

CHAPTER IX

THE FIRST KING, KALABARI

A. THE FIRST KING OF KALABARI

It has been shown earlier that in those days of cannibalism and lawlessness it was vitally necessary for the people of a town to live together in greater numbers in order that they might be able to form a security and defence group strong enough to protect themselves and their economic, political and social activities. As the towns of those days were naturally sparsely populated, there was no reason why a town would divide itself into several smaller towns each having a head under a paramount head of the original or capital town. Each town was, therefore, its own town and nation administratively independent of all the neighbouring towns.

Every town, therefore, had its own king who was the paramount chief or head of the particular town. However slender the population of a town might be, the man recognised by his people as their head or leader was the king and he performed special functions and enjoyed special rights and privileges associated with this lofty status. For instance, he occupied the first stool at every gathering of the town chiefs and served as its permanent chairman.

The Kalabari equivalent for "King" is "Amadabo". "Ama" means town, and "da", to head, and so amada" means to head a town; "bo" refers to the person performing the action, and "Amadabo", therefore, means a man who heads a town, that is, a king. In later periods of history the king was also designated, "Amayanabo", meaning owner of the town or land.

From Chief J. T. Princewill's history of the founding of Kalabari as narrated at the Intelligence Report conference at Abalama on 16th April, 1935, it is clearly seen that Kalabari was the leader of the people who migrated from the Central Delta to the Eastern Delta in Obu-Amafa where a permanent settlement was founded at the deserted town of Kengema which for sometime still went by the name of Kengema. Kalabari, therefore, as can be seen from the above was the first King of the town founded by his team and initially known as Kengema, but which, after some years, lost its name for Kalabari, the name of the reigning King.

B. COMPARISON BETWEEN KALABARI KINGS AND THEIR CONTEMPORARY KINGS OF BONNY

There is no doubt about it. It is the tradition of the Ijaw people to organise themselves into the various categories of society as soon as they settle down at a new place of abode. If one would care to refer to the history of our next door neighbours at Elem Kalabari - the Ibani or Bonny people - one would readily acquiesce in the truth of this statement that it is the tradition of the Ijaws to give the title of "Amadabo" (King) to one of their leading elders or "Amakoroma-apu" (founders) in their communities at any era. In Chapter 2, pages 6 and 7 of "A Chronicle of Grand Bonny", Alagoa and Fombo include the following ancestors in their list of Bonny Kings:

- i. Okpara Ndoli: This was the leader of the Ibani at Orupiri before their migration to Okoloama (Bonny town) and, as it is the tradition of the Ijaws to organise themselves when they have settled down at a place and designate one of the founders "King". Okpara Ndoli, who died at Orupiri and of whom little is recorded, appears on the Bonny list of Kings on page 89 of Chronicle of Grand Bonny" as the first King of Bonny.

- ii. Opu-Amakuba: "After the migration from Orupiri to Okoloama (Bonny town), the eldest of the group, Opu-Amakuba, became the leader. He appears on the List of bonny Kings as No. 2.
- iii. Alagbariye: "When Opu-Amakuba became very old, the elders and priests persuaded him to hand over to Alagbariye who was then the high priest... "Accordingly, his right to rule and fame appears to have been based on his being a founding ancestor Alagbariye is No. 3 on the list of Bonny Kings.
- iv. Asimini: page 7. "Asimini came to the forefront through receiving the first Portuguese visitors. He not only became their host while they were in Bonny but also gave them his son, Ebi (also Abasie, Babaye) to take to Portugal." These and several other great services "established Asimini as the paramount ruler of the Ibani. He was then crowned at Ebi Nungo and his name commemorated as that of the true founder of Bonny Kingdom."

