Sensemaking in Benin Kingdom Oral Traditions: Repetitive Recall of Actual and Traditional Enmity between the Oba and the Ogiamien

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Abstract

The Benin Kingdom’s oral history, like all histories, highlights selected past incidents to the exclusion of most. Major events, especially those linked to specific monarchs, are likely candidates for inclusion. Oranmiyan’s founding of the current dynasty was a key cataclysmic event, along with his immediate descendants’ efforts to establish themselves in the city. These incidents, unsurprisingly, are remembered in some detail. Conflicts between the autochthones, represented by the Evian-Ogiamien line, and the incoming royal family constitute a crucial aspect of this dynastic beginning. Subsequent but far less critical clashes between the two parties flared up periodically during later reigns, but their retention in history is less explicable. Why are these lesser incidents recalled?

Human ability to recollect choice past events is shaped by sensemaking and other cognitive processes. Particular cognitive frameworks serve to organize memory creation, and their composition can ensure that certain events not only attain contemporaneous prominence, but also are likely to secure a place in historical accounts. In Nigeria’s Benin Kingdom, ominigbon divination may have provided such a framework for stories regarding the continued conflict between the present dynasty and the Evian-Ogiamien line. Its Ohun Ighitan code sentence speaks to (among other things) disputes that are never fully settled, and its veiled
language appears to refer to the initial struggles between the Evian-Ogiamien and Oranmiyan lineages. The framework it established may have served as a significant device that ensured a narrative of conflict continued over the centuries.

Ominigbọn divination and sensemaking

*Agbọn khon ye omen ẹrinmwin ke vbe khon ye ukherhe.* This world fought for palm fronds and the spirit world fought for sugarcane [coded sentence associated with Ohun Ighitan].

Humans interpret and reinterpret their world through patterns. These patterns sometimes take on a more enduring phase, becoming cognitive frameworks. Such mental models can develop into familiar tropes to the degree that new incidents may be categorized according to these established mental devices, which can originate from religious, literary, and other sources. In countries imprinted by the Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions, Biblical tales—even among non-believers—have become fixed structures through lengthy cultural bombardment, and can act as cognitive “magnets” that attract and attach new incidents. For example, the millennia-old story of Cain and Abel still resonates when cases of fratricidal conflict occur, even when its contemporary echoes have little of the power and impact of the original event. Likewise, Shakespeare’s circa 1595 tale of Romeo and Juliet provides an attachment point for any love that defies familial resistance.

These kinds of structures are not mnemonic tools. Instead, they act as methods of organizing our observations, ensuring some new incidents become attached to older, already fixed elements, strengthening the cognitive structure’s lodestone abilities. Karl Weick articulated this organizational process through the theory of sensemaking. As we relate ourselves to the greater world, we shape our experiences through meaningful patterns that
result from socialization. This process is continuous, remaining in constant flux. We reify the cues we perceive in retrospect, and we also recognize that no individual can achieve absolute fact regarding past events—plausibility is sufficient as we construct narratives of personal and community history.¹ The theory emerged from Piaget’s rationalist-oriented psychological research concerning how the mind processes reality through stages of cognitive structures that progress from childhood to adulthood.² It then split into multiple directions and refinements.³ Sensemaking’s applications rapidly spread to communications within corporate and other structures,⁴ but subsequently disciplines as diverse as linguistics and narrative studies employed the theory. As a communications theory that addresses transmission and reception, it would seem to have particular relevance to oral history. While the process of sensemaking is universal, one of its underlying tenets is that its constructions are culturally dependent. In Nigeria’s Benin kingdom, sensemaking emerges as a possible analytical direction. Divination may provide some framing devices for historical creation, increasing the likelihood that those incidents fitting into established constructs would be recalled. One specific example is the ominigbọn divination verse above, which refers to a remembered and repeated tension


³ Some related theories take different names. Michael Cole’s work in psychology and communications, for example, stresses the role culture plays in shaping and creating the mind and cognition. Called cultural psychology, it has the same roots as sensemaking and has had a major impact on psychological studies. Some of his extensive publications pertain to West Africa and education. They include his book *Cultural psychology: A once and future discipline* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996). Max Velman’s theory of “reflexive monism” is likewise a cognate approach that deals with the critical place of an individual’s experience to his consciousness and perceptions (*Understanding Consciousness, 2nd ed.* [London: Routledge, 2009]).

between Edo autochthones and their ruling dynasty.\(^5\)

*Ominigbon* divination is one of several Edo systems that invoke the supernatural world in order to interpret events and discern a course of corrective actions. It involves a trained specialist (*obo agwega*) who employs an implement consisting of four strands, each hung with four half-pods of the *ogwega* tree. His work with a client involves accessing the oracle by addressing it through the *uta*, a small implement (often a boar’s tooth). The client holds the *uta* in front of the lips while asking a (usually inaudible) question, and the diviner then touches this tool to each seed pod half. He next tosses the strands, which land in front of him, their 16 half-pods presented either concavely or convexly. Possible outcomes are 256 in number, and combinations of adjacent pairs of strands (*owa iha* [owihā], or “house of divination”) are named by a code. He often repeats the throws to verify or clarify his findings, then discusses the results with the client, naming the code and its key associated sentence, then further interpreting it with set stories. To ensure positive results, a specific sacrifice is usually a vital part of the recommended course of client actions. The analogous Ifa divination system of the Yoruba, which can involve either a single strand (*opele*) or the use of a divination board (*ọpo ọna* *Ifa*), sacred palm nuts (*ikin Ifa*), and tapper (*iroke Ifa*), is also employed in Benin, but with associated verses that are independent of Yoruba content.\(^6\) The *ominigbon* system, closely related to surrounding strand-throwing systems of the Nupe, Igbo, Yoruba, and others, appears to be

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\(^5\) This paper developed from research in Benin City prior to and in conjunction with a 1997/98 Fulbright grant for a study of how *ominigbon* divination can shed light on history and art through its shaping of cognition. Further fieldwork and archival support via a 1994/95 NEH Collaborative grant and an SSRC sub-grant was vital, as was additional research in Benin in 1992 and from 1996-2004. Although the divination and cognition study was not fully completed due to Ikponmwosa Osemwegie’s illness and subsequent demise, certain critical aspects will be included in an upcoming book concerning Oba Esigie’s shaping of Edo art and culture. My unmeasurable gratitude is owed to Ṫmo n’Oba Erediauwa, his chiefs, priests, and citizens for the support and encouragement of my research.

Benin’s oldest divination system, and includes many references to Benin history in both its code sentences and explication stories.

The Ohun Ighitan code sentence above at first seems ahistorical in its content—fresh palm fronds and sugarcane are not time-bound. The only published story that expands on its meaning initially appears solely metaphorical as well. As recorded by Egharevba (who was not a diviner) and translated by Jeff Omoruyi, this cautionary tale can be summarized as follows. A beautiful maiden refused her parents’ choice of a husband and began to live as a prostitute. She succumbed to sickness and her family did everything they could to help her; finally, however, they abandoned her. Remaining at the junction between this world and the spirit world, she hid in a hollow tree and played the flute. For unexplained reasons, this caused the warriors of the two worlds to fight. A hunter caught her, and the angry warriors on both sides cut her body in half, burying her at the junction of the two worlds. There the spirit world’s denizens cut sugar cane fronds and placed them on her grave, while the living warriors placed fresh palm fronds there. “So they lay a foundation that the warrior of life and dead will no longer meet and fight each other for life.” Egharevba went on to explain that the throw meant men should avoid catching diseases from women or quarreling with them, while women should shun prostitution and illness that would make people reject them at the time of death.

“Women, quarrel, prostitution and sickness move with Ohun-Ighitan.”

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of published information on *ominigbọn*, it is worth noting that Egharevba’s related story is not necessarily the only narrative associated with Ohun Ighitan. Story use is not as codified as Egharevba’s text might suggest; diviners may have several stories in their repertoire that illustrate the meaning of a throw, and even single stories can vary from one diviner to another.  

Fig. 1. The aftermath of the battle of Ekiokpagha includes the destruction of the Ogiamien’s sugar cane fronds. Ekiokpagha “battle” (Treaty of Ekiokpagha), Benin City, Nigeria. Photograph by Joseph Nevadomsky, 1979. EEPA 2012-013-xxxx (batch 2, binder 2). Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution.  

Ikponmwosa Osemwegie, who conducted extensive unpublished research on *ominigbọn*, agreed that this code related to illness, particularly skin and venereal or gynecological diseases, but stressed the “quarrel” component of its meaning, stating that it referred to a dispute that would never be settled completely. He also expended on the code’s sentence, stating that “the day they fought for sugarcane and *omen* [fresh palm fronds], that is the day they separated man and spirits into different worlds.”  

As Osemwegie noted, the code

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10 Personal communication, Daryl Peavy, November 9, 2016, Akron, OH. Peavy is an *ominigbọn* diviner who has studied and researched since the 1990s in both Benin City and the Esan/Ishan areas.

11 Personal communication, Ikponmwosa Osemwegie, July 6, 1994.
sentence’s reference to sugarcane and palm is far from a generalized statement. It alludes to an incident relived at every coronation (Fig. 1), an explicit association between divination and history that Nevadomsky first published. He observed that the final battle between Oba Ewedo and Ogiamien at Ekiokpagh market involved bedecking a pavilion of the former with fresh palm fronds, while the latter was represented by sugar cane foliage. Nevadomsky saw their confrontation as primarily a supernatural, rather than a political, struggle, stating:

Because of the resistance of the gods of the soil to alien rule, the treaty and its conditions—the world for the Oba, the underworld for the indigenous deities—must be renewed during each succession if the land is not to become annoyed, bringing plagues of chicken pox and other maladies to the city. Thus, the prevention of calamity seems to be the underlying essence of the Treaty of Ekiopagha.\(^{12}\) Sugar cane and fresh palm leaves as used during the coronation’s Ewedo/Ogiamien reenactment demarcate borders and a mark a conflict. These materials do not appear together elsewhere in Edo ceremony or oral literature, making identification of Ohun Ighitan’s supernatural battle between the spirit and human worlds’ warriors with the battle between Ewedo and Ogiamien likely and plausible.

