

# **Understanding our Roots: A Historical-Cultural Perspective of Edo State People of Nigeria**

*By*

**Dr Stephen Enoma**

PhD (Doctor of Philosophy);

EdD (Doctor of Education);

MSc; MEd; GradDipEd; GradCertEd

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# INTRODUCTION

Good evening and thank you for the opportunity accorded me to share some vital information about the genesis and cultural history of the people of Edo State of Nigeria with you. Having a knowledge of our roots and cultural identity are matters of urgency and tremendous importance not only for us today but for our children and the future generations who will live after us after we have closed our eyes to the light of this world. As noted by Marcus Mosiah Garvey, “A people without knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots”. Thus, it seems to me responsible child upbringing to raise our children with a sound knowledge of one of the oldest continuing cultures in human history. It is without doubt among the lasting legacies that we can leave behind for all Edo State citizens regardless of where they dwell on the globe - to leave them with some historical capital about their origin and keep them connected with the culture which has survived the eroding power of time. The targeted audience of this talk therefore, encompasses not only those of us who are sitting down here tonight (some of whom already have a degree of understanding of our history) but particularly for the expanding populations of Edo State citizens dwelling at home away from home in different parts of the world - recognising that some of them may never step their feet on Edo State or Nigerian soil in their life time nor have the time to glean through the body of literature to harvest such an important information.

I appreciate the huge challenge associated with being in a minority in a foreign land. For example, being the only person of African heritage in a place, classroom or a school can be a very daunting experience for anyone and even more so for our young children. When you consider the fact that “trees that are not firmly rooted in rich, fertile soil do not grow, do not bear fruit, they cannot

withstand strong wind, or bear heavy loads” (LaShawn Routé Chatmon, 2021) to their maximum capacity or potential, one comes to the realisation of the unassailable wisdom in satisfying our natural curiosity and desire to learn about our yesterdays. It is one of the primary objectives of this talk tonight to support our children in developing firm foundations for self-worth and identity by drawing inspirations from the history of their fore-parents’ formidable strength, industry, pioneering and organised political and social structures as well as outstanding leadership qualities. I find it as an invaluable quality for our children (including those unborn) to have confidence and a sense of pride in who they are as Edo State citizens, not minding the fact that they reside in various countries around the world as members of a minority group but rather, to be a people of handsome character, to equip themselves with an indefatigable spirit of hard work and a strong belief that they can rise to any office in the land, be as good as anyone in the world and can accomplish anything that they put their minds on. Remember that we can only be as tall as our dreams and that hard work pursued alongside fine character beats talent.

## Scope

The primary objective of this presentation is to peel back the layers of time and establish the roots and culture of the different ethnic cohorts that currently make up Edo State of Nigeria.



Figure 1: Map of Edo State showing the 18 Local Government areas (Ehiorobo, J. O (n.d.)

## **An Overview of Edo State of Nigeria – Present (2024) (including Local Government Areas and Wards)**

Edo State is located in the Southwestern part of Nigeria on latitude 6.339185 and longitude 5.617447. It boasts a population of about 8 million people, consisting primarily of the Binis, Esan/Ishan, Owan (the Emai and Ora of Ivbiosakon), Etsako and Akoko-Edo ethnic groups (Eboreime, J, 1997; Official website of Edo State Government) - <https://edostate.gov.ng/edo/>).

The state is divided into 18 Local Government areas and 192 wards (Soluap, n.d; EDUWEB, n.d; EdoAffairs, 2024) (Tables 1 & 2). The state is led/headed politically by a governor while the Local Government areas and the Wards are headed by Local Government Chairmen and Councilors respectively. Historical records have consistently demonstrated that the Binis, Esan/Ishan, Owan, Etsako and Akoko-Edo ethnic groups have a common ancestry and heritage (The Kingdom of Benin which took its roots from Igodomigodo) as depicted in the diagram below. I will elaborate further as this discussion progresses.

**Table 1: The 18 LGAs of Edo State according to Soluap (n.d.)**

| <b>LGA</b>      | <b>Headquarters</b> | <b>Area (km<sup>2</sup>)</b> | <b>Population (2006 census)</b> | <b>Senatorial district</b> |
|-----------------|---------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Akoko-Edo       | Igarra              | 1,371                        | 262,110                         | Edo North                  |
| Egor            | Uselu               | 46                           | 339,899                         | Edo South                  |
| Esan Central    | Irrua               | 186                          | 147,073                         | Edo Central                |
| Esan North-East | Uromi               | 265                          | 167,721                         | Edo Central                |
| Esan South-East | Ubiaja              | 546                          | 217,648                         | Edo Central                |
| Esan West       | Ekpoma              | 502                          | 188,940                         | Edo Central                |
| Etsako Central  | Fugar               | 1,097                        | 94,055                          | Edo North                  |
| Etsako East     | Agenebode           | 1,286                        | 158,092                         | Edo North                  |
| Etsako West     | Auchi               | 1,399                        | 281,642                         | Edo North                  |
| Igueben         | Igueben             | 117                          | 67,715                          | Edo Central                |
| Ikpoba-Okha     | Idogbo              | 631                          | 473,376                         | Edo South                  |
| Oredo           | Benin City          | 249                          | 374,671                         | Edo South                  |
| Orhionmwon      | Abudu               | 1,764                        | 191,194                         | Edo South                  |
| Ovia North-East | Okada               | 1,809                        | 159,354                         | Edo South                  |
| Ovia South-West | Iguobazuwa          | 1,825                        | 143,009                         | Edo South                  |
| Owan East       | Afuze               | 1,074                        | 169,728                         | Edo North                  |
| Owan West       | Sabongida Ora       | 1,300                        | 128,802                         | Edo North                  |
| Uhunmwonde      | Ehor                | 1,371                        | 107,494                         | Edo South                  |

Soluap (n.d.)



Figure 2: Map of Edo State of Nigeria  
Source: (Soluap, n.d.)

**Table 2: List of Edo State Local Government Wards according to EDUWEB (n.d.) and Edoaffairs (2024)**

| <b>LG</b>         | <b>WARDS</b>          |
|-------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 AKOKO EDO       | IGARRA I              |
|                   | IGARRA II             |
|                   | IMOGA/LAMPSE          |
|                   | IBILLO                |
|                   | MAKEKE                |
|                   | OLOMA                 |
|                   | SOMORIKA              |
|                   | ENWAN                 |
|                   | UNEME                 |
|                   | OSOSO                 |
|                   | <b>Total wards 10</b> |
| 2 EGOR            | OTUBI                 |
|                   | OLIHA                 |
|                   | OGIDA/USE             |
|                   | EGOR                  |
|                   | UWELU                 |
|                   | EVBARKEKE             |
|                   | USELU I               |
|                   | USELU II              |
|                   | OKHORO                |
|                   | UGBOWO                |
|                   | <b>Total Wards 10</b> |
| 3 ESAN CENTRAL    | UNEAH                 |
|                   | UWESSAN I             |
|                   | UWESSAN II            |
|                   | IKEKATO               |
|                   | OTORUWO I             |
|                   | OTORUWO II            |
|                   | EWU I                 |
|                   | EWU II                |
|                   | OPOJI                 |
|                   | UWENU                 |
|                   | <b>Total Wards 10</b> |
| 4 ESAN NORTH EAST | EGBELE                |
|                   | OBEIDU                |
|                   | ARUE                  |
|                   | UELEN OKUGBE          |
|                   | IDUMU OKAJIA          |

|                   |                       |
|-------------------|-----------------------|
|                   | UZEA                  |
|                   | AMEDOKHIAN            |
|                   | EFANDION              |
|                   | UWALION               |
|                   | EWOYI                 |
|                   | UBIERUMU              |
|                   | <b>Total Wards 11</b> |
| 5 ESAN SOUTH EAST | EWOHIMI I             |
|                   | EWOHIMI II            |
|                   | EWATTO                |
|                   | OHARDUA               |
|                   | EMU                   |
|                   | UBIAJA I              |
|                   | UBIAJA II             |
|                   | ILLUSHI I             |
|                   | ILLUSHI II            |
|                   | UGHOHA                |
|                   | <b>Total Wards 10</b> |
| 6 ESAN WEST       | OGWA                  |
|                   | UJIOGBA               |
|                   | EGORO IDOA            |
|                   | EMAUDO/EGUARE         |
|                   | IHUNMUDUMU IDUMEBO    |
|                   | IRUEKPEN              |
|                   | EMUHI UKPENU          |
|                   | UROHI                 |
|                   | UHIELE                |
|                   | ILLEH                 |
|                   | <b>Total Wards 10</b> |
| 7 ETSAKO CENTRAL  | FUGAR I               |
|                   | FUGAR II              |
|                   | FUGAR III             |
|                   | OGBONA                |
|                   | IRAOKHOR              |
|                   | EKPERI I              |
|                   | EKPERI II             |
|                   | EKPERI III            |
|                   | SOUTH UNEME           |
|                   | SOUTH UNEME           |
|                   | <b>Total wards 10</b> |
| 8 ETSAKO EAST     | AGBENEBODE            |
|                   | WANNO I               |
|                   | WANNO II              |
|                   | WEPPA                 |



