

Abi Alabo Derefaka and the Reconstruction of the Cultural History of the Niger Delta

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Abstract

This article examines the role of archaeology and anthropology as practiced by Abi Alabo Derefaka, in the reconstruction of the cultural history of the preliterate people of the Niger Delta. The problematic of this study is the evaluation of the relevance of material culture of a people to the reconstruction of their remote past through the lens of an archaeologist and anthropologist who does the authentication or otherwise of collected oral traditions. The methodology adopted is predominantly a comparative review of Derefaka's published works and reports of archaeological investigations and works of other scholars on historical reconstruction in the Niger Delta. This work demonstrates that oral traditions provide the hypotheses and speculative information as the foundational guide to direct archaeological investigations. It further affirms that material remains which the archaeologist investigates constitute the proof of human's totality of past social, cultural, economic and political activities and civilizations. It concludes that the cultural history of the Niger Delta through the material remains recovered by the archaeologist and anthropologist aided the professional historian in the reconstruction of the sequences of past events of the Niger Delta and indicates their relevance to the contemporary society.

Keywords: Abi Alabo Derefaka, Reconstruction of cultural history, Niger Delta, Archaeology and anthropology, Professional historian.

Introduction

The cultural history of the Niger Delta is associated with the study of the past time and place of the peoples of the region reflected in

the products of their material culture and ritual practices as well as objects of economic and socio-political organization, structures and institutions. Its importance rests on the illumination and understanding of the cultural edifices of the people and their communities, institutions and the region. Essentially, as a history of culture, it is interested in a cultural space and identity with a fascinating task to accomplish in defining the people's cultural milieu or locality. According to Crone, Gange and Jones (2007, p. 2), "cultural history presented an opportunity to plunge even deeper into the lives of ordinary people, offering the potential for a richer study of human experience in the past." Culture and cultural institutions evolved in a historical progression. Cultural history refers to the history of a people with an identity inextricably tied to a geographical location or environment like the Niger Delta, migration and settlement, socio-political organization and institutions, economic specialization and practices, and religious rituals and worldviews (Charles, 2008, p. 1).

A concrete and successful attempt at the reconstruction of the cultural history of the preliterate people of the Niger Delta can be achieved with the aid of cultural remains existing in the form of artefacts and symbols, which characterized the evolution of cultural patterns and institutions. Evolution enters this discourse to indicate that contemporary organic forms and complex cultural practices and institutions as well as socio-political organization and structures developed from rudimentary and undifferentiated beginnings. Moreover, the development of cultural practices and materials cannot be separated from the dynamics of the environment, which influence the invention or creation of adaptive indigenous technologies to deal with the vagaries of the environment or facilitate its exploitation. For instance, the salt water environment of the Eastern Niger Delta facilitated the invention of appropriate tools like canoe and other watercrafts for fishing economic practices on the one hand, and technologies for the developed indigenous salt making industry, on the other hand. These tools and relevant institutions became the strategic symbols in the hands of the culture bearers in the conquest and exploitation of the Niger Delta environment (Alagoa, 1972; Derefaka, 2003; Charles, 2008). Fundamentally, there is an inextricable relationship between the mode of production and the nature of cultural activities and socio-political organization of the Niger Delta communities.

This study focuses on the analysis of the role of Abi Alabo Derefaka, an archaeologist and anthropologist, in the reconstruction of the cultural history of the Niger Delta. It examines the reconstruction of prehistoric developments and evolution of cultural and socio-political institutions of Niger Delta through the lens of archaeological and anthropological data. Archaeology is deeply concerned with the reconstruction of man's past from his physical and cultural remains (Derefaka, 1998, p. 111). This historical reconstruction of culture is not intended to search for cultural laws or "construct behavioural models to retrodict patterns of archaeological debris in the use of ethnographic analogy" or demonstrate "prejudice to the relevance and usefulness of the processual approach ..." (Derefaka, 2003, p. 191). Rather, it is an attempt to justify the contention that "archaeological investigation offers the most direct and systematic means of reconstructing the prehistoric past" and the most important tools in the hands of the culture historian (Gabel, 1967, p. 229). Although most culture historians usually adopt the normative theoretical framework that treats culture as a collection of shared ideas, values and beliefs or the 'norms' of a human group, while prehistoric artefacts are the material products of those shared ideas (Flannery, 1977, p. 103), this article focuses on the material component of culture history, the centrality of the concerns of the archaeologist (Derefaka, 2003, p. 193).