It is now very clear from the few examples given above that the men whom Chief J.T. Princewill described as "leaders" were, in fact, "Kings" or Amadapu (plural of Amadabo). Asimini, King of Bonny, who operated in a greater way in a period of greater economic revolution and who was "crowned at Ebi Nungo" and whose name was "commemorated as that of the true founder of Bonny Kingdom", has his name on the list of Bonny Kings as well as the other earlier leaders with smaller performances, such as Okpara Ndoli, Opu-Amakuba and Alagbariye. Indeed, "the development of the time is equal to the time." The small developments of the beginning periods of Okpara Ndoli, Opu-Amakuba and Alagbariye, guided and controlled entirely by the small resources available and the unimproved conditions prevailing at those periods, moved into the period of Asimini and assumed a great dimension with the new development of the Portuguese Slave Trade which enabled him to make his mark. It is quite clear from this that without the foundation work of the earlier kings, Asimini would have nothing on which to build his great edifice. Each king's contribution was equal to its time.

Definitely, what applies to Bonny, a contemporary of Kalabari, equally applies to Kalabari and the other sister clans as well. All these founding fathers and subsequent leaders whom history has placed at the paramount position at a particular period of time and shown unequivocally as Kings, should be recognised as such although the manner of selection and installation would not be identical at all times. It is unwise for one to disregard historical documents. In any case, it will serve no useful purpose for Kalabari to continue bickering and buffeting about their list of Kings. Let the wise citizens of Kalabari conserve their energies and utilize their talents for more progressive and uniting activities. The books of eminent historians have gone a long way to solve this problem for Kalabari as will be clearly seen from the history of the periods still to be discussed in this and the other books to follow.

From the Bonny examples, it is also clear that Kalabari, as the leader of the "Amakoroma-apu" (founders) who landed at Kengema in Obu-Amafa was, naturally, recognised as King of that town. He was the owner of the national god, Owukolo, and, with this god, wielded additional influence to that which his right as chief founder had already given to him and, indeed, by the standards of the time, he was powerful, wealthy and famous. He was a chip of the old block. As his father worked with framed energy and enthusiasm until Ogboiama was renamed Ogobiri, after his own name, so did Kalabari work diligently to develop Kengema until visitors at a certain stage began and continued to speak of "going to the town of Kalabari" instead of Kengema. The people at Kalabari, themselves, protecting their own interests, persistently referred to the town as Kalabari and so the original site of Kengema came to be known as Kalabari and is predominantly called "KALABARI" under King Kalabari.

This is why, on ceremonial occasions, the Kalabari sometimes call themselves KENGEMA" and, especially, when the brave deeds of their ancestors are being emblazoned in songs and drums, as "KENGEMINA KALABARI" - The Kalabari of Kengema - meaning, "The Kalabari founded on the soil of Kengema".

C. THE DUTIES OF THE KING

- i. The King, Kalabari, was the greatest chief of the town. He, himself, was a chief of his own house, the Royal House, and it was, therefore, necessary for him, wherever applicable, to fulfil all the obligations of a chief to himself, his group, his town/clan and to his national deity.
- ii. The King of the entire town was the symbol of Unity. Although he did not interfere directly in the day-to-day running of any independent group of Houses, he was, in fact, a part of every group in so far as that group formed a part of the town of which he was head or king. He was, therefore, the one person attached to all those who lived at that community or town.
- iii. The King summoned meetings of chiefs as he found necessary, occupied the first chair and officiated as life chairman.
- iv. The King convened meetings of the town and sat in front of the chiefs and people and officiated as life chairman. At such meetings the King would sometimes preside over cases or summonses of a serious nature Instituted by a plaintiff against a defendant or a group of plaintiffs against a group of defendants.
- v. All visitors or errands for negotiation with the town reported first to the king who then summoned his chiefs together for discussion with such visitors, if necessary.
- vi. He was the owner of the national god, Owukolo, by inheritance, in addition to his position as king. Obviously, he must have set the best examples in the worship of this deity by approaching him with awe and reverence and almost doing nothing without consulting him.
- vii. He moved in front of the chiefs and the people. One can clearly see from the above that the king was distinguished from the rest of the chiefs and people by special rights and privileges.

