Understanding the Nature of Pre Colonial Political Institution in Uromi

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Abstract

Nigerian pre colonial historiography mainly addresses the evolution of states with emphasis on what Obayemi refers to as mega states. The pre colonial kingdom of Benin is regarded in Obayemi’s reckoning as a mega state out of which, other mini states emerged and one of such mini states is the Uromi community in the Esan region of Edo state (Obayemi 202). This present discourse observed that commentators hinged their commentaries on the pre colonial Benin’s extensive territorial coverage within the Benin axis to assume that a monolithic political structure existed, dating back to centuries. Relying on the interpretative historical approach to analyse available accounts and documents, this paper attempts to demonstrate that the Uromi community had developed a complex political structure before the imposition of Benin style monarchical system around the 15th century. The paper concludes that a holistic approach to the study of state creation in the Nigerian geographical space may unearth information that may contribute to understanding the various degrees of inter-group relations among the Nigerian people.

Introduction

There is the general assumption among most Nigerian historians that the Edoid people, by this, we refer to Natufe’s grouping of the following communities that share similar cultural entities such as the Bini, Etsako, Esan, Owan, Urhobo and Isoko (Natufe 50) emerged as independent communities at the instance of the Bini monarchy and therefore developed their political institutions inline with the practices in Benin, the seat of the king or Oba. This assumption was popularised by colonial literature after the Edoid people were violently compelled to accept British colonial rule from 1897 (Butcher 241, and Morris, 1915-1916). Though there are some elements of facts in the colonial claim, to the extent that, at the time of imposing colonial government, the Edoid groups were under monarchical rule with
reference to Benin as the oldest and head of the other potentates. However, what is not popular in Nigerian historiography is the effort to identify the nature of the degree of political development of the other non Bini Edoid peoples before colonial rule. Within the Esan group is the Uromi people whose monarchical history is suspected not to be as old as it is commonly believed. In fact the Benin style monarchical practice was the fifth stage of Uromi political development before colonial rule. The development of Benin style monarchical practice was not peculiar to Uromi alone but the whole of Esan (Okjie 49-50). However, emphasis is on the Uromi people because it represents one of the oldest communities in the Esan region with a pre Benin political character before the introduction of Benin monarchical practices and later British colonial rule. The political stages were the family unit (Uelen), quarter unit (Idumu), village unit (Igue), federate unit (Okhiode, Obiruan, and Obiyuan), and dynastic Administration (Uromi). The paper is divided into four sections. Introduction begins the discussion, the second section deals with the people’s geography and traditions of origin; section three discusses pre colonial Uromi political culture, while the fourth section concludes the discussion.

**Geography and Traditions of Origin**

The Esan region falls in the east of Benin City, and the people occupy a land mass covering about 2987.52 square kilometres (Omo-Ojugo 4) comprising about thirty two developed communities. The colonial authority in some cases spelt Esan as Isan, Ishan or Isa but the right spelling is Esan pronounced as A-SAN. The people are commonly referred to as Esan because of their common cultural practices as observed in language, dressing, norms and values though with some variants. While Uromi is founded in the north-east of Esan with about twenty villages located approximately on a landmass of not more than 60 square miles (Butcher 240). The debate on the origin of Uromi villages may continue to be an unending discussion. Generally, all accounts of Uromi traditions of origin can be reduce to two. These
are the Benin and non Benin sources. Butcher (237, 238-241), Egharevba (4, 5, 26 and 84) and Ojiefoh (2-3) have argued that the Uromi people migrated from Benin, and this version is popular in Nigerian historiography. The non Benin source argues that the early founders of Uromi were migrants from across the Niger-Benue River confluence as represented by Webster (8), Omoregie (1-13) and Bradbury. According to Bradbury, Uromi and a few Esan communities are believed to have descended from the sky; some rose from the ground, while others emerged from the rivers (cited, Osagie 4).

Bradbury’s account seems to have encapsulated all accounts already discussed. Bradbury identifies three channels through which migration entered into Uromi. These are the sky, ground and rivers. These channels of passage, though appear comical, reveal in clear terms a proper understanding of the various traditions of origins. A correct interpretation of Bradbury’s account will convey the meaning that those who claim to have descended from the sky represent the group that believe their ancestors migrated from Benin. It is believed to be so because the early Benin kings of the first period in Benin monarchical history are referred to as the Ogiso-sky gods, therefore those who claim the sky-god tradition of origin in Uromi are most probably migrants from Benin. The groups that believe they emerged from the ground attest to the aborigines in Uromi. These groups have lost the history of their origin as they represent the original inhabitants of the region. The river origin tradition indicates the migratory history of those who came from across the Niger-Benue River confluence, because Esan has no big river of significance.

