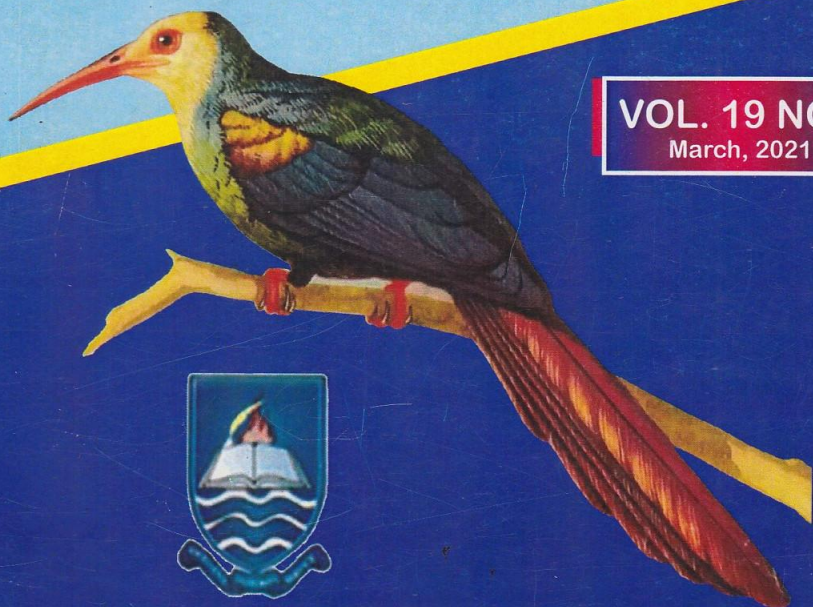


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The Ibibio Bible and the Eclipse of Efik Hegemony in the Lower Cross River Region By

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Abstract

On Thursday, the 27th of August 2020, a significant milestone was recorded in the annals of Ibibio history as a result of the public presentation of the Ibibio Bible. This feat is a product of the missionary enterprise pioneered by the Presbyterian Mission (Church of Scotland Mission) at Calabar in 1846. In the first 60 years, the Efik leaders barred the penetration of the missionary activities to Ibibio land (present-day Akwa Ibom State). As a result of this development, the Ibibio were denied the early benefit of the missionary influence. For instance, the New Testament of the Bible was translated into Efik in 1862 and the Old Testament in 1873 instead of the Ibibio which is believed to be the parent stock of the Efik and the language which Efik is a dialect. However, after 158 years, the Ibibio succeeded to produce a New Testament Bible translated by an all Ibibio team. Obviously, the debut of the Bible symbolises an eclipse of more than a century and a half of "cultural imperialism" of the Efik over the Ibibio. The paper acknowledges the labour of the early missionaries and their legacies and the indigenous bunch of Ibibio elites for translating the Bible. It concludes that the Bible team should complete the project by translating the Old Testament into Ibibio. The paper takes a historical analytical method.

Keywords: Ibibio, Bible Translation, Eclipse, Efik Hegemony, History

Introduction

As the Ibibio people, Nigeria's fourth largest ethnic nationality continues to bask in the euphoria of having a Bible in their own Ibibio language, 158 years after the New Testament Bible was first translated into Efik language, historical consciousness demands that this phenomenal event should attract scholarly attention. In this respect, it is very needful for tributes to be paid to some significant human initiators of the Bible translation in Eastern Nigeria.

Most importantly, it is necessary to critically assess the reason why the Bible was rather translated into Efik which is considered as a dialect of the Ibibio language instead of the Ibibio language by the Presbyterian missionaries whose operational headquarters was in Calabar.

According to Aye (1987) Presbyterianism in Nigeria has come to stay. Several factors contributed to this; first, it was one of the earliest, if not the earliest of Christian evangelical bodies fully expressive in the Oil Rivers and the Niger Coast Protectorate; second, it was the first missionary body to introduce the Bible in the Cross River basin; third, it was the earliest bearer of the torch of Western education and Christian enlightenment in these parts; fourth, it was the first Christian mission to come out at the direct invitation of the indigenous rulers and so its transplantation was cordial and peaceful. From its womb have come other indigenous religious and educational institutions that help to reinforce its achievements. The impressions left by this early bird will ever remain indelible in the history of this country. The educational and religious history of Nigeria would reflect a huge vacuum if the activities of the Presbyterian Church were left out.