Kalabari enjoyed a successful and well respected reign at Kalabari in Obu-Amafa, for the economy was buoyant as measured by the standards of the time. It is, however, necessary to point out that throughout his regime, the Amafa people were still tenacious of the stand that the Obu-Amafa Ijaws should confine themselves to the watersides and supply them with fresh and smoked fishes, boiled salt, bamboo mats and bamboo bags, which they were not so favourably placed to produce for themselves, while they would also restrict themselves to their hinterland and supply the Ijaws with such items of farm products as yams, coco-yams, plantains and palm oil, drinkables such as palm wine, livestock such as cows, goats, sheep and fowls, and simple tools such as knives, matches, cutlasses and hoes which the Kalabari, in turn, could not produce or obtain easily themselves. They, in fact, insisted that no work of any kind should be done by the Ijaws in the hinterland.

Obviously, in this situation an inter-tribal specialisation scheme developed but proved very favourable to the Ijaws in Obu-Amafa. They went on fishing expeditions to various parts of the rivers, found new markets for their fishes and accumulated for themselves greater wealth which attracted more settlers who increased the population. In this situation Kalabari, in particular, as a result of its alluring location and the unique experiences and other qualities of its leaders, was a very busy town. The labour force had increased, new houses were being built to extend the area of the

town, and more capital items such as canoes and paddles and fish traps were possessed to increase the wealth of the town.

On the other hand, the scheme, introduced under duress by the Amafa people, turned against them. In their attempt to offer inadequate supplies of foodstuffs for fish measured out to them, they hoarded in their barns larger stocks of yams than those normally held by them. Prudence, therefore, bade them to dispose of their surplus stocks at barter rates satisfactory to the jaws at the watersides. Thus, the Amafa people's stratagem of creating an artificial scarcity with their farm products with a view to getting much more than their real worth had been foiled. Naturally, they would be unhappy to find things so.

From what has been learned so far about King Perebo-kala-ibari, it can be easily admitted that he was an able leader with several virtues worthy of emulation. When he was forced out of the hinterland he was not despondent about his fate and so worked with fortitude, perseverance and diligence until he achieved unique results, moreover, the laudable success made at Kalabari in Obu-Amafa during his regime is indicative of the fact that under his administration peace and harmony reigned supreme, for it is when a community is so blessed that its position, in general, can be described as stable.

King Kalabari died at Kalabari in Obu-Amafa and was buried there. His only son, Ende, became chief of Kalabari, Polo (the Kalabari Quarter) which, in later years, as a result of the fame and popularity of Ende, had the second name of "Endeame", corrupted to "Endeme", meaning "the people of Ende".

D. THE USE OF THE NAMES OF SUCCESSORS FOR HOUSES, WARDS OR QUARTERS.

One can easily see from the name, "Endeme", that the Kalabari custom of naming Houses, Wards or Quarters after successors instead of the original founders began with the beginning of Kalabari History and has moved up to the present century.

It may seem premature at this stage but, in fact, it is opportune for me to point out that names of Houses or

Quarters used to change with time through the frequent uses of the name of a famous successor in office although it is realised that this successor was not the founder or owner of the House or Quarter.

This confusive development emanated from a habit or custom which the Kalabari have still not been able to check. The people of a town, in going from their Chieftaincy House or Quarter to another always speak of "going to the House or Quarter of the present successor" although they know that the original and real owner or founder whose name the House or Quarter bears is dead and that the chief on the stool at the moment is merely a successor. In this way the name of the successor, through frequent use, attaches itself firmly with time to the House or Quarter. Where there are no historical documents in connection with an ancient House or Quarter, such a development could be a bone of contention between the descendants of a real founder and those of a successor who might, in some cases, even be the eldest son of the founding father.