However, it should be stated that there is a distinction between the origins of the people from the origin of the ruling monarchy. This fact has been noted as the history of the Ruling Houses, that is the Enijie [kings], is quite different from that of the subject or commoners. Practically all the Ruling Houses of Esan came directly from Benin to rule the people they found who were already firmly established (Okojie 17 and 26). Okojie
position is supported by Ikime who acknowledges that people migrated from Benin to the Esan region, but posit that the migration in the reign of Oba Ewuare should not be considered as the "primary and founding migration [of Esan communities as] Benin migrants must be seen as the last to arrive in the areaé " (Ikime 274) This discussion tends to support the assertion that Uromi had developed a system of government before the arrival of Benin migrants.

Pre Colonial Political Institution

Political institution refers to the administrative mechanism of government that evolved within the cultural beds of the Uromi people, which are discussed below.

The Family Unit (Uelen) and the Ominjiogbe Administration

It would amount to overstating the obvious that the family represents the first political unit in any society. The same could be said of Uromi, as the evolution of the people’s political institution began from this stage. A typical Uromi Uelen as in all other parts of Esan was patriarchal and to this extent, the family unit was headed by the man who was addressed as the Odion–Azagba or Odefen or Ominjiogbe (Okoduwa 53). This unit was composed of the nuclear and extended family members from the same linage. The Ominjiogbe was not appointed by age, rather as Okojie notes ìit was [is] a hereditary position in as much as each successor duly performed the burial ceremonies of his father,î The easiest definition of Ominjiogbe is the FIRST SON OF THE FIRST SON traced from the progenitor of the family (Okojie 116-117).

The strategic position of the Ominjiogbe placed him as the political head of the unit, which empowered him with the authority to act as the only authoritative spokesman of the unit (Ukhun 23 and Okoduwa 53-54). There were also some privileges exclusively reserved for the Ominjiogbe. He was entitled to free labour services from his kinsmen when occasion demanded. For example, the Iduamukpe festival, which was a prelude to the new yam festival
in Uromi was observed by the [kinsmen] to show respect to the eldest male in the family as he was regarded as the heir to the father in Esan tradition, and to demonstrate that he had authority over them (Ehiabhi 127) Therefore, he enjoyed the payment of tribute from his kinsmen at least once a year. These tributes consisted of;

a bundle of yams (usually 7 yams to a bundle), and a keg of palm wine. When they kill any animal in the bush or slaughtered a domestic animal like a goat at home, one of the hind legs had to be sent to the Omingiogbe because he was regarded as the pillar on which the family rested. In other words he was considered as hind leg of all the family members (Okoduwa 63).

That being the case, Okoduwa argues that as the Uelen began to increase and expand, coupled with migration into the Uromi region, the Uelen political institution had to respond to the change which evolved into the quarter (Idumu) unit (Okoduwa, Emergence 27).

The Quarter Unit (Idumu) and the Odion Administration

The evolution from Uelen to Idumu came with its own political formation. Unlike the Uelen, where the Ominjiogbe was not determined by age, appointment to headship of the Idumu was on age, and the oldest in the Idumu was recognised. The headship was not rotational among the Uelen as it was based strictly on gerontocracy. The head of the government was known as the Odion (plural Edion, meaning senior). In spite of the evolution to the Idumu composition, all the Uelens retained their political positions. It has been argued that Onojie (king) Omoinhinbhin of Uromi, coroneted in 1590 AD introduced the practice of Idumu because he wanted to use the number of quarters to determine the size of a village for the supply of tributes to the palace of the Onojie (Omoregie 115). Omorogie’s thesis appears spurious. To argue that the quarter system began in Uromi in the 16th century amount to denying the convocation of the Benin Esan conference of between 1460 and 1463 that actually determined official diplomatic relations between Esan and Benin.
From historical accounts, the Uromi community had passed the quarter political system before 1590.