Does Ohun Ighitan intersect with sensemaking and, if it does, is that noteworthy?

Sensemaking and its cultural psychology cognates have not formed a significant part of an

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\(^{12}\) Joseph Nevadomsky, “Kingship Succession Rituals in Benin. 3: The Coronation of the Oba,” *African Arts* 17:3 (1984): 55-56. Nevadomsky adds that the Edo associate seven—the interval of days that takes place between the challenging skirmish and the final battle between the two parties—with things mystical, rather than legal. Ikponmwosa Osemwegie expanded on palm fronds as a cure for skin diseases, noting “they are the best way to cure measles or any skin disease—apply omen and it will clear. If raffia seed is burnt, the water is used for skin disease. To purify from sex, or disease from prostitute, tie eggshells to raffia broom and purify by circling it above head, lifting feet alternately and say ‘Awua, get away from my body’ to be released from the disease. When measles or other skin diseases are rampant, they dance Ekpo,” a masquerade that uses fresh palm fronds as a costume (personal communication, July 6, 1994).
analysis of oral history in Africa. As approaches that consider nodes of culture and cognition, they have the potential to provide insights into how societies construct not only history, but culture more generally. A key element of sensemaking structures is the idea of repetition with varied content, resulting in an “active” structure that continues to shape thought and construct memory. In his analysis of cognitive semantics, Leonard Talmy spoke to the creation of narrative on both individual and societal bases. Noting that cognitive systems operate on organizing principles, he discussed the conceptional partitioning that can emerge when time and narrative are considered together, stating that “the human mind . . . can extend a boundary around a portion of what would otherwise be a continuum of time, and ascribe to the excerpted contents within the boundary the property of being a single-unit entity,” adding that the “contents of an event may change over the span of the event, in which case the event is active, constituting a process or activity.”

As such, the “active event” in the instance of the Ohun Ighitan code is not repetition of the code sentence’s elements, nor its expository story, nor the initial confrontation itself, but rather it is the “dispute that is never settled,” to which the code refers. An examination of repeated conflicts between the members of the present dynasty and the Evian/Ogiamien lines is necessary to assess whether Ohun Ighitan’s unsettled dispute formed a kind of cognitive magnet that encouraged the attachment of additional events, ensuring their place in history.

**Beginnings with Evian, Ogiamien, Ubi, and Ëwere**

The battle between Oba Ëwedo and Ogiamien and its subsequent settlement marked the final phase of the present dynasty’s consolidation of Benin rule in the 14th century, a

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process that began in the late 13th/early 14th century. At that time, the former Ogiso dynasty died out subsequent to the exiles of its last ruler Owodo and his heir Ekhaladerhan. Political vacuum and potential disarray in the city then known as Igodomigodo was avoided when a local man named Evian became the administrator of a republican government. In his A Short History of Evian, Egharevba stated that Evian was the second son (and therefore not the heir) of the Ehọlọr n’Ire, one of the then-five Uzama chiefs who acted as kingmakers in Benin’s early era. He expanded upon the reasons for Evian’s popularity. A blacksmith, he was purportedly responsible for vanquishing the man-eating monster Osogan by throwing a red-hot hammer into its mouth. His patriotism extended to the creation of medicines buried within the city to protect citizens against wild animals and evil-intentioned strangers.

14 Many scholars have proposed various approximate dates of the monarchs’ reigns; the ones used here are my own, from Kathy Curnow, Iyare! Splendor and Tension in Benin’s Palace Theatre (Cleveland: Curnow, 2016), i.
15 Because of the machinations of his stepmother, the heir Ekhaladerhan was to be executed. Instead, his captors allowed his escape into exile. Some versions of the story claim he lived out his days in Ughoton (Jacob Egharevba, A Short History of Benin. [Lagos: Church Missionary Society Bookshop, 1953, 3]), while others state he wandered further west and was acclaimed monarch at the Yoruba city of Ile-Ife. This latter version was elaborated upon by Ena Basimi Eweka, Evolution of Benin Chieftaincy Titles (Benin City, Nigeria: University of Benin Press, 1992), 8; by Oba Erediauwa himself in numerous speeches and in his autobiography; and by numerous other chiefly authors. Its origins are earlier; see footnote 91 below. After Ekhaladerhan’s departure from Benin, his father is said to have also been driven into exile by his subjects, due to mismanagement of the state and the killing of a pregnant woman.
16 Jacob Egharevba (A Short History of Benin [1953], 4) initially referred to him as “Evin-an.”
17 Percy Amaury Talbot first published this reference in his The Peoples of Southern Nigeria, vol. 1 [1926] (London: Cass, 1969), 153. Talbot referred to Ogiamien, Evian’s son, as the “petty chief” ruling when the new dynasty began; the names of Evian and Ogiamien frequently have been interchanged in accounts. Jacob Egharevba (A Short History of Benin, 1953, 5) stated that Evian began as an administrator of republican rule, then negated it by choosing to place his son, nicknamed Ogiamien, next in succession.
18 Jacob U. Egharevba, A Brief Life History of Evian (Benin City, Nigeria: n.p., n.d. [1970]), 7. Egharevba stated the Evian-Ogiamien morning salutation of “Laire,” shared by the Ehọlọr n’Ire family, confirmed the relationship. Although there are seven Uzama today, the Oloton and Edaiken positions were added during the second dynasty.
19 See Jacob Egharevba, A Short History of Benin, 3rd ed. (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1960), 6, for the initial mention of the monster, a story repeated in his A Brief Life History of Evian, 2-4. In addition, the latter added a discussion of Evian’s medicine-making and the city’s acclaim for his leadership.
After his popular appointment and service as the republican city’s administrator, Evian betrayed dynastic ambitions when he sought to have his eldest son, nicknamed Ogiamien ("Ogie mianmwẹn n’aga" [It is vexatious to serve a king], a phrase that became his title), replace him as ruler. In 1951, Chief Ogiamien told R. E. Bradbury of Evian’s deathbed wishes regarding his three sons, Ogiamien, Ohevian, and Oliha: “Evian ordered that Ogiame [Ogiamien] should be the owner of the land in Edo while Ohevian should be in charge of Iyekọgba.” He also proclaimed that “his senior son Ogiame [should] inherit his position. Evian pulled a parrot’s feather from his head and placed it in Ohevian’s hair, and said that after his death Ohevian should worship him. Oliha was to be the sacrifice.”

According to Egharevba, the Oliha Ogiamien was meant to install the ruler, just as the Uzama chief known as Oliha was tasked with installing the Ogiso monarch, while the Ohe Evian (Ohẹn Evian, or priest of Evian), was to lead Evian’s worship.

Some factions of the city, led by the Uzama chiefs, sought to restore the monarchy, and sent to Ile-Ife for a replacement king against Ogiamien’s advice. Prince Ọranmiyan arrived

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20 Although the titleholder, newspapers, and most recent authors, including Eweka (Evolution of Benin Chieftaincy Titles, 1992, 8) spell the title “Ogiamien” (with or without the diacritical underdot), earlier writers such as Egharevba (A Short History of Benin, 1953, 5), Hans Melzian (A Concise Dictionary of the Bini Language of Southern Nigeria [London: Kegan Paul, 1937, 135]), and G. A. Akinola (“The Origin of the Eweka Dynasty of Benin: A Study in the Use and Abuse of Oral Traditions,” Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria 8 [3, 1976]: 21-36) spelled it “Ogiamwen.” The shift apparently occurred in the late 1970s, for it was in place by the 1979 coronation (see Royalty Magazine [Benin City, Nigeria: Bendel Newspapers, 1979], 1). Some authors continued to use the former spelling, however (Dmitri M. Bondarenko, “Advent of the second (Oba) Dynasty: Another Assessment of a Benin History Key Point,” History in Africa 30 [2003]: 65).

21 Chief Ogiame [Ogiamien], June 14, 1951 in R. E. Bradbury archive, A66. Bradbury’s extensive archival material, gathered from lengthy stays in Benin in the 1950s and 1960s, is deposited at the University of Birmingham Library, Birmingham, U.K. Egharevba attributed the appointment of the Ogiamien Oliha and Ohevian to Evian’s son, the first Ogiamien.

22 Egharevba, A Brief History of Evian, 6. Egharevba, however, stated that Ogiamien appointed the brothers, rather than his father. He also listed the second son as Oliha, unlike Chief Ogiamien who named the Oliha as the third son in 1951. The Evian shrine is located at First East Circular Road in Benin City’s Ikpokpan Quarter, where the original Evian homestead stood (Ekhuaguosa Aisien, Elegbe, Prince of Benin and the Orhionmwon Territories [Benin City, Nigeria: Aisien Publishers, 2015], 45).

23 While the city was still divided, the territory where the Oba lived was known as Ore-Oghene (a reference to the
with supporters, including his physician Ogiefa,\(^{24}\) for that purpose but was blocked from entering the city proper by Ogiamien’s supporters.\(^{25}\) During his sojourn, he increasingly became irritated by the actions of the citizens, and departed after impregnating a chief’s daughter. His son became Oba Eweka I, the first Oba of the new dynasty, though the communities under his command were few. Eweka and his first two successors, his sons Oba Uwakhuaben and Oba Ehënihiyen, continued to live outside the inner city walls at their Usama palace. Increasingly, however, they chafed at the attempted control of the Uzama chiefs they lived amongst, who had assumed the privileges of equals.