|                |                       |
|----------------|-----------------------|
|                | OKPELLA I             |
|                | OKPELLA II            |
|                | OKPELLA III           |
|                | OKPELLA IV            |
|                | THREE IBESI           |
|                | OKPEKPE               |
|                | <b>Total Wards 10</b> |
| 9 ETSAKO WEST  | AUCHI I               |
|                | AUCHI II              |
|                | AUCHI III             |
|                | AUCHI IV              |
|                | SOUTH IBIE            |
|                | JAGBE                 |
|                | AVIELE                |
|                | ANWAIN                |
|                | UZAIURE NORTH WEST    |
|                | UZAIURE NORTH EAST    |
|                | UZAIURE SOUTH WEST    |
|                | UZAIURE SOUTH EAST    |
|                | <b>Total Wards 12</b> |
| 10 IGUEBEN     | EKEKHEN IDUMUOGO      |
|                | IDIGUN IDUMEDO        |
|                | AFUDA IDUMUOKA        |
|                | UHE/IDUMOOGBO         |
|                | UDO                   |
|                | OWU/OKATA             |
|                | OKALO/OKPUJIE         |
|                | AMAHOR UGUN           |
|                | EWOSSA                |
|                | EKPON                 |
|                | <b>Total Wards 10</b> |
| 11 IKPOBA OKHA | IWOGBAN/UTEH          |
|                | OREGBENI              |
|                | OGBESON               |
|                | ADUWAWA EVBO          |
|                | S. T SAVIOR           |
|                | GORRETTI              |
|                | UGBEKUN               |
|                | IDOGBO                |
|                | OBAYANTOR             |
|                | OLOGBO                |
|                | <b>Total Wards 10</b> |

|                       |                       |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 12 OREDO              | OGBE                  |
|                       | GRA/ETETE             |
|                       | UZEBU                 |
|                       | URUBI/EVBIEMWEN       |
|                       | IHOGBE ISEKHERE       |
|                       | NEW BENIE I           |
|                       | NEW BENIE II          |
|                       | OREDO                 |
|                       | IKPEMA EGUADASE       |
|                       | UNUERU/OGBOKA         |
|                       | OGBELAKA              |
|                       | IBIWEN/TWEGIE         |
|                       | <b>Total Wards 12</b> |
|                       | 13 ORHIONMWON         |
| AIBIOKUNLA II         |                       |
| UGBEKA                |                       |
| IYOBA                 |                       |
| UGBOKO                |                       |
| UKPATO                |                       |
| URHONIGBE NORTH       |                       |
| URHONIGBE SOUTH       |                       |
| UGU                   |                       |
| EVBOESI               |                       |
| IGBANKE EAST          |                       |
| IGBANKE WEST          |                       |
| <b>Total Wards 12</b> |                       |
| 14 OVIA NORTH EAST    |                       |
|                       | OKADA EAST            |
|                       | UHEN                  |
|                       | ADOLOR                |
|                       | OFUMWGBE              |
|                       | OLUKU                 |
|                       | UHIERE                |
|                       | ISIUWA                |
|                       | OKOKHUO               |
|                       | OGHEDE                |
|                       | ODUNA                 |
|                       | IGUOSHODIN            |
|                       | UTOKA                 |
|                       | <b>Total Wards 13</b> |
| 15 OVIA SOUTH WEST    | IGUOBAZUWA EAST       |
|                       | IGUOBAZUWA WEST       |
|                       | UMAZA                 |
|                       | SILUKO                |

|              |                       |
|--------------|-----------------------|
|              | UDO                   |
|              | ORA                   |
|              | USEN                  |
|              | UGBOGUI               |
|              | OFUNAMA               |
|              | NIKOROGHA             |
|              | <b>Total Wards 10</b> |
| 16 OWAN EAST | EMAI I                |
|              | EMAI II               |
|              | IHIEVBE I             |
|              | IHIEVBE II            |
|              | OUKAH/AKE             |
|              | IGUE                  |
|              | IVBIMION              |
|              | OYUHO I               |
|              | OTUHO II              |
|              | IVBIADAObI            |
|              | WARRAKE               |
|              | <b>Total Wards 11</b> |
| 17 OWAN WEST | OZALA                 |
|              | OHANMORA              |
|              | EME ORA /IKE          |
|              | SABONGARI/ORA         |
|              | AVBIOSI               |
|              | UKHUSE-OSI            |
|              | ERU ERE               |
|              | OKPUJIE               |
|              | UZABA I               |
|              | UZABA II              |
|              | SOBE                  |
|              | <b>Total Wards 11</b> |
| 18 UHUNMWODE | EGOR                  |
|              | UHI                   |
|              | IGIEDUMA              |
|              | IRHUE                 |
|              | UMAGBAE NORTH         |
|              | UMAGBAE SOUTH         |
|              | ISI NORTH             |
|              | ISI SOUTH             |
|              | OHUAN                 |
|              | EGBEDE                |
|              | <b>TOTAL wards 10</b> |
|              | <b>Total 192</b>      |

## **The Past: From Igodomigodo to Benin Kingdom**

The Benin Kingdom was previously known as Igodomigodo, meaning ‘the Land of Igodo’ and began as a conglomeration of small villages and settlements into a formidable empire (Edo, V. O 2008, Edigin, C. 2024). The Igodomigodo Kingdom was named after Ogiso Igodo, the first king to rule from 40 BC to 16 AD (Peavy, 2010). The word “Ogiso” when translated directly from Edo/Bini language means “King of the Sky” in acknowledgement of the widely accepted belief amongst the people that although the Ogiso is born into the world but they are sent by God (Osagie, J. I. & Ikponmwosa, F, 2015). This is reflected in a popular Bini saying “Ase Agbon rioba”.

There is no consensus in the literature on when the Igodomigodo Kingdom was founded. Some historians have indicated that it started in the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> century (Ekeh, 2001), 601 AD (Osagie, 1999), 900s (Osagie & Ikponmwosa, 2015; Eisenhofer, 1995; B.B.C, n.d.), 10<sup>th</sup> century (National Museums Scotland, n.d.), probably between the early 10<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 12<sup>th</sup> centuries (Bondarenko & Roese, 2001). Others have identified 40BCE as when Ogiso Igodo founded Igodomigodo (Peavy, 2010). Reflecting about the uncertainty of the origin of the Edo people, Prince Eweka (2021) noted that “No one is really certain about the Origin of the Edo people whose origin appears to have been lost in the myths and legends of the distant past”.

However, one of the most popular and comprehensive versions of the origin of the Edo State people has been given by Peavy (2010) who published a list of the Ogisos and the periods of their rulership starting from Ogiso Igodo. According to this author, 30 Ogisos ruled the Igodomigodo Kingdom from 40BCE to 1100 as detailed below:

## **The Igodomigodo Kingdom/Empire under the Ogisos** (Peavy, 2010)

1. Ogiso Igodo – 40BC-16AD
2. Ogiso Ere – 16AD-66AD
3. Ogiso Orire - 66AD-100AD
4. Ogiso Ighido – 400AD-414AD
5. Ogiso Evbuobo – 414AD-432AD
6. Ogiso Ogbeide – 432AD-447AD
7. Ogiso Emehe – 447AD-466AD
8. Ogiso Ekpigho – 466AD-482AD
9. Ogiso Akhuankhuan – 482AD-494AD
10. Ogiso Efeseke – 494AD-508AD
11. Ogiso Irudia – 508AD-522AD
12. Ogiso Orria – 522AD-537AD
13. Ogiso Imarhan – 537AD-548AD
14. Ogiso Etebowe - 548AD-567AD
15. Ogiso Odion – 567AD-584AD
16. Ogiso Emose – 584AD-600AD – possibly a female Ogiso
17. Ogiso Ororo – 600AD-618AD – possibly a female Ogiso
18. Ogiso Erebo – 618AD-632AD
19. Ogiso Ogbomo – 632AD-647AD
20. Ogiso Agbonzeke – 647AD-665AD
21. Ogiso Ediae – 665AD-685AD
22. Ogiso Orriagba – 685AD-712AD