The paper is divided into eight sections. Section one is the introduction. Section two is a brief discourse of the missionary advent in Calabar. Section three also briefly examines the pioneering missionary efforts of Revs. Huge Goldie and Alexander Robb in the translation of the New and Old Testaments of the Bible respectively. Section four looks at the Efik hegemony and the Ibibio Bible, section five examines the Efik dialect as an Ibibio language, section six discusses the indigenous efforts which resulted in the translation of the New Testament version of the Ibibio Bible, section seven examines the dwindling interest in Ibibio language while section six is the conclusion.

Missionary Advent in Calabar: A Brief Discourse

The background to the Mission is traceable to the abolition of slavery in the British Dominions in 1833. Prior to the Emancipation era, the Scottish Missionary Society from which the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria sprang attempted to operate among the slaves in Kingston, Jamaica in 1800. The project soon failed owing to prevailing condition in the island. It was in 1824 that the Mission was revived. In that year, the Scottish Mission in Jamaica constituted a Synod with 26 congregations (Goldie 1890; Aye, 1987; Kalu, 1986).

In 1825, a personality who later became the arrow head of the missionary enterprise in Eastern Nigeria, Hope Masterton Waddell was accepted by the Scottish Missionary Society for training as a missionary and was ordained in 1829 by the Edinburgh Presbytery in the United Secession Church. In the same year he was sent as missionary to Jamaica. In 1830,

he established a station in Cornwall (or Mount Zion Estate), North West of the Island. Missionary sources posit that Rev. Waddell's "dwelling house provided the original venue for Sunday meetings held by the early congregations". In 1833, Rev. Waddell's congregation at Cornwall was officially inaugurated. In 1836, the congregation increased to 500 adults and 300 children (Waddell, 1862).

It should however be mentioned that in about 1833, the Christian community in Jamaica, consisting of emancipated African slaves had "a dream" of sharing the blessings of the gospel of salvation with their kinsmen in Africa. According to a source, "from the period of emancipation of slaves in the West Indies, hope was being cherished that it would be from among these emancipated Christians that agents would be found to propagate the gospel in the land of their progenitors in Africa. In 1839, the subject occupied the discourse of the Presbytery, but no reliable information on Africa was available. Nevertheless the Presbytery depended on enquiry and prayer. In 1840, a serious thought was given to the formation of a mission to Africa from the Jamaican congregations" (Nyon, 1997).

An intellectual dimension to the missionary enterprise in Africa was Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton's book entitled *The Slave Trade and Its Remedy*, which made its debut in 1840. The contents of the book formed the centrality of the agenda in the 1841 Presbytery at Goshen. Buxton postulated that "a race of teachers of their own blood is already in the course of active preparation for them; that providence of God had overruled even slavery...the peasantry of the West Indies and the thousands of their children now receiving a Christian education, may be expected to raise a body of men, who will return to the land of their fathers, carrying divine truth and all its concomitant blessings into the heart of Africa" (Waddell, 1862).

At the end of the Presbytery's session, the participants declared unalloyed support for the missionary scheme in Africa. The Presbytery also resolved that a robust case be made to the Missionary Society of Scotland to commence missionary work in West Africa using the missionaries in the West Indian congregations already acclimated and experienced as the "best agents".

However, in the initial reaction, the Scottish Missionary Society rejected the proposal citing detailed instances of previous failures in attempts to explore Africa. Yet, this did not deter the Jamaican congregations who were determined to facilitate the "light of the gospel" to their kinsmen in Africa. Later, the congregations re-grouped and resolved to pursue the missionary scheme to a logical conclusion. Providence came to play using some human vessels such as Rev. Dr. Robson of Glasgow who visited Jamaica and returned to Scotland

with encouraging report about the planned missionary scheme to Africa. Also, Revs. George Blyth and Peter Anderson who were missionaries operating in Jamaica also positively influenced the Home Mission in Scotland when they were on furlough. In addition, Dr. Fergusson of Liverpool who had visited West Africa strongly supported the enterprise. He linked Revs. Blyth and Anderson with the captains of ships who had been trading with Old Calabar. The captains gave favourable accounts of the willingness of the rulers of Old Calabar to engage in commerce and to receive education and Christianity (Waddell, 1862; Aye, 1987).