During this period, the sour relations between the royalist and republican parties erupted occasionally, yet a significant initial rapprochement took place. According to the Chief Ogiamien who held the title in 1951, this occurred before Oranmiyan’s departure, when drummers were performing before him:

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\text{Ogiame [Ogiamien] heard the sound of drummers and inquired what it was. He sent 4 men to fetch the drummers with their drums. The Oba was brought to him tied with a rope. The drums were doctor’s drums. When he got there, he begged Ogiame that Ewere should be a substitute for him. Ewere was the senior Ooni of Ife}, \text{ while Ogiamien’s general territory was Uhunmwum Idunmwun (personal communication, Ikpenmwosa Osemwegie, August 10, 1994).}
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\(^{24}\) Chief Osuna told Bradbury that the original Ogiefa was an itinerant \textit{oba} (ritual specialist), a Yoruba traditional doctor from Ife who had been living in Benin since the times of the last Ogiso ruler. When some of the Edos grew tired of Eviyan’s rule, it was the Ogiefa who traveled to Ife to bring a monarch (May 18, 1957, Bradbury archive, BS.27). Nevadomsky, however, sees him, as well as other Efa guild members, as an autochthone who takes care of a shrine to the land (“Kingship Succession Rituals in Benin. 3,” 1984, 50), while Eweka contradicts himself, first saying Ogiefa came with Oranmiyan from Ife, then noting that Ogiefa and the Efa guild “were the original people who God sent with the first Ogiso” (\textit{Evolution of Benin Chieftaincy Titles}, 1992, 30, 74). Dmitri M. Bondarenko and Peter M. Roese support the view that the Efa and Ogiefa were autochthones, reviewing the evidence in “Between the Ogiso and Oba Dynasties: An Interpretation of Interregnum in the Benin Kingdom,” \textit{History in Africa} 31 (2004): 105-108.

\(^{25}\) His frustrations were compounded by difficulties with the ferryman at the Ovia River crossing, much like those later inflicted by the Isekherhe who initially refused to help Oba Ewedo cross into Ogiamien’s territory (Egharevba, \textit{A Short History of Benin}, 1953, 10. In a 1967 interview, the then-Ogiamien referred to Oranmiyan’s arrival as an invasion involving “a long and bloody fight” (October 1967 interview in \textit{Spear Magazine}, quoted in Akinola, 1976, 35-36). Bondarenko and Roese see this battle as a logical continuation of a more basic struggle between the Uzama (then called \textit{edionevbo}, or “elders of the land”) who sent to Ife with the goal of controlling the state and the Evian/Ogiamien administrators (“Between the Ogiso and Oba Dynasties,” 2004).
daughter of Ogiefa. Ogiame consented and untied the rope. Ogiame had a senior son called Ubi and Ewere was married to him. It is because of this marriage that a link was brought about between Ogiefa and Ogiame. They call each other ọtẹn [“my sibling” or “my relation”]. Whenever it is necessary to purify Ogiame’s house as a result of a breach of taboos, or the women made the house impure, Ogiefa was the one who should come and make the house cool.26

The saying “Ogiamien l’Ubi, Ogiefa i gb’Ewere” (“Ogiamien doesn’t take part in Ubi, and Ogiefa doesn’t take part in Ewere”) refers to the outcome of this relationship, which will be discussed below.

Multiple variations of this story exist, none referencing the same ruler.

Egharevba does not include any ọba in his version, mentioning only that Ogiefa was playing his drums when Ubi, Ogiamien’s son, appeared and slashed the instruments. Ogiefa’s subsequent entreaties to continue drumming were accepted, and “a few years later Ogiefa gave his daughter Ewere in marriage to Ubi, the son of Ogiamwen, in order to please him.”27 Osemwegie’s version placed the story in Ewèka I’s reign, stating that Ubi was the first Ogiamien’s grandson, who in turn had assumed the title from his father. He said:

Ogiefa was one of the chiefs that came from Ife with marbles [to cure Ewèka from his childhood speech impediment]. He had the habit of playing the ighede drum, medicine drum, every evening. Normally it is played to purify or pollute the land. For the people playing, it purifies, but can be played against others. Ubi heard about the drum. He left old Benin with annoyance to destroy it. He came to Ogiefa’s house. When Ogiefa saw how tough Ubi was, and with troops, there was nothing he could tell the king. Ogiefa decided to bring out his daughter. He prepared her very well, and led some delegates to Ubi’s house, saying “See, the other day you came to destroy our drum, but we like you very much, we want to settle this case, we want to present this lady to you.” Her name was

26 Chief Ogiamien, June 14, 1951, Bradbury archive, A66. The “doctor’s drums” were ighede, played by ritual specialists before divination, during meditative trances, for special dances, and to inspire soldiers before battle (see Peavy, Kings, Magic, & Medicine, 2009, 71).
27 Egharevba, A Short History of Benin, 1953, 6.
Akọnnosunwenkhen [“pumpkin-white teeth”], the daughter of Ogiefa. She was very beautiful. When Ubi saw her, his annoyance reduced.28

The story about the rapprochement between the Ogiefa and the Ogiamien families presages the reconciliation of the royal and republican groups, with a woman bridging the camps. Osemwegie recounted that Oba Ehẹnmihen had urged his son Efabọ (the future Oba Òwẹdo) that it would be advisable to leave Usama and push into Benin City proper to rule, stating that he would pave the way by improving relations between the city dwellers and some of the Usama people. The quarrel between the two parties had cooled down. While there was still some enmity and reluctance to accept the monarchy, it was no longer pronounced. When Oba Òwẹdo came to the throne in the early 14th century and decided both to consolidate his rule and to escape Uzama control, the Ogiamien still controlled the city proper.29 Even per Egharevba’s royally-sanctioned account, Òwẹdo accomplished his goal with Ubi’s cooperation, despite the appearance of continued antagonism.30

Òwẹdo’s entry into Benin and the coronation reenactment

Oba Òwẹdo is said to have met secretly with Ubi multiple times, promising the latter expensive gifts if he could enter the city and assume general rule. Ubi agreed, but counselled this would only be possible through subterfuge, since many Òdo were still against the return of

28 Personal communication, Ikponmwosa Osemwegie, June 18, 1994. Osemwegie added that Akọnnosunwenkhen was nicknamed Òwere, a term associated with good fortune, because the Òwere leaf grew out of her grave, signifying a safe arrival for the Òranmiyan party. Melzian refers to her as “the daughter of one of the Ogi-efas,” adding “she was the wife of Ubi, and a very kind woman. Hence, her name has become a symbol of goodness. Thus, there is a greeting oxi-Òwe [E o godspeed! a lucky journey!]” A Concise Dictionary of the Bini Language, 1937, 57.
29 Personal communication, Ikponmwosa Osemwegie, June 18, 1994.
the monarchy. He instructed Ẹwedo that they should meet at the point where their respective domains were demarcated—opposing sides of the streams in the ferryman Isekhere’s territory. The Oba should announce his intentions to enter the city while carrying a cock wrapped in white cloth around his neck. Ubi would refuse entry, seize the rooster and run with it, instructing that war would follow in seven days. Ẹwedo should then offer a cow, a goat, some people, an agba stool and other goods if Ubi would let him pass and take control of the city on the seventh day.

Ẹwedo followed these instructions.\(^{31}\) The rooster, its presence and cloth indicating a sacrifice (perhaps in response to ominigbon divination), was duly snatched, and Ubi fled with it, chased by the Oba’s men. “He was saying ‘Ọ gua, Ọ gua, Ọ gua’ over and over— ‘This place has contained you.’ Ubi threw the chicken [when he came to where the cemetery was]. When they saw it, they left him. That became the present palace.”\(^{32}\)

After seven days, both parties were to meet and battle at Ẹkiokpagha, where Ubi would put up a token fight and then, as agreed, capitulate. Before the royal party reached the site, however, they sighted Ogiame’s Oliha and killed him, giving rise to the saying “A ma he se Ẹkiokpagha, a gbe Oliha Ogiame,” or “We have not yet reached Ẹkiokpagha, but we have killed Ogiame’s Oliha.” Chief Ogiame’s 1951 account negated this better-known account. He stated that Ogiame had told Ẹwedo that:

> on the day of the battle, Oliha-Ogiame must stand by the fence and some one [sic] must murder him. The head was to be thrown towards Iyase. The Iyase would rub his hand with the blood from it [that is, serve his right arm], then every body [sic] would say this was in truth a war. By private arrangement, it was not Ogiame’s Oliha who was murdered. Ẹwedo sent some one else and after he

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\(^{31}\) Chief Ogiame, June 14, 1951, Bradbury archive, A66.

\(^{32}\) Personal communication, Ikponmwosa Osemwegie, June 18, 1994.
was murdered, it was proclaimed that he was Oliha-Ogiamen.

This is likely historical revisionism, but whether 20th-century invention or fact, it demonstrates collusion and good will between the two formalized “enemies.”

