

Origin, Migration and Settlement of Uruan People: The Northern Section

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Abstract

The question of Uruan's identity has in recent time become debatable; consequently, two schools of thought have emerged. The first school which views Uruan as an Ibibio group is supported by oral tradition, colonial and missionary sources as well as the writings of Ibibio historians. The second school of thought views Uruan as a distinct group who are only neighbours to the Ibibio. This view has recently been adopted as the "official tradition". Within this context, Uruan is considered as a monolithic group whose forebears once occupied a place known as Uruan Akpeh in the South West Cameroon area and later migrated to settle in Akani Obio Uruan in the Cross River estuary, from where they accessed Ibibio land. Based on the above conflicting accounts, it became necessary to undertake a study of the origin, migration and settlement of the 12 villages in Northern Uruan area from an inside-out perspective using an interdisciplinary methodology. The study discovers that the Uruan people are of Ibibio stock and their forebears migrated in waves to settle in their present abode. Thus, the novel contrary view of non-Ibibio origin of Uruan is based on political considerations and a response to the emerging desire for self-identity among some Ibibio groups.

Keywords: Ibibio, Northern Uruan, Origin, Migration, Settlement

Introduction

Uruan consists of 42 villages¹ divided into four geo-political sections, namely: Northern, Central and South-East, and South-South.² Uruan, one of the 31 Local Government Areas in Akwa Ibom State, was created in May 1989 by the Nigerian Military Government with its administrative headquarters at Idu in the Central part of the clan.³

The question of Uruan's identity as an Ibibio clan has recently generated some controversies. As a result of this development, two schools of thought have emerged. The first school considers Uruan as an Ibibio group. This position consistently reflects in the missionaries' and colonial accounts. In the same vein, indigenous writers such as Okon and Nkpanam Ekereke, Udo-Ekong Etuk Obio-Offiong, and historians such as Edet Akpan Udo, Monday Abasiattai and Monday Noah, Okon Uya, etc., maintain the Ibibio thesis of Uruan origin. The claims by these authors have been confirmed and corroborated by the extensive study of common ethnographic data such as totems, deities, etc. in Uruan area by this author.⁴

The second school of thought is a derivation from a book entitled, *Uruan People in Nigerian History*, published in 1993 by Dominus Essien, a Professor of History and an indigene of Uruan Local Government Area. Essien's "pure race" account which has in recent time been adopted as the "official tradition" of origin, migration and settlement of Uruan people asserts a distinct Uruan identity and presents Ibibio as Uruan's neighbour. In fact, Essien's account asserts that Uruan people used to have a distinct language from the Ibibio language which has now gone into extinction.⁵ As observed, the above construct has been retained as the official history of Uruan people and reflects in the programme of events during the coronation of Uruan chiefs since then.⁶

Also, oral evidence paraded by some modern-day Uruan elite presents Uruan as a monolithic group whose forebears migrated distinctly from the South West Cameroon to settle in their present abode. The version has it that it was during the movement to the hinterland that some of the canoes that conveyed the Uruan migrants "missed their way" and landed in many parts of Ibibio land.⁷

Based on the above conflicting accounts, it became imperative to critically study the Northern section of Uruan, consisting of 12 villages. To arrive at a close approximation of Uruan past, a peculiar manner of studying each of the families in all the villages by analysing their origin, migration and settlement, their totems and deities, kinship relations etc., has been adopted.

Perspectives on the Origin, Migration and Settlement of Uruan People

The earliest authors who commented on aspects of Ibibio history and culture were European missionaries and administrators. They included Hope Waddell, Hugh Goldie, M.D.W. Jeffreys, Robert M'Keown, G.I. Jones, etc. They unanimously agreed that Uruan people are of Ibibio origin. Also, Akwa Ibom historians such as Monday Noah, Monday Abasiattai and Okon Uya, affirm the assertion. In addition, some Efik authors such as E.N. Amaku and E.U. Aye, describe Uruan as Ibibio.⁸

The Intelligence Report on Uruan was compiled in 1932 by Captain H.P. James. The research process involved interfacing with the chiefs and elders of the respective villages in Uruan. The process of the exercise in Uruan was directed by a leading elite at the time, Chief Nyong Essien, who later became the first Nsom of Uruan. The report describes "Uruan as a clan of the Ibibio tribe that occupies an area of the right bank of the Cross River in the East of Uyo Division consisting of 36 Uruan villages, 2 Efik villages and one Oku village, 41 distinct villages in all".⁹

Okon and Nkpanam Ekereke, indigenes of Ibiaku Uruan in Northern Uruan, in their book entitled *Historical Sketches of Ibiaku Uruan*, which was published in 1957, also describe Uruan as one of the Ibibio clans. They point to the Rio del Rey region of present-day Cameroon Republic as the point of their migration to establish a settlement in the Cross River estuary, known as Aqua Obio Uruan, before their expansion to the Ibibio hinterland.¹⁰

Okon and Mkpanam Ekereke note that:

Coming to the people who now occupy the Northern Division of Uruan, they were almost the last to leave Aqua Akpa Uruan; and following up the course of a river, they landed at a beach, the spot of which is now known as Ikpa beach. After a few yards trek, Ikpa group settled; while

others namely: Ibikpe, Ita, Mbiaya, Eman, Ibiaku and Utit passed on and posted themselves in a juxtaposition as we now find them.¹¹

In 1958 another work was written by Udo Ekong-Etuk Obio-Offiong, entitled *A First Step to the Study of Ibibio History*. The author also points to Akwa Akpa, a settlement in the Rio del Rey region as the centre of dispersal of the Uruan stock, whom he described as Afaha people. He links their dispersal to the harmful effects of the floods together with family strife and domestic wrangles there.¹²

