

Between Diplomacy and Imperialism: The Vestiges of Portuguese Influence on Benin Kingdom

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Abstract. The contacts African had with the Europeans presented several sides of experiences. For most of them, it led to loss of independence which commenced with a violent attack on their cultural beliefs. The fore bearers of these contacts were the explorers and missionaries whose ultimate objectives were the exploitation of the economic resources of the Africans. Thus, trade and religion were major instruments of the imposition of alien rule. The people of the Old Benin Kingdom were known for cherishing their cultural values. They had experiences with the Portuguese and the British. While the Portuguese were their trading partners who exchanged ambassadors with Benin, the British on the other hand, although came as traders and missionaries, were more violent in their approach towards the Benin people. This paper therefore, is an attempt to assess the impact of the Portuguese in their relationship with the Benin Kingdom and the influence they were able to leave behind.

1. Introduction

The relationship between African people and Europeans which started on a mutual basis subsequently degenerated to one of master-servant relationship. Colonial rule had often been depicted as a civilizing mission who the colonized people were in dire need of. The arrival of the Portuguese in the last quarter of the fifteenth century marked the beginning of the much cherished relationship in Benin history. In the relationship, between the Portuguese and old Benin Kingdom, trade became the most important thing, as no political conquest took place. In fact, it was a relationship based on mutual respect and appreciation of each other's cultural values. The cultural exchange that followed was therefore

reciprocal. This was unlike what followed the invasion of 1897 which led to the imposition of political dominance and control by the British.

The focus of this paper is the examination of the impressive influence of Portuguese culture on a society that is known to cherish and jealously protect its traditional culture and value. This is most significant when it is realised that the influence by the Portuguese though external in nature did not come as a result of imposition, but voluntary acceptance.

1.1 The Pre European Benin Kingdom

Benin, which is now the capital of Edo State, Nigeria, used to be the cultural and political hub of an ancient kingdom, "which stretched from the lower Niger in the East, to the frontiers of modern Dahomey in the West, and far in land, taking in much of Yorubaland. (It must be noted that the extent of influence on some Yoruba communities remains a subject of dispute). The People of the kingdom, called Bini, spoke the Edo language" (Buah, 1981).

The origin of the Bini people is usually confused with the establishment of the current dynasty. In all the traditions of origin of the people, it is acknowledged that the Bini people have always existed in their present locations. As observed by A.F.C. Ryder (1984), although some form of state may have existed among the Edo before the thirteenth century, the specific establishment of a kingdom was attributed by both Benin and Yoruba tradition to Oranyan, a scion of the prestigious ruling family of Ife, who was said to have been seen sent to Benin by the king, his father, probably around 1300, at the invitation of a

number of Benin chiefs (Aderibigbe, 1956; Egharevba, 1968; Ryder, 1984). However, the hermitic influence on the tradition of origin can still be seen in reference to Egyptian origin in some of the narrations.

The geographical area covered by the Benin people is approximately 8,653sq.km. It is primarily a rainforest zone of a low-lying plain covered with porous, reddish sand called "Benin sand". The area is on the edges of the Delta proper of the Niger River, and it is drained by a series of deeply entrenched rivers and small streams flowing in a general north-south direction. The major rivers are Siluko, Osse, Orhionwon, Ikpoba and Ovia. There are few hills to the East. The Climate is hot and humid with temperatures reading 100^{of} (38)^{of} and is characterized by two distinct seasons, the wet and dry (Anene, 1965).

The Benin Kingdom reached its peak as a coastal power in the period between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and until it was invaded by the British in 1897 was still a dominant force in the area. Until then, it had survived as an independent kingdom, through the heroic, efforts of its rulers like Ewaka (c 1200) Oguela (c 1280), Ewuare the Great (1440-73) and many more.

1.2 Portuguese Arrival and Inter-Group Relations

Joas Affonso d'Aveiro is usually regarded as the first Portuguese to arrive Benin in 1485. However, there is another reference to Roy de Sequeira coming in 1472 (Bleke, 1975). Whoever, may have arrived first, there is no dispute, however, that the Portuguese were the first Europeans to reach Benin City, the Kingdom capital.