The introduction of gerontocracy to decide leadership in the *Idumu* must have been influenced by two factors. One, to moderate on serious cases because the Ominjiogbe was not based on age, the tendency of a minor Ominjiogbe, not yet versed in cultural norms and traditional practice to make mistakes in the interpretation of some aspects of tradition could not be ruled out. Two, there are some family or quarter disputes that could only be handled by a higher authority. Therefore, the functions of the *Odion* in a quarter were to guide, protect, resolve crisis, and administer the Idumu for the good of the commonwealth. The influence of elders in the Uromi community was noted by Butcher;

> The people are of a very independent and stubborn nature, paying no blind obedience to any person whether hereditary chief or Government Official. They do, however, revere the Edion, and defer to their advice. This advice is always in support of tradition and is conservative in the extreme (Butcher 238).

The overall implication of the evolution of the *Idumu* unit was that change and continuity were observable. Change in the sense that the practice of gerontocracy met a gradual concession of the family unit (*Uelen*) sovereignty for the benefit of all, and continuity of the *Uelen* without any observable discordant tones. As shall be demonstrated later in the discussion, the evolution to the village, quasi federate, and federate political institution without conflict was due to the experiment and experience gained from the *Idumu* composition.

**The Village Unit (*Igue*) and Odion (wele) Administration**

The village unit (*Igue*) in the chain of Uromi evolutionary political history can simply be referred to as a mega *Idumu* in the sense that a group of *Idumus* make up a village. Olumese believes that respect for defensive alliances, marriage relationships, migration due
to conflicts or superstition from other Idumus, tradition of common origin, kinship links, and political necessities might have encouraged different Idumus to amalgamate (Olumese 67-68). Be that as it may, the political practices in the Uelen and Idumu units of organisation were not disrupted. The practice of gerontocracy was retained as the oldest indigenous male in the village community assumed the authority of leadership (Omokhodion 13 and Okojie 47). The traditional leader of the village was referred to as Odion (singular) of the village he headed and not Odionwele as recorded in Butcher’s intelligence report and repeated as such in subsequent Esan/Benin historiography (Butcher 238, Okojie 47, Omonkhodion V, Osagie 7 and Okoduwa Collectivism 55). It is believed that Benin migrants introduced the Odionwele concept in Esan around the 15th century to distinguish between the head of the village community, which was the oldest man, from other heads in the village (Odion 2009). The Òwere’ concept is autochthonous to the Benin more than Uromi because in Benin, the oldest man in a street or quarter is addressed traditionally as Odionwere (Eweka 84).

The scope and depth of the village administration had to be widened to accommodate the lower strata in the evolution. Therefore, village administration became more complex, which required more than just one Odion to administer. The people then introduced a new style of administration popularly called the village council. Again, it should be argued that scholars in Esan historiography have not clearly distinguished between the functions of the village council and its relationship with the agei grade administration. The impression has been created that village governance was based on the age Ì grade system (Okoduwa, Collectivism 55) or that the age grade sets were part of the village council (Osagie 7-8). This confusion needs to be addressed in order to better appreciate the intricate network of the village administration and other arms of traditional governance in Uromi. Butcher’s intelligence report on Uromi explains that the village council was composed of two groups. First, heads or Edion (plural) of all the Idumus, and the oldest among them became the
Odionwele, while the next three oldest to the Odionwele became his body of advisers, and those four elders were collectively called Odiononne (four Odion). Secondly, the three sets of age groups, which comprised the Edion (elders), Igene (middle aged youths) and the Egbonughele (children age grade) were also members of the council (Butcher 23, 238, Okojie 47-48, Osagie 7-8 and Omonkhodion 14). The village Council administrative structure would therefore look like this, in other of seniority;

1. Odionnene headed by the Odionwele
2. Odion-Idue
3. Age grade members

The above Council composition appears to be faulty. In reality, the age-grade was not included in the council. What was culturally practicable, if keenly observed in terms of functionality in Uromi and other parts of Esan, was that the Village Council, which was both the executive, legislative and judicial arm of government, was limited to the Odionwele/Odionene, and Odion-Idue. The age-grade was a form of traditional sector that rendered three major services for the Village Council, and to the community.

i. It was a leadership training academy that prepared would be leaders for the challenges of administration;

ii. it ensured that the village council decisions were implemented in the community, and

iii. provided a pool of labour force for the community (Ehiabhi 2012).

To buttress our position, there are copious instances where the Village Council had to arbitrate in alternative conflict resolution among the age grades as recorded by Okojie (50-51). The Odionwele, as the head of the council was entitled to exercise authority to the extent traditional norms required. He was regarded as ūthe repository of the law and custom of the village and the one who is [was] most respected in the villageÔ (Butcher 238). The position of
the *Odionwele* and composition of the village council made the council to act as the executive, legislative, and judicial body of the village community. The *Odionwele* was the authoritative spokesperson of the village.