1. EARLIEST EXAMPLES AT OBU-AMAFI AND NEW CALABAR

- i. Kalabari Polo for Endeme
- ii. Owoame for , Koroame
- iii. "Awo Wari" (The Awo House) or "Awo Polo"

(The Awo Quarter) was founded by Awo whose English name was Barboy and, after his death, he was succeeded by his eldest son, Odum, whose English name was Will and was, therefore, known as

Will Barboy. Odum (Will Barboy) was a famous and influential successor to the Awo (Barboy) Chieftaincy and looked after the House or Quarter known as Awo Wari or "Awo Polo" (The AWO House or Quarter), but after some time, people began and continued to call it "Odum wari" or "Odum Polo" (The Odum House or Quarter). Many people up to this day still refer to this House or Quarter founded by Awo (Barboy) at Elem Kalabari during the reign of King Amachree I, as "Odum Wari", although it is an overt matter that this great chief, Odum, (Will Barboy) only succeeded his father, Awo (Barboy) and did not found a personal chieftaincy of his own at the Old Shipping or New Calabar. (Please refer to "The Trading States of the Oil Rivers", by G. I. Jones, Appendix A, page 207, under the heading of "The Barboy Group").

2. AT ABONNEMA

- i. "Owukori Polo" (The Manuel Quarter) was founded by Owukori (Manuel) at Elem Kalabari during the reign of King Amachro (Amachree II) in the 1820s. Owukori (Manuel) died in 1860 and his son Ekine (Bob Manuel) succeeded him in 1861 and came with the House or quarter to Abonnema when Elem Kalabari was abandoned in 1882 by the founding fathers of Abonnema. Ekine (Bob Manuel) was the first Amayanabo of Abonnema and, naturally, a great and influential chief. "Owukori Polo" or "Owukori Wari" is, therefore, referred to some times as "Ekine Polo" (Bob Manuel Quarter) although it is known that the great and famous Chief did not found a personal chieftaincy of his own at the Old Shipping or New Calabar now known as Elem Kalabari.
- ii. In the same way, "Oruwari Polo" (Briggs Quarter) is sometimes being referred to as "Isiowu Polo" (Young Briggs Quarter) although Young Briggs only succeeded the real founder, Oruwari (Briggs), and did not found his own personal chieftaincy at the Old Shipping.
- iii. Similarly "Otaji Polo" is now being referred to sometimes as "Akpana Polo" although Akpana, a great chief, only succeeded the original founder, Otajinta (Georgewill) at Elem Kalabari and did not found his own chieftaincy there.
- iv. "Iju Polo" (Jack Quarter) at Abonnema was brought over from the Old Shipping under Kala-Dokubo Standfast Jack and was initially being called "Kala-Dokubo Polo". Kala-Dokubo was afraid that by giving his name to the Quarter, the real name of the Quarter might be lost to posterity and so sent a town crier round the town requesting the people to call the quarter, "IJU POLO" (Jack Quarter), as it is known up to this day.

2. AT BUGUMA

- i. Here, "Elebike Polo" is mostly called "Tom Polo" (Tom Quarters), although it is an overt matter that the quarter was founded by Elebike who died at the Old Shipping and was succeeded by Dodo who in turn was succeeded by Tom West India who brought the Quarter over to the new Town of Buguma in 1883.
- ii. Similarly, "Tariah Polo" (Tariah Quarter) is sometimes called "Inko Polo" at Buguma, although Inko Tariah was only made a chief at the new town of Buguma and did not create his own chieftaincy in his lifetime.

E. THE DESIGNATIONS "AMAYANABO" AND "AMADABO"

In chapter 2, page 6, of "A Chronicle of Grand Bonny", Alagoa and Fombo write as follows:

"The Ibani have had kings for a long time. Kings, Amayanabo (owner of the land) or Amadabo (also applied to a regent or subordinate town or district head), ..."

In Kalabari, this was not the order or the organisation at the early stages. There had been no man in Kalabari who owned the "ama" (the town, really meant the land and all the people in it) at any period of its existence, and in the above-mentioned history written by Alagoa and Fombo it was not so even in Bonny where the people, as it is stated, originally designated their big kings, "Amayanabo" (owner of the land).