The coming of the Portuguese to Africa was in search of the gold trade and the legendary Presta John. At the time they arrived Benin coastline, a Lisbon Merchant, Fernando Gomes, held the lease of the Guinea trade. By 1471, Gomes and his seaman had reached a port of the Guinea, which they called Coast de Mina, and it was in the following year that they got to the Bight of Benin. At the time of their arrival, they were unable to get enough slaves off the coast and had to turn to the rivers in the Bright of Benin. It became the practice for a few sails to detach from the main fleet and make their way inland in search of slaves. The geographical location of the Benin people put them outside the swamp forest area. So in their travels inland, the Portuguese came across mostly Ijaw people and the Urhobo, who were further inland. Thus, it was possible for the Portuguese to trade in

the rivers without knowing of the existence of Benin, and had to eventually penetrate inland to establish contact with them. It was through this route that they arrived at the entry port of Ugboton, from where they made their final journey to Benin.

The Portuguese, on getting to Benin were highly impressed with what they saw. These men who back in their places were used to the narrow confines of the walls and the small towns of Europe were fascinated by the spaciousness of the 'great city of Benin' and this made a powerful impression on them. This indeed confirmed that there was a state of far greater consequence than the petty chiefdoms which they were used to seeing on the coast (Bradbury, 1937).

They were well received by Oba Ozolua, who subsequently agreed that the Chief of Ugboton should accompany them to Lisbon so that he could learn more about the ways of the Whiteman (Ryder, 1962).

The choice of the Chief of Ughoton could be attributed to two main reasons. The first reason was because of importance of his village as the location of 'port' of Benin and the second which was one of the first immediate entry point/contact point of European trade, and, most important was his status as the *Edaiken* heir to the throne. The visit of the Chief of Ugboton to Portugal marked the beginning of a long lasting relationship between Benin Kingdom and the Portuguese. This visit culminated in the establishment of diplomatic relations, which was immediately followed by trade.

In spite of this early contact, the Portuguese were unable to dominate the trade of Benin for a number of reasons.

First, most of the areas the Portuguese had first traded before 1486 laid outside the Benin's sphere of influence and remained largely independent of it in the following years. At the same time, the Portuguese were not the only European trading interest in the area. Others could only operate with its licence. All interests however, wanted slaves from Benin and the rivers. The Ijaw and Itshekiri as well as the Edo of Benin, managed to meet their own supply quota of slaves by selling criminals and outcasts of their societies, by drawing upon existing slave markets and lastly by disposing of war captives (Agbontean, 1997). Oba Ozolua's numerous successful campaigns must have swollen the number of prisoners available for sale in this period, but there is no reason to suppose that this policy of conquest was in any way prompted by the opening of the European slave trade.

Many of the slaves were shipped away and exchanged for gold at a great profit.

Benin Kingdom is known worldwide for its arts. The artistic traditions of pre-colonial Benin were firmly established in the peoples way of life and maintained by traditional guilds specially designed for this purpose (Kimble, 1937). This guild has been associated with the origin of the kingdom since about 900AD (Kimble, 1937). By the second half of the fifteenth century, when Benin made contact with the Europeans, the development of Benin art under the guild system had reached its apex. New raw materials, broadened experienced, new design and representation of wider imaginative scope made Benin arts unrivalled. However, the decline of the kingdom gave way also to the decline of the system, which had developed closely with the monarchy for centuries (Ben-Amos, 1999).

The over-all impacts of the Portuguese influence on Benin are normally seen in terms of religious conversion, assistance in warfare, and the introduction of European goods. The supply of brass used in casting both cannon and the works of arts commonly referred to as bronzes was a greater part of the gains of the contact. The reflection of these impacts on Benin art can be said to have engendered a number of forms that are manifest both in exploited bronze and ivory. The bronze and very artifacts could reasonably be ascribed to the initial period of contact between the two cultures (Ben-Amos, 1999). It would seem that not only did such forms first appear in that period, but that many persisted and were repeated in the art throughout subsequent stages of development right into the present century. Notable are representations of Portuguese heads appearing on ivory and brass armlets; of tall figures of Portuguese on ivory tusks; and of torsos, on bronze plaques.