To appreciate the enormous responsibility of the *Odionwele*, custom demanded as duties from members of the village to pay homage to, and honour him with the choicest parts of any killed game, gift of the best looking tubers of yams, palm wine and other edibles. He was exempted from communal labour and accorded respect equal to royalty. The uniqueness of the village administration lied in the fact that the authority and privileges of the *Omingiogbe* and *Odion – Idumu* were not eclipsed by the emergence of the village *Odion* and his Council. The various villages were engaged in inter-group relations as manifested mainly in covenant of taboos that established relationship of brotherhood. It is this nature of relationship that made it, even till contemporary times, for some quarters among Uromi villages not to marry themselves. Some of these villages are: Oluwazi and Arue, Utako and Amendokhian, Idumioza and Equarre, and Uwalor and Ewoyoma. There are other contracted marriage alliances in order to cement their relationship, such as Efandion and Amendokhian (Butcher 243-248). The independence of the villages before they federated made them to have their own peculiar ancestral shrine relevant to their cosmology. With the passage of time, Uromi political institution evolved to the cluster of group of villages which resulted in the evolution of a federate unit of three groups.

**The Federate Unit: Okhiode; Obiruan; Obiyuan and the Okakuro Administration**

Butcher argues that it was war time exigency that created the circumstances that led to the grouping of Uromi villages into three militarized communities to protect the state. That the Okhiode wing was stationed at the centre flanked on the left by the Obiruan and on the right by the Obiyuan groups respectively (Butcher 242). Webster adds that though those groups were military districts, they had their own corporate identity (Webster 2,6 and 8).
Okogie explains that the organisational structure was such that a man and his male children were incorporated into the various units. Accordingly if a man was in Okhiode group, his first son would join him there, while his second son goes to Obiruan and the third son to Obiyaunô (Okogie 51), and those military districts were collectively called Oboigbato (family guard together). War captains, known as Okakuro in Esan language, were appointed to oversee the districts. Ojeifoh argues that the idea to organise Uromi villages into military formations began with Oghu, believed to be one of the Onojie of Uromi (Ojeifoh 22 and 49).

However, Omorogie disagrees with the thesis that war exigency led to the amalgamation of Uromi villages into three units. Rather, he Omorogie (28 and 50) argues that it was Ogiso Oriagba of Benin who in 1051 AD, vested Igiesan, the first Onojie of Uromi with the authority to be lord over all the villages in Uromi, by bringing the villages of Arue, Oyomo, Unuwazi, Utako, and Onewa that were contiguous to the village of Egbele (where Igiesan lived) into a common political domain, and created a primogeniture based subi monarchy out of themô (Omorogie 28 and 50). Omorogie continues that with time, Onojie Agba 1 (1250 ì 1283 AD), consolidated monarchical principles in the mentality of Uromi independent Edition.

This he achieved with the aid of Ogbeide from Benin who moulded Uromi territory ñs a being with deep roots on the ground, a round head resting on a thick heart held up on a long single trunk, adorned to the right with a long wing and to the left with a long wingô Agba and Ogbeide gave meaning to the sculpture that the heart was Egbele, the centre of Uromi and head of the Okhiode village group, while the right and left wings were the Obiruan and Obiyaun groups respectively (Omorogie 51). Omorogie therefore posit that the political and social value in the interpretation was Agbaô attempt to unite the people in the spirit of oneness. That a united Uromi would achieve more and even be militarily prepared to ward off hostile enemies or invasion, and that later, the three political units in Uromi from
1283 AD took definite identity as protective vigilante divisions marking out how they would fight as a united people (Omoregie 51 and 56)

From the foregoing, even with Omoregie’s explanation, there are some issues that must be settled for the purpose of proper historical interpretation of events. Butcher and Webster’s positions exposes two fundamental issues. One, there was a trigger factor that compelled the villages to federate. Two, which is more important, as Webster has noted that those federating units had their separate administrative structures. The overall implication for our discussion is that if those federating units maintained separate identity, it only strengthens our position that the federation was as a result of evolution and diplomacy and not by compulsion as Omoregie wants us to believe.