The missionaries in Jamaica eventually sent a formal proposal through Captain Turner to the chiefs of Old Calabar for permission to establish a mission there. After many months of waiting, they received an assuring reply from eight "undersigned kings and chiefs of Old Calabar, having consulted together, agree to those things written, and request you to come among us".

Coincidentally, a month before the missionaries' proposal sent through Captain Turner reached Calabar, Commander Raymond was in Old Calabar, on behalf of the Queen Victoria to conclude a treaty with the rulers following the end of the slave trade. As a show of affirmation of the treaty, King Eyamba V of Duke Town and King Eyo Honesty of Creek Town, two prominent Efik kings in their separate letters to the British monarch in December 1842, summed up three pressing needs - the development of agriculture, trade, and Christian education/evangelism. But the uncertainty and irregularity of contact between West Africa and Europe delayed business and replies to the letters never came (Nyon, 1997).

After sometime, the missionaries addressed a letter to Captain John Beecroft stationed in Fernando Po through a friend in Liverpool requesting for a confirmation of the Old Calabar rulers to receive them. The reply of the letter arrived in August 1844. The favourable response from Old Calabar rulers to encouraged the Presbytery to meet at Hampden, Jamaica in September 1844 and resolved to implement the evangelisation agenda in Old Calabar. The Presbytery also appointed Rev. Hope Masterton Waddell as the pioneer leader of the mission. In January 1845, eleven representatives of the Jamaican Presbyterian Mission formally presented its case to the parent mission in Scotland and requested for a quick endorsement and material support (Waddell, 1862).

When Rev. Waddell eventually departed Jamaica for Scotland, he engaged in massive enlightenment campaign to generate support for the mission to Old Calabar. His message was warmly received by Christians of all denominations. The United Secession Church

under which many of the Jamaican missionaries received their ordination officially adopted the missionary expedition to Old Calabar. According to an account, "with his effort and those of his friends and well-wishers, contributions flowed in from the British Islands, the West Indies and from the various evangelical denominations. The sum of more than four thousand pounds was raised that first year. Mr. Baike, the Provost of Kirkwall, generously presented the missionary party with a new sloop on which to sail to the Guinea Coast. When the little ship was found unsuitable for the tropical expedition, one of the Liverpool merchants, Mr. Jamieson, donated to the party, the free use of *Bringanite*, the *Warree*, plus one hundred pounds as its sailing expenses every year (Goldie 1862; Aye, 1987; Nyong; 1997).

Waddell writes that:

On the morning of the 6th of January 1846, the little band of missionaries sailed from Liverpool in their 150 to vessel – the *Warree*...the missionary party comprised Rev. Hope Masterton Waddell, the leader, Mr. Samuel Edgerley (a printer and catechist) with his wife (both English), Andrew Chisholm (carpenter), Edward Miller (teacher), both West Indians, and a little boy George, Rev. Waddell's black boy (Goldie, 1890: 84).

After three months of perilous sailing, the *Warree*, conveying the missionary party arrived Fernando Po, a Spanish Island colony off the coast of Old Calabar on the 2nd of April 1846. They were received by Captain Beecroft and some Baptist missionaries there. Beecroft officially led the missionaries to Duke Town in Calabar on the 10th of April 1846 (Waddell, 1862).

The Pioneering Efforts of Rev. Goldie and Robb: a Brief Discourse

Goldie (1890) notes that "our want of the language was a great hindrance to the work in every way, and to be dumb, moving among them, while in possession of the message of God's grace for them, was a very painful experience, but unavoidable in those early days, the language being unwritten.

Available records show that the missionaries showed early interest in the area of developing the vocabulary of the Efik language. According to Waddell's account:

...Mr. Edgerley commenced teaching a school, and Mr. Waddell, while overlooking the work, sat with his note-book before him, collecting the vocables of the language, and, with the assistance of Mr. Young, wrote out considerable vocabulary, which he printed by lithographic press, the use of

which he had acquired. He had, as the first produce of this press, thrown off a few leaflets in English containing Scripture narratives, which he gave to the king and a few others who could read a little in that tongue (Waddell, 1862: 920).