- 23. Ogiso Odoligie – 712AD-767AD
- 24. Ogiso Uwa – 767AD-821AD
- 25. Ogiso Eheneden - 821AD-871AD
- 26. Ogiso Ohuede – 871AD-917AD
- 27. Ogiso Oduwa – 917AD-967AD
- 28. Ogiso Obioye – 967AD-1012AD
- 29. Ogiso Arigho – 1012AD-1059AD
- 30. Ogiso Owodo – 1059AD-1100AD

## **The Benin Kingdom under the Obas**

The second dynasty of kings that ruled the Benin Kingdom began in 1170 AD as detailed below:

### **The Benin Kingdom/Empire under the Obas** (Naiwu S, 2021)

1. Oronmiyan (1170 AD – 1200AD) – Son of Ikaladerhan (the Oduduwa of Ife)
2. Eweka I (1200 AD – 1235 AD).d
3. Uwakhuahen (1235 AD – 1243 AD)
4. Ehenmihen (1243 AD – 1255 AD)
5. Ewedo (1255 AD – 1280 AD)
6. Oguola (1280 AD – 1295 AD)
7. Edoni (1295 AD – 1299 AD)
8. Udagbedo (1299 AD – 1334 AD)
9. Ohen (1334 AD – 1370 AD)

10. Egbeka (1370 AD – 1400 AD)
11. Orobiru (1400 AD – 1430 AD)
12. Uwaifiokun (1430 AD – 1440 AD)
13. Ewuare The Great (1440AD–1473 AD)
14. Ezoti (Reigned for 14 days)
15. Olua (1473 AD – 1480 AD)
16. Ozolua (1483 AD – 1504 AD)
17. Esigie (1504 AD – 1550 AD)
18. Orhogbua (1550 AD – 1578 AD)
19. Ehengbuda (1578 AD -1606 AD)
20. Ohuan (1606 AD – 1641 AD)
21. Ohenzae (1641 AD – 1661 AD)
22. Akenzae (1661 AD – 1669 AD)
23. Akengboi (1669 AD – 1675 AD)
24. Ahenkpaye (1675 AD – 1684 AD)
25. Akengbedo (1684 AD – 1689 AD)
26. Oroghene (1689 AD – 1700 AD)
27. Ewuakpe (1700 AD – 1712 AD)
28. Ozuere (1712 AD – 1713 AD)
29. Akenzua I (1713 AD – 1735 AD)
30. Eresoyen (1735 AD – 1750 AD)
31. Akengbuda (1750 AD – 1804 AD)
32. Obanosa (1804 AD – 1816 AD)

33. Ogbebo (1816 AD – 1816 AD) (Reigned for eight months)
34. Osemwende (1816 AD – 1848 AD)
35. Adolo (1848 AD – 1888 AD)
36. Ovonramwen N'Ogbaise (1888AD–1914 AD)
37. Eweka II (1914 AD – 1933 AD)
38. Akenzua II (1933 AD – 1978 AD)
39. Erediauwa (1978–2016)
40. Ewuare II (2016 – present)

A timeline approach is one way of examining historical events in order to gain a deeper understanding of how things unfolded. Thus, I have made an endeavour to summarise the sequences of historical and political developments from the time of Igodomigodo Empire in 40 BCE to the formation of the Benin Kingdom in 1100 CE, through to the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates to form Nigeria (1<sup>st</sup> January 1914) and further developments led to the creation of Western and Mid-Western regions, the creation of Bendel State on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February 1976 and eventually, the creation of two separate states (Delta) and Edo (Edo) on the 27<sup>th</sup> August 1991 from the old Bendel State (Table 3).

While Table 3 indicates that Flora (née Shaw) Lugard (the British journalist, author and wife to Nigeria's first governor-general – Federick Lugard) coined the word “Nigeria” (named after the River Niger) in 1897, it is important to note that the Tuaregs, long before Flora Shaw, had used the words “*egerew nigerewen*” as their name for River Niger. Being an author and a journalist, it is possible that Flora Shaw Lugard could have been influenced by the Tuaregs in naming Nigeria.





Figure 3: Flora (née Shaw) Lugard (Beresford, G.C, 1908)

### **Table 3: A Summary of historical events leading up to the creation of Edo State of Nigeria**

- 27/08/1991** - Edo State/Delta State (Edo State Government, n.d.)
- 03/02/1976** - Bendel State (Niger Delta Monitoring Group, n.d.)
- 27/05/1967** – Mid Western State (Natufe, O.I; 1999)
- 09/08/1963** – Mid Western Region (Omoigui, N. A; 2002)
- 1939-1963** - Western Region (Hubert Herald, n.d.)
- 01/10/1960** – Nigeria gained independence from the British
- 01/01/1914** – Birth of Nigeria (Unification of Northern Southern Protectorates)
- 01/01/1900** – Creation of Northern & Southern Nigeria Protectorates
- 09/02/1897** – Benin Kingdom was invaded by British force of 1,200 men
- 08/01 1897** – The word “Nigeria” coined by Flora Shaw
- Year Unknown** – The Tuaregs used “*egerew nigerewen*” for River Niger
- 04/01/1897** – James Robert Phillips & 249 people ambushed – 2 survived
- 1894** – Annexation of the Niger Coast/Southern Protectorate
- 1861** – Annexation of Lagos colony (Hopkins, A. G. 1980)
- 1100CE** – Benin Kingdom (Edo World Net, n.d.)
- 40BCE-1100CE** – Igodomigodo (Edo World Net, n.d.)

## **The Royal Niger Company - A Major Player in the Colonisation of the Benin Kingdom and Nigeria**

The history of Benin Kingdom will not be complete without clarifying the role of a company (**The Royal Niger Company**) that played a very significant part in colonial British contacts with the Benin Kingdom. The Royal Niger Company has been described by Pearson, S. R. (1971) as:

*The Royal Niger Company was a British chartered company, active from 1886 through 1899 in the territory bordering the Niger and Benue Rivers in contemporary Nigeria, that parlayed its administrative powers into a successful commercial monopoly. Such foreign-owned chartered companies played a significant role in the history of economic imperialism in sub-Saharan Africa.*

Growing up as a teenager in Benin City during the 70s, I recall seeing the office of Unilever along Mission Road. Therefore, their impacts remained in Benin city and Nigeria long after colonisation.

## **The Benin Empire, A military Power - Some facts about the Walls/Moat of Benin**

The great walls of Benin City were a towering and formidable barrier against invaders. The Guinness Book of Records (1974 edition) described the walls of Benin City and its surrounding kingdom as the world's largest earthworks carried out prior to the mechanical era

- The walls were at one point “four times longer than the Great Wall of China”.
- extended for some 166,000km
- Covered 6,500 sq km

- Took an estimated 150 million hours of digging to construct and are perhaps the largest single archaeological phenomenon on the planet.

## The Benin Massacre of 1897

Another event that significantly changed the course of history of the Edo State people is the Benin Massacre of 1897 (Agbontaen, K. A, 1997). The recount of one of the two survivors of the Benin Massacre (Alan Boisragon) as reported by the British Royal Collection (n.d.) is presented below:

*The Oba (king) of Benin held great influence and prevented the Company from forming a monopoly in the region. In 1896, the Company decided to mount an expedition to depose the Oba and replace him with a council appointed by British officials. The expedition set off in late December, reaching Benin territory in early January 1897. On 4 January, they were attacked by the forces of the Oba, and all but two Europeans were killed. One of the survivors, Alan Boisragon (1860-1922), was the author of this book, which recounts the mission and the subsequent British retaliation.*

*On 12 January 1897, Queen Victoria wrote in her journal of receiving news that ‘there has been a terrible disaster on the Niger, near a place called Benin. No details are yet known beyond the fact that a number of English officers & civilians including doctors &c who went on a friendly mission, but imprudently not armed, were attacked & fired upon by the King of Benin’. Although she reports that the expedition was unarmed and consisted of civilians, in fact, **the soldiers were in disguise, accompanied by 250 Africans dressed as porters, who concealed firearms in their luggage. The Oba had been informed by the Company that the mission was a peaceful one but had been tipped off about its true intent by a group of Itsekiri traders and, in response, he sent forces to ambush the British at Ughoton.** The queen’s entry shows the misinformation spread by the Royal Niger Company following what came to be known as ‘Benin massacre’, in which they portrayed Benin as a violent nation prone to unprovoked attacks, in order to justify a larger punitive invasion.*

*In response to the ambush, the government commissioned Sir Henry Rawson to lead a large expedition in retaliation with orders to capture the Oba and destroy the capital, Edo (Benin City). The expedition remains a controversial event in the history of the British Empire and resulted in*

*the taking of thousands of objects from the city, including the 'Benin bronzes', many of which were sent to museums around the world.*

The Kingdom of Benin has been described as one of the major powers in West Africa until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (The British Museum, n.d.) and as the most prosperous, politically advanced, powerful, and popular states in pre-colonial Africa (Edo, 2008) – a fact that was further attested to by the British Royal Collection Trust (n.d.), who observed that the Kingdom of Benin was a highly influential and “wealthy West African Kingdom”.