Edet Akpan Udo, another indigene of Uruan, in his book, *Who are the Ibibio?* which was published in 1983, notes like the previous authors that Uruan is of Ibibio stock. He, however, maintains that the name Uruan is derived from an Ibibio word *urua* (market). He also holds the view that the people were so named because, after settling on the bank of the Cross River, they had become great traders and fishermen.¹³

Despite the established norm in Ibibio history and historiography as regards the Ibibio origin of Uruan people, a historian, Dominus Essien, in 1993, published a counterpoise, entitled *Uruan People in Nigerian History*. Essien claims that Uruan people migrated from the region which is now known as Congo-Garcon-Cameroon border to South-Western Cameroon and occupied a new region which they named Uruan Akpeh – meaning Uruan country. He adds that at Uruan Akpeh, Uruan neighbours included Efut, Balundu (sic.) Obakundu, Bafe, Batanga and Bamboko who were like Uruan people, the descendants of Semi-Bantu, or Bantoid.¹⁴

Essien further claims that:

There were 12 traditional clans that migrated from Uruan Akpeh, the *Essien Uruan Duopeba* “being Bulanki, Etongo-Mkpe, Ntem Ntem, Ikiba, Odiodio, Mutaka, Mbawa, Mosongo, Akpe Iboku, Aqua and Ibonda”. They migrated in 12 boats out of which seven landed at Aqua Obio Uruan, namely: Aqua, Mutaka, Ekondo, Ibonda, Akpe Iboku, Etongo-Mkpe and Mosongo Uruan. Five were lost, namely: Bulanki, Mbawa, Odiodio, Ntem Ntem and Ikiba Uruan. These five lost clans are referred to as Uruan in the diaspora.¹⁵

According to Essien, there were some Uruan families that missed their kith and kin during the migration from Akwa Obio Uruan to the mainland. The missing families strayed into other areas and settled in Okobo, Oron, Eket, Ikot Abasi, Mkpato Enin, Ikono and Itu. Essien also posits that Uruan people began to be closely related with the Ibibio after they had settled in their present abode in close proximity. In other words, he views Uruan as Ibibio neighbours. He considers inter-marriages as one cardinal factor that triggered exchanges of shared values between the Ibibio and Uruan.¹⁶

Origin, Migration and Settlement of Northern Uruan People

Ibiaku Uruan

Ibiaku is formed from two Ibibio expressions, “Ibia” and “Oku”. “Ibia” in Ibibio means “aggressive demon” or “someone or a thing that is possessed or controlled by an aggressive demon”. Thus, there is *Ibia Ekpo Nyoho* (an aggressive or wicked ekpo masquerade). Sometimes, the term *ibia ekpo* is used when one is talking about a certain demon that seems to influence a human being. When that happens, such a person acts in an aggressive and violent manner, or in a way that is beyond human control; hence, some people are described as *Mbon Ibia Ekpo* or *Ibia Ekpo* when they seem to behave in a manner described above.¹⁷

A source posits that the name “Ibiaku” is derived from two words – *Ibia* and *Oku*. According to the source, *Ndem Ibia* was (the chief deity of the farm) and the priest of the deity used to make sacrifices to the deity in the last week of the month of August. Thus, “Ibia” means deity of the farm and “Oku” means the priest in-charge of the deity of the farm. The two words were joined together to produce “Ibiaku”.¹⁸ This explanation suggests that *Ibia* deity was a strand of *Idio Inwang* (the deity of the farm).¹⁹

It should be stressed that the pre-colonial Ibibio society was such that religion permeated all facets of life, so much that it is not easy to divorce it, even by recent scholarship. This exercised significant influence on the thinking pattern and life of the people. Udo supports this position thus:

Running through the system underlying the life of the pre-Christian Ibibio was his religion. His daily life was regulated by the tenets of this religion. For instance, in farming, marriage, fighting, or fishing, in play, in initiation into various secret societies and clubs, in naming of his children, in trade,

during journeys, while eating, in the morning, afternoon, or night, his life was tied up with his religion. There is nothing he did from which he expected good results which he did not first of all refer to the Supreme God, *Abasi Ibom*, and secondly, to the lesser gods (deities) of his clan and of his neighbouring clans, and to his ancestors. Religion therefore permeated every facet of life.²⁰

Okon and Nkpanam Ekereke explain that Ibiaku Uruan people are of Afaha extraction and were saddled with the sacred responsibility of priesthood and, therefore, were the ones who administered *Ataokpo*, the deity of the Afaha in Uruan area and also bore its ark. The authors also claim that because of the sacred responsibility of Ibiaku, it was agreed that they should occupy the tail end of the land. Such a place being remote from the coast or river side where enemies might not easily attack, or in the event of invasion, the ark of *Ataokpo* might be easily removed and defended.²¹

At present, Ibiaku Uruan consists of two major sections, Afaha and Mbiokporo. However, research has shown that Mbiokporo is a splinter group from Afaha. In other words, Mbiokporo, wherever it exists in Akwa Ibom (either as a family or a section of a village or village) is of Afaha stock. According to Obio-Offiong, Okporo, the putative father of Mbiokporo was one of the leaders of Afaha and therefore of Afaha stock.²² It has also been explained that originally there were seven sections in Ibiaku namely: (1) Nnung Otu (2) Edem Urua (3) Mbebit (4) Abak (5) Ikot Enin (6) Odok Okobo and (7) Akpayak.²³