However, much credit goes to two “scholar-missionaries” who facilitated the translation of the New and Old Testaments of the Efik Bible, namely: Rev. Huger Goldie and Dr. Alexander Robb respectively in 1862 and 1873 respectively even after Waddell had retired in 1858.

Rev. Huger Goldie was a Doctor of Divinity arrived Calabar from Jamaica in 1847. He distinguished himself in the Calabar Mission as a teacher and an author. He was outstanding for his keen study of the Bible which he is said to have mastered from Genesis to the Revelation. He studied Efik language so meticulously that he got himself into the intricacies, mastered its grammar and idioms, and devised its orthography, the last of which was in excellent use in the 19th century and down to the early 20th century (Aye, 1987).

Goldie also observes that “after sufficient mastery was attained of the language of the people among whom the mission labours, the work of translation of the Sacred Scriptures, and the writing of books for use in school and church, were undertaken...my translation of the New Testament was printed by the Scottish National Bible Society in 1862”.

Dr. Alexander Robb has been described as one of the “high stature missionaries” who served in Old Calabar. Available sources note that his arrival in Calabar marked the “era of hope for the gospel and the church was getting prepared for the great intellectual awakening that was to give its new life and sustenance”. Dr. Robb successfully translated the Old Testament of the Bible in Efik language in 1873, Goldie (1890), however explains that “three separate books of the sacred volume were translated, chiefly by Mr. Anderson”.

Dr. Robb while serving as a minister of Goshen congregation, Jamaica, was called by the Board to enter the Calabar Mission as a translator of the Scriptures, and to form a class for educating a ‘native’ ministry. He was eminent as a student in Aberdeen University, and being distinguished as a Hebrew scholar he was well qualified for such duty. In the middle of 1875, Dr. Robb, after a long period of devoted service, retired from the mission. His strength was so much debilitated by repeated attacks of fever and he passed on, but painful as it was; his books in the Efik language, especially his translation of the Old Testament Scriptures, remain to carry on his work in the mission (Goldie, 1890).

the Efik exploited the opportunities afforded by their location to achieve extensive economic power. Economic power carried considerable political and cultural significance. Available records show that the Portuguese had arrived the area in 1472 (Aye, 2000). Later the British explorers, traders and administrators also came. Through these early contacts the Efik were able to learn European manners and customs and also seized the opportunity and sent their sons abroad to acquire Western education even before the advent of the Presbyterian missionaries in 1846, a development that ushered in the establishment of the first formal school –Duke Town School, established by Samuel Edgerley who was in the pioneering team. Following the introduction of Western education in Calabar, other schools were established and Efik people embraced the system. The outcome of this development was that Efik language became the language of commerce and “civilisation”. It was widely spoken in the Cross River region including the Southern Cameroon. The scenario caused the Efik language to “swallow” the Ibibio language - its proto-language.

Efik as a Dialect of Ibibio Language

Based on linguistic and ethnographic studies of the Ibibio and Efik, Nair (1972) submits that “there are some linguistic proofs that Efik is a dialect of the Ibibio language, and that it separated from the other only within the last centuries”. Simmons cited in Essien (1990) also notes that a comparison of 195 Ibibio and Efik words on the Swadesh basic vocabulary list revealed 189 cognates (95 per cent). He adds that this high percentage of the cognates indicates recent separation of the two groups. The above claim has been corroborated by Essien (1990) and Essien (1994).

Udo (1983), Noah (1978) states that Christianity and commerce constituted the two main factors that facilitated the transformation of Efik as the *lingua franca* within the Cross River region. He points out that first “the members of the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland who began their evangelical education in Calabar (the principal Efik community), established schools and churches among the Efik; second, the missionaries translated the Efik dialect into writing; third, they produced Efik vernacular readers for use in Efik schools; they also translated the English Bible and the English hymn book into Efik and published a dictionary in Efik”.

Udo (1983) and Noah (1978), also aver that “as with trade in slaves and in politics, the Efik also controlled Western education and prohibited its spread into Ibibio land for about 60 years (1846-1906). It was during the scramble for the mission spheres of influence (1904-1952) that the United Free Church of Scotland was permitted by the Efik to penetrate the Ibibio land.