The kingdom enjoyed the greatest period of its economic prosperity from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Cartwright, 2019). This was in part due to the Kingdom of Benin international trading relationship with some European countries, most notably, the Portuguese. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to ever establish a commercial relationship with the Benin Kingdom and for a relatively long time enjoyed a very healthy trading relationship with the Kingdom of Benin. According to (Hubbard, 1948, p.173), “the second half of the century (fifteenth) saw the arrival of the first European in Benin, the Portuguese, Ruy de Sequeira in 1472 in Ewuare’s reign and Alfonso de Avienro in 1485 in Ozolua’s (c.1481) reign”. They were joined later by the Dutch and the Swedes (Boisragon, 1898), followed by the French.

The economic ties between the kingdom of Benin and Portugal blossomed because it was based on mutual respect and the valuing of each other’s cultural identity (Odunlami & Olukayode, 2020). No party tried to dominate the other, it was purely a trade relationship – with no political undertone. The Kingdom economy was bolstered by large scale production of palm oil which was needed by

the United Kingdom and some other European countries as industrial lubricants for their railway system (previously labouring hard to get a very limited supply of oil from fish and the fat of animals). The inhabitants of Edo Kingdom had developed many clever ways of using palm products. Apart from using palm oil extensively in cooking, skin ointment, serving as fuel for their lamps and making soap, oil palm trees were tapped for palm wine while palm fronds were used for roof thatching and brooms (Hellermann, 2022).

The Edo Kingdom was through and through an international hub not only for palm oil but for other items of commerce including rubber products, spices, artwork and so on and in return received relevant resources, part of which were diverted to building a strong and powerful military. The early European arrivals in Benin were so impressed with its standard of development that they described Benin (its capital town) as a city (Ryder, 1977). As a result, it became the focus and destination of attraction for a number of countries in Europe (Osadolor & Otoide, 2008).

The British began visiting West Africa and the Benin Kingdom in 1552 possibly through British explorers who did not have a trading relationship with the Kingdom of Benin at the time. That changed in 1588 when Queen Elizabeth granted royal authority or charter to the **Royal Niger Company** to begin trading in West Africa (including the Kingdom of Benin).

Historians have unanimously agreed that the Benin Kingdom which had been ruled under a dynasty of Obas originated from the Igodomigodo Empire under the rulership of a line of Ogisos. However, attempts to trace the beginning of the Igodomigodo Kingdom to its very beginning have encountered great difficulties amongst researchers of Edo history due to the absence of a culture of

written documentation of events in this part of Africa until relatively recent times (Ekeh, 2012). It was only until the end of the 15th century that written records about the Kingdom of Benin were made available by international traders, sailors, explorers and so on (Bondarenko, D. M & Roese, P. M. 1999).

## **The Ada and Eben**

The Ogiso Ere has been credited with introducing the Ada and Eben during the period of his reign from 16 AD to 66 AD. Some authors of historical records refer to the Ada and Eben as swords of authority (Egharevba, J. U. 1968; Edo, V. O. 2008) and others refer to them as scepters (symbols of sovereign authority) (Edoaffairs 2024, Edo World.Net, 2019).

The Eben is a flat iron that is made in the shape of a leaf blade while the Ada is a curved blade. While titled chiefs in Benin are accorded permission to have and use the Eben during ceremonies, the Ada is restricted to the Oba who may delegate it to high-ranking chiefs (Edo World.Net, 2019). The Ada is usually carried on the right-hand side of the Oba by the 'Emada'.



Ada



Eben

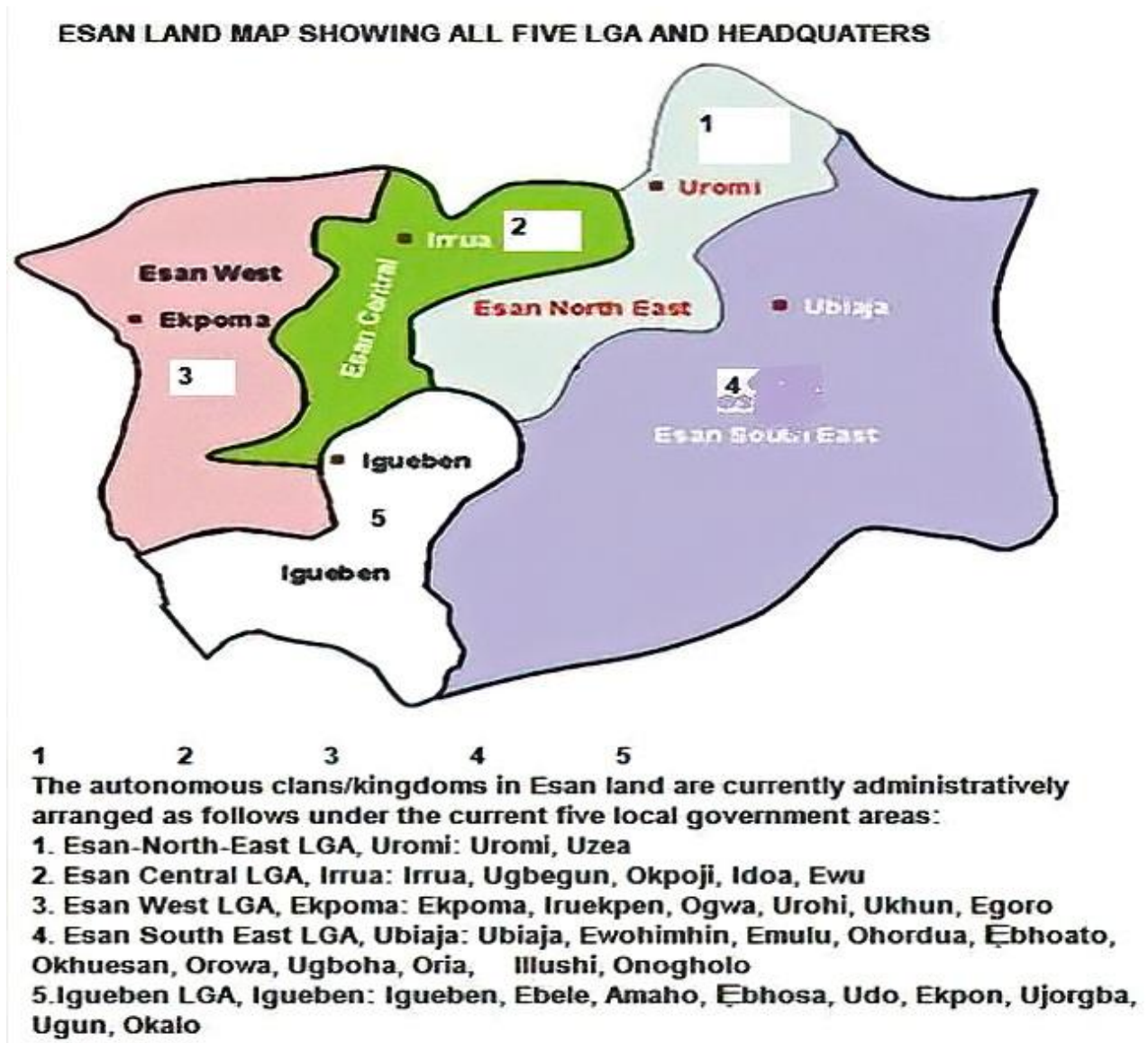
Edoworld.Net, 2019

## **THE Esan Land**

The present-day Esan land consists of five Local Government Areas (Egbefo, D. O. 2016; Ikhayere, A.S. & Osawe, A. I. n.d.) namely, Esan North East, Esan Central, Esan West, Esan South East and Esan and Igueben (Figures 2 and 3). Esan land shares borders with Benin to the south, Agbor to the South-East, Etsako to the North and East and by River Niger to the West. Esanland consists of 35 clans including Ekpoma, Uromi, Ekpon, Emu, Ewohimi, Ewatto, Irrua, Ubiaja, Egoro, Wossa, Ukhun, Ugbegun, Igueben, Ido, Ohordua, Okhuesan, Oria, Ogwa, Okalo, Ebelle, Uzea, Onogholo,



Orowa, Urohi, Ugun, Udo, Ujiogba, Iyenlen, Ifeku, Iliushi, Amahor, Opoji, Ogboha, Uroh, and Ewu (Edoworld Net, 2019). Each clan is headed by an Enojie.