After Ogiamen’s concession at Ekiokpagha (formerly a market, now by St. Matthew’s Church), a formal treaty was witnessed:

The Oba and Ogiamen, each held an ukhurhe and linked their right hands. [Ogiamen] said, “My daughter should not go to the Oba’s erie [harem]. My son should not be made omada [palace page] or uronisen. My children should not be murdered. If anybody contravenes these laws [he] should be killed by these ebo [medicines, charms].” The Oba said, “You must advise your children not to marry iberie [harem servants]. Ogiamen must not kill Ewedó’s children nor kill the Oba’s iberie. That neither Ogiamen nor his children should marry the daughter of the Oba.” They held hands. Ogiamen took some sand from the ground and put it in Ewedó’s palm, saying: “I sell this land to you and your children forever; that any Oba who reigns after you must come and divide the land with me again. He who contravenes this law, must be killed by these ebo.” Ogiamen did not relinquish his ownership of the land. On his side of Ekiokpagha, each Oba who comes to the throne is also to send an ukhurhe to Ogiamen together with stool and three men and a woman.33

Ewedó left Usama permanently, establishing his palace at the present site. As Obayemi noted, the graveyard location was strategic, as it related Ogiso-era “owners of the land” to the new monarch, lending his rule the legitimacy of the local ancestors.34 Despite the surface amity that allowed Ogiamen to retain his title as a chief under the new monarchy, Ewedó apparently did

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33 Chief Ogiamen, June 14, 1951, Bradbury archive, A66.
34 Ade M. Obayemi, “The Yoruba and Edo-Speaking Peoples and Their Neighbors Before 1600,” in History of West Africa, eds. J.F. Ade Ajayi and Michael Crowder, 3rd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 255-322. Nevadomsky concurs with this viewpoint, further noting that one of Chief Ogiamen’s praise names is “Ovbi Ughogio,” or “the Son of the Great Chamber of Soil” (“Kingship Succession Rituals in Benin,” 1984, 54-55; 92), the “Chamber” referring to the gods/ancestors of the land. Another reference to them occurs in his palace, where Ogiamen has a stepped shrine topped by a pot. This Ofeghenooyanowa shrine “indicates that Ogiamen is the owner of the soil on which his house is built.” (Chief Ogiamen, June 14, 1951, Bradbury archive, A67).
not fully trust him, because he sited his Isiènmwenro bodyguard in a quarter adjacent to Ogiamien’s palace.\(^{35}\)

Indeed, these two public encounters between Chief Ogiamien and Oba Ewedo regularly have been relived at coronations. The first takes place at an erected “bridge” hung with fresh palm fronds (the rivers Omi and Oteghele that once formed a natural boundary no longer exist). After this morning challenge, the monarch advances to his public crowning. Seven days later, the now-symbolic Ekiokpagha battle occurs. A royal headquarters pavilion is decorated by fresh palm fronds (\(ome\)), while sugarcane fronds demarcate the Ogiamien’s side, recalling the \(ominigbon\) divination code’s sentence.\(^{36}\) Ogiamien’s sugarcane represents the spirit world, the ancestors of the land, whose good will the rulers must repeatedly buy at the coronation and placate annually at the Ugie Erhoba ceremony when the Oba sacrifices a goat to the tree-marked shrine in the ancestral courtyard. At the battle, the Oba’s \(ome\) represents this world, an established political reality.

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\(^{36}\) For photographic documentation of both Ogiamien sequences, see Nevadomsky, “Kingship Succession Rituals in Benin,” 1984 and Tam Fiofiori, \(A\ Benin\ Coronation:\ Oba\ Erediauwa\) (n. p.: Suna Art, 2011).
At the time of the coronation, the Oba sends Ogiamien an erhe stool (Fig. 2) of the type priests and chiefs acting in a priestly capacity use, as well as an ukhurhe (Fig. 3). Talbot remarked that the ukhurhe shaft included “four persons with the Ogiame at the summit wearing his crown to show his ownership of the land. The following insignia of the Ogiame were imitated by the Obba [sic]--the chair Ekise, the small sword Akwoho, the fan Zuzu and the leather box Ekpoki.” Colonial reports list other gifts from the monarch:

- two men, two women and two of every kind of cattle and also should give permission to the Ogiame to rule beyond the boundary at Ekiokpagha. Up to the present time . . . the prescribed gifts are given and the Ogiame is given

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permission to rule though it would seem that since the time of Oba Ewuare the Ogiame has not in fact exercised any administrative function.\textsuperscript{38}

In turn, Ogiamien makes part of the throne (ekete) for the Oba, because his ancestor was the custodian of the Ogiso throne.\textsuperscript{39} These exchanges mark the inherent tension between the former ruler and custodian of the ancestors of the land and his conqueror. According to a past Ogiamien, the title to the land is not only resuscitated at each coronation, but whenever the Ogiamien and the Oba meet. Raymond Tong, an Education Officer with The British Council, wrote:

He showed us a particular handshake, which on certain ceremonial occasions, he and his ancestors had always used when greeting the Oba. When shaking hands, the chief as head of his family, must place a piece of earth in the palm of the Oba’s hand. This is to symbolize the fact that he recognizes that the land of Benin belongs to the Oba, and to nobody else.\textsuperscript{40}

Although this story appears to convey submission, the gesture could also be interpreted as a challenge for ownership of the land. Assistant District Officer H. F. Marshall equated land ownership with fertility, the Ogiamien, and “certain other persons who represent the original owners of the land,” observing that such ownership “can not [sic] be acquired either by conquest or by peaceful penetration.”\textsuperscript{41} Bradbury, too, spoke of the outcome of the Ekiokpasha

\textsuperscript{38} H. F. Marshall, “Intelligence Report Benin City,” August 12, 1939, Benin City, Nigeria, 10. Dennett also mentioned that Ogiamien ruled the district of “Sapoba” (presumably the Sakponba Road area near his present palace), as the Oliha was in charge of Udo or the Ero was in charge of Uselu (R. E. Dennett, \textit{At the Back of the Black Man’s Mind}, [London: MacMillan, 1906], 182).

\textsuperscript{39} Oba Erediauwa’s throne was usually covered with white cloth, but it was an enlarged ekpokin box, consisting of an interlocking set of cylinders, its top and bottom projecting circles. This also can clearly be seen on 16\textsuperscript{th}-century plaques, such as the British Museum’s Af1898,0115.23. This throne type is related to that of ancient Ile and some Igala settlements, and seems to have once had a substantial southern Nigerian distribution. In Benin, Ogiamien traditionally makes the throne bottom from bark, while the Isekpokin leatherworking guild makes the top (Exorugue, May 22, 1959, Bradbury archive, BS243). Medicine presumably is kept within.

\textsuperscript{40} Raymond Tong. \textit{Figures in Ebony: Past and Present in a West African City.} (London: Cassell, 1958), 101. Since Tong worked in Nigeria from 1949 to 1958, the Ogiamien he met is likely to have been the same titleholder Bradbury interviewed in 1951.

\textsuperscript{41} Marshall, “Intelligence Report,” 1939, 11.
struggles as “a ritual division of the land between the two.”\textsuperscript{42} At Oba Òewka Il’s coronation in 1914, colonial commissioner of Benin Province James Watt observed an aspect that no other author mentioned. His notes on the Ekiokpagha treaty state that Ogiamien “returned to make peace with the Oba and shared with him a handful of earth retaining a portion as a symbol that he retained a part of the land for himself. Terms of peace were arranged and with this reconciliation the ceremony of the installation of the Oba ended.”\textsuperscript{43}

These references to a less-than-complete resolution have not been merely lip service. In a discussion of \textit{ikega} (a cowrie strand that can stand in for the arm or shrines to the arm) with Bradbury, the Ogiamien mentioned that, during an unspecified time, he wore miniature machetes on his wrist, then threw them on the ground at night. “When people see them on the ground the next morning they know Ogiamie [sic] has used them to fight for the land,”\textsuperscript{44} a statement that hardly seems like a full repudiation of rights to land ownership or of duties to the land. Nonetheless, the titleholder’s continued relationship with the land apparently remained purely ritual rather than political.

\textbf{The forbidden and its outcome}

After the Oranmiyan dynasty took control of the totality of the city, the Ogiamien family appears to have dropped out of historical view for some time, resurfacing during Oba Ohen’s early 15\textsuperscript{th}-century reign. Egharevba briefly referred to a critical incident, noting that Ohen developed paralysis after about 25 years of rule, and that Iyasẹ Emuze had discovered this despite the monarch’s efforts to disguise his

\textsuperscript{42} R. E. Bradbury, \textit{The Benin Kingdom and the Edo-Speaking Peoples of South-Western Nigeria} (London: International African Institute, 1957), 20.


\textsuperscript{44} Bradbury archive, BS.338.
condition. Angry about his exposure, the Oba had the iyase killed at the palace, and “the people rose to arms.”\textsuperscript{45} In retaliation for the death of their leader, the chiefs stoned Ohen to death with kaolin-coated rocks, urging him to “eat chalk,” the only food the monarch is said to consume.\textsuperscript{46}

The root of the story is the monarch’s paralysis, often alluded to in Benin art by his Olokun-like mudfish legs. Ohen was anxious to conceal his state from his chiefs and subjects because a blemished divine king would have been rejected, resulting in the monarch’s death or exile. Given the belief that calamitous occurrences result from either human or supernatural agency, the cause of the paralysis is central to the story. Though Egharevba did not discuss this, there are indeed unpublished accounts of its genesis that lead us back to the unsettled quarrel between the Ogiamien and the Oba. Talbot referred to it in 1926 when he spoke of “Awhen” and his “disturbed reign” that saw the rebellion of Ogiamien and the Uzama.\textsuperscript{47}

Several oral traditions recorded at mid-century—not all in accord—discuss Ohen’s secret romance with a woman who lived at Uté village, across the Ikpoba River. Bradbury noted that Ohen fell in love with a woman there whose father was a powerful native doctor whom the Oba feared to offend. He therefore only met her late at night. During one visit, Ohen overstayed. To avoid discovery and escape without revealing himself, he ordered masks carved. These were worn by “some men and the oba himself,” and were the origin of the Ekoko n’Uté

\textsuperscript{45} Egharevba, \textit{A Short History of Benin}, 1953, 13.
\textsuperscript{46} A product of Olokun’s realm, kaolin (\textit{orhue}), which the Edo call “chalk” in English,” is a symbol of rejoicing, purity, and all things good. Palace protocol precludes comments about the monarch eating or drinking.
masquerade.\footnote{Bradbury archive, R6.} In a variation, Orhue Ọmọrẹgbẹ oh’Origie told Bradbury that Ohẹn had no son, so a diviner instructed him to marry Elẹrẹ (sometimes referred to by others as Elẹye), the daughter of the Ogi’Utẹ, so the monarch visited her secretly at night. In this account, her father used medicine to ensure Ohẹn wouldn’t awaken early, then caught him. Subsequently both her father and the monarch danced to the palace, disguised as masqueraders. Elẹrẹ later bore a son named Ogun, subsequently crowned as Oba Ëwuare.\footnote{June 28, 1953, Bradbury archive, US3. Orhue Ọmọrẹgbẹ oh’Origie added that Elere had four breasts, two to feed the people and two to feed the royal family, and that this was the origin of the masquerade’s name, since “koko” means “feed.” Ekhaguosa Aisien recorded song lyrics from Ute that included “The Queen mother endowed with four breasts! With two of them she nurtured the Oba for the Edo people! With the other two she nurtured the Edo people for the Obal!” [\textit{Ewuare: Oba of Benin} (Benin City, Nigeria, 2012)]. Orhue Ọmọrẹgbẹ oh’Origie’s statement that Elere’s father accompanied Ohẹn to the palace seems to be a mistake; unlike other versions, it does not account for Elere’s smuggling into the harem.} In this account, her father used medicine to ensure Ohẹn wouldn’t awaken early, then caught him. Subsequently both her father and the monarch danced to the palace, disguised as masqueraders. Elẹrẹ later bore a son named Ogun, subsequently crowned as Oba Ëwuare.\footnote{As told to D.U. Emokpae, Bradbury archive, R.3.} This story mentioned neither Utẹ nor the masquerade. A fourth informant stated that Ohẹn’s paralysis resulted from medicine the husband of the Oba’s lover placed along his path to her, laming the ruler when he stepped on it.\footnote{Mr. Akagbosa, Bradbury archive, R.5.} While these stories are inconsistent, they circle the associations of Ohẹn’s secret lover, the Ekoko n’Utẹ masquerade, Ohẹn’s paralysis, and the birth of Ogun.

Why did the identity of Ohẹn’s lover need to be secret? How was his paralysis generated and why? Why was the Ekoko n’Utẹ masquerade associated with subterfuge? What was the purported importance of Ogun’s birth? Examining each question illuminates the short version of the story. The Oba was entitled to marry nearly anyone he wanted to, already wed or not—except for members of Ogi’amien’s family, as outlined by the treaty’s conditions. Paralysis is not traditionally considered to be merely a medical misfortune, but rather the result of directed
malicious medicine. All versions of the story that mention Ekoko n’Utẹ stress the impromptu nature of the masquerade, and the need to disguise the ruler’s presence with a lover, bringing us back to the question of why she couldn’t openly enter the royal harem. Ogun’s birth and the secret lover’s association with it may provide the key to interpretation.

Egharevba stated that Ogun/Ewuare had two elder brothers, Egbeka and Orobiru, who preceded him on the throne, as did his younger brother Uwaifiokun. Uwaifiokun had accompanied Ogun into banishment after the latter’s unnamed offense, then returned to Benin in advance and usurped Ogun’s throne. Two later twentieth-century accounts are more specific. One explicitly linked the lover, paralysis, the masquerade, and Ogun’s birth to “the dispute that will never be settled,” that is, to the palm/sugarcane demarcation of rights to the land. Osemwegie recounted that, despite the Ekiokpagha Treaty’s ban on marriage between the royal and Ogiamien families, Ohẹn resolved to take a bride from the latter. He felt this would finally settle the dispute and any question regarding his dynastic rule. Because of the ban, he knew the union would have to occur secretly. He heard that one of Ubi’s descendants, a beautiful woman named Elẹrẹ, lived in Utẹ village. He sent gifts to her, donned a disguise, and began sneaking out of the palace to visit her at night, accompanied only by an omada page or two. This necessitated crossing the Ikpoba River. When Ohẹn met Elẹrẹ, he made her many promises contingent upon their marriage. Although she said it was forbidden for a daughter of the Ogiamien family to wed a royal, Ohẹn convinced her. His night disappearances made courtiers suspicious. After discovering Ohẹn’s route, they reported it to the iyase, who

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52 Egharevba, A Short History of Benin, 1953: 14.
53 Although Aisien gives her name as Ovenmwen, he also refers to one of Ewuare’s praise names: “Adagbafi, n’ovbi Elere” (“Adagbafi, son of Elere”) (Ewuare, 2012, 5, 9).
contacted the Ehuae of Ikpoba, who lived by the river.\textsuperscript{54} When Ehuae knew it was almost time for Ohẹn to cross, he planted a dangerous medicine called \textit{ero} under the bridge, and the Oba stepped over it. Ehuae then removed the medicine, because if Ohẹn recrossed it upon his return, its effects would be neutralized. While the monarch was still at Utẹ, his enemies also used \textit{aban}, an iron, staple-like medicine, and nailed it so Ohẹn would oversleep at Elẹrẹ’s house and be exposed. The Oba indeed could not be roused until the \textit{aban} was removed, and by then it was daylight. How could he return, his treaty-breaking exposed? He took materials from the house and improvised masquerade costumes for himself and Elẹrẹ. Accompanied by the \textit{emada}, they danced to the palace and asked to perform for the monarch. The Iya and his colleagues were delighted. The believed the Oba was still at Utẹ, and felt his absence would be revealed by the masqueraders’ request. Instead, the two masqueraders entered the palace, Ohẹn found substitutes to don their costumes, and then he emerged to watch their performance. Elẹrẹ passed into the harem, later bearing the baby boy known as Ogun.\textsuperscript{55} After some time, the bridge’s medicine of “slow poison”\textsuperscript{56} set in, paralyzing Ohẹn. His enmity with

\textsuperscript{54} An enigmatic saying probably refers to this event: “\textit{Ehuae n’Ikpoba rue emwin y’okhoror okie okue}” or “Ehuae of Ikpoba did something.” Personal communication, Ikponmwosa Osemwegie, July 15, 1994.

\textsuperscript{55} Personal communication, Ikponmwosa Osemwegie, July 15, 1994. Egharevba placed Ewuare’s maternal natal home near Udo at Esi (\textit{A Short History of Benin}, 1953, 19), where he spent his last years and died, and reiterated this statement in a personal communication to Patrick Darling in 1977 (\textit{Archaeology and History in Southern Nigeria: The Ancient Linear Earthworks of Benin and Ishan}. [Oxford: B.A.R., 1984], 155). S. B. Omorogie, however, believed Ewuare’s maternal village was Utẹ [\textit{Emotan and the Kings of Benin} (London: Longman, 1972)], as does Aisien, who names Esi as the birthplace of Ewuare’s maternal grandmother (\textit{Ewuare}, Benin City, 2012, 2). In 1965, A. F. C. Ryder raised the possibility that Ewuare may have been a foreign conqueror (“A Reconsideration of the Ife-Benin Relationship,” \textit{Journal of African History} 6 [1, 1965]: 36), later amending this to suggest he might have been strongly influenced by nearby states (\textit{Benin and the European states 1485-1897} [London: Longmans, 1969], 8). In 1980, Ryder again speculated about Ewuare, stating his reign “suggests a widespread struggle in which Benin came out on the losing side. . . from civil war or external attack,” postulating he may have been associated with Udo (“The Benin Kingdom” in \textit{Groundwork of Nigerian History}, ed. Obaro Ikime [Ibadan: Heinemann, 1980], 113, 115). Despite Ryder’s reasoning, Ewuare’s integration into many aspects and sources of Benin’s oral history do not support foreign birth.

\textsuperscript{56} The late Ine of Ibesanmwan, Chief David Omorogie also attributed the poisoning to the romantic relationship’s subterfuge and the chiefs’ annoyance: “Oba Ohẹn met a lady and fell for her. They had a secret marriage. An old woman told chief [the iyase] to watch out. He prepared an \textit{okinruwin} (stroke) \textit{oro} (paralysis) \textit{umion} (lose limbs’
the iyase increased, the latter’s attempts to catch him out resulting in his death by stoning. In turn, the chiefs, bereft at the loss of their leader (the iyase) at the instigation of the Oba, dug a disguised pit under the throne, trapping Ohen and stoning him to death.

S. B. Omorogie concurred with the certain aspects of both accounts, albeit with variations. In his version, Elere’s father had begun marriage negotiations with Benin’s Oliha when she began meeting Ohen secretly. Her father then disguised them both with “two of” the Ekoko n’Utẹ masks—the implication being that they were two of many, which is not the case—and used this subterfuge to gain her harem entrance. Omorogie did not link the Oba’s paralysis with this incident, nor did he associate it with iyase Emuze’s curiosity, agency, and subsequent murder, although he discussed these incidents. He did, however, link the Edo reluctance for Ogun/Ewuare’s rule with his mother Elere’s heritage, though he associated her not with the Ogiamien family, but with Ogiso Qdoligie.57 There does not, however, appear to be any marriage ban between the present royal family and the descendants of the Ogiso, as there is between them and the Ogiamien family. A third individual, Chief Ogiamien himself, did not
expand upon these historical events, but allowed that Elêre had been a member of his extended family.  

While the Ekoko n’Utê masquerade performance includes no references to the monarch’s paralysis or the Iyase’s murder, its impromptu beginnings are recalled by a common saying: “Ekoko i mwen ihuan ovbehe” or “Ekoko has no song.” Its accompaniment remains a simple, repetitive verse: “Ogbe uvbe rre ekpo” or “Next year, may we see you, masquerade.”

While it can perform for various occasions in its home village, it still performs annually at the palace. In the 1990s, it usually danced on an Otuê occasion during the Ìgù period. Osemwegie recalled that under Òba Akênzua, it had often appeared early on the day of the Òba’s Ìgù. Although this may have occurred at times, the Ekoko n’Utê masquerade was associated most frequently with Otuê Ìgù’Óba.