Goldie confirms this development thus:

From the establishment of the mission in 1846, there seemed to be a kind of tacit understanding that no missionary were to penetrate land beyond a certain border, fixed at the inland station of Ikot Offiong (Goldie, 1890: 206)

It should also be mentioned that the flowering of Efik language occurred to the detriment of the Ibibio language. Colonial records reveal that attempts to write and develop the Ibibio language happened at the time the Efik was about to be written (between 1846 and 1862), when Rev. Goldie's Dictionary of the Efik Language was published.

According to Jeffreys:

The first attempt to write Ibibio was defeated by two votes...at the language conference held in Calabar, the motion to impose the Efik dialect on the Ibibio race was carried by two votes...only because two members refrained from voting (Jeffreys, 1935: 106).

That defeat of the Ibibio or victory for Efik made all the difference, for the Efik dialect to be imposed on the Ibibio race by the early missionaries to this part of the world whose efforts were directed to the development of Efik (Essien, 1990).

Jeffreys also stresses that:

The missionaries naturally directed their first studies to the Efik language with the result that Efik have benefited enormously and their language has inevitably assumed position that is not justified either upon population or linguistic basis (Jeffreys: 1935: 104).

In spite of the initial set-back for the Ibibio language, Jeffreys, produced orthography for the Ibibio language and made a passionate plea to the missionaries and other authorities that Ibibio be used officially, side by side with Efik for mutual benefits. But this orthography was rejected and an attempt to make Ibibio an official language failed.

"Shrine of a People's Soul" thus: "every language is a temple in which the soul of the people who speak it is enshrined". He also states that "some authorities believe that a million, others five million, would constitute the minimum unit for a vernacular literature. He was startled that "yet in Vol. II, No. 4 of the quarterly *Africa* it is recommended that:

Efik, the dialect of about 30,000 persons of mixed descent, be forced on 650,000 pure Ibibio. The recommendation to destroy the shrine of a people's soul is done in words that suggest it is with their full consent and approval. Thus, to use Ibibio side by side with Efik would mean raising an artificial barrier...not a single Ibibio was consulted....Apart from the main inaccuracy that Efik is already fixed as the language for the whole of Ibibio, two others are apparent. Efik is not a language, but a dialect of Ibibio...the Efik are not a tribe, not even a clan, but a mixture of many races of freeborn and of slaves (Jeffreys, 1935: 104-105).

The Ibibio Bible Translation: Indigenous Efforts

The missionaries' conspiracy which was the rejection of the Ibibio language made the language to remain unwritten and also be un-official for decades until 1983, when with the sponsorship of an Ibibio cultural organisation, *Akwa Esop Imaisong Ibibio*, an orthography edited by Okon Essien, a Professor of Linguistics, was produced and presented to the Ministry of Education of the defunct Cross River State.

The Ministry of Education in the defunct Cross River State directed that Ibibio be taught in all schools in what is now Akwa Ibom State, using the orthography as the standard text. As at that time, Ibibio was probably the only language in Nigeria whose orthography was designed and produced by the owners of the language themselves. Before this time, the orthographies of other languages, including those of the major languages, have been produced by either expatriate missionaries or government agencies (Essien, 1990).

In this respect, tribute must be paid to some Ibibio elites such as Professors Okon, Essien, Elerius Edet John, Ime Ikiddeh, Monday Abasiattai, Monday Efiang Noah and Mr. Sonny Samson-Akpan. These geniuses also formed the Ibibio Language Writers Association (ILWA). The ILWA engaged in the writing of books in Ibibio language for use in schools in an attempt to promote the Ibibio language.

This scholarly synergy generated in the 1980s particularly after the creation of Akwa Ibom State in 1987, gradually snowballed in the Ibibio Bible Project. Available information shows that the Ibibio Bible was initiated by Professor Okon Essien. The translators include Professors Margaret Mary Okon, Bassey Okon, Eno-Abasi Urua, Inimbom Akpan and Udo Etuk. Others include Drs. Paulinus Noah, Effiong Ekpenyong and Rev. Fr. Dr. Donatus Udoette. The Ibibio Bible is published by the American based International Bible Society, publishers of the New International version of the Bible (NIV).