Esanland, n.d.

Figure 4 (Map of Esan Land – Edo State of Nigeria)

Source: Esanland (n.d.)

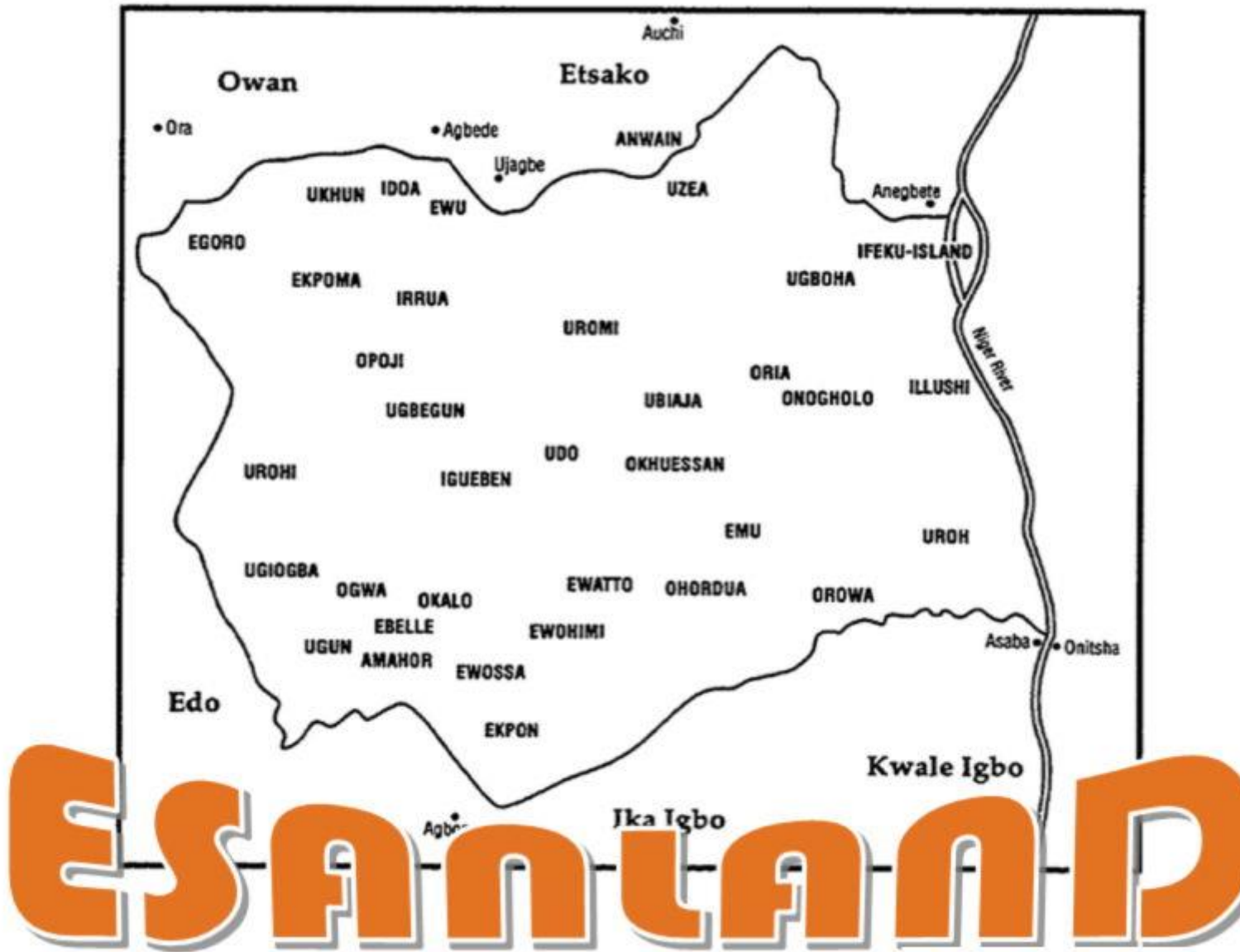


Figure 5: Map of Esan Land

Source: Esan Progressive Association, n.d.

There are differing views in the literature about the origin of the Esan people of Edo State, Nigeria. Some writers have indicated that Esan land was a separate entity, independent of the Benin Kingdom (Osagie J. I, 2014; Orukpe, E. W. 2022; Zhema, S. & Elimian A, 2020).

The most popular view in the literature has it that the Esan people migrated from the Benin Kingdom (Eiguedo-Okoeguale, H. 2020, Palmer, F. M. 2015; Africa 101 Last Tribes, n.d; Enato, L. S. E, 2021; Enato, L. S. E, 2018) in 1460 (Ekpoma Okpa UK association, n.d.) during the reign of Oba Ewuare. It is widely believed that the Oba called a meeting of his subjects and when he observed that the population had shrunk (to his surprise), he questioned where the others were. Those present responded in the local Bini language “E san fia” (anglicised by the British to Ishan as they could not pronounce Esan correctly), meaning they have fled (Itua, P. O. 2022; Ibarhokanrhowa, O. M, 2016; Alude, C. O. (2023; Webster, J. B. & Ogbomo, O. W, 1997; Ekpoma Okpa U. K. Association, 2024).

## **The Owan People**

The Owan ethnic group is named after River Onwan/Owan – the largest and longest river in the area (Edo World Net, 2019). The Owan people are settled in the Northern part of Edo State of Nigeria, East of Benin City (the capital) and designated as the North Senatorial District of the State (Owan Association USA Inc, n.d.).

Owan land is located along Longitude 6° E of the Greenwich Meridian and latitude 7° N of the Equator, bordered in the North by Akoko-Edo ethnic group, in the South by the Bini and Esan

Ethnic groups, in the East by Etsako Ethnic group and in the West by the Yorubaland (Edo World Net, 2019). It consists of two Local Government Areas (Figure 3).



Figure 6: Map of Owan Local Government Area

Source: Owan Association, USA

All Owan people originated from the Benin Kingdom through the lineage of Oba Ozolua save for Ikao clan who claim to have originated from the Yoruba Kingdom ( [HYPERLINK "https://afgedconsult.wordpress.com/"](https://afgedconsult.wordpress.com/) Afro-Global Education Deliveries , 2024). The Local Government Area consists of 11 clans including Emai, Ighue, Ihievbe, Ikao, Iuleha, Ivbiadaobi, Evbiomoin, Ora, Otuo, Ozalla, and Uokha (Ogbomo, O. W, 1991).

## **The Origin of the Akoko-Edo People**

According to Edo World Net (2020), Akoko-Edo Local Government Area is located in the northern part of Edo state in the south of the Niger-Benue junction/confluence, located between latitudes 6° 45' to 7° 35' North, and longitudes 5° 55' to 6° 45' East. It is characterised by ridges of rugged rocky hills that extend through an area of 1,371 square kilometres. The census figures of Akoko-Edo, in 1991 and 2006 were 124,000 and 261,567 respectively, constituting about 5.7% of the population of Edo State. Akoko-Edo shares boundaries with Kwara State and parts of Kogi State in the North, with Ondo State in the north-west, Etsako West and Etsako North in the South East and Owan Local Government Area in the South West. The headquarter of Akoko-Edo is Igarra.

It has been acknowledged that the earliest people to settle in Akoko Edo were the Binis who came to the area around the same period the Etsako people migrated from Benin City during the reign of Oba Ozolua (1483-1504).



Figure 7: Map of Etsako

Source: Moses, O (2023 – Akoko EDO News )

## The Origin of the Etsako People

Etsako land comprises three local government areas, including Etsako West (Auchi as headquarter) Etsako East (Agenebode as headquarter) and Etsako Central (Fugar as headquarter).