The male masquerader covers his face with strip cloth, while the female wears an

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58 Personal communication, Chief Osarobo Okuonghae, the Ogiamien of Benin, July 12, 1994.
59 Personal communication, Ikpenmwosa Osemwegie, July 15, 1994. Aisien, however, recorded another song from Jacob Okungbowa, one of the Ute singers. Its translated lyrics include: “The mother of Ogun, the son of Ohen, I recognize you! Mother of Ewuare!” While this song is purportedly sung at the palace, its lyrical direction aims solely at the masquerader representing the female. This may indicate a praise song used at other occasions in Ute that later migrated to palace performances; otherwise, the “Ekoko has no song” saying would not have arisen.
60 On an occasion in the 1990s when Igü’Óba was publicly performed, I saw the masqueraders dance at Otuê Igü’Óba. In years when that ceremony was private, Ekoko n’Utê danced on the Otue of Ugie Erhọba. Ikpenmwosa Osemwegie said he had seen the masqueraders perform in the early morning of Igü’Óba (personal communication, Dec. 22, 1994). Those who associated it with Otue Igü’Óba included Chief Uniöyen (Dec. 22, 1957, Bradbury archive, R31), its priest, the Ekhure of Ekoko (Dec. 21, 1958, Bradbury archive, B4), and Ëró (Igüe and Other Festivals, 2003, 26).
antelope mask (Fig. 4). The former is known as Ekoko Ogiwére, a direct royal allusion. The latter’s narrow jaw and lowered eyes are marks of female attractiveness, and the masquerade is evoked when praising women: “Ọ ruẹ agbamwen vbe agbamwen Ekoko” or “Her jaw is like the Ekoko masquerade.” Like a number of other Benin masquerades (Ovia, Ovbo, and, to a lesser extent, Ododua), both of the masqueraders’ headpieces stress feathers, a component that differentiates them from the costumes of most neighboring ethnic groups. On the Ekoko n’Uté headpieces, the tightly-packed, splaying feather bouquets consist of long, dark plumes topped with the tied-on red tail feathers of the African Grey Parrot, the latter a choice that invokes the spirit world for the Ẹdo and the Yoruba alike. Both Ekoko costumes also include mirrored lappets that hang from the back of the headpiece. Mirrors usually suggest water in Ẹdo thought, and may here reference the Ikpoba River. The costumes are of locally-woven cloth, and both performers wear raffia-style ankle rattles like those worn by Ovia masqueraders. Each has a priest whose gender matches that of his/her masquerade. Even the priestess carries an ada, a mark of high honor that denotes palace favor.

The masquerade’s place in the Igue ceremonies is now fairly low-key, its audience sometimes not even including the Ọba, though its dance and prayers are directed to his usual place on the dais in Ẹwuare’s courtyard. The event it commemorates, however, has perpetuated its appearance for more than half a millennium. That this forbidden union produced Prince Ogun (later Ọba Ẹwuare) may be one of the chief reasons the latter was exiled in his youth, his very existence abhorrent to the citizens until all remaining options were

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61 Personal communication, Ikpenmwosa Osemwegie, July 15, 1994. Although Aisien names the masquerades as Elere (female) and Origie (male), he mismatches their costume with their gender, attributing the carved mask to the male (Ewuare, 2012, 7). Aisien, like Bradbury’s informant Orhue Omoregbé oh’Origie (see above), attributes the masquerade subterfuge to Ọnogie of Ute, the girl’s father.
extinguished.

Ohẹn’s paralysis is commemorated by the fish-legged Olokun-like figures common in Benin art.\textsuperscript{62} Other associations between his malady and subsequent events are also visually recalled. The Ine of Igbesanmwan stated that the crocodile heads that appear at the Oba’s waist on certain 16\textsuperscript{th}-century plaques were a mode Ohẹn began. The variety of crocodile was the small, more docile type known as \textit{eghughu},\textsuperscript{63} about which it is said, \textit{“Te eghughu buaro rua na gba,”} or “The ‘alligator’ will look at you and tie up its mouth.”\textsuperscript{64} The animal is used in medicine to prevent enemies from creating obstacles, as well as medicine designed to paralyze opponents. Ohẹn’s use of it may have been related to an attempted cure for his legs. His reported founding of the major Olokun shrine at Urhonigbe may have been due to similar efforts.\textsuperscript{65} The consequences of Ohẹn’s murder of his overly-curious Iyasẹ are reenacted annually when high-ranking chiefs greet the ruler at the Igue celebrations by “playing” a gesture across their horizontally-held \textit{eben} ceremonial swords. It signifies “Where is the Iyasẹ?” His returning gesticulation belies any knowledge.

\textbf{Ẹwuare and the distortion of the Ubi-Ẹwerẹ story}

Egharevba notes that when Ogun was still in hiding, he came to the city and sought refuge with Ogiefa, who hid him and “then went to tell the Ogiamwe [sic] and others so that

\textsuperscript{62} Fish-legged figures are multivalent symbols in Benin. They can be interpreted as the sea/river deity himself, as Ohẹn with paralyzed legs, or as any Oba in his divine state. Besides the deification mode or the latter, it serves as a cautionary image to monarchs, reminding them that unacceptable behavior such as Ohẹn’s have consequences, including regicide.

\textsuperscript{63} \textit{Ewuwu} appears to be the shy \textit{Crocodylus cataphractus} or \textit{Mecistops cataphractus}. \textit{Agbaka}, the larger and fiercer crocodile species, is also well-known in Benin and its environs.

\textsuperscript{64} Personal communication, Chief David Omorogie, Aug 29, 1994.

\textsuperscript{65} Ikponmwoosa Osomwegie suggested that because the paralyzing medicine was associated with a river, Ohẹn may have sought a more powerful river to overcome it. Personal communication, July 15, 1994.

66 Egharevba, A Short History of Benin, 1953, 17.
67 Egharevba, A Short History of Benin, 1953, 14-17.
68 Though small pieces of firewood can also be used, the Ubi rite begins with “dead raffia brands” (personal communication, Ikponmwosa Osemwegie, July 6, 1994). Aghama Omoruyi concurs in his discussion of the Benin “moats,” noting the “only surviving ceremony is the throwing of ubi palm torches” (Benin Anthology [Benin: Cultural Publications, 1981], 28). Here the raffia of the royal party resurfaces, recalling the ominigbon saying. Nevadomsky points out that raffia is used in medicines for chicken pox (“Kingship Succession Rituals in Benin, 3,” 92), which relates its use to Ohun Igihian and how the treaty prevents skin and other diseases from affecting the populace.
present them to citizens as symbols of good luck, the latter placing small pieces of the leaves on their foreheads. At the palace, members of the Oba’s “official” family, the Ihogbe guild of royal ancestral priests, offer ẹwerẹ leaves to the monarch, as do his blood relations. Perhaps significantly, the Ihogbe not only medicinally reinforce the head and body of the monarch and lead the worship of his ancestors, they also propitiate the spirits of the land, i.e., the pre-Ọranmiyan, Ogiso-era rulers.

The instigation of these dual ceremonies seems to have been Ẹwuare’s way of deemphasizing his connection to his parents’ forbidden marriage. Osemwegie suggested that one aspect of the Igu’Ọba festival is thanksgiving that the Ọranmiyan party successfully reached Benin to rule, and that the Ubi/Ẹwerẹ ceremonies emphasize the insulting and pursuit of Ubi alongside a desire to bring “our own woman” home, her nickname of Ẹwerẹ synonymous with “safe arrival.” Ogiamien cannot take part in the Ubi ceremony because it would seem as if he celebrated his ancestor’s capitulation, and, in turn, Ogiefa cannot take part in Ẹwerẹ because it would be a celebration of the necessity of past accommodation.

The Ubi/Ẹwerẹ saying’s significance is not confined to events of the early historical period or to Ẹwuare’s commemoration of them. It additionally acts as a check on a story that is in common circulation today. Because of Egharevba’s A Short History of Benin, most people now associate the dual ceremonies of Ubi and Ẹwerẹ with a tale about three of Oba Ẹwuare’s wives. Egharevba recounted that the monarch married Ubi, the eldest of Chief Ogiẹka’s three daughters, then drove her from the harem because of bed-wetting and other bad behavior. He subsequently married her sister Ẹwerẹ, who wept for the company of another sister, Ọyọyo. To stop her tears, he then married this third sister as well. This story did not appear until

69 Personal communication, Ikponmwosa Osemwegie, June 18, 1994.
Egharevba’s third edition of 1960, and was repeated in the fourth edition of 1968. The recounting of the earlier Ubi and Ẹwere—the Ogiamien family’s Ubi and the Ogiefa family’s Ẹwere—remained in both of these editions as well. That the original tale, which related to the accommodation of settlers by Benin’s old guard, should be shunted aside in favor of a tale of three wives, none of whom apparently bore the Oba surviving sons, is curious indeed. Only women with major roles in the court and kingdom, such as Emotan, Idia, or Idẹn, tend to be remembered by name in Benin history. The power of the printed word seems responsible for the popular supplanting of the earlier version of Ẹwere’s meaning.

Certainly the lyrics of the songs sung at the Ẹwere ceremony include no references to the sisters; instead, they reference happiness, blessings, and peace. While the word oyọyọ appears in one of the songs, Osemwegie stressed it referred to the shaking of bunches of ẹwere leaves, not to a name. The ceremony of Ẹwere contains numerous allusions to dynastic origins and its featured participants are members of Ihogbe. That a major ceremony would celebrate the good or bad harem behavior of women who did not even give birth to monarchs would be extremely strange; if such a festival were to exist, the Ibiwe palace society members who work with the harem should have been its key actors.

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71 The triple marriage story was, however, in circulation in Benin by at least the early 1950s, when Bradbury interviewed Chief Esogban (May 2 and 3, 1951, Bradbury archive, A8). In the latter’s rendition, however, Ubi was rejected from the harem because diviners told Ewuare that her presence had led to his illness and that of many of his wives, as well as to many deaths in the town. The remainder of Chief Esogban’s version was very close to that Egharevba published in 1960.


