**

**BINI**

**ENGLISH**

**CALL-**Imawomwan rokpa tiemwen ovbigho..... I didn't say anyone should  
call me a rich man

eeo e, ovbiuwanerhamwen 'yemwen tiemwen o,

ose mwen yaghahio.....a wealthy man my father and  
mother call me

**RESP-** Imawomwan rokpa tiemwen ovbigho..... I didn't say anyone should  
call me a rich man

eeo e, ovbiuwanerhamwen 'yemwen tiemwen o,

ose mwen yaghahio..... a wealthy man my father and  
mother call me

## APPENDIX II

### ***Iwebo* Palace Society**

The *Iwebo* palace society is the most senior of the three palace societies. They are the makers and custodians of the *Oba's* wardrobe and regalia used in different *Ugie* ceremonies. The group consists of twelve members with the *Uwangu* as head. Other members are as follows: *Eribo*, *Ovienrioba*, *Osague*, *Aiyobahan*, *Olaya*, *Obaruduagbon*, *Esasoyen*, *Obamarhiaye*, *Aiwerioba*, *Osasuoba*, and *Osaguahadiaye*. In addition to the aforementioned titles of *Iwebo*, there are several affiliated titles and guilds that have important functions to perform at the *Ugie* ceremonies.

### **Affiliated Titles of *Iwebo***

*Urhehakpa*: The *Urhehakpa* titles are found both within the *Iwebo* and *Iweguae* societies.

The following are the ones within the *Iwebo* society: *Ihaza*, *Obarisiuwa*, *Obazoriaye*, *Ehioba*, *Aghahon*, *Oghator*, *Aiyinmwioba* and *Obarisiagbon*. There are eight in total. The leader of the group is *Ihaza*. History has it that *Ihaza* was sent from heaven by *Osanouhua* (God) to destroy the man-eating beasts and thereafter returned to heaven.

*Ekhaewen Uko*: These are junior titleholders to the *Eghaevbo N' Ogbe*. They are generally duty chiefs with definite title names. Within these groups there are two important titles; *Enobore* supports the *Oba's* hand while he carries the royal sword (*Eben*). Other *Ekhaewen Uko* chiefs of *Iwebo* are as follows:- *Eriyo*, *Obasoyen*, *Uso*, *Osia*, *Osonlaye*, *Esenua*, *Unionyen*, *Inene*, *Obakhavbaye*, *Obamagiagbonrhia*, *Obazuhunmwuwa*, *Obamedo*, *Obaruhunmiugbon*, *Osarenvbagharu*, *Aiyobgbon*, *Edosomwan*, *Obarisiagbon*, *Arasokun*, *Obasoye*, *Obadolagbonyi*, *Obasogie*, and *Osamagiedode*.

## **Affiliated Guilds of the *Iwebo* Society**

*Ogbelaka:* *Ogbelaka* guilds are the royal drummers and singers who perform at every *Ugie* ceremony. *Obamwonyi N' Ogbelaka* is the leader of the guild.

*Ogbesasa:* Members of the *Ogbesasa* guild are the shield bearers to the *Oba* during *Ugie* ceremonial activities.

*Igun-Eronmwon:* *Igun-Eronmwon* is the royal bronze caster.

*Igun-Ematon:* This is the guild that specialises in iron casting (blacksmith).

*Igbesanwan:* This is the royal guild whose members are the traditional wood and ivory carvers.

It is important to note that the *Igun-Eronmwon*, *Igun-Ematon* and *Igbesanwan* guilds are responsible for making the *Eketé* (royal throne), *Ekpokin* (round leather box), *Ada* (sceptre), *Eben* (royal sword), *Eguen* (beaded anklets), *Odiba* (collar and undecorated form of crown) as well as wooden plates, bowl mortars and pestles, and wooden heads which are placed on the ancestral shrines. The aforementioned items are used during royal *Ugie* ceremonies.

*Avbiogbe:* The *Avbiogbe* guild is one of the oldest guilds, dating back to the first *Ogiso* period. This guild, headed by *Okan Avbiogbe*, performs the functions of supervision of the land, police and town-criers or bell ringers. At every *Ugie* ceremony they announce the items in the programme.

*Owina:* This is a guild of weavers who weave all the woven materials used during *Ugie* ceremonies.

*Odionmwon:* Members of this guild are ceremonial executioners. The *Okaó* is the head of the guild.

*Ikpemba*: The members of the *Ikpemba* guild constitute the royal drummers who usually perform during *Ugie* ceremonies. They also engage in ritual and ceremonial drumming at the peak of royal funeral ceremonies. The *Ikpema* guild is headed by the *Omuemu*.