History, Archaeology and Anthropology in the Niger Delta

The use of archaeological data in the process of historical reconstruction portrays the uniting of sources or what contemporary scholars refer to as the multidisciplinary method or approach, which implies the collection of data from different sources and combining them in the process of analysis. This approach defines the scientific content of historical studies and the relationship between the disciplines of history and the physical and natural sciences spoken of by Edward Hewett Carr (1961, pp. 70-112) and Derefaka (1998, p. 112). According to Carr (1961, p. 71), science was no longer concerned with something static and timeless, but with a process of change and development. Evolution in science confirmed and complemented progress in history. Nothing, however, occurred to alter the inductive view of historical method ... first collect your

facts, then interpret them.

To Carr, apart from the fact that “geology brought history into science”, the most implicit point of relationship between history and science is the sameness of their core concerns with the process of change and development as also demonstrated by Hopkins (1973). The application of “the archaeological science” to the process of reconstructing history demonstrates the authentication of collected oral traditions and other data. Traditional archaeological scepticism “leads the direction of research activities to controversial areas”. The four main stages of archaeological investigations: reconnaissance or site location, actual excavation, laboratory analysis, and interpretation are guided by oral traditions (Chikwendu, 1984, pp. 64-65). Archaeology, claimed as one of the sources of history, is concerned with extinct and extant cultures based on material remains in the same way history is concerned with the study of the past of humanity. The material remains recovered by the archaeologist enable the successful reconstruction of the sequences of past events of a people and the indication of their relevance to contemporary ones. Archaeology brings into reality the historian’s most valuable admonition: know the past to understand the present to prepare for the future as aptly captured in Alagoa’s (2004) theory of “hindsight as foresight”.

Archaeological excavations confirm the historian’s position that the first wave of migrations and settlement of the Niger Delta was in the first millennium AD, several centuries before the arrival of the Portuguese, the first Europeans to visit the West coast of Africa, while the second wave took place from about 1450 (Dike, 1956, p. 23; Derefaka, 1998, pp. 124-125). While Andoni, Ke and Okrika were identified in the first wave of migrations with Andoni as the earliest settlers (Anene, 1966, p. 7; Ejituwu, 1991, p. 23; Derefaka, 1998, pp. 119-121), the city state of Bonny, identified in the second wave, owed its settlement in the Niger Delta to the development of the Atlantic slave trade (Dike, 1956, p. 24; Alagoa & Fombo, 1972, p. 74). Similarly, the people of *Awome* (Kalabari), probably to get salt and fish, migrated to a site on the right bank of the New Calabar River around 1400 and settled on the islands of Asaramatoru (Horton, 1969; 1998, pp. 195-255; Talbot, 1969, p. 238).

The settlements of the first wave of migrations were fishing and salt making villages that later transited to city states with attendant

evolution of cultural and socio-political institutions and organizations following the rise of the local long distance trade on which structures the Atlantic trade rested (Horton, 1969; Alagoa, 1970, 1972). However, in time, their cultural and political features altered radically as a result of such socioeconomic factors as trade and war (Jones, 1963, p. 9; Alagoa, 1964, p. 5; Cookey, 1974, p. 11). The multiplicity of events that occurred in these constantly changing political formations indicated the diversity of responses to the received stimuli (Horton, 1969; Alagoa, 1970, 1971). The transitory nature of Niger Delta communities questions Western bourgeois ethnographic analysis that views African societies as traditionally static, changeless or motionless, geared towards customs and subsistence without obedience to the laws of the market place (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1976, p. 90).