Although the Ibiaku group exists in Uruan, it was not the “son” of a man called “Uruan” who migrated independently as “non-Ibibio group” from a location known as Uruan Akpeh to the present locale. Rather, it is an integral part of Ibibio people found in Uruan area just like their kith and kin are found in other parts of Ibibio land and elsewhere. For instance, Ibiaku exists in Itam (Ibiaku that exists in Itam clan). There is Ibiaku Ibiono (Ibiaku that exists in Ibiono land). There is Ibiaku Ikono (Ibiaku that exists in Ikono land). There is Ibiaku Mkpát Enin (Ibiaku that exists in Mkpát Enin), there is Ibiaku Offot (Ibiaku that exists in Offot clan), etc. These groups accept Ibibio ancestry.²⁴

At present, there are 19 family units in Ibiaku Uruan namely: (1) Nnung Otu (2) Anwa Ikot Ofiong (3) Anwa Enin (4) Anwa Essien (5) Ikot Udo (6) Edem Urua (7) Ikot Otu Ekong (8) Ikot Akpan (9) Ikot Abasi (10) Nnung Oku Odiong (11) Mbebit (12) Ikot Enin (13) Abak (14) Nnung Ekon (15) Nnung

Okono (Okonoso) (16) Nnung Abin (17) Nnung Akpa Enyong Okon (18) Odok Okobo and (19) Akpayak (a new unit created from Nnung Otu).²⁵

The prevalence of some deities that are replicated all over Ibibio land also strengthens the Ibibio origin of Ibiaku Uruan. Some of the deities are: (1) *Iso Itiat* – a deity in Nnung Otu (2) *Ndem Ekpenyong* – Efak Edem Urua (3) *Ndem Odiong* – Efak Edem Urua (4) *Afia Anwan* – Efak Abak Ibiaku (5) *Ndem Ubo Ekong* – Efak Abak Ibiaku (6) *Ndem Itiat* – Efak Ikot Enin (7) *Ndem Idim Unen* (Adiaha Amasa) (8) *Ndem Ibia*.²⁶

Eman Uruan

It is believed that the name “Eman” means “to procreate”.²⁷ Eman Uruan, as one of the Afaha villages, has a tradition of having migrated from the Cross River estuary to their present abode. An informant states that their ancestors accessed the hinterland with a section of Ibesikpo people. They are believed to have crossed the present-day Ita Uruan village after a brief fight and came to find a large forest where they cleared and built their own homes. At present, the village consists of nine families namely: (1) Ikot Akpan No. 1 (2) Ikot Akpan No. 2 (3) Nnung Abisang No. 1 (4) Nnung Abisang No. 2 (5) Nnung Ewa No. 1 (6) Nnung Ewa No. 2 (7) Nnung Obio Odongo (8) Nnung Obio Nwed (now Nnung Abebeh) and (9) Nnung Ekpeyak.²⁸

Another source notes that a section of Eman Uruan consists of the survivors from the *Isu* stock, who were messengers of *Ataokpo*. Since the *Isu* were non-Ibibio, this source holds that the founders were, therefore, non-Uruan people.²⁹ Eman Uruan has kinship relationship with Oku villages in Uyo Local Government Area, Mbiabong Itam in Itu Local Government Area, and Aka Ikot Udo Eno in Ibiono Ibom Local Government Area.³⁰ Moreover, a careful perusal of the name of some families such as: Nnung Akpan and Nnung Ekpayak indicates typical Ibibio extraction. Nnung Ekpeyak has ancestral links with Ikot Ekpeyak in Ikono clan both in Uyo Local Government Area.³¹

The family known as Nnung Obio Odongo was founded by a hunter from Ikot Obio Odongo in Ibesikpo clan of Ibesikpo/Asutan Local Government Area. It is also believed that after Eman people had settled in their present locations for some time, the people of Ikot Obio Etan in present-day Nsit Ibom Local Government Area came to the area for hunting. Those who settled there, having found the place convenient enough, went to their original homes and brought back their wives, children and relations. That is why Eman gave the new settlers the name Ikot Ewa (the Bush of Hunters), which is now known

as Nnung Ewa. These families bear typical Ibibio names and exist in many parts of Ibibio land. Based on this observation, it can be stated that the forebears of these families migrated from the hinterland Ibibio to settle, probably after the earlier Ibibio migrants who accessed Eman Uruan from the sea.³²

Utiti Uruan

Utiti Uruan is made up of two major sections with seven families. The sections are Afaha and Atai (Mbiokporo). Obviously, these two sections are one and the same people. The Afaha families are: (1) Nnung Inyang (2) Nnung Akpan (3) Nnung Ubok. The Atai (Mbiokporo) section consists of: (1) Nnung Otu Ndua (2) Nnung Enwang (3) Nnung Inua and (4) Nnung Oku Ubo.³³

Nnung Oku Ubo is an Ibibio priestly family found all over Akwa Ibom State. Nnung Enwang is also one of the sea-borne families that exists in many parts of Ibibio land such as Itak in Ikono Local Government Area, Nnung Ndem in Onna Local Government Area, Western Nsit in Nsit Ibom Local Government Area, Ikot Ekpene and Ika Local Government Areas etc., and Mbo Local Government Area, Enwang in Mbo Local Government Area. Also, a family known as Nnung Inyang has kinship relations with Ikot Inyang in many parts of Ibibio land.³⁴