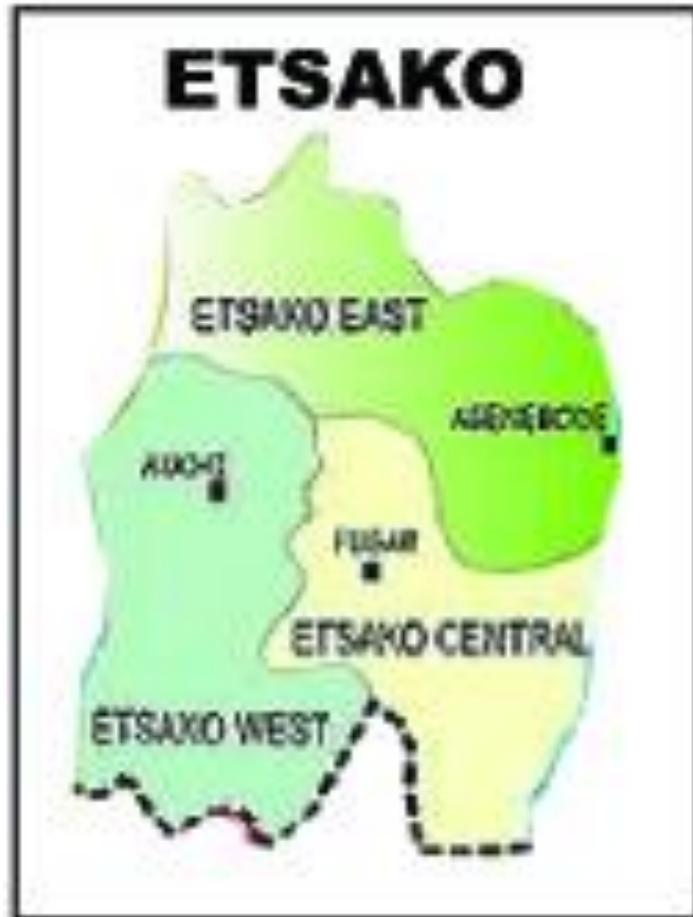


Figure 8: Map of Etsako Land

Source: <https://etsakolanguage.com/etsako.html>

Etsako land is located in the North-West of Edo state, Nigeria (Edo North Senatorial District. It shares boundaries to the East with the River Niger, North with Kwara State, South with Akoko-Edo and West with Owan. Etsako land is made up of thirteen clans, namely: UZAIRUE, AUCHI, SOUTH

UNEME, THE THREE IBIES, WEPPA WANNO, AVIANWU, OKPELLA, EKPERI, ANWAIN, SOUTH IBIES, JAGBE, AVIELE and OKPEKPE. There are also people of Etsako descent in Owan East (e.g. Ihiebe, Iviaro) and some areas of Akoko Edo Local Government area (e.g. Unemhe). The Etsako people migrated from Benin between the 13th and 15 centuries.

## Etsako East

**Etsako East** possesses an area of 1,133 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 145,996 at the 2006 census. The main towns include Okpella, Itsukwi, Okpekpe, Uzanu, Ivianopodi and Agenebode (the headquarter).



Figure 9: Map of Etsako Est

Source <https://www.anamero.com/about/explore-etsako/>



## Etsako West

Etsako West LGA is has a total land area of 1,204 square kilometers and an estimated population of over 200,000 people, according to the 2006 census. It consists of six clans, including Uzairue, Auchi, South Ibie, Anwain, Jagbe and Aviele. The main towns include Auchi, [Jattu](#), [Agbede](#), Ughiole, Odighie, Egho, Ubiane, Iyamho, Iyuku, Ayogwiri, Apana, Iyora, Afowa, Afashio, Ikabigbo, Irekpai, Ogbido, Ayaoghena, Ikhola, Uluoke, Ugbhenor, Idato, Ayua, Imeke, Elele, Sabo Iyakpi, Ibienafe, Ughieda, Iyerekhu, Egbogio, Jagbe clan (Ikhwa, Imiokono, Inhianmhen, Imogian) and Awain clan {Ewora, Idegun, Ama, Ibhioba} (Media Nigeria, 2018).

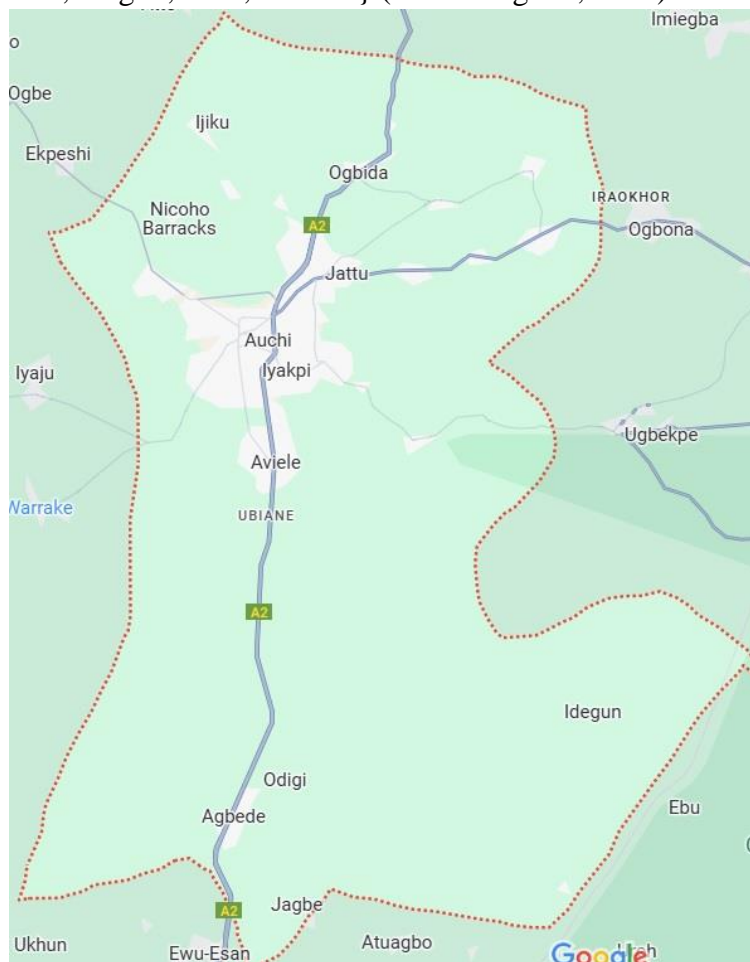


Figure 10: Map of Etsako West

Source: Google map

## Etsako Central

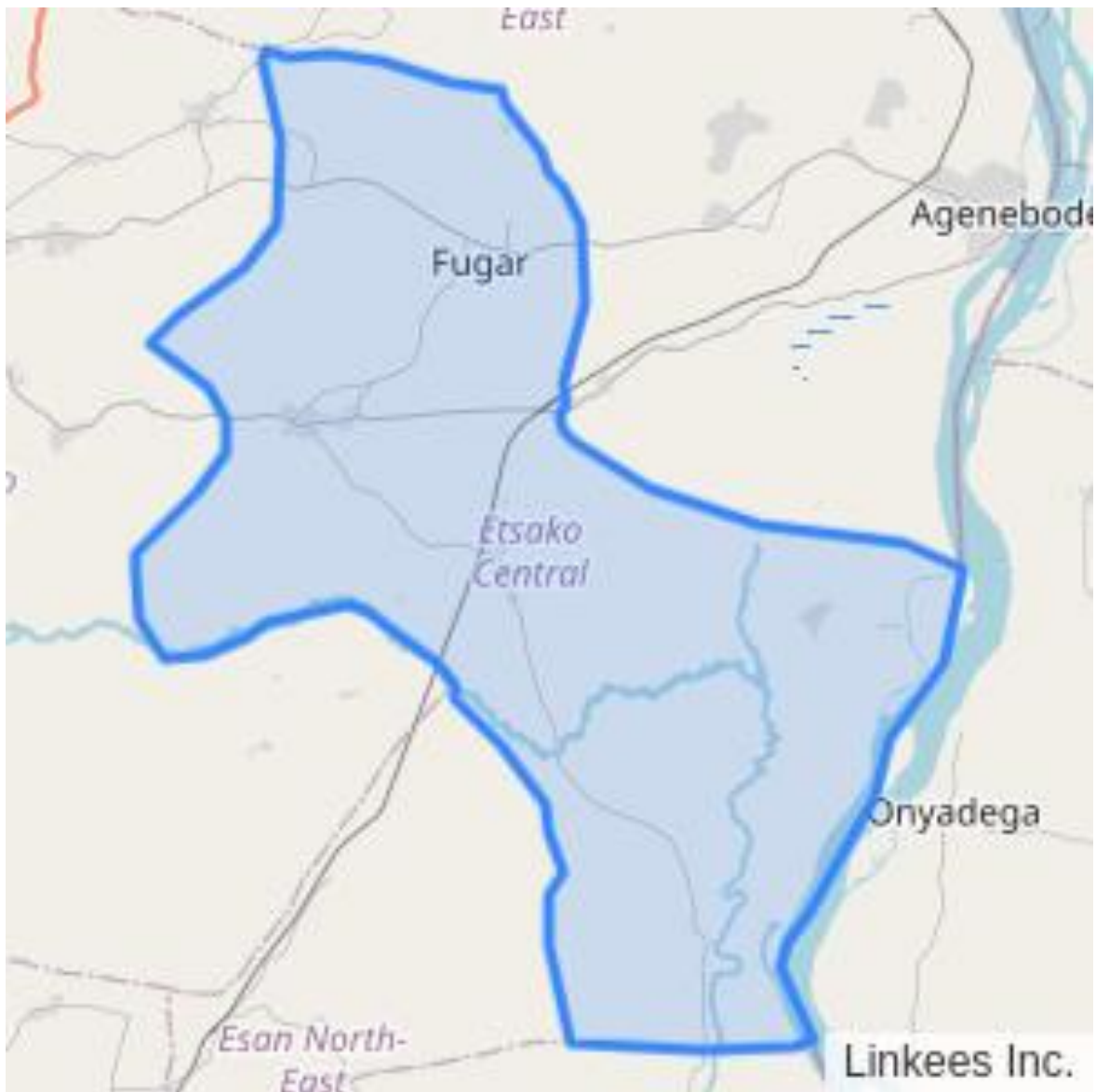


Figure 11: Map of Etsako Central

Source: <https://www.linkees.com/placelist/ng/edo-state/etsako-central/2>

## The Edoid Family Tree

There are enormous evidences in the literature that support the fact that all the ethnic groups in Edo State including the Binis, Esan, Owan, Akoko-Edo and Etsako of Nigeria share a lot of similarities in their languages/dialects. Research and documented linguistic findings have demonstrated that the five ethnic groups and others in other states of Nigeria have so many words in common, so much so that they have been grouped into what is now known as the “Edoid Family Tree” (named after the Edo/Bini people) (Elugbe, B. 1989; Ikoyo-Eweto, 2017; Lewis, A. A, 2013).

### Edoid Family Tree

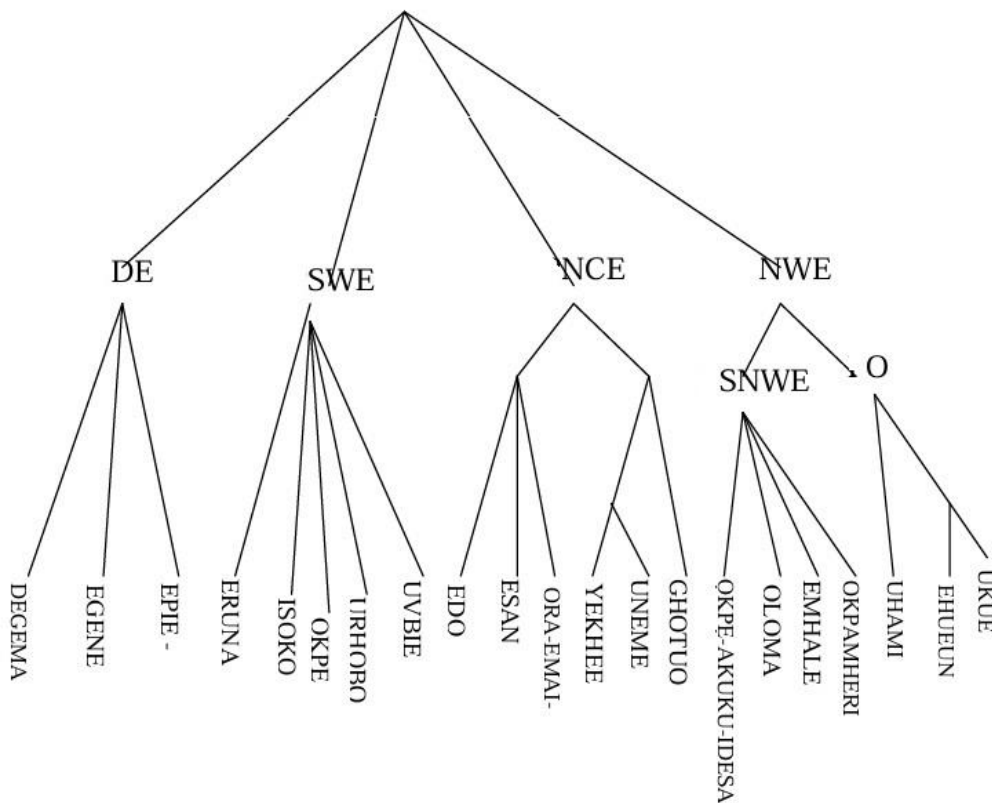


Figure 12: Edoid Family Tree

Adapted from Elugbe, B. 1989 & Ikoyo-Eweto, 2017

**Key****DE** = Delta Edoid**SWE** = South Western Edoid**NCE** = North Central Edoid**NWE** = North Western Edoid**SNWE** = South North Western Edoid**O** = Osse

To put the information above in perspective, Blench (2019) expanded the Edoid Family Tree further to include the locations where all members are located in Edo State and other parts of Nigeria (Table 4).

Table 4: Edoid branches and where the people are located in Edo State and other parts of Nigeria

| Language                                | Branch        | Cluster         | Dialects   | Alternate spellings | Location(s)  |
|---|---------------|-----------------|--|---------------------|--|
| <a href="#">Degema</a>                  | Delta         |                 | Atala, spoken in Degema town, and Usokun spoken in Usokun–Degema               | Deḡema              | <a href="#">Rivers State</a> , Degema LGA              |
| <a href="#">Engenni</a>                 | Delta         |                 | Ediro, Inedua, and Ogua; Zarama in Yenagoa LGA                                 | Ngene, Eḡene        | <a href="#">Rivers State</a> , Yenagoa and Ahoada LGAs |
| <a href="#">Epie</a>                    | Delta         |                 | Two clans, Epie and Atiṣa in at least three towns: Agudiana, Akeṅfai, Yeṅeḡe   |                     | <a href="#">Rivers State</a> , Yenagoa LGA             |
| <a href="#">Emai–Iuleha–Ora cluster</a> | North-Central | Emai–Iuleha–Ora | Ivhimion. Spurious languages Ihievbe and Uokha are listed in Ethnologue (2009) |                     | <a href="#">Edo State</a> , Owan, LGA                  |
| <a href="#">Emai</a>                    | North-Central | Emai–Iuleha–Ora |  |                     |  |
| <a href="#">Iuleha</a>                  | North-Central | Emai–Iuleha–Ora |  |                     |  |
| <a href="#">Ora</a>                     | North-Central | Emai–Iuleha–Ora |  |                     |  |

|  |               |                         |   |                  |   |
|--|---------------|-------------------------|---|------------------|---|
| Esan                                   | North-Central |                         | Many dialects   | Ishan            | Bendel State (now Edo State and Delta State), Agbazilo, Okpebho, Owan and Etsako LGAs |
| Ikpeshi                                | North-Central |                         |   |                  | Edo State, Etsako LGA   |
| Etsako                                 | North-Central |                         | Auchi, Uzairue, South Ivbie, Uwepa–Uwano, (Weppa–Wano), Avbianwu (Fugar), Avbiele, Ivbiadaobi |                  | Edo State, Etsako, Agbako and Okpebho LGAs  |
| Ghotuo                                 | North-Central |                         |   |                  | Edo State, Owan and Akoko–Edo LGAs  |
| <i>Ivbie North–Okpela–Arhe cluster</i> | North-Central | Ivbie North–Okpela–Arhe |   |                  | Edo State, Etsako and Akoko–Edo LGAs  |
| Ivbie North                            | North-Central | Ivbie North–Okpela–Arhe |   |                  |   |
| Okpela                                 | North-Central | Ivbie North–Okpela–Arhe |   | Okpella, Ukpilla |   |
| Arhe                                   | North-Central | Ivbie North–Okpela–Arhe |   | Ate, Ate, Atte   |   |
| Yekhee                                 | North-Central |                         | Auchi, Uzairue, South Ivbie, Uwepa–Uwano, (Weppa–Wano), Avbianwu (Fugar), Avbiele, Ivbiadaobi |                  | Edo State, Etsako, Agbako and Okpebho LGAs  |
| Edo                                    | North-Central |                         |   | Oviedo, Ovioba   | Edo State, Ovia, Oredo and Orhionmwon LGAs  |
| Ososo                                  | North-Central |                         |   |                  | Edo State, Akoko–Edo LGA  |
| Sasaru–Enwan–                          | North-Central |                         | Enwan, Igwe, Sasaru   |                  | Edo State, Akoko–Edo LGA  |