*Ivbiosa and Ivbiosuan*: The holders of the twin titles *Osa* and *Osuan* are leaders of the guilds. The leading role which these two chiefs play during the coronation of the *Oba*, *Ugie-Eghute* and *Ugie-Odudua*, is an attestation of their important position. The senior of the joint guild is *Osa*.

*Emadase*: This guild comprises the cult of Oro dancers who perform certain rites during *Ugie* ceremonies. The *Emadase* guild is headed by *Obobaifo*.

*Isekpoki*: The *Isekpoki* guild is made up of leather craftsmen. The leader of the *Isekpoki* guild is the *Okao*.

*Igbuzebu*: This is a guild of royal dancers whose origin can be traced back to the reign of *Oba-Orhogua* (1550-1578). The head of the guild is known as *Odionwere*.

*Iwifemwen*: This guild is responsible for the production of archers and manufacturers of arrow poisons. The head of the guild is the *Odionwere*.

*Iwoki*: The *Iwoki* members are experts in weather forecasts and are capable of controlling the weather. The guild comprises traditional astrologers and astronomers. At every *Ugie* ceremony, the *Iwoki* normally act as ceremonial guards against the *Uzama* who were known to have caused trouble for the *Oba* in the past. The *Iwoki* guild is headed by an *Odionwere*.

*Iwogun*: Members of the *Iwogun* guild are caretakers of the *Ebo N' Edo* and *Ogun* shrines. An *Odionwere* is the head of the guild.

*Ukhegie*: This guild is responsible for the maintenance of the shrine in memory of the face of the land.

*Iguisi*: Members of this guild render private services to the *Oba*. The *Eson N' Ogaevbo* is the head of the guild.

*Iviekpen*: This is a guild of leopard hunters whose duty it is to catch leopards for *Oba's* annual sacrifice to his head for good luck. The guild is headed by *Okao*.

*Ivekpen*: This guild is responsible for the slaughtering of the leopard, the sacrificial animal at a *Ugie* feast for good luck.

### **Miscellaneous Guilds of *Iwebo***

(a) *Enisen*: This guild is responsible for bead making and are also royal store keepers.

(b) *Igbemaba*: This guild is made up of a group of drummers who perform during *Ugie* ceremonies.

(c) *Ikpakoen*: This guild is responsible for blowing elephant tusks during *Ugie* and other ceremonies.

(d) *Izpeziken*: The *Izpeziken* members are the royal flute players.

(e) *Ifieto*: members of the *Ifieto* guild usually lead the procession and clear the route, which the *Oba* passes during the royal *Ugie* and other ceremonies. Memberships are drawn from all the palace societies.

## **THE IWEGUAE PALACE SOCIETY**

From a historical account, the *Iweguae* palace society came into existence during the reign of *Oba-Ozolua* about 1483-1505 A.D. The *Iweguae* society is in charge of the *Oba*'s personal attendants. The bulk of the title's composition in *Iweguae* is consists of a nucleus of the *Iweguae* palace society. The leader of this society is *Esere*. There are fourteen titles in *Iweguae*: *Esere*, *Obazelu*, *Aighobohi*, *Aisagborbrioba*, *Obadagbonyi*, *Obaradesagbon*, *Oviezowoba*, *Aideyanba*, *Obaguehidase*, *Akenzuwa*, *Ekhorsioba*, *Ossinmwioba*, *Obabueki*, and *Osamudianoba*. Due to the peculiar nature of their functions to the *Oba*, they stand closer to the *Oba* than any other member of the different palace societies. Apart from the affiliated titles and guilds of the *Ugie* there are also personal domestic servants of the *Oba*. These include *Emuada* (Sceptre bearer), *Ibierugha* (Attendants), and *Uko N' Iweguae* (Palace emissary).

### **Affiliated Titles of *Iweguae***

The following are titles within the *Iweguae* palace society.

*Urhehakpa*: These groups of title holders are made up of three members: *Oghato*, *Uwuogyo*, and *Eraluwen*.

*Ekhaemwen-Uko*: These are title emissary chiefs in *Iweguae* society. The group presently consists of twenty-eight title members. These are: *Ehanire*, *Erahoyen*, *Ohen-Osa*, *Nohuanren*, *Ogua*, *Ezama*, *Ohonba*, *Obayagbon*, *Asuen*, *Ikuobasoyenmwen*, *Ohananye*, *Uwaya*, *Obairogbon*, *Otomwen*, *Esaa*, *Ehana*, *Aro*, *Efobasota*, *Obadagbonyi*, *Osayuwaoba*, *Obanisiuwa*, *Obazogbon*, *Osayobase*, *Osezegioba*, *Obasoyen*, *Osawobaguaen*, *Obasohan*, and *Obarenogae*.