Mbiaya Uruan

Mbiaya Uruan has a large section known as Afaha. The Afaha people in Mbiaya Uruan are descendants of two patriarchs, namely: Uyiouko and Inyang Ambit. Afaha were the warriors who led others. Afaha forebears were the ones that arrived first, later others came in, such as present-day Nnung Abidang and Nnung Obong. In the process, the diplomacy of “state formation” took place and they agreed to form a village. The name “Mbiaya” was coined from an Ibibio deity known as *Aya*.³⁵ Mbiaya Uruan consists of six families namely: (1) Afaha (2) Ikot Etit (3) Nnung Oko (4) Nnung Obong (5) Nnung Abidang (6) Nnung Abinde.³⁶ All the above-named families are replicated in various parts of Ibibio land. Also, the *Aya* deity is found in various parts of Ibibio land such as Edem Aya Clan in Ikot Abasi Local Government Area and Akpa Utong in Esit Eket Local Government Area.³⁷

Ita Uruan

Ita Uruan derives its name from the union of three families, namely: (1) Nnung Obio Ido (2) Nnung Obio Asang (3) Usuk Ita. There are many sub-family units within these three families. They

include: Nnung Akpe Enang, Nnung Akpe, Nnung Odiong, Nnung Itihe, Nnung Enam, Nnung Emah, Ekpene Ikon, Nnung Ete, Nnung Amkpa, Nnung Obio Ekpene, Nnung Amaya.³⁸

As seen above, the names of the families and sub-families are familiar Ibibio names which are replicated across Akwa Ibom State. It should be noted that Idue (Asang) - being a distinct family in Akwa Ibom area and other parts of the Lower Cross River region - exists in some Uruan villages such as Ekpene Ibia, Ekim Enen and Adadia etc. Also, the Odiong family exists in Oron, Eket and many parts of Ibibio land either as Ikot Odiong or Nnung Odiong.³⁹

Ikot Udo Uruan

A strand of tradition of origin, migration and settlement of Ikot Udo Uruan has it that the village was established by some migrants from Mbiaya Uruan.⁴⁰ However, this version is not accepted by the people of Ikot Udo. An official source rather claims that the forebears of Ikot Udo shared the close migration experience with Mbiaya people and are, therefore, *imaan* (kinsmen).⁴¹ Ikot Udo Uruan is divided into two sections, namely: Afaha Ikot and Atai Nnung Ubok with a total of six families. Also, the typical Ibibio names borne by the sub-families, such as: Nnung Andem, Nnung Ukpang, Nnung Umo Etang and Nnung Ubok point to Ibibio origin.⁴²

Ifiayong Obot

The official tradition of the origin and migration of Ifiayong Obot posits that Ifiayong Obot and Utit Uruan have very close affinity. The village leadership claims that the families in the village enjoy equal status and each family superintends over its own affairs. It also has strong kinship relations with Oku Iboku, Ibesikpo and Itam villages.⁴³

Ifiayong Obot consists of three sections namely: (1) Nnung Akpan (2) Ikot Obio Nde (3) Nnung Inyang. The embedded sub-families such as: Nnung Ibut, Nnung Utono, Nnung Ibanga, Nnung Udom, Ikot Ekan and Nnung Udo Ayan, indicate their Ibibio ancestry.⁴⁴

Despite the official claim that their forebears came from *Akwa Akpa Uruan*, the existence of some families which are prominently known in the Ibibio hinterland such as Nnung Utono and Ikot Ekan suggests movement of some families from the hinterland Ibibio area. For instance, Nnung Utono is a family that dispersed from Ikot Mbon Ikono in present-day Ikono clan of Uyo Local Government Area. A family known as Ikot Ekan dispersed from Ikot Ekan village in Etinan Local Government Area.⁴⁵

Akpa Utong Uruan

Official tradition of origin, migration and settlement of Akpa Utong Uruan indicates that the forebears were sea-borne Ibibio. Akpa Utong Uruan is one of the Afaha villages in Uruan Local Government Area. The village shares the same ancestry with the Afaha people spread all over Akwa Ibom State. Akpa Utong is replicated in places such as Asutan clan, Ibesikpo Local Government Area, Esit Eket Local Government Area, Ukana clan of Essien Udim Local Government Area as villages and in Mbak Itam in Itu Local Government Area as a family. Akpa Utong Uruan consists of three families namely: (1) Nnung Udo Udom (2) Nnung Akpan (3) Nnung Nkekit. These are all Ibibio names.⁴⁶

Ikot Oku Uruan

Ikot Oku village in Northern Uruan is of Oku ancestry. It is believed that their forebears came as in-laws and were given land by Ikpa people to settle. This assertion is justified by the claim that the *Esuk Ikpa* (Ikpa Beach) which was a thriving port is located in the section of the village known as Ikot Oku. Another informant claims that the Ikot Oku people in Uruan and the Oku Iboku people in Itu Local Government Area are kinsmen. Ikot Oku Uruan is a priestly village in Ibibio land. At present, there are two families in the village namely: Nkan Oku and Nnung Adia.⁴⁷

Ikpa Uruan

Opinion varies on the meaning of the word “Ikpa”. Obio-Offiong’s account has it that:

...Ikpa group was known as such by their industry – *ikpa*. They were makers and users of a kind of a trap called *ikpa* for catching fish. Both Nnung Asang and Ikpa are found in the present area of Opobo (sic.). Dispersal further took place from Ikpa area and a group from here moved away and became the people of Ika, now a clan in Abak Division.⁴⁸

The assertion is that the Ikpa, found in Uruan and elsewhere in present-day Akwa Ibom State are one and the same people. There are Ikpa villages and families in places such as: Ibiono, Ikot Abasi, Mkpai Enin, Esit Eket, Abak, Uyo, etc.