European weaponry and armour of the 15th and 16th centuries were frequently adapted with all kinds of designs, including floral motifs (Broadbury, 1959). The factors influencing Benin art at the time of this first contact with Europeans were undoubtedly beyond the considerable increase in the supply of brass metal for casting but also included the personal dress and baggage of the visitors themselves. In their luggage, the Portuguese were likely to have had small ivory caskets, the lids of which were subtly carved by Indian craftsmen; perhaps a few European illuminated books, and perhaps, examples of Indian painting (Dark, 1973). Such items may have stimulated the Edo artist: the arrangement of figures on plaques might have been suggested by similarity arranged designs of Indian paintings. The Portuguese

had earlier made incursion into Indian in 1498 (Egharevba, 1968).

Oral history suggests that Esigie's reign (1504-1550) was remarkable in many ways. The first and the most important was in regard of the arts and artifacts. The period witnessed the production of the finest works of Benin art. The impact of the Portuguese, which was touched on earlier, combined with Oba Esigie's regal abilities, his liberal tendencies in accepting the Portuguese religious and social reforms, and his political problems, must have together created a climate in which fermentation of idea started to stimulate artists and citizens alike (Ryder, 1977).

At the same time, as Professor Ryder has established, considerable supplies of brass were entering the Benin Kingdom (Dark, 1973). We may suppose, therefore, that a whole new host of ideas were absorbed by the artists of Benin. This newness of ideas coincided with an influx of raw materials and led to the production of new forms. For instance, the efflorescence of art in Oba Esigie's time, as a stimulus of Portuguese contact, led to the production of the rolled-collar beds, the fine pectorals and other works in ivory, such as two gongs and possibly, a pair of armlets, the first of two major types of queen mother heads, and, about the middle of the 16th century, the first plaques; those with a circled cross as a background motif (dark, 1973).

Other items probably of this period are works like the dwarfs, head of a dwarf, and the figure of a cross-bow man and a fine hip mask in the British Museum (Dark, 1973). Also, many Afro-Portuguese ivory have graced the courts of Princes during the renaissance and the cabinet of curiosities in Barque times. These include salt-cellar, spoons, forks, hunting horns of great refinement. These were initially thought to have originated from Indian or China but were in fact from Benin and Sierra Leone. Citing Fagg, a former keeper of the **London Museum of Mankind**, Ben-Amos (1999) writes that: *... Fagg's intelligent guess has been confirmed by other studies devoted to this problem in the last 25 years and many unanswered questions have found satisfying solutions, especially regarding the origin of the artifacts, now established as being the ... Sierra-Leone and Nigeria (Benin).*

The Afro-Portuguese ivories were made not for the local market, but by contract of the Portuguese. Drawing upon the image defined by the Portuguese, Benin sculptors incredibly made objects they otherwise knew nothing about. Among the works of arts, is the image of an angel. Another image in

bronze, showing European soldier “at the arrival of the Portuguese in the pose of firing his gun (Bradbury, 1937). Most importantly, the lasting impression/impact of Portuguese contact with Benin, on its art, is in the area of raw materials that were subserviently adopted for production. Today, most of Benin cast arts, if not all, are done in brass which originated from the Portuguese period.

2. Oral Tradition and Proverbs

Although the Benin people had no written language or record of their civilization, nonetheless, they developed an artistic system of recording events in traditional ways. This recording system had been found to offer more detail and depth than Portuguese records. Much of what has been achieved in Benin studies are derived from oral and art records confirmed by archaeology and allied studies (Egharevba, 1968).

Benin oral traditions have it that Oba Ozolua was king when the Portuguese first came to Benin. It is also claimed that in the early years there were four Portuguese visitors among them only one out of them persistently demanded for slaves and the Benin people did not like him. Benin records also claimed that the Oba appointed people who kept pots of water along the route for the Portuguese to find water on their journeys to and from their factory at Ughoton. In the early years, the Benin people had favourable impression of the Portuguese that were sustained by other Europeans as revealed in Benin proverbs and sayings. Also, impressions of the Portuguese can also be found in songs. One particular Edo song sung by children and young maidens of old Benin in their moonlight games goes thus:

*I le ema gie ebo
O ye ihieghe fi me;
Ai he emwin owie
I gba he ne ebo*

Meaning

*I cooked a meal of pounded yam for the whiteman;
He rewarded me with the gift of some herbs;
It is unlucky to refuse the day's first gift;
Else I would have rejected the whiteman's gift*
(Oduntan, 2002).