## **Affiliated Titles Guilds of *Iweguae***

*Isienmwenro*: The origin of *Isienmwenro* is dated back to the reign of *Oba Ewuare* the great in about 1440-1473 A.D. The guild goes by appellation. *Asaka N' Osoghinonba* (the ant that stings the *Oba's* enemies); the guild is charged with the responsibility of guarding the *Oba*. There are at present nine titles within the *Isienmwenro* guild. The leader of the guild is the *Ekegbian*, other members are *Ekeghugu*, *Amaghizemwen*, *Obadolaye*, *Ogiemwensi*, *Obaraye*, *Ine*, *Eholo* and *Obasogie*.

*Eben*: the *Eben* guild is charged with the responsibility of preserving the sacred corpus during royal obsequies. The guild also performs some rituals at certain *Ugie* ceremonies. The leader is called *Oka-Eben*.

*Ebo/Ewaise*: Royal physicians

*Ihogbe*: Priests and keepers of the shrines of the royal ancestors, court chroniclers.

*Efa*: The *Efa* are the priests and the diviners of the land. In addition, they are worshipers of the *Oba's* head at *Ugie* ceremonies for good luck. The two important titles within the guild are *Ezelerobato* and *Aighobahi*. All the titles are hereditary. The *Ogiefa N' Ozeben* are in charge of the shrines of the ancestral *Oba's*. The *Ihogbe* are the custodians of the *Erinmwindu* shrine (the totality of the spirits of the departed ones) and their importance is that they are synonymous with all the royal *Ugie* ceremonies. The group is charged with the ritual propitiation of the spirits of the ancestral *Oba's* in addition to the anointment of the *Oba's* head with the blood of the sacrificial animals; an act done to strengthen the *Oba* against all evil. The *Ihama* is the leader of the guild, but it is the *Isekhure* that actually officiates at *Ugie* and other traditional ceremonies. The *Ihogbe* is divided into two groups.

These are *Ihogbe N' Idunmwun* and *Ihogbe N; Ore*. *Ihama* heads *Ihogbe N' Idunmwun*, while *Isekhure* is the leader of *Ihogbe N; Ore*.

The *Ihogbe N' Idunmwun* is made up of the following seven members: *Ihama*, *Latema*, *Idusimuioba*, *Obariyekaegbon*, *Uheluyi*, *Obazuhunmwuwa*, and *Uhemure*. On the other hand, the *Ihogbe N' Ore* possess the following nine titles, *Isekhure*, *Esegbure*, *Uheluyi*, *Legame*, *Uhelore*, *Uhe-Obioba*, *Idusinmwioba*, *Ihenokpan*, and *Aiwansoba*.

The following are also different guilds of the *Iweguae* palace society; *Emehe*, *Ahorhan*, *Evbienmwun*, *Ikpokpan*, *Iwowa*, *Oguanogbe*, *Amufi*, *Uhunmwidumwun*, *Unueru* and *Idumwun-Ivbioto*.

### ***Ibiwe* Palace Society**

The third of the three palace societies is the *Ibiwe* society. Their responsibility is to take care of the royal harem and the children within the palace. At the *Ugie* and other ceremonies they serve as guards around the *Iloi* (*Oba's* Wives). The *Ine N' Ibiwe* is the leader of the group which comprises twelve *Ibiwe* titles chiefs: they are *Ine*, *Osodion*, *Obazuaye*, *Obahiagbon*, *Obamwonyi*, *Obayuwana*, *Aiyobagiegbe*, *Obaradesuwa*, *Uso N' Ibiwe*, *Ezuwako* and *Obazula*.

### **Affiliated Titles of *Ibiwe***

There are nineteen affiliated titles in *Ibiwe*. They are the titles that constitute the *Ekhaemwen Uko N' Ibiwe*. The *Ehiondo* who is in charge of *Iwarganwen* (royal butcher) at *Ugie* and other ceremonies is a member of this group.

The full composition of the *Ekhaemwen Uko N' Ibiwe* are as follows: *Imasogie*, *Arase*, *Eholo*, *Osague*, *Ebagua*, *Ehondo*, *Osasemwonyen*, *Obaraye*, *Idkpaye*, *Agbohbayemwen*,

*Obasohen, Aiwansoba, Agbomoba, Osayabase, Osagiobagon, Agbobarhinrhien, Okaolriemila and Obahanye.*

### **Affiliated Guilds of *Ibiwe***

There are six affiliated guilds in *Ibiwe*. These are *Lubiemezi, Oguniwenfo, Ibieriye, Iwehiaze, Iriemila, and Iwenoga.*

This brings an end to the chronological order of the composition and functions of the chieftaincy societies as they relate to the Observances of the different *Ugie* ceremonies celebrated periodically by the *Omo N Oba N Edo. Uko Akpolokolor, Oba* of the *Benin* kingdom.