73 Personal communication, Ikponmwosa Osemwegie, July 1, 1994.

74 Curnow, Iyare!, 2016, 137-138.
The official enemy and the 1897 survival

Because of the present dynasty’s slow conquest of Benin City and the part the Ogiamien line played in first obstructing and then colluding with this dynasty, Chief Ogiamien’s position remains that of a formal enemy of the Oba. He does not attend palace functions regularly, nor does he take part in most ceremonies. His appearance at the coronation for the two rites of historical reenactment has, however, remained a key role. Because the former Ogiamien had died before Oba Erediauwa’s 1979 enthronement, his adolescent son’s chieftaincy installation had to be rushed in order to allow his participation (Fig. 5).

Despite “official” enmity, not all Oba/Ogiamien relations were cool. Indeed, Oba Esigie’s early 16th-century relationship with his Ogiamien appears to have been quite close, for when the monarch quarreled with the Uzama N’Ihinron and created the Uzama N’Ibie to take over

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75 This is not to the degree of someone declared the Oba’s enemy, an unenviable position that involves public disgrace, a ban on palace visits, and burial restrictions. Rather it is akin to certain other hereditary roles that allude to historical conflicts, such as the Oheñukoni, or high priest of Okhuaihe. Okhuaihe, one of Ewuare’s most stalwart and powerful friends, was betrayed by him and given a domain as a bribe to leave the capital. The Ohenukoni comes to Benin only for his installation, and the mere threat of his approaching the city’s border results in presents being sent to conciliate him (personal communication, Oheñukoni, Sept. 4, 1995).
some of their ceremonial duties, he appointed Ogiamien one of its members.\textsuperscript{76} Although the histories of all Ogiamien title-holders and their relationship to the palace are not well-known, the present titleholder, Ogiamien Osarobo Okuonghae, spoke of Oba Erediauwa with respect and cordiality.\textsuperscript{77}

\textsuperscript{76} Eweka, \textit{Evolution of Benin Chieftaincy Titles}, 1992, 40.
The depredations of the 1897 British invasion resulted in extensive metropolitan destruction, including damage to major shrines and homes and a fire that consumed most of the palace. The only major chiefly structure to survive to the present is Ogiamien’s palace78 (Figs. 6, 7). Its outer wall includes a blocked-up doorway, opened only for the Oba’s entrance during the coronation period,79 while its warren-like courtyard structure includes numerous secular and sacred corners. One such is the shrine in what Ogiamien Osarobo referred to as “the treaty room,” where the monarch’s gifts at the time of his installation are kept (Fig. 8): a priestly stool (erhe), ukhurhe, ekpokin box, and an agba rectangular stool. Family members attribute the survival of the building and some of its shrine furniture to divine intervention on the part of the ancestral spirits of the land, who protected the descendants of Evian, Ogiamien, and Ubi.

Fig. 8. Chief Ogiamien’s “treaty room.” The agba stool is at front left. Photograph by Kathy Curnow, 1992.

78 The Edo use the English word “palace” for the homes of wealthy or major Benin chiefs’ homes; it is meant to imply status, and does not here refer to royalty.

The National Commission for Museums and Monuments declared the palace a National Heritage Site in 1959. Nevadomsky states it was home to about 400 people in 1920, but only a handful were resident in its harem by the 1990s, leaving the main house a monument, rather than living quarters. As was standard for large chiefly dwellings of the past, the harem is separated from the main structure that was built as a series of interconnected open courtyards, with rooms arranged around their perimeters (Fig. 9). Ogiamien’s palace still shows the integration of religion and daily life, with over 30 shrines, dedicated to such beings as the High God Osanobua, the divinity of the ocean and wealth Olokun, the deity of medicine Osun, the power of the arm’s accomplishments, and separate altars to male and female family ancestors (Fig. 10). One room is dedicated to the Shrine of the Ground. Although Benin includes several shrines to the ground/earth (otoe), most are out-of-doors at sites marked by ikhinmwin trees; this is not. Is this the Great Chamber of Soil to which the chief’s praise name refers?

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Recent recurrence

The periodic conflict between the royal family and Ogiamien resurfaced during preparations for the 2016 coronation. The present titleholder, Ogiamien Osarobo Okuonghae, traveled overseas to pursue a graduate degree in 1998 and apparently remained there, purportedly out of touch with his extended family. A faction of the Ogiamien family declared him missing and presumed dead, with no known son and heir. They took it upon themselves to not only select a new Ogiamien, but install this titleholder themselves on September 9, 2015. This flouted tradition. Since Oba Ewedo’s time, the Ogiamien chieftaincy has been a palace title, with its installation conducted there, the monarch presiding. The preparation for and “installation” of this faction’s chosen titleholder, hotel owner Rich Arisco Osemwengie, a prominent member of the PDP political party, as Joseph Nevadomsky noted in “The Owegbe Cult: Political and Ethnic Rivalries in Early Postcolonial Benin City.” Umewaen 1 (2016): 65, the proliferation of national media outlets, education, political parties, and various types of
periodical called *The Ogiamien Trumpet*. The Secretary of the Edo State Government, Julius Ihonvbere, condemned this tabloid in a press statement on Sept. 11, 2015. He declared that the publication, whose purported intent was the “unity” and “renaissance” of the Ogiamien family, used “abusive language” and showed disrespect towards the monarch. Ihonvbere invoked sections of the 1979 Traditional Rulers and Chieftaincy Law to state that self-proclamation of chieftaincy or traditional rule is a criminal offence.  

Osemwengie and five supporters were ordered held on Sept. 16, 2015, some months after sending letters to then Edaiken, Eheneden Erediauwa, and Governor Oshiomhole. His list of demands included recognition of the Ogiamien titleholder as a monarch rather than a chief, the appointment of his own traditional council, acknowledgement of his “Utantan Benin Nation’s” boundaries in parts of Oredo, as well as Ikpoba-Okha, Orhionmwon, and Uhunmwode Local Government Areas (with associated payments), as well as general reparations of 350 million naira. State Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice Henry Idahagbon, prosecuted the case, referring to the actions as an attempted “traditional coup.” A few weeks later, one of Osemwengie’s “installers” was killed by a bus that struck him while he was sitting

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84 The letters and the initial *Ogiamien Trumpet* publication apparently date to June, 2015, nearly a year before Oba Erediauwa’s demise was announced, a severe breach of Benin protocol. Some of the particulars of the letters and the *Trumpet*’s claims can be found in Osadolo, “Ogiamien Vs Oba of Benin,” 2016. Osemwengie and his younger brother Patrick Osabohien were arrested; a third person was to be incarcerated but was never located or jailed.


outside his home, an action attributed by many to supernatural sanction. On Dec. 11, 2015, the Iyase of Benin led members of the palace Ewaisé guild (traditional doctors and diviners), the Ihogbe (guild of the royal ancestors), and additional ritual specialists to multiple city shrines, cursing the pretender to the Ogiamien title and his cohorts as Oghian Oba, or enemies of the Oba.

For the past year, the escalated friction has played out in the media. Palace spokesman Chief Ayobahan diminished the importance of the Ekiokpagha Treaty and called the Ogiamien family “slaves” whose palace was little more than “a cave.” Osemwengie’s supporters retorted with accusations that the Oba was merely “a tenant” on their land, further asserting that Evian had actually been a member of the Ogiso royal family rather than an Ogiso-era chief, a claim never made before. They went on to discredit the palace’s assertions that the last known Ogiso-era prince, the exiled Ekaladerhan, was identical to the Ife dynasty’s founder Oduduwa, a viewpoint they attributed to the late Oba Erediauwa. While the Oba did publicize

89 Chief Aboyahan stated, “The Oba goes there not because it is traditional but for formality. It is to remember an event where the Ogiamien were defeated and crushed” in Gabriel Enogholase, “Ogiamien plays no part in coronation of Oba of Benin—Palace chief,” Vanguard, Feb. 20, 2016, http://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/02/ogiamien-plays-no-part-in-coronation-of-oba-of-benin-palace-chief/.
this historical version, he was not its originator, for it had already been recorded at least as early as the 1950s, when R. E. Bradbury was researching in Benin, and reiterated by several Edo authors from 1970 to 1973, prompting historian G. A. Akinola to investigate their claims that year via Benin City fieldwork.

Osemwengie’s supporters even asserted the postponement of the coronation from September to October of 2016, due to a shift in the date of state elections, was actually the result of their own court case’s delay, implying that the Edaiken could not be crowned until their demands were considered. Three Senior Advocates of Nigeria quickly repudiated the claim, noting the rescheduling was due to prior court engagements and was unrelated to the coronation. The Edo State Government’s criminal case against Osemwengie was overturned by the state High Court, and the government undertook an appeal. The contentiousness continued. Osemwengie sought an injunction to delay the Oba’s coronation because the

91 Curnow, *Iyare!* 2016, 178. Although Bradbury’s archives are publicly available at the Birmingham University Library, they are not digitized and therefore authors such as Bondarenko (“Advent of the Second [Oba] Dynasty, 2003, 68 and Akinola (“The Origin of the Eweka Dynasty of Benin, 1976) attribute the Ekaladerhan story to shifting political goals in the 1970s. This alternative story, however, existed at least two decades before.