Ikpa Uruan at present has two sections namely: Nnung Abasi and Nnung Ekop. Within the two sections are some sub-families such as Nnung Akra, Nnung Udo Akpan, Nnung Anko, and Nnung Udo Udo. These sub-families are replicated all over Ibibio land. Ikpa Uruan has multiple deities such as *Anwa Atinsak Okoko*, *Iso Ndem Ikot Iso Isua* and *Akan Anwa Idung* (Anwa Asan). These point to diverse ancestry of the people.⁴⁹

Research has shown that Ikpa Uruan, being one of the leading trading ports in Ibibio land, received migrants from diverse places who settled there for business since the era of the Atlantic slave trade which eventually snowballed into the trade in staple commodities such as palm oil and palm kernel. The settlers came from Efik land, Ibeno (at present there is a section in the village known as Esa Ibeno), Igbo land, etc. The descendants of these “settlers” had since integrated into the Ikpa Uruan community.

James’ Intelligence Report on Uruan also states that the Ikpa Beach was one of the principal markets and Efik settlements in Uruan. It adds that “the Ikpa Uruan people gave a site to Creek Town people to settle and trade in, and the place became an important trading centre with a large market. The settlers used to pay tribute to the Ikpa people but were given no farm land”.⁵⁰ From the above explanation, it is obvious that Ikpa has people of diverse origin who came to the area for the purpose of trade. Many of them have integrated with the original Ibibio people.

Asong Uruan

Tradition posits that the area known today as Asong Uruan was a swampy and uninhabited area. The version adds that those that developed the community were palm wine tappers from Mbiaya Uruan. In other words, the present-day Asong Uruan is believed to have been established by Mbiaya Uruan migrants.⁵¹ The village is made up of two sections, namely: Nnung Edok and Nnung Akata. Asong Uruan is of Afaha ancestry. Osong has its diaspora in Ukpum Clan, Mkpata Enin Local Government Area.⁵²

Ibikpe Uruan

Ibikpe consists of two sections, namely: Atai and Ikot Akpabio. There are three major families in the village namely: (1) Atai Obio Edim (2) Nnung Owo Enang Oku (3) Nnung Ekpene. There are

21 sub-units in the village. There are some Cameroonians in the village whose ancestors came in as tree Sawyers and have integrated into some of the families. The Cameroonians have settled in Ibikpe Uruan village for about four generations now.⁵³

As shown above, the two sections of the village are Atai and Ikot Akpabio. These are all typical Ibibio names and have in no way expressed distinct origin of the Uruan people. Atai exists in Utit Uruan and Ikot Udo. In Utit Uruan, the Atai section is Mbiokporo (a splinter group of Afaha). It is likely that Atai section was part of Afaha, before it evolved a new identity. Ikot Akpabio exists as villages in Nsit Atai, Ibiono, Mkpato Enin, Etinan, Abak and Essien Udim Local Government Areas and as families in many parts of Akwa Ibom State.⁵⁴

The Afaha Factor and the Reconstruction of Northern Uruan History

The Afaha group is the largest group in Akwa Ibom State. Afaha people inhabit all the Local Government Areas in the State. The Afaha people descended from a common ancestry and migrated from Usak Edet in the Cameroon Republic and later moved in-land and created settlements for themselves throughout the areas that became Calabar, Ogoja, and Owerri Provinces of colonial Nigeria. It has been established that “today, Afaha people occupy not less than 710 villages in present-day Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Abia and Imo States of Nigeria”.⁵⁵

Afaha is the regarded as “the core of the Ibibio.” This claim is supported with the fact that Afaha kinship and Usak Edet thesis permeate all sections of Akwa Ibom State. It is believed that the Ibibio are Afaha people whose original home was at Usak Edet in the Cameroons. Obio-Offiong also specifically states that the settlement was named Afaha *Ukpoppo Ukim* or *Afaha*.⁵⁶

Commenting on the Uruan Afaha origin of Uruan, Obio-Offiong posits that:

The harmful effects of the floods together with family and domestic wrangles in *Akwa Akpa*...under that circumstance...a section of Afaha during the great dispersal had to move along the creeks of the *Akwa Akpa* and eventually got settled at an upper portion of the mouth of the river – *Akwa Inyang* – and they came to be called Uruan. The body of water in the Uruan region came to be traditionally known as *Akwa Akpa Uruan*.

From *Akwa Akpa Uruan* region, the Uruan group spread into the mainland.⁵⁷

Tradition has it that while Afaha people were at Akwa Akpa, they were governed by a putative figure known as Obio-Offiong who also led a major wave of Afaha migrants to present-day Ibibio land.⁵⁸ Obio-Offiong as a putative father of Afaha features in the history of Afaha sub-groups such as Uruan, Ibesikpo, Nsit, Esene, Ibekwe, etc.

An unpublished document on Ibiaku Uruan history establishes the Afaha Uruan thesis thus:

The account of Afaha in Akwa Ibom State is very striking as a result of migrations. It is true that wherever any man from Afaha is found, he identifies himself by addressing himself as “son of Afaha” “Afaha” always develops into families - *ekpuk*, *efak*, villages and into clans”...Afaha in Ibiaku Uruan shares the right and privileges with the rest of Afaha...It is important to note that there are many relations of Ibiaku Uruan in different parts of Ibibio land, example: Afaha Nsit, Afaha Iman, Afaha Ibiono, Afaha Ibesikpo, Ibiaku Ntok Okpo in Ikono Local Government Area, Ibiaku clan in Mkpai Enin Local Government Area, Ibiaku in Essien Itiaba in Nsit Atai Local Government Area, Ibiaku Itam in Itu Local Government Area, etc.⁵⁹

Uruan Ethnography: The Afaha Origin of the *Ataokpo Uruan* Deity

According to Essien, *Ataokpo* served the Uruan people as a symbol of their unity. In the olden days, the deity was regarded to be the giver of fertile lands, the controller of fishes and animals for Uruan fishermen and hunters. In trading, it was believed that *Ataokpo* could make an Uruan trader have good profits. It was also a common belief that *Ataokpo* could ensure the security and personal development for Uruan people. That it could rescue an Uruan indigene if, by accident, the one was thrown into a river.⁶⁰