## GLOSSARY

### A

*Agba* = rectangular chair used by the *Oba* and chiefs.

*Ada* = ceremonial sword that symbolises the ruler's power over life and death

*Akpat a* = harp-like stringed musical instrument

### E

*Eben* = fish-shaped ceremonial sword owned by a monarch, chiefs, priests

*Ebo* = medicine; charms or amulets

*Ebuluku* = gathered full skirt

*Edaiken* = crown prince; eldest son of ruler

*Edion* = elders

*Edo* = *Benin* kingdom; language and people of *Benin*

*Eghaevbo N' Ogbe* = palace chiefs

*Eghaevbo N' Ore* = high ranking generals; chiefs who are counsellors

*Egogo* = gong-like bell

*Eguae* = palace

*Ehonmwun* = purification

*Ekete* = throne

*Ekhaemwun* = chiefs (*Okhaewun*=singular chief)

*Ekpokin* = bark and leather cylinder box

*Emobo* = palace ceremony honouring *Oba Esigie* and driving evil to *Udo*, his half brother's stronghold

*Emuada* or *Emada* = palace pages

*Enigie* = provincial rulers or "dukes"

*Enisen* = junior titleholders in Iwebo palace association

*Enogie* = a provincial ruler or "duke"

*Erha* = father

*Erie* = harem

*Erinmwini* = the other world; the supernatural, watery world

*Erinmwidu* = spirit of *Oba's* ancestors

*Ewaise* = a guild of traditional healers and medicine makers

*Ezomo* = member of the *Uzama* chiefly group; one of the major generals of the past

## **I**

*Ibiwe* = the youngest of the three palace societies

*Ibiwe N' Ekhua* = a group of title holders

*Idunmwun* = town quarter

*Igbesanmwan* = guild that carves ivory and wood

*Igue* = celebration that thanks the head for the luck of the past year

*Igun* = brass casting

*Igun-Ematon* = iron smith (iron caster)

*Igun Eronmwon* = brass casting guild

*Ihinron* = seven

*Ihogbe* = a guild in charge of recording the *Oba*'s ancestors

*Iloi* = queens

*Iron* = palace ceremony that commemorates *Oba Esigie*'s quarrel with the *Uzama* chiefs

*Ivie* = coral and red stone beads

*Iwebo* = palace society that cares for regalia; formerly managed trade

*Iweguea* = palace society next to *Iwebo* in hierarchy

*Iyase* = the chief who heads the *eghaevbo N' Ore* nobles

*Iye* = mother

*Iyoba* = title of the queen mother (*Oba*'s mother)

## **O**

*Oba* = the king, is the central figure in the kingdom and is considered a divine ruler, descended from the son of a god. He provides a link between the human and spiritual realms and has the power to influence natural and supernatural forces that affect the well-being of his people.

*Odionwere* = village head

*Ogbe* = palace quarter of town

*Ogbelaka* = a royal “super guild” that includes many different types of musicians and singers

*Ogiamien* = the chief who descends from the leader of the egalitarian autochthones who ruled *Benin* before the present dynasty began

*Ogiukpo* = dais-like altar

*Ohen* = priest

*Okao* = a minor title

*Okuku* = beehive coiffure with upward arching braids, decorated with coral beads

*Olotu* = leader

*Omada* = a palace page

*Omo* = child

*Omo N’ Oba N’ Edo* = worthy child who is *Oba* of *Benin*

*Ore* = town

*Osanobua* = the High God

*Otue* = salutation; also, the eve of an important palace ceremony

## **U**

*Ugie* = general term for palace ceremony (festivals) in the *Benin* kingdom

*Ugie-Erhoba* = annual festival in memory of the *Oba*’s father

*Ugie-Iron* = mock battle commemorating the revolt of the *Uzama*

*Uhunmwun* = head

*Ukhurhe* = segmented wooden rattle staff used to call the ancestors and placed against back wall of ancestral altars

*Uko* = emissary

*Uko Akpolokpolo* = the great emperor of *Edo* (appellation for *Oba* of *Benin*)

*Ukhuse* = calabash rattle covered with netting strung with seeds or beads

*Uselu* = the dukedom of the heir apparent to the *Benin* throne.

*Uzama* = class of seven chiefs who officiate at coronation of *Oba* of *Benin* (king makers)

The oldest set of hereditary chieftaincy title holders in the *Benin* kingdom

*Uzama N' Ibie* = younger *Uzama* who normally officiate as deputy if the *Uzama* is not available

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