It is of course impossible to accurately date the origins of these proverbs and songs, many of them could have originated and developed only after the Portuguese pioneering venture, and during the intense exchanges that characterized Benin relationship with the Europeans.

However, given the intensity of the Portuguese impression, for which relics of the Portuguese venture still survive in Benin language, arts, cultures, etc, it is clear that the early Portuguese were not different from the images sustained by other Europeans. On the whole, the Benin proverbs, sayings and songs considered the Portuguese as self-seeking, disinterested in Edo ways, merciless and uncompassionate people (Aisien, 2001).

3. Social Life and Culture

After the Portuguese introduced firearms into Benin 500 years ago, the *Igun* guilds in the city took up the elaboration of these weapons locally. The guilds made Dane guns, and also pistols which the Edos called *Ovbisegba*. However, the *Igun* guilds made only arms, but not ammunition. Portugal might have been generous to Benin with her metals and her metallurgy, but kept the knowledge of chemistry exclusively (Aisien, 2001). Thus, Benin was never able to make gunpower and had to depend on Europe in the following centuries for supplies of the powder. This is because gunpowder was item of trade which was partly depended upon by the Europeans to make profit.

There is the *Uguakpata* hairdo worn by chiefs alone, which can be found on the famous FESTAC mask; the carved ivory hip pendant of a noble personage, Queen Idia, mother of Oba Esigie, consisting of a row of the repetitively carved heads of an European Catholic Bishop. These heads are eleven in number and the long hair and flowing beard identify him as a Prince of the church that is a Bishop, an Archbishop, a Cardinal, or the Pope himself (Aisien, 2001). The *Uguakpata* hair do of the FESTAC mask was the carvers representation of the head of the Roman Catholic Bishop of the Benin City of Oba Esigie, 1504-1550, (Ryder, 1977).

The Portuguese also brought along with them variety and colour which infused itself into the habit of the Benin people. Aside from the special garment of the chiefs which was made to resemble that of the Catholic Priests, velvet mostly red, became associated with the Benin monarch and royalty in general. Velvet featured in the gifts presented to the oba from Portugal (Akenzua, Interview, 2003). Also, it was common for chiefs to use linen shirts as a symbol of their status in the society because linen shirts were usually given to chiefs and messengers of the Oba from the king of Portugal, while silk shirts were restricted to the Oba alone.

The womenfolk also learnt to make use of the wide variety of coral and glass beads, which could be found in Benin at the time, for their personal adornment and beautification. Also, banglets as a fashion statement begin to feature prominently on Benin women (Isekhure, interview, 2002). The Portuguese introduced the “Big Umbrella” to Benin, the fan, was also used as a symbol of power and prestige (Akenzuan, interview, 2003). The Benin people also learnt to use spoon as part of their culinary etiquette, alongside the use of tumblers called *Akalaka* in Benin City.

The Portuguese also brought along with them personal effects, such as mirrors, kitchen utensils, and some other items of beautification which may not have been altogether foreign to the average Benin person, such as combs and brushes. It is also believed that the hair-do of the Oba’s wives, exclusive to them alone, was made to resemble that of the European counterparts. This could have been possible by means of European illustrated books. Sometimes they gave gifts of medicine, in the form of a bark of a tree, known to contain quinine a remedy for malaria. Spices such as curry were also introduced to a select few, which may have been used by Benin women in the preparation of their traditional dishes (Bradbury, 1973).

4. Christianity in Benin

When the Benin-Idah war ended about the year 1516, the Europeans in Benin were greatly relieved. This was because they were able to turn their energies to what really was of interest to them in the kingdom; the conversion of the people to Christianity, instead of their being obliged to help out in Oba Esigie’s tedious series of warfare since he succeeded Ozolua, his father, to the throne (Egharevba, 1968). The letter written in Benin City by Duarte Pires to Dom Manuel, the king of Portugal on the 20th October, 1516 and reproduced in J.U. Egbarevba’s *Short History of Benin*, paints a vivid picture of the Benin City of Oba Esigie soon after the Idah war ended. The letter said that:

Peace had returned to the kingdom; the European, even through Priest of God, had been away with Esigie to Idah for a whole year, and had helped Benin to defeat the Igalas: the Preaching of the Gospel: the great Mystery, and the conversion of the Benin people to Christianity which had been shelved because of the total commitment of the kingdom to the war effort was not possible, now that the war was over; the effort to convert the pagan kingdom to Christianity had begun in earnest. Already Oba Esigie had built a

Church (presumably the Cathedral along Akpakpava road in Benin). Esigie had ordered those closest to him-the Crown Prince Orhogbua, and two important palace Chiefs, to become Christians; the spark of literacy had been introduced into Benin amongst the royals and noblemen and these persons proved proficient in it (Bradbury, 1973).

Duarte Pires’ letter, a key in the understanding of the early years of Portugal in Benin also explains very satisfactorily, why, in spite of the of the unchallengeable military advantage which Esigie possessed at the time over all the other kingdoms and peoples of the region of West Africa, the Idah war proved to be the last major campaign of the Oba (Bradbury, 1973). The energies of rulership were now directed inwards, towards changing the society, and coping with internal opposition engendered by these changes. The European power which sponsored these changes was happy that there could be no more external distraction which might hamper the successful unraveling of the Great Mystery to and acceptance by the generality of the Benin people as had already been done with regard to the palace (Egharevba, 1968).

For the greater portion of the thirty four years for which he reigned after the war, Esigie devoted his energies to building Churches in town and the suburbs. The sites of the four churches are known, three of them very well, the fourth is not so well known. These churches were built at Akpakpava, Ogbelaka, Erie and the fourth at Ugbugue, located at No. 3, Idahosa Street, Ugbugue Quarters (Aisien, 2001).

The biggest of the four churches built in the town, and the headquarters of the Benin Christian Mission was the Cathedral on Akpakpava Road. Recent evidence has confirmed that the site was once the seat of a Bishop colonizers, on the conquest of Benin in 1897:

...discovered on arrival in Benin City that the Portuguese had in fact built a church in the city which was probably the seat of a Bishop as evidenced by the discovered of Episcopal cross (Aisien, 2001).

The discovery of the Episcopal cross in Benin in the early years of the 20th century, an artifact which could be found in association with the presence of an officer of the church not below the rank of a Bishop, is good evidence of the Cathedral status of the church built in Akpakpava by Oba Esigie. Another evidence which corroborates this chance finding can be seen in the FESTAC mask consisting of eleven heads of a

European Catholic Bishop. It is argued that the church in the Benin city of Oba Esigie could not have been important enough to accommodate the office of a Bishop, then. The least that could be suggested was that the Portuguese Roman Catholic Bishop of the Nigerian off-shore Island of Sao Tome paid a pastoral visit to the Benin church, and the Benin artist adopted the august visitor as his subject for Uguakpata adornment of the representation of the face of a Benin royal personage which he was carving in ivory (Aisien, 2001).

The Akpakpava Cathedral built by Oba Esigie was of a large size. Its frontage was on Akpakpava road, and its rear on Ehondor Street. Cathedral and castle-builders from Portugal probably constructed the edifice, but the more likely scenario was that the resident Priests themselves did the supervision, with the artisan guilds of the city put at their disposal by Esigie, doing most of the construction (Aisien, 2001). It is worthy of note that some twenty years before Esigie became the Oba, castle-builders had been sent by King John II to construct a more substantial and enduring edifice on the soil of West Africa. This was the Elmina Castle, now in Ghana, built on the seashore with materials brought by sea from Europe (Aisien, 2001).

However, the Akpakpava Road Cathedral was not destined to enjoy the robustness of the construction which Elmina Castle enjoyed. Benin City was too far inland from Ugboton, and Ugboton was too far by boat from the open Atlantic for appropriate building materials to have been brought from Europe for the Cathedrals construction. Building materials especially stone, were not available in the alluvial soil of the Benin kingdom, thus the best materials which the builders could have had for the walls of the edifice was the kneaded mud. All Benin homes and places have been constructed of this material since time immemorial.

Akpakava Road, on which the Cathedral stood was said to have been constructed by Oba Ewuare, Esigie's grandfather (Aisien, 2001). But it was the Portuguese in Benin that gave the road the name by which it is now known.