92 Akinola, “The Origin of the Eweka Dynasty of Benin,” 1976, 28-29, 34. The Ihama of Ihogbe and other chiefs corroborated the identification of Ekaladerhan with Oduduwa, but Akinola stated that Oba Akenzua, after eliciting what information Akinola had unearthed, responded with “Who told you that?” in apparent surprise. Akinola concluded that his own interview and a subsequent one with an Ibadan University student indicated the Oba did not support this point of view. Akinola’s contention that this version of the story resulted from youthful chiefs and shifts of political alliances in contemporaneous Nigeria may be true, but his suggestion that its non-appearance in early recordings of oral history signifies it was not in circulation then employs faulty logic. Most early colonial histories of Benin were very brief, excluding more information than they included; that does not negate the circulation of those then-unpublished stories. Bondarenko carefully compared the three versions of Benin’s second dynasty’s foundation—Yoruba, former Benin palace version, and Ekaladerhan/Oduduwa identification in his “Advent of the second (Oba) Dynasty,” 2003. Stefan Eisenhofer had previously evaluated changing versions of the Ogiso dynasty, the interregnum and the new dynasty in “The Origins of the Benin Kingship in the Works of Jacob Egharevba.” *History in Africa* 22 (1995), 144, but mistakenly stated Egharevba had listed nine “republican rulers” preceding Evian and Ogiamien in the 1936 edition of *A Short History of Benin.*

Ekiokpagha battle and treaty were not on the advance coronation program. In any case, since
the Ekiokpagha battle and its treaty customarily occur a week after the monarch is actually
crowned, there is no reason it would have interfered with the ceremony itself. The appeals
court, however, rejected his motion and, on November 17, 2016, further upheld the appeal of
the Edo state governor and the Benin Traditional Council, striking down Osemwengie’s claims.94

From the beginning of this controversy, a second bloc of the family declared that
Ogiamien Osarobo Okuonghae was alive and well, and that their family had enjoyed excellent
terms with the Oba for many centuries. They repudiated Osemwengie and the Ogiamien
Trumpet group, stating that even Arisco’s claims to family membership were spurious.95 The
family reiterated these statements, even staging an anti-Arisco protest, and pledged its support
for the coronation and the participation of either the recognized Ogiamien Osarobo or “another
person that joined in the burial of their father.”96

The coronation of Oba Ewuare II has recently concluded. Although the reenacting of the
crossing of the bridge from Isekhere’s territory (complete with chicken)97 took place on
October 20, 2016, the morning of the formal crowning, the subsequent Ekiokpagha battle and
reconciliation did not occur. Referring to Osemwengie, Ogiamien family member Moses
Igbineweka stated, "Someone came to steal the title from us, so we cannot honour the

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97 The BBC photographed the event (http://ichef-1.bbci.co.uk/news/976/cpsprodpb/EC0F/production/_92013406_ts14.jpg), while The Nigerian Observer reported it (http://www.nigerianobservernews.com/2016/10/the-coronation-of-history-focus-on-oba-of-benin/#.WBl5el-v3arV).
The coronation process itself is not static; it has incorporated elements from other monarchs over time, including incidents relating to Obas Òwuare and Òsigie, and may have dropped others. The dropping of the Battle of Òkiokpaga becomes one more example of the Edo saying, “New Oba, new rules” (*Oba ghe rrie Oba, oghi donmwen iyi ogbon*).

**Interpretation: memory or sensemaking?**

The periodic conflicts between members of the current dynasty and the Evian/Ogiamien line, subsequent to the Òkiokpaga battle, were considered meaningful enough to become part of oral history. This occurred even when they seem minor, as in the case of Ogiamien’s alliance with Ogiefa against Oba Òwuare—certainly unimportant compared to the key conflict referred to in Ohun Ighitan. The cognitive construct this divination code provided not only served as a kind of magnet for even petty associations, it buoyed the logic of correlations made without broad support. For example, when Ikponmwosa Osemwegie and Ogiamien Osarobo maintain Elere’s affiliation with the Ogiamien line, a claim not previously published, it underlines the significance of the construct, “proven” or not. Once the construct was in place, episodes could be “filed” there. Because Ohun Ighitan set up a narrative framework, future references to conflicts between the royal and Ogiamien lineages required no allusions to palm and sugar cane, nor to expository divination tales; they needed only a mention of the parties involved. As such, the divination code constitutes an “active” sensemaking element, its structure shaping thought even as its content varies over time. As Talmy stated above, it produced a narrative structure that bounds like contents within a fluid cognitive unit.

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98 Femke van Zeijl, “The Oba of Benin Kingdom: A History of the Monarchy,” *Aljazeera*, Nov. 12, 2016, http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/10/oba-benin-kingdom-history-monarchy-161031161559752.html. At the time of the story, the doorway remained sealed, but the family still hoped it would be opened for a future visit of the Oba with the traditional gifts.
Sensemaking initially might seem related to the preoccupation with memory that has affected postmodern historians, anthropologists, and other scholars since the late 1980s. Historian Pierre Nora’s comment that “Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past”\(^{99}\) sounds akin to sensemaking’s concept of the “active” element. Memory studies’ interest in phenomenological approaches to events,\(^{100}\) rather than the documented facts of history, also appears to relate to the experiential component of sensemaking. Of the types of memory scholars have discussed, sensemaking seems closest to the concept of collective memory originating in the work of sociologist-philosopher Maurice Halbwachs. He postulated that individual memories are based on social frameworks that are in turn produced by sub-groups, rather than society as a whole.\(^{101}\)

This collective memory concept could be applied to the Oba/Ogiamien conflicts in several ways. Historian Lynn Abrams points out that the act of remembering is an active process, and even inaccurate remembering provides insight into accounts,\(^{102}\) such as Elere’s membership in the Ogiamien line discussed above. Anthropologist Johannes Fabian defines collective memory in opposition to public memory, considering the former a “bounded and closed territory” for the sub-group.\(^{103}\) This too connects to the Oba/Ogiamien conflict. Although the initial battle that finally established the dynasty’s rule in Benin might have been known to

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\(^{101}\) Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). This volume is a translation of Halbwachs’ works, written before his 1945 death.

\(^{102}\) Lynn Abrams, “Memory as both source and subject of study: the transformations of oral history” in *Writing the History of Memory*, eds. Bill Niven and Stefan Berger (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 89, 93.

the general public through coronation reenactions, only those involved in divination as practitioners or clients would hear the coded Ohun Ighitan sentence and associate its human/spirit battle with the palm fronds and sugar cane of repeated mock Ẹkiokpaghà battles and a smaller circle yet might have linked the concept of the “dispute that is never settled” with the Ọba and Ogiamien. The code structure and metaphorical language would have been the province of intellectuals. As for the repetitive nature of the conflicts, history creation and keeping was less the sphere of every citizen than it was of certain courtiers. Some of these tended royal history generally, others kept only their own family’s interaction with various Ọbas alive. Historian Mary Fulbrook developed Halbwach’s postulation that “remembering agents” within sub-groups were significant.104 Here memory studies break down somewhat when applied to Ọba/Ogiamien conflicts, in that precise “remembering agents” are difficult to isolate. Ominigbon diviners alluded only to the key conflict, although multiple versions of nearly every other clash point to diffused narrative sources. Still, the notion of collective memory invokes process, as does sensemaking.

Collective memory studies have been critiqued for a lack of historicity and excessive stress on the individual,105 as well as for their focus on modern European states, things national, the Holocaust, and WWII. In addition, as historian Wulf Kansteiner observed:

Works on specific collective memories often cannot illuminate the sociological base of historical representations. . . . [s]ome of these problems can be addressed by adopting and further developing the methods of media and communication studies, especially regarding questions of reception. For this purpose we should conceptualize collective memory as the result of the interaction among three types of historical factors: the intellectual and cultural traditions that frame all our representations of the past, the

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memory makers who selectively adopt and manipulate these traditions, and the memory consumers who use, ignore, or transform such artifacts according to their own interests.\textsuperscript{106}

Kansteiner’s suggestions for further historical illumination via communication studies invoke certain of sensemaking’s key contributions. His “three types of historical factors,” apply to discussions of the unsettled quarrel: ournament traditions provide a framing device, memory makers exist in the person of past courtiers, and memory consumers consist of those same past courtiers, current courtiers, scholars, and a relatively narrow swath of the general public.

Sensemaking, then, while it overlaps with some aspects of memory studies, ultimately remains distinct from them. Its objective differs. Rather than providing a method to reframe the past, sensemaking’s purpose is to identify the frameworks that construct narratives.

\textbf{Conclusion and questions}

The latest conflict between the Ogiamien pretender and the palace is unlikely to reorder the Benin Kingdom radically in any way,\textsuperscript{107} but it has already added a new chapter to the continued cognitive framework ournament divination provides. However, who today will recognize and link this chapter to an ournament code? ournament practice in Benin City itself has diminished substantially over the past.\textsuperscript{108} With written rather than oral documentation the new norm, have or will the structures created by increasingly obscure oral practices become

\textsuperscript{107} Osemwengie’s supporters accused the late Oba Erediauwa of hiding Ogiamien Osarobo Okuonhae away overseas to avoid the reenactment of the Ekiokpaga Treaty. Despite this and other calumnious and actionable accusations against both the late monarch and the monarch-to-be, and these supporters’ proposal that Edaiken Eheneden’s half-brother Ada be appointed to the throne (Osadolo, “Ogiamien Vs Oba of Benin,” 2016), the Traditional Council, as well as the state and federal governments and most Benin subjects, continued to support the Edaiken. He was crowned successfully as Oba Ewuare II, his formal coronation held on Oct. 20, 2016.
\textsuperscript{108} It does, however, enjoy greater popularity in the Esan/Ishan regions. (Personal communication, Daryl Peavy, Nov. 17, 2016).
irrelevant, their modes of mental compartmentalization no longer utilized? Almost certainly. The cognitive magnet that was part of sensemaking for centuries has lost its impetus and may have already become an agent of collective memory, replaced by calcified written accounts.

Even if divination’s decline means that an enduring sensemaking device is, in effect, now demagnetized, *ominigbon* codes seem worthy of additional historical analysis, no matter the approach. Certainly, not every code references historical incidents, and many of those that do are apparently specific, rather than episodic. Nonetheless, the relevance of the Ohun Ighitan code suggests other *owiha* might effectively yield insights not only into the past, but into the cognitive system and worldview that produced Benin’s histories.

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