

Okpame Oronsaye

**Summon My Ehi to
Ugbine**

PREFACE

PREFACE TO THIRD EDITION

The third edition of *Summon My Ehi to Ugbine* is primarily due to the acquisition of some information about the events that led to the January 4 1987 incident at Ugbine from the Edo viewpoint, which are coming gradually into light. Iro Eweka in his book, *Dawn to Dusk*, shed some light on the clandestine roles played in the final phase of the events by some high-ranking Edo Ekhaemwen who wanted to 'put the Benin king-Emperor (Omo N'Oba Ovonramwen) in trouble'. He also pointed out the driving force behind the British intentions, which was; "They (the British) had not come to make friends. They came to bully and to rob, to cheat and to steal". Sadly, this truism is what the majority of eminent scholars(American, European and even many African) of African art history and history have refrained from mention in their discourses about the January 4 1987 incident at Ugbine. An incident that they continue claim to be "Benin Massacre".

According to James Russell Lowell, 'Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide In the strife of Truth with Falsehood, for the good or evil side.' And this moment has arrived for these scholars of African art history and history, including mainstream publications and media to decide whether they are on the side of Truth or Falsehood in their versions of the British intentions, the events that led to the "Benin Massacre", and the destruction and looting of Benin City.

Okpame Osawamienghemwen Oronsaye
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PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

After obtaining some fresh information a slight modification has been made on a section of the book *Summon My Ehi To Ugbine*. Nonetheless, the main text and message remains unchanged. It is, however, worthwhile to mention that even before the publication of *Summon My Ehi To Ugbine* in 2016, there has been an increasing awareness in America and Europe of the wanton destruction and looting of Benin City in 1897. Indeed much earlier on there have been incessant calls for the return of the Edo people stolen treasures back to the rightful owners. These calls however gathered momentum following the action of one individual, Mr. Mark Walker. In 2014 Mr. Walker, a grandson of one of the soldiers who took part in the gruesome destruction and looting of Benin City, returned two bronzes to the Benin king-emperor, Omo N'Oba Erediauwa (r. 1979-2016). Mr. Walker is reported to have been motivated to return the two bronzes because they were described in his grandfather diary as "loot". Mr. Walker is also reported to have said, " That gave me the idea that perhaps they should go to the place where they will be appreciated for ever."

However, the narratives of the events that lead to the destruction and looting of Benin City as presented by 19th- and 20th century American and European scholars of African art history and history, publications, and mainstream media remains largely unchanged. The fable they created out of the British government official report that several unarmed British official and traders who were on a peaceful trade and mission to the Benin king-emperor were massacred by Benin chiefs continued to be re-echoed. Apparently, this fabrication seems to have become a template on which the narratives of the incident are written.

Hence it is not surprising that 130 years after the incident contemporary scholars of African art history and history, publications and mainstream media still present such writings as:

“...British traders were furious that Oba (King) Ovonramwen, ruler of the still independent territory, had defied the empire and was demanding customs duties from them. Outrage back home in the UK was fuelled when a group of officers dispatched to see the Oba on the orders of the governor of Britain west African Niger Coast Protectorate were ambushed and killed.” - Museums In Talks To Return Benin Bronzes To Africa. - The Guardian, 12 August 2017.

“In 1897 a British Trading expedition arrived in Nigeria to explore the potential for conducting business with the region for various items such as Palm oil. An initial party of some 9 British officers arrived in Benin City in an attempt to open negotiation with the Oba and his Council of Chiefs. This meeting was a disaster and resulted in the death of the 9 British Naval officers.”

- Benin Bronzes. www.richardlander.org.uk

“A London punitive expedition sent to avenge the murder of British envoys conquered Benin City.” - Die Magie der Kriegerkönige: Geo Epoche Nr. 66. Afrika 1415- 1960.

Hopefully, in the near future, the actual narratives of the events that lead to the invasion, destruction, and looting of Benin City as mentioned in the book, Summon My Ehi To Ugbine, will be acknowledged by American and European scholars of African art history and history, publications, and mainstream media.

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CREDITS

*This book is dedicated to Ologbose Irabor, Ekhaemwen
Obakhavbaye, Uso,
Obayuwana Obaradesagbon and Oviawe, Okakuo
Ebeikhinmwin, Omuada Asoro
and all unsung Edo warriors who died fighting the British
imperialists between January
1897 and May 1899.
You are not dead. You are honoured Ancestral Spirits*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Edo people of the Midwestern area of Nigeria believe every living thing individual has an ehi (mystical or spirit twin). The *ehi* ensures that the *uhimwen* or self-predestination of an entity lifespan on earth is carried out precisely as the entity had avowed on the day it, he or she was created by *Orisa N' Oghodua*, the supreme creator God. The ehi is thus perceived by the Edo not only as the guide and guard but also a witness to an entity's sojourn on earth.

Ugbine is a small town located a few kilometres west of Benin City on the Benin/Ekewan (Ekiohuan) Road. It was founded in the early 19th century as a farm settlement by Okhaemwen Ogbeide-Oyo, the then *Inneh N' Ibiwe* (a high-ranking functionary in the *Ibiwe* palace guild), hence the name Ugbine (ugbo innah or Innah's farm settlement).

Ugbine was thrust into the limelight of European history by an incident that took place there on January 4, 1897, which scholars and experts of African history and art history, mainstream media publications and writers, choose to refer to as the 'Benin Massacre'. The Benin Massacre, in their opinion, was the unprovoked killing of seven unarmed British envoys and traders, who were allegedly on a peaceful mission to Benin City by a group Benin chiefs, whom they claimed were fetish and bloodthirsty savages.

Summon My Ehi To Ugbine, is neither a history reference book nor a critique of any publication of the Ugbine incident. Neither is it a personal nor an Edo view of the events that led to the alleged January 4, 1897 'Benin Massacre' at Ugbine, the subsequent plundering and razing of Benin City and the reign of terror the British unleashed on the Edo people from 1897 to 1899. *Summon My Ehi To Ugbine* is not an expose of these events. The story has been documented

and long told by those who consciously or unconsciously initiated, orchestrated and executed the tragic and painful chapter of Benin history. However for over a century subsequent storytellers: professional historians and art historians, including internationally renowned publications have retold this story, unfortunately sadly shamelessly prejudiced and massively distorted. *Summon My Ehi To Ugbine* is a let-the-truth be heard story. And nothing more.

My sincere gratitude to all, whose material and moral support brought this work to fruition especially, my mother Princess (Dr) Aiyevebekpen Katherine Oronsaye, my brothers and sister, Professor Jude Oronsaye, Mr. Patrick Oronsaye, Mr. Leonard Oronsaye, Ms. Consolata Oronsaye, and Mr. Damian Oronsaye, my cousins Prince Bruce Ailobafe Eweka and Prince Osahon Ogbonmwan Eweka, and my friends Dr. Sam Osarenkhoe and Mrs. Charlotte Osarenkhoe.

My heartfelt thanks to Mr Richard Ayanru who took, time to proofread the final manuscript.

My sincere thanks to Edo commentators, writers, and musicians, whose views of the Ugbine incident was food for thought. My deepest gratitude to the honest non-Edo critics, writers, and historians, who cherish and hold truth sacred, whose unbiased and objective reports helped in the search for the true account of the events that led to the Ugbine incident, and the plundering and razing of Benin City.

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