The Dwindling Interest in the Ibibio Language

At present, the interest in the use of the Ibibio language has extensively diminished. The Ibibio prefer foreign and "Bible" names for themselves and children. Children are instructed in English language at home and in school. Events such as church services, traditional marriages, burials in typical Ibibio communities are conducted in English language. In the Ibibio churches, the acceptable songs are not in Ibibio language, but in English, Efik, Igbo and Yoruba. Also, preaching is done in English language to easily "activate the anointing". In fact, one of the most frightening actions of the present administration in Akwa Ibom is the discontinuation of news translation in Ibibio language in both Akwa Ibom Radio and Television stations. This action is a clear indication that the Ibibio elites do not really value the development of their language.

For the Ibibio language not to go into extinction like the Efut and Kiong languages spoken by the Efut and Okoyong peoples of Cross River State (Thomas, 2020, Akpan, 2021). There is an urgent need for the introduction of Ibibio language as a compulsory subject in primary and secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. Ibibio should also be introduced as a course in Akwa Ibom State University while the Department of Efik/Ibibio in the University of Uyo should be supported by the Akwa Ibom State Government. In fact, students offering this course should be made to enjoy some special incentives and tuition free studies. Teachers of Ibibio language should also be trained and re-trained regularly. Moreover, the Akwa Ibom State Government should immediately order the restoration of the translation of news in Ibibio language in Akwa Ibom Television and Radio stations. If these measures and related ones are not taken immediately, the Ibibio Bible would have been a wasted venture, because there will be no readers of the Bible. Moreover, the stakeholders in Ibibio land should also join in the process of re-orientation to reclaim the lost heritage.

Conclusion

The Ibibio language is as old as the people themselves dating back to many centuries ago. However, the history of its written language is very recent. The early Presbyterian missionaries who worked in the Lower Cross River paid attention to the development of Efik dialect of the language.

Jeffreys supports the above assertion thus::

The initial concentration of the Europeans...the Ibibio has suffered an eclipse. The first missionaries to the Cross River were invited there by the Efik and these missionaries naturally directed their first studies to the Efik language, with the result that the Efik have benefited enormously and

their language has inevitably assumed a position that is not justified either upon a population or a linguistic basis. The Efik as a result of the magnificent work done by the United Free Church of Scotland in its efforts with the language has secured a long advantage over the Ibibio. This advantage must continue until a corresponding amount of work has been done among the Ibibio, namely the production of a dictionary, grammar and a translation of the Bible. Other literature in this vernacular will then duly follow (Jeffreys: 1935: 36).

It should also be mentioned that the expectation of Jeffreys had also been strongly proclaimed by Rev. Waddell in his farewell speech to the Creek Town Christians in 1858 thus:

We left Calabar with confidence. The past caused no regrets and the future no apprehensions. The work which began in Old Calabar area shall continue forever... (Aye, 1987: 88).

Despite the fact that the early missionaries were pressured by the Efik elites to deny the Ibibio the Bible in its language more than a century and a half ago, their contributions are sincerely acknowledged and appreciated.

Waddell re-echoes the literary contributions of the missionaries thus:

Having a printing press, the various books prepared for school and church were most of them printed in the country, and of these we have the supply required...no literary society has put its hand to aid the unlettered tribes in obtaining even an alphabet, and it is well that the organisation of a literature among them is in the hands of missionary societies, so that the first utterance of the language in written form is of the Divine Truth which alone gives men "the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come". By these, aided by Bible Societies, the confusion of Babel will be reduced, and the Divine Oracles find a voice in the many tongues of earth, harmonising them all into the one song of heaven (Waddell, 1862: 304-305).

Apart from the early missionaries, all the stake holders in the Ibibio Bible Project are also sincerely appreciated for their contributions. It is expected that a vibrant team to translate the Old Testament of the Bible into Ibibio will soon be inaugurated. As mentioned above, the team led by Rev. Robb completed the translation of the Old Testament in 1873 after the New Testament had made its debut in 1862, a period of six years. On this basis it is expected

that the debut of the Old Testament version will not take too long. In fact, it is indeed of historical significance that the Ibibio people now have a Bible in their own Ibibio language after 158 years.

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