Another source states that the *Ataokpo* deity was worshipped by the people of Uruan in addition to the God of the Sky (sic.). A shrine was erected in a grove on the bank of the river in Ibiaku Uruan, dedicated to *Ataokpo* and for the use of its priest – *Oku Ndem*. Offerings and sacrifices were regularly

made to these places which were looked upon as sacred and where no other man but the priest could tread.⁶¹

On *Ataokpo* priesthood, Obio-Offiong writes thus:

The clan deity of the Uruan was known as *Ataokpo*. This priest-king of the Uruan people who was also the sacred custodian of the shrines of *Ataokpo* was always traditionally a descendant of Afaha stock or family. One of the last of the priest-kings of Uruan was Essien Udo Edet from Mbiokporo, a descendant of Afaha family.⁶²

The Ekereke's work also lists the names of some of the past *Ataokpo* priests who were all of Afaha origin as follows: (1) Ata Okuku from Afaha (2) Udo Orung Inwan from Mbiokporo (3) Akpan Edet Udo Otoro from Mbiokporo (4) Andem Abasi Inyang from Afaha (5) Akpan Udo Abia Enin from Mbiokporo (6) Akpan Ikon from Afaha (7) Udosen Eka Ete Edet (alias Udosen Adiaha Eman) from Mbiokporo (8) Essien Udo Edet from Mbiokporo.⁶³ Very significantly still, Uruan people venerate *Ndukpo* (African Black Kite) as its totem. Also, this is one of the Afaha totems.⁶⁴

Uruan Elite and the Establishment of Ibibio Union (Later Ibibio State Union)

Available records show that Chief Nyong Essien, the first Nsom of Uruan was the organiser and first President-General of the Ibibio Mainlanders Association which was established in Calabar on the 18th of October, 1924. The association started as a social, friendly, humanitarian, charitable, educational, industrial, and constructive society. Its name "Mainland Association" was significant in the sense that its membership included all Ibibio indigenes resident in Calabar. He remained as the leader of the Association up to 1928 when it merged, to become Ibibio Union, with another group known as Ibibio Welfare Union which existed in the Mainland part of the then Calabar Province,⁶⁵ now Akwa Ibom State. (In 1948, the Union was re-named Ibibio State Union). Chief James Udoafia, an indigene of Ibiaku Uruan and the second Nsom of Uruan, also served as the President of the Ibibio Union from 1938 to 1947.⁶⁶

The Ibibio Union's "Confidential Memo No. 8/37/22 of the 5th of November 1937", signed by Mr. Usen Udo Usen, General Secretary of the Union, and addressed to the Divisional Officer,

Uyo, which nominated Chief Nyong Essien as an “Unofficial Member of the Legislative Council”, unambiguously regards Uruan as an Ibibio clan, and Chief Nyong Essien as an Ibibio man.⁶⁷

In a funeral oration entitled: “The Father is no More”, presented at the graveside of Chief Nyong Essien on Saturday, 20th November 1976, at Issiet Ekim, Uruan, an Uruan elite, Chief Bassey E. Akpan – who later became the *Akwa Iko of Akwa Esop Imaisong Ibibio*, (the spokesman, Akwa Esop Imaisong Ibibio) – described Chief Nyong Essien as the *Akpan Ibibio*, who founded the organisation that later became known as the Ibibio State Union in 1924, and was instrumental to the concept and evolution of Ibibio man’s manifest destiny.⁶⁸

Conclusion

Uruan is an Ibibio clan and the people of Uruan are also of Ibibio ethnic stock. Like the rest of the Ibibio, Uruan are Afaha, whose forebears migrated in waves from Edik Afaha in the Cross River estuary to settle in their present homeland. A critical survey of the deities, totems, kinship relations and the names of families and villages in Northern Uruan reflect the Ibibio heritage. Oral tradition, missionary and colonial evidence, the works of early Ibibio writers and historians unanimously affirm that Uruan are of Ibibio stock.

However, in 1993, the wind of “self- identity” that had blown across Ibibio land since the 1950s, reached Uruan area and distinct ethnicity was carved out for this Ibibio clan and documented in a book entitled *Uruan People in Nigerian History* by Dominus Essien. Since then, the idea of distinct origin has been paraded by a section of Uruan elite. As this work has shown, the recent claim of Uruan as non-Ibibio group is neither corroborated by any known colonial or missionaries’ records, the writings of pioneer Ibibio historians; nor ethnographic data; hence, the theory is un-historical. Rather, Uruan is evidently one of the Ibibio clans and the people of the clan are Ibibio.

Endnotes

¹Dominus Okon Essien. *Uruan People in Nigeria History*. Uyo: Modern Business Press Ltd. 1993, p. 1

²Uwem Jonah Akpan. *A History of Uruan People of Ibibio Nation*. Uyo: Heritage Preservation Foundation, 2024, p.1

³Dominus Okon Essien. *Uruan People in Nigeria History*. p. 1

⁴See Hugh Goldie. *Dictionary of the Efik Language, in Two Parts. 1 – Efik Language, II English and Efik*. Glasgow Printed by Dunn and Wright, 1862, Robert L. M’Keown. *Twenty Five Years in Qua Iboe: The Story of Missionary Effort in Nigeria*. London: Morgan & Scott, Ltd. 1912, G.I. Jones. *The Background of Eastern Nigerian History. Vol. III. Tribal Distribution (2)*. New Haven: Connecticut: Human Relations Area Files, Inc. 1988, Okon and Mkpanam Ekereke. *Historical Sketches of Ibiaku Uruan*. Lagos: The Ife Olu Printing Works, 1957, Udo-Ekong Etuk Obio-Offiong. *A First Step to the Study of Ibibio History*. Aba: Aman Press, 1958, M.E. Noah. *The Ibibio Pioneers in Modern Nigerian History*. Uyo: Modern Business Press Ltd. 1980, Edet A. Udo. *Who are the Ibibio?* Onitsha: Africana-FEP. Publishers, 1982, O. E. Uya. *A History of Oron People of the Lower Cross River Basin*. Oron: Manson Publishers Co. 1984, and M. B. Abasiattai. “The Ibibio: An Outline History-1960”. Abasiattai, Monday B. (Ed.). *The Ibibio: An Introduction to the Land, the People and their Culture*. Calabar: Alphonsus Akpan Press, 1991.

⁵See Dominus Okon Essien. *Uruan People in Nigeria History*. Uyo: Modern Business Press Ltd. 1993

⁶See *Souvenir Programme For Final Traditional Burial Rites and Royal Obsequies of HRH Late Edidem Ataokpo James Udo Afia, Nsom of Uruan, Monday 30/3 – Sunday 12/4/1992*, and the *Souvenir Programme of the Coronation His Royal Highness, Edidem Ataokpo Nicholas Eyo Ukpang. Clan Head of Central Uruan, Nnung Oku, Uruan Local Government Area*, 2010.

⁷The author conducted extensive research in all the villages in Uruan Local Government Area between 2019 and 2023, and gathered oral information from many informants.

⁸See Hugh Goldie. *Dictionary of the Efik Language, in Two Parts. 1 – Efik Language, II English and Efik*. Glasgow Printed by Dunn and Wright, 1862, Robert L. M’Keown, *In The land of the Oil Rivers: The Story of the Qua Iboe Mission*. London: Marshall Brothers. 1902, M.D.W. Jeffreys. *Old Calabar and Notes on the Ibibio Language*. Calabar: Hope Waddell Press, 1935, G.I. Jones. *The Background*

of Eastern Nigerian History. Vol. III. Tribal Distribution (2). New Haven: Connecticut: Human Relations Area Files, Inc. 1988.

⁹H.P. James. *Intelligence Report on Uruan Clan of Uyo District, Calabar Province. N/A Ibadan.* p. 3

¹⁰Okon and Nkpanam Ekereke. *Historical Sketches of Ibiaku Uruan.* Lagos: The Ife-Olu Printing Works, 1957, p. 11

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²Udo-Ekong Etuk Obio-Offiong. *A First Step to the Study of Ibibio History.* Aba: The Aman Press, 1958, p. 27

¹³Edet Akpan Udo. *Who are the Ibibio?* Onitsha: Africana FEP Publishers, p. 45

¹⁴Dominus Okon Essien. *Uruan People in Nigeria History.* Uyo: Modern Business Press Ltd. 1993, p. 35

¹⁶*Ibid.* pp. 16-17

¹⁷*Ibid.* pp. 57-58

¹⁷Okon Essien. Interview: Ibiaku Uruan, Northern Uruan, Uruan Local Government Area, 22/3/2000

¹⁸P.P. Okon. *A History of Ibiaku Uruan (Unpublished)*, 2004. p. 2

¹⁹See Edet Akpan Udo. *Who are the Ibibio?* Onitsha: Africana FEP Publishers, 1993, P.P. Okon. *A History of Ibiaku Uruan (Unpublished)*, 2004. p. iv, Uwem Jonah Akpan. *A History of Uruan People.* Uyo: Heritage Preservation Foundation, 2024.

²⁰Edet Akpan Udo. *Who are the Ibibio?* Onitsha: Africana FEP Publishers, 1993, p. 248

²¹See Okon and Nkpanam Ekereke. *Historical Sketches of Ibiaku Uruan.* Lagos: The Ife-Olu Printing Works, 1957, p. 12

²²Udo-Ekong Etuk Obio-Offiong. *A First Step to the Study of Ibibio History*. Aba: Aman Press, 1958, pp. 39-40.

²³Bassey Ada. *The Founding of Ayadehe as a Scion from Abak Uruan*. Unpublished Manuscript, 2008, pp. 1-2

²⁴Uwem Jonah Akpan. *A History of Uruan People*. Uyo: Heritage Preservation Foundation, 2024, p. 124

²⁵Jonathan Imagha and Chief Joseph Usanga. Interview: Port Harcourt Street, Uyo, 23/3/22

²⁶Bassey Asuquo, Okon Medo. Interview: Ibiaku Uruan, Northern Uruan, Uruan Local Government Area, 15/2/20, Effiong Ita Uyanga. Interview: Ibiaku Uruan, Northern Uruan, Uruan Local Government Area, 13/12/20, Effiong Ita Uyanga. Interview: Ibiaku Uruan, Northern Uruan, Uruan Local Government Area, 13/12/20

²⁷Sebastain Ita Nsubong. "The Origin of Eman Uruan People in Northern Uruan, Uyo Local Government Area". *NCE Long Essay. College of Education Uyo*, 1979, p. 16

²⁸Patrick Eyo Offiong. Interview: Eman Uruan. Northern Uruan. Uruan Local Government Area, 15/2/20

²⁹Okon and Nkpanam Ekereke. *Historical Sketches of Ibiaku Uruan*. p. 10 and Essien Okon. Interview: Eman Uruan, Uruan Local Government Area, 13/2/21

³⁰Patrick Eyo Offiong. Interview: Eman Uruan. Northern Uruan. Uruan Local Government Area, 15/2/20

³¹Uwem Jonah Akpan. *A History of Uruan People*. Uyo: Heritage Preservation Foundation, 2024, p. 128

³²Sebastain Ita Nsubong. "The Origin of Eman Uruan People in Northern Uruan – Uyo Local Government Area". *NCE Long Essay. College of Education Uyo*, 1979, p. 7.