There is no doubt that war circumstances would have compelled the villages to federate under the protective care of a strong, or groups of strong personalities, probably migrants from Benin before the 1440s as Okojie has noted that the early political leaders in Esan were fleeing Ekakulo from Benin (Okojie 3, 17, 26 and 27). So, it was easy for the three units to share a bound of consanguinity. For example, the organisational structure where father and sons were members of the three units suggests that the federated units must have reached a high level of understanding and networking for such practice to survive. This is only possible if we concede to the reasoning that the amalgamation of villages was a continuation in the political evolutionary process that began with the Idumu unit. However, the federation of Uromi villages, perhaps, represents the earliest attempt at experimenting with the possibilities of using monarchical powers to bring the Uromi villages under the Benin style kingship governance. Though this experiment was partially successful, it failed to unite the villages under the supremacy of a single ruler because no society loses its independence easily without resistance and the fact that tradition dies hard. The political institution at the federate level would have been how Friedrich defines a federation;
a union of group selves, united by one or more common objectives but retaining their distinctive group being for other purposes. Federation is on inter-group level, what association is on the inter-personal level. It unites without destroying the selves that are uniting, and is meant to strengthen them in their mature relations (cited, Erim 8).

This was the political reality in the Uromi until the Esañí Benin Conference, which aftermath witnessed the massive binization of Uromi political institution.

The Dynastic (Onojie) Administration

There is no account, neither are there evidences to suggest the possibility that the emergence of dynastic governance in Uromi resulted from the people’s political evolutionary process. However, there are two different positions on the emergence of the Beniní style kingship institution in Uromi. These positions can be divided into the preí Oba Ewuare of Benin era, and the consequences of the Beniní Esan Conference.

The Pre–Ewuare Era

Proponents of the establishment of kingship institution in Uromi argues that Beniní style kingship practice had been in Uromi before the popular and much credited Beniní Esan Conference called at the instance of Oba Ewuare of Benin. Of the sparse available literature on Uromi, two different narratives have been rendered by Ojiefoh and Omoregíe on the emergence of dynastic administration in Uromi. Ojiefoh narrates that one of the wives of Ogiso Ewedo of Benin betrayed the king and in order to avoid punishment, she fled with her three sons on the advice of Omaenerokhin, a diviner, who told Ijiesan (one of the sons) that he would rule as a leader in the place his mother would find the lower jaw of the elephant. Ijiesan eventually settled at the place the jaw was found, a place that harboured ancient Benin migrants who fled from Benin as a result of the harsh rule of Ogiso Orire. Ijiesan’s ability to bring all other Benin emigrants scattered in the Uromi bush under his administrative control made the people to proclaim him as Eramen or Ojie (Ojiefoh 172 and 22). Eramen and
Ojie mean our father or king in the Esan dialect. Omorogie’s position is that royal tussle for power in the reign of Ogiso Ediae (1044 ï 1050 AD) made three brothers named Iyekowa, Uza and Igiese to migrate from Benin, each carried along a sceptre of authority based on the advice of Omminbigbon, the diviner.

They were told by the diviner that whoever found an Elephant’s jaw on their journey would be the king of the community where the jaw would be found. It was Igiese, the youngest of the three that found the jaw in the village of Egbele and was henceforth referred to as Igiesan settled down with the sceptre of rule in his hand and established a rulership authority in the place. For this reason where Ijiesan settled became the centre of the new territory which he ruled after it was named Uromi. That the authority of Igiesan to be properly constituted and recognised as a king was given to him by Ogiso Oriagba who anointed Ijiesan in 1051 AD as the first Onogie of Uromi vesting him with the authority to rule by primogeniture law over all the villages of the Uromi territory (Omoregie 22, 24 and 28).

Though the above accounts on the establishment of dynastic government in Uromi differ in narration, they both agree in content. The practice of dynastic administration was alien in Uromi until the arrival of a Prince from Benin. That Ijiesan began the list of Uromi kings, which is a clear justification to support the assertion that the concept of kingship did not evolve from the evolutionary processes in the Uromi political history. Therefore, the argument that elements of monarchical or royal practices had longed been established in Uromi is not sustainable.