|                  |               |  |  |   |  |
|------------------|---------------|--|--|---|--|
| Igwe             |               |  |  |   |  |
| Uneme            | North-Central |  |  | Uleme, Ileme, Ineme                     | Edo State, Etsako, Agbazilo and Akoko-Edo LGAs. The Uneme are a blacksmith group and live scattered among other language groups. |
| Uhami            | North-Western |  |  |   | Ondo State, Akoko-South and Owo LGAs   |
| Ukue             | North-Western |  |  |   | Ondo State, Akoko South LGA  |
| Ehueun           | North-Western |  |  |   | Ondo State, Akoko South LGA  |
| Iyayu            | North-Western |  |  |   | Ondo State, one quarter of Idoani town   |
| Emhalhe          | North-Western |  |  |   | Edo State, Akoko-Edo LGA   |
| Okpamheri        | North-Western |  | Okpamheri means 'we are one': Okulosho (Okurosho), Western Okpamheri, Emhalhe (Emarle, Somorika, Semolika). Various. | Opameri                                 | Edo State, Akoko-Edo LGA, Kwara State, Oyi LGA   |
| Okpe-Idesa-Akuku | North-Western |  | Okpe, Idesa, Akuku   |   | Edo State, Akoko-Edo LGA   |
| Oloma            | North-Western |  |  |   | Edo State, Akoko-Edo LGA   |
| Eruwa            | South-Western |  |  | Erohwa, Erakwa, Arokwa                  | Delta State, Isoko LGA   |
| Isoko            | South-Western |  | various  |   | Delta State, Isoko and Ndokwa LGAs   |
| Okpe             | South-Western |  |  | Ukpe                                    | Delta State, Okpe LGA  |
| Urhobo           | South-Western |  | Several dialects, Agbarho accepted as standard. Okpe and Uvbie, often  | Sobo (not recommended) (See also Isoko) | Delta State, Ethiope and Ughelli LGAs  |

|                       |               |  |   |   |   |
|-----------------------|---------------|--|---|---|---|
|                       |               |  | regarded as dialects of Urhobo, are treated as distinct languages (q.v.) on purely linguistic grounds |   |   |
| <a href="#">Uvbie</a> | South-Western |  |   | Uvwie, Evrie, Uvhria, Effurum, Effurun, Evhro (not recommended) | <a href="#">Delta State</a> , Ethiope LGA |

Table 5: Meaning of the same word in different Edo State Languages

| <b>English</b> | <b>Edo</b> | <b>Esan</b> | <b>Etsako</b> | <b>Owan</b> |
|----------------|------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| <b>1</b>       | Ọkpa       | Okpa        | Ogwo,         | Okpa        |
| <b>2</b>       | eva        | Eva         | Eva           | Eva         |
| <b>3</b>       | eha        | Ea          | Ela           | Ea          |
| <b>4</b>       | enẹn       | Ene         | Ene           | Eele        |
| <b>5</b>       | isẹn       | Isen        | Ishe          | Ihien       |
| <b>6</b>       | ehan       | Ehan        | Eseesa        | Ehan        |
| <b>7</b>       | ihinron    | Ihinlon     | Ishiila       | Ihion       |
| <b>8</b>       | erẹnřen    | Elenlen     | Eleele        | Eën         |
| <b>9</b>       | ihinrin    | Isinlin     | Itiili        | Isin        |
| <b>10</b>      | igbe       | Igbe        | Igbe          | Igbe        |
| <b>Eye</b>     | Aho, aro   | elo         | Ikpalo        |             |
| <b>Clock</b>   | Egogo      | Egogo       | Agogo         |             |

|               |        |         |        |        |
|---------------|--------|---------|--------|--------|
| <b>Hand</b>   | Obo    | abo     | Obor   |        |
| <b>Cat,</b>   | Ologbo | Onogbo  | Onogbo | Onogbo |
| <b>Market</b> | Eki    | Eki/Aki | Oki    |        |
| <b>Hair</b>   | Eto    | Eto     |        | Eto    |
| <b>Night</b>  | Ason   | Ason    |        | Ason   |

*(Personal compilation)*



## Conclusion – One People, Five Families

Considering the extensive research that has been undertaken, I have reached the conclusion that the historical relationship between the different ethnic groups in Edo State (Bini, Esan, Owan, Akoko-Edo and Etsako) can be best described as **ONE PEOPLE, FIVE FAMILIES**.

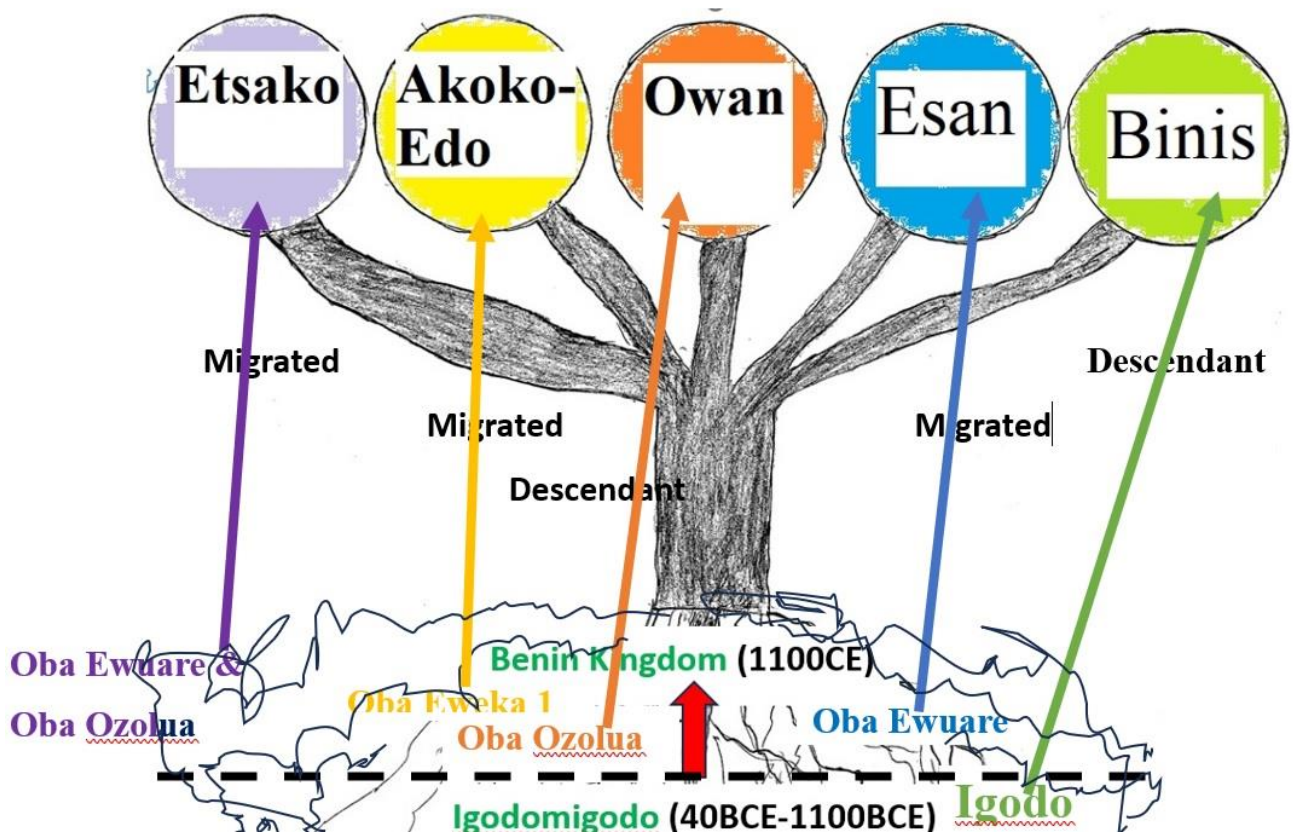


Figure 13: One People, Five Families

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