In spite of the endnote explanation above, a plausible manner of derivation of the name '*Akpakpava*' surfaced recently when the subject was discussed with the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Benin, His Grace Patrick Eboese Ekpu. The story of the construction of the Benin City Cathedral 500 years ago was told, and the word '*Papaver*' (the Latin name of the medicinal Poppy plant found on Akpakpava road by Portuguese Priest), mentioned in association with the street on which the new

Cathedral stood. In a flash the Archbishop exclaimed quietly in Latin: *Papa via*; the "Pope's Way" or "Pope's Road" (Ryder, 1962).

For two centuries the Christian church struggled to take root and survive in the soil of Benin. But by the year 1713, Priest stopped coming to Benin and the Beni Church lapsed into idolatry, which is the native religion of the land (Aisien, 2001). However, a sort of synthesis had taken place between the Christian religion and the native one such that at *Arousa* the premier shrine, the Lord God Almighty was worshipped as with other shrines dedicated to him. God was propitiated with chalk, cowries, pods of pumpkin and strips of white and red linen in these shrines. The *Ohensa*, native priest of the Akpakpava Cathedral, after taking over from the 16th century Roman Bishop, would come before the Oba in the palace, holding his staff of office, which represented the Episcopal cross of the Catholic Bishop of the Benin of Oba Esigie, 1594-1550, (Egharevba, 1968).

The Arousa N'Ogbelaka is vastly important to the Nigerian nation. Benin City was the place where Christianity was first preached and accepted. The Arousa shrine is one of the many relics still possessed by the old city which tells the story of the first arrival of Christianity into Benin halfway into the second Christian millennium. The acceptance of Christianity by Esigie, and his efforts to make Edoland embrace the new religion shook Benin to its foundation and nearly led, not only to Esigie's loss of his throne, but also to a complete dynastic change in Benin (Egharevba, 1968).

He also incorporated into the palace ritual many of the usages of the Roman Catholic Church. The Maltese cross, with its four limbs of equal length, which was the form of cross the Portuguese brought to Benin, was adopted as a palace motif, and can be seen reproduced today on the *Ada*, the state sword of the Oba of Benin. It is also liberally reproduced, in coral, on the hats and other regalia of the monarch and his chiefs. The Morning and mass said in those days by Priests for Oba Esigie continue to be celebrated today, especially the Evening Mass or vespers, which metamorphosed into the daily *Eghuae Ematon* palace ceremony when the indigenous religion of the land later swallowed up the foreign religion as bush does to an untended patch of cultivated land (Aisien, 2001).

5. Education

Encouraged by his victory over the Igallas in the Idah war (1516), an unrestrained Esigie devoted all his

energy to the encouragement of the acceptance of Christianity in Benin. Thus, he went on to build a Cathedral and three chapels. A fourth chapel was situated in the Oba's palace by Oba Esigie is use.

It is probable that the three chapels built in the city were in reality intended as schools, with a little chapel attached to each, where Mass was said before the days teaching began. This supposition is provoked by the fact that two of the three "chapels", those of *Ogbelaka* and Ugbague, have the same adjective attached to them. Each is referred by its priests as: *Aruosa n'Ewaen*, "the chapel of wisdom" or "the chapel of knowledge" (Aisien, 2001).

With the building of the *Akpakpava* Cathedral therefore, three schools were probably built, in the densely populated areas of the town, where the teaching of the rudiments of literacy was attempted. The schools were built as more Portuguese Priests became available to man them. Christianity, like Islam, is a literate religion. The three satellite *Aruosa* in the city, and perhaps also, those which were built in some of the near-villages were in reality like the "Ile Kewu" the "Arabic House" or the Quoranic center in Islamic communities, where the Moslem Imam teaches children, clutching their wooden slates, how to read and write in Arabic and therefore, how to read, write and recite the Koran (Aisien, 2001).

If these suppositions are acceptable, then the *Aruosa* shrines at *Ogbelaka*, Eric and Ugbabue in Benin City are in reality the sites of the earlier Christian schools in the geographical context of Nigeria, just as *Arousa n'Akpakpava* is the site of the earliest church in the country. These three sites would represent the first efforts of Portugal to bring the inestimable gifts of literacy to Benin, under the guidance and encouragement of Oba Esigie.