The Benin–Esan Conference

The last stage in the evolution of Uromi polity before the imposition of British colonial rule was occasioned by the political activities and influence of Oba Ewuare of Benin (1440 ï 1483). It is believed that the Oba attempted to curb the massive migration of his
subjects from the city as a result of his mourning laws (Egharevba 8) by digging moats in the heart of the city in about 1460 AD to enclose the people (Egharevba 83). When that strategy failed, the Oba then sent word to all rulers of neighbouring states to give no refuge to his deserting subjects, and he began to tattoo their bodies so that they might easily be known and identified amongst the people or other tribes (Egharevba 15). The second attempt also failed. Okojie and Ojiefoh continue the discussion that Oba Ewuare, therefore, invited the various political heads of Esan to Benin to address the crisis of depopulation in Benin and to solicit for their cooperation (Okojie 346 and Ojiefoh 49-50). Omorogie's position is that the Benin-Esan meeting was held to compel all vassal states of Benin to pay homage to, and swear oath of allegiance to Oba Ewuare (Omorogie 83-85). There are two contrasting scenario in the presentations. While Okojie and Ojiefoh argues that political heads were invited, which would seem that at that point in time the Esan-Bени political relations had not been properly defined. Omorogie posit that the Esan political heads were ordered to Benin by a superior over lord, which means the Esan-Bení political connections had already be settled.

However, there are strong indication that Uromi presence was felt in Benin as Ikiesan, Ichesa, or Ekhenoa represented Uromi at the Conference between 1460 and 1463 when Oghala or Oighala or Oghaghila refused to go, and Ikiesan, Ichesa, or Ekhenoa who attended the conference on behalf of others was commissioned by the Oba to assume political headship of the whole of Uromi as the Onojie or king.* He was bestowed with authority and instructed to implement Benin cultural practices (Ojiefoh 22-49). Miller believes that there was a Benin-Esan meeting on an unspecified date. He therefore, suggests that the meeting could have been between 1455 and 1482. Miller based his speculation on his interpretation of the king list of Benin (Miller 1-38). It is most likely that the meeting was held between 1460 and 1463, and definitely not before 1460 since, Oba Ewuare's first attempt to curb the migration was around 1460.
From all indications, the Benin Esan conference may explain a Benin sponsored coup against the federated state of Uromi and the establishment of a Benin Style monarchical political institution. Thus, Benin supplanted and introduced the Onojie institution into Uromi traditional political practices. It is important to also state that sending a representative to Benin gives the impression that kingship institution was already in place before the conference. This impression is suspect given the evolution of Uromi political structure already identified as it would have been difficult to talk about one single authority representing the whole. What is most probable is that either a strong personality with the Benin royal backing used coercion or diplomacy to super impose him on the political strata of the Uromi traditional society, or since Uromi was still divided into three political military units, the three war lords (Ekakulo) might have decided that one of them would represent them in Benin. Since the Onojie practice did not evolve from the people's culture, it therefore rendered it less sacred when compared to the Obaship in Benin. This is evident when some sections of Uromi called for the abrogation of the Onojie title in 1916, just fifteen years into colonial rule in the community (Okojie 6-7). The introduction of the Beninī style monarchical governance came with some privileges.

He was entitled to inherit the properties of any male who died without a male heir, could marry any woman of his choice and all land and natural endowment were under his custody. His permission was sort before anyone could celebrate burial ceremonies, killed rare games belonged to him, homage from all and sundry was accorded to him, especially during festivals and enjoyed the authority to confer chieftaincy (Butcher 257). Theoretically, the Onojie was autocratic, but in practice, he was not, as his powers and privileges were regulated by established customs and traditions. It is germane to mention that the introduction of the Onojie practice did not diminish the political roles performed by the Uelen, Edion-Idumu and Odionene in the respective village Councils.
Conclusion

Uromi pre-colonial institution evolved from the Uelen to the super-imposition of Benin style monarchical structure. A unique balance of power was observed among the various tier of traditional government. The Uelen was the foundation on which the Uromi pre colonial political structure was built. With the passage of time, the Uelen expanded to accommodate the Idumu and Igues without any form of political disequilibrium. The emergence of the federate and later monarchical form of government represents the people’s response to change. Therefore, before the imposition of Benin political imperialism and later British colonial rule, the people of Uromi had evolved an untangled skein of political administration relevant to the needs of the people. Most literature on Uromi historiography does not agree on the number of kings or when monarchical institution began in Uromi. Okojie list twelve kings from 1463 to 1900 (Okojie 367), Omorogie has thirty-two, dating it from 1050 A.D to 1900 (Omoregie 150-151), while Ojiefoh records thirteen without dating their reigns (Ojiefoh 53). This apparent confusion may suggest that a lot still has to be done by historians to explain the true nature of Uromi pre colonial political practices.

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Interview with P. Odion, 67, retired civil servant, Benin, 10th December, 2009.

*No specific date can be speculated for the conference, the identity of the Uromi ambassador and his political and social status are yet to be established.