Indisputably the term is ambiguous and has misled many persons ignorant of the traditions into thinking that an Amayanabo was the owner of both the land and the persons or a town. In Kalabari, the word is, comparatively, a new one. The original word was "Amadabo" but, in fact, the Kalabari had preferred to use the English word, "King". King Robert (Kamalo) who hosted the European merchant, James Barboy, at Iwo Kalabari (New Calabar) or the Old Shipping in 1699 was not known to have reigned under the designation, "Amayanabo": he was known as "King Robert". So was it with King Amachree 1 in his days - everyone high and low referred to him as "King Amachree". The treaties signed by King Abi Princewill Amachree (Amachree IV) from 1871 - 1882 shows the first signatory as "KING AMACHREE", not AMAYANABO". Even up to the 1930s the word, "KING", was being used in preference to the word "AMAYANABO".

In 1932, before the arbitration panel looking into the Kalagbea/Amachree Kingship dispute, the word, "King" was used to such an extent that Mr. Dickenson, the chief arbiter, asked to know whether there was a word in Kalabari for the English word, "King". He was given the word "AMAYANABO" and so he advised them to resort to this because there was only one "KING" in the whole of the British Empire. (Please refer to the heading, "The Arbitration", on pages VI and VII of the Preface to the "Kalabari Clan Conferences at Degema On the Intelligence Report" - 1935, Volume 2).

Bonny and Nembe used the word "AMAYANABO" long before Kalabari and it was in imitation of these sister clans that the word was adopted in the twentieth century to designate the Kalabari Kings. Thus, the Kalabari Clan Conferences from 1909 - 1914 had three Amayanapu (the plural), namely, the Amayanabo of Buguma/Kalabari (Chairman), the Amayanabo of Abonnema (1st Vice Chairman) and the Amayanabo of Bakana (2nd Vice Chairman).

In Kalabari, therefore, the word "Amayanabo" and "Amadabo" have virtually the same meaning. This was why, before the promulgation of the Chieftaincy Edict NO: 5 of May, 1978, resulting from the Report and recommendations of the Tamuno Chieftaincy Enquiry Committee appointed in July, 1975, the Kalabari were addressing every holder of the first stool of a town or village with the title of "AMAYANABO" however large or small his town or village was.

Thus, as already seen above, they designated the paramount head of Buguma and the whole of the Kalabari clan, "Amayanabo of Kalabari", the paramount head of Abonnema, "Amayanabo of Abonnema" and the paramount head of Bakana, "Amayanabo of Bakana". In the same way, they called the paramount head of Tombia, "Amayanabo of Tombia" and the elders of the smaller towns or villages were each known by the designation, "Amayanabo". Alalibo Oruambo, a celebrated free-lance journalist of Bakana, Kalabari, in his article entitled "another look" at the Kalabari Constitution, which appeared in the issue of the "Nigerian Star" of 29th March, 1975, gives the definition of an Amayanabo as follows:

"An Amayanabo is the paramount chief or head of a particular town."

The size of the town did not matter in Kalabari. As an example, before the Chieftaincy Edict NO: 5 of May, 1978, the paramount head of the village of KE was addressed, "Amayanabo of Ke". This can be

verified from page 3, paragraph 7, of a letter dated 4th April, 1978, addressed to His Excellency Col. Zamani Lekwot, Military Governor of the Rivers State of Nigeria, Port Harcourt, by the "Sé Kobiri" (National Assembly), Buguma, on the subject of the "Introduction of the Amayanabo of Kalabari to the Degema Local Government authority. This, as stated by Alagoa and Fombo, was inconsistent with the Ibani tradition which gives the designation of "Amayanabo" to the paramount head of the capital town and that of "Amadabo" to the subordinate or district head.

On thorough examination of the set-up of the kingship organisation in various clans, it is obvious that the original word was "Amadabo" (the one who heads the town), and that the term "Amayanabo" (owner of land and persons) first came into use as a mere greeting or salutation of great respect and loyalty to a king in the same way as the ancient Hebrews employed the salutation, "O King live forever" when they, in fact, realised too well that a king could never live forever. It was merely an expression of homage paid by a subject to his or her King and, by long usage, fixed itself firmly in the vocabulary as a synonym of "Amadabo".