Oba Orhogbua, Esigie's son, a converted and convinced Christian who reigned from 1550-1578, was the most formally educated Oba of Benin until Akenzuwa II of the 20th century. He was educated outside Benin perhaps at first, in the off-shore Island of Sao Tome, then, later in the metropolitan capital of Lisbon in Portugal. He trained with his eye on ultimately becoming a Catholic Priest. He was still overseas when his father, Oba Esigie, died. When he arrives in Benin from Europe he had choice to make; to take up his patrimony as the Oba of Benin, or to practice the procession of the priesthood of the church. It was in this regard that the Edo's said;

Ai no Oba, wo ebo:

"You cannot be king, and concurrently be a Priest to a deity (Aisien, 2001).

Orhogbua became the Oba of Benin and relinquished his priestly duties to the few Portuguese Priests and the native clergy which the Priests had trained as Catechists to help at the altar. The advantages of Orhogbua's overseas education began to show immediately he became Oba. Considerable time had elapsed since the death of his father and his own arrival home.

In the interval, the numerous women in the royal harem had dispersed to their various homes and had begun to co-habit with other men. This was a capital offense in the kingdom. Thus, against the insistence of the chiefs, Orhogbua forbade the execution of the women their consorts, and the offspring of their co-habitation (Aisien, 2001).

The other advantages of his overseas education and enlightenment which Orhogbua conferred on the kingdom were his love for the sea, and how his love influenced the running of the affairs of Benin. He turned the extensive lagoon system running parallel to the Bight of Benin into Benin lake, and became the lord of all lands bordering this lake. He founded an Enogie-ship on the island of Lagos. During the reign of this wise king, trade with the Portuguese developed fast. Ughoton became an important port in the Western Niger Delta and so Benin grew on the tolls and custom duties levied by the Oba. He was also clearly a strong warrior for he enforced tribute payments from all parts of the empire and in the mid-1550's conquered all the coastal lands up to Lagos where he left a permanent garrison. Tradition in Lagos says that their first Oba, the Eleko of Eko, was a son of Oba Orhogbua of Benin (Aisien, 2001).

During this long period of Orhogbua's reign Christianity and education looked after themselves in Benin as best as they could, limping along without the royal presence they needed for support and encouragement. By the time Ehengbuda, Oba Orhogbua's son, succeeded the throne and came to the end of his own reign, Christianity had gone 'native' in Benin. The Cathedral, and the chapel's attached to the places of learning, both in the city and in the near villages had become:

"Aro Osa" or "Aruosa"

"Shrines to the Supreme God"

The Catechists and the trained "Brothers" who were left in charge of the places of worship when the Vatican and Portugal could no longer sustain the missionary efforts of manning them with ordained Priests, became the:

"Ohen Osa" or "Ohensa"

"Priests of the Supreme God" (Aisien, 2001).

6. Benin Vocabulary and Crops

With the arrival of the Portuguese also came various crops that were foreign to the Benin people. Pineapples, coconuts, oranges, were some of such food items not only introduced to Benin, but later grown on Benin soil. Such food items were introduced gradually into the kingdom and have since constituted part of the diet of the Benin people. Coconuts eaten with roasted corn or cassava is considered a delicacy in some parts of Edo land.

The arrival of these crops which were foreign to Benin people necessitated the need for the people to coin words or adapt words from the Portuguese for which they would be known. Thus the orange fruit came to be known as “*alimo*”; the pineapple as “*ediebo*”; the coconut as “*uviebo*”, etc. Some of these words have one thing in common which is the noun, “*ebo*” in Benin language literally means “white man” or “white person” and can be used in the context pertaining to a white person.

Besides edible items introduced by the Portuguese, utensils, such as spoons, called “*Kuye*” in the Benin languages; tumbler, called “*Akalaka*”; calabash, called “*Okuye*”, were also introduced among others⁵⁵. It would seem, in the above examples, that the Benin people during the time of the Portuguese visit were trying to copy or imitate Portuguese tongue. Another prominent example is found in the adaptation of the word “*sanguine*” which has been modified in the Benin context to “*Esagien*”.

Fragments of the Portuguese language are also used in the palace as a special language of the important high-ranking chief to ensure secrecy among them. This special language or court language cannot be understood by the average Benin person and serves its special purpose at the Palace.

7. Conclusion

The paper was opened with a cursory look at the history of Benin and its inhabitant focuses mainly the vestiges of Portuguese relations with Benin. An understanding of the culture of the Benin people help to distinguish between what is indigenous and what is borrowed. It also helps us to understand the reactions of the people towards a foreign culture.

The contact between the Benin and Portuguese people resulted in trade and other relations, which impacted both positively and negatively on Benin people. They exchanged various items such as, pepper, semi-precious stone, beads, cloth, slaves and

a variety of gifts, meant for the king of Portugal, the Oba of Benin and their messengers. In addition to this, envoys were also exchanged between Portugal and Benin, the Oba himself was said to have made a trip to Lisbon in Portugal. In effect, trade and contact between Portugal and Benin Kingdom led to cultural borrowing. For example, Benin shifted its preference for copper manila to those made of brass.

Legacies of the Portuguese can also be found in the areas of art, sculpture and social life. The Portuguese infused life into the already vibrant art of Benin by making brass available in large quantities. At the time of the Portuguese visit, the Benin craftsmen were recorded to have made images and designs that had hitherto been alien to them. An example can be found in the crafted image of an angel. Also spoons, forks, salt-cellars and hunting horns were also depicted by the Edo artists of that period. Many of such works are still in existence till date.

Vestiges of the Portuguese contact with Benin people can also be found in the oral tradition, songs and proverbs of the Benin people. Stories about the first visitors to the Benin kingdom abound in Benin oral history and tradition. Oral tradition records that Oba Ozolua was king at the time of that visit and how the strange visitors demanded for slaves. Oral tradition also records that the Portuguese though highly welcomed at first, later began to lose favour in the eyes of the Benin people and this image was sustained by subsequent European visitors. Records of the Portuguese are also contained in their songs. Though the period of the Portuguese visit was short, they also managed to introduce guns and gunpowder into Benin; they were equally responsible for the attire and hair-do of the Benin chiefs.

The greatest influence of the Portuguese can perhaps be found in the area of religion with the introduction of Christianity under Catholicism. Overtime, the dogmas and emblems used in the practice of the Catholic faith have synthesized with the indigenous traditional practice. The introduction of Christianity also led to the spread of literacy among the Benin people. This is a very significant aspect of Portuguese impact because Benin City may well be the area where the first church was built, Christianity preached and literacy imparted. This is contrary to the assumption and popular believe that Christianity was first preached under the Agia tree in Badagry in 1842. Contact with the Portuguese led to the building of the first four churches in Benin, the sites of which can still be found in Benin City today. The son of Oba Esigie, Orhogbua, who took over the mantle of leadership after his father’s death, trained in Lisbon,

Portugal, to become a priest. Consequently, though he could not serve in that capacity, his overseas education had a positive impact of great magnitude on Benin kingdom.

This paper has also been able to address the impact of the Portuguese on Benin language and crops. The appearance of alien commodities also led to an enrichment of the Benin vocabulary, such that words like 'kuye' meaning 'spoon' were introduced. A special language used in the palace by the Oba and his special chiefs is made up of mainly Portuguese words for the purpose of secrecy.

In conclusion, it is necessary to point out that despite the relatively short period of contact between the Benin and the Portuguese 1472-1517, as compared with the longer contact with the British from the time of the invasion in 1897, it is wrong to assume that the Portuguese left no legacies of lasting imprint on the Benin people. This paper has been able to shed light on the neglected areas of the brief but enduring encounter with the Portuguese. Aspects of the impact of the Portuguese discussed in this paper are those which have stood the test of time. They can be found in relics and artifacts, which exist in Benin City till date, such as, the Holy Aruosa Cathedral, a number of artworks on display at the National Museum, Benin the Uguakpata hair-do and the traditional attire of the chiefs to mention but a few. We have also been able to establish that although the Benin cultural heritage has been carefully preserved and guarded over the centuries, it has however, succinctly imbibed some aspects of the Portuguese culture into its core practices. In fact, there is still room for further in-depth study into the period of Portuguese contact with the Benin kingdom.

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