³³Ime Okon Edet and Umoh Afia, Utit Uruan, Northern Uruan, Uruan Local Government Area, 15/2/20).

³⁴See Uwem Jonah Akpan. *The Foundations of Ibibio History*. (Unpublished Manuscript). p.230

³⁵Bassey Albert Nyong. Interview: Mbiaya Uruan, Northern Uruan. Uruan Local Government Area, 10/6/2007

³⁶Uwem Jonah Akpan. *A History of Uruan People*. Uyo: Heritage Preservation Foundation, 2024, p. 135

³⁷A section of Edem Aa people in Ikot Abasi Local Government Area point to Mbiaya Uruan as their ancestral home. They also claim that their forebears brought one of their deities known as Aya from Mbiaya Uruan.

³⁸Prince Bassey Ndon. Interview: Ita Uruan, Uruan Local Government Area, 23/6/24

³⁹Uwem Jonah Akpan. *A History of Uruan People*. Uyo: Heritage Preservation Foundation, 2024, p. 134

⁴⁰Godwin Effiong. Interview: Mbiaya Uruan. Northern Uruan, Uruan Local Government Area, 21/2/20.

⁴¹Michael Asuquo, Ikot Udo Uruan. Northern Uruan, Uruan Local Government Area, 21/2/20

⁴²*Ibid.*

⁴³Edet Bassey Ema, Victor Ekpenyong Uruk, Asuquo Etim Orok, Kingsley B. Ataokpo, Etim Offiong Akpan, Moses Ndarake Udo. Interview: Ifiayong Obot. Northern Uruan, Uruan Local Government Area, 29/8/20

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

⁴⁵Uwem Jonah Akpan. *A History of Uruan People*. Uyo: Heritage Preservation Foundation, 2024, p. 138

⁴⁶Albert Tom Nyong. Akpa Utong Uruan. Northern Uruan. Uruan Local Government Area, 14/3/20

⁴⁷Lawrence Ikpe. Interview: Ikpa Uruan, Northern Uruan, Uruan Local Government Area, 24/8/20

⁴⁸Udo-Ekong Etuk-Obio-Offiong. *An Introduction to Nsit History. A History of Afagha Obio Offiong and A First step to the Study of Nsit History*. Aba: St. Paul's Press, 1958, p. 30

⁴⁹Lawrence Ikpe. Interview: Ikpa Uruan, Northern Uruan. Uruan Local Government Area, 24/8/20.

⁵⁰H.P. James. *Intelligence Report on Uruan Clan of Uyo District, Calabar Province*. N/A Ibadan, Serial No, 330, Agency Mark, 27722, 1932, p. 15

⁵¹Godwin Effiong. Interview: Mbiaya Uruan. Northern Uruan, Uruan Local Government Area, 21/2/20.

⁵²Edet Bassey. Interview: Asong, Uruan Local Government Area, 13/4/21

⁵³Asuquo Essien. Interview: Ibikpe, Uruan Local Government Area, 23/7/21

⁵⁴Uwem Jonah Akpan. *A History of Uruan People*. Uyo: Heritage Preservation Foundation, 2024, p. 141

⁵⁵Uwem Jonah Akpan. "The Afaha Factor in the Reconstruction of Akwa Ibom History". *AKSUJA. A Publication of the Faculty of Arts, Akwa Ibom State University, Obio Akpa Campus, Nigeria*, Volume 4, No. 1, October, 2023, p. 229

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

⁵⁷Udo-Ekong Etuk Obio-Offiong. *A First Step to the Study of Ibibio History*. Aba: Aman Press, 1958, p.27

⁵⁸P.P. Okon. *A History of Ibiaku Uruan (Unpublished)*, 2004. pp. 12-13

⁵⁹*Ibid.*

⁶⁰Dominus Okon Essien. *Uruan People in Nigeria History*. p.19

⁶¹Okon and Nkpanam Ekereke. *Historical Sketches of Ibiaku Uruan*. p. 12

⁶²Udo-Ekong Etuk Obio-Offiong. *A First Step to the Study of Ibibio History*. Aba: Aman Press, 1958, p. 27

⁶³Okon and Nkpanam Ekereke. *Historical Sketches of Ibiaku Uruan*. p. 16

⁶⁴Edet Bassey Udokrang. Interview: Afaha Ikot, Southern Uruan, Uruan Local Government Area, 20/1/20.

⁶⁵See A Private Paper of Chief Nyong Essien, Entitled “Questionnaire, Answers to” Presented to the The Hon. The Secretary, Eastern Provinces, Enugu, 5th of November, 1948, pp.1-8

⁶⁶Udo Udoma. *The Story of The Ibibio Union*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books. 1987, p. 40

⁶⁷The Ibibio Union’s “Confidential Memo No. 8/37/22, of the 5th of November 1937”, signed by Mr. Usen Udo Usen, General Secretary of the Union, and addressed to the Divisional Officer, Uyo, with the title: “Nominated Unofficial Member of the Legislative Council. pp. 1-2

⁶⁸In a funeral oration entitled: “The Father is no More”, presented at the graveside Chief Nyong Essien, on Saturday 20th November 1976, at Issiet Ekim, Uruan, by an Uruan elite, Chief Bassey E. Akpan, p. 3