This phase of the evolution of Niger Delta societies brings to the fore the relevance of anthropology to connect the development of an array of simple and complex cultural as well as socio-political institutions in response to the varying historical circumstances of the societies. Environmental factors significantly influenced the development and evolution of cultural institutions and socio-political organizations and structures, cultural institutions, economic system, and ways of life of these societies (Horton, 1969, p. 39; Alagoa, 1970, pp. 270-271). The social and religious expressions as well as the material culture of the people were the direct result of the exploitation of their environment. With this was associated an analogous progress in laws of descent, inheritance, succession, and rise of government. The evolution of cults of gods, goddesses and deities was synchronous with communal development and advancement. Their religion and worldviews were based on adoration of ancestral and water spirits deified with material representations of emblems and totems as convenient forms of embodiment to be altered or transferred according to circumstances of evolution (Leonard, 1906: viii-xii).

The monarchy and subjects were devoted polytheists with ancestral shrines in every lineage for veneration for the protection of descendants and provision of their needs. Through ancestors, prayers and sacrifices were offered to the Supreme Being for communal health and socio-economic resolution and advancement. The lack of regular sacrifices and inability to observe moral codes

attracted misfortune and severe punishment. These ideas profoundly promoted group solidarity at the two levels of lineage and village. The religious beliefs of the Okrika, for example, were intricately bound up with attitudes and behaviour towards social transgression but with significant tendencies towards checkmating crime and immorality and adverse socio-political impact (Ejituwu, 1991, p. 60; Abam, 1999, p. 61; Enemugwem, 2000, pp. 83-84).

Important, too, the indigenous religion of the Niger Delta societies derived its force from their recognition of the power and influence of nature and the unseen. Therefore, they seek harmony with the Supreme Being or nature through supplications, worship and veneration. Europeans met the people worshipping various gods and deities based on their individual well developed belief systems (Kimble, 1937, p. 132; Horton, 1984, p. 2; Ejituwu, 1995, p. 97). They were so superstitiously bigoted and guarded their cult objects jealously due to the strong belief in their *jou-jou* (Barbot, 1732, p. 462; de Cardi, 1899, p. 539). The deity of *Yok Obolo* of the Andoni of the Niger Delta, for example, was the greatest single factor in their religious experiences, which in turn, influenced their socio-cultural orientation, direction and political organization (Leonard, 1906, p. 401; Ejituwu, 1995, p. 97).

Archaeological and anthropological evidence show that the earliest settlements of the Central Niger Delta were characterized by the hunting and gathering mode of production, a stateless political organization and system with only a religious leader, high priest, based on autonomous village community structure and lacking in central political authority. This socio-political organization later formed ethnic, cultural, and historical unit with rudimentary village assembly as the highest political authority and the oldest man as the 'President', a form of gerontocratic practice. On the other hand, in the fishing villages of Eastern Niger Delta, the village assemblies of all adult males were presided over by the *Amanyano*, *Okaan Ama* or owner or town founder (paramount ruler), chosen for his personal ability from the founding lineage (Derefaka, 2003; Alagoa, 1972, pp. 17-18). The national god was usually connected with the deified founding ancestor. Added to the pantheon of gods were a number of primal forces or traditional religious cults, cultural institutions, and numerous secret societies and deities like age grades, *Ekine* (*Sekiapu*), *Koronogbo*, *Ofiokpo*, etc., responsible for the

socialization and acculturation of village members, and performance of recreational functions and ministrations to the *owu* (the water spirits and deities). The high priests or priestesses play strategic ritual roles (Jones, 1963, p. 19; Alagoa, 1972, pp. 18-20).

The village shared cherished feelings of common cultural identity, and religious cults and societies. The people thought of their village in terms of its peculiarity and political autonomy under a distinctive body of village laws, customs, values, beliefs, norms, traditions and culture. The constituent units emphasized their complementary roles as each brought something special from its original settlement as the basis for the allocation of ritual offices and development of religious rituals. Age grades, *biri*, also provided social acculturation, conviviality and recreation with an obligation for reciprocal help among members and the preservation of collective solidarity and stability (Horton, 1969: 42). This was aptly noted by Hopkins (1973, p. 27) that preindustrial societies owed their cohesiveness to freely accepted and equally shared values.

Kinship ties like marriage also counted for communal solidarity. The three types of marriage in the fishing villages of the Eastern Niger Delta were: *eya* (big bride wealth), *egwa* (small bride wealth) and *waribiosime*. There were communities that transitioned from patrilineal to matrilineal societies, and the wards became matri-clans and further subdivided into matri-lineages. Basically, pre-contact marriage systems of the Niger Delta encouraged both endogamous and exogamous practices with the strategic aim of expansion “through reproduction and integration of domestic slaves”, or adoption of persons looking for socio-economic security since individual traditional economic rights were guaranteed through membership of lineages (*wari*) often located in the ward or compound (*polo*) of the village. The lineages were not necessarily knitted together by traditions of common descent or progenitor (Jones, 1963, p. 53; Horton, 1969, pp. 41-45; Wariboko, 2007, p. 101).

Fundamental changes in the economic patterns and socio-political organization in the Eastern Niger Delta reflected both the scarcity of settlement land and heterogeneity of village communities that heightened exchange, the manifestation of network of relationships and internal production and organization of society (Alagoa, 1972; Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1976). However, it is insufficient to see the evolution of a society only in terms of its exchange dynamics (Rey

& Dupre, 1969). Eastern Niger Delta societies of the early settlement period exchanged their fish and salt with foodstuff of the hinterland. While the fishing economy bound its village members across lineage boundaries, it weakened them due to lack of lineage control of creeks used as fishing grounds no longer susceptible to demarcation or lineage differentiation as farmlands, but communally exploited (Alagoa, 1972, p. 18; Ejituwu, 1991, p. 53).

The socio-political organization and structures of pre-colonial Eastern Niger Delta villages show considerable uniformity in internal organization: dispersed in a vast number of relatively small and virtually independent political units with territorial limit and government (Jones, 1963, p. 16). They made visibly differentiated class societies, privileged aristocracies and state monarchies with jurisdiction over village patriarchies in the Niger Delta. According to Dike (1956, pp. 31-33), the city states were divided broadly into monarchies and republics. The republics were single trading units with divided political authority as the Efik and Andoni where the trading states had separate and independent rulers in contrast to the hereditary monarchies of the Pepples in Bonny and Amakiris in New Calabar. Although Andoni was an ancient republican state without a single political authority in an overall monarchy or trading unit but several kingdoms to negate the concept of a city state, in times of urgent political and security needs like war, a king of an Andoni segment or kingdom is chosen by popular acclaim, while *Yok Obolo*, the national god of the people, remains the nation's rallying point (Eneyo, 1991; Ejituwu, 1995). This delineation between the republican and city states demonstrates the coexistence of multiplicity of socio-political organizations, structures and institutions in the Niger Delta.

The analysis distinguishes the varieties of political organizations, which were no longer schematically grouped *en bloc*, as though they were homogenous. The centralization of states in Niger Delta prior to the fifteenth century evolved the concept of dispersion of territorial powers though the prestige of the sovereign never completely effaced ethnic patriarchal authority. The political system showed centralized administrative and judicial institutions and cleavages of wealth and status corresponding to the distribution of power and authority developed out of a previously dominant segmentary political system. The profound upheavals linked to the European

commercial penetration manifested in the restructuring of Eastern Niger Delta states as kingship took the form of a superimposed bureaucracy. The village assembly became transformed into a council of heads of war canoe houses (*wari*), while the kinship groups transited to political, military and economic units with heads of villages constituting a national body. The traditional political system, which corresponded to their indigenous ways of government were only different from the Western model but did not imply a primitive mode of governance (Jones, 1963, p. 5; Abam, 1999, p. 113).

In the socio-political organization of the Niger Delta societies, the nuclear family is the smallest unit and structure. In most cases, the system of descent and inheritance is patrilineal and the society becomes predominantly patriarchal with a few cases of matrilineality as in Nembe (Brass) (Ejituwu, 1991, p. 53; Wariboko, 2007, p. 100). In time, societies like Andoni began to accommodate dual system where descent and inheritance were derived from both patrilineal and matrilineal lines. This is a unit for production and education of children as well as economic cooperation. Above it is the lineage or house (*wari*), "a federated canoe house" comprising a group of nuclear families and headed by the oldest man, *waridabo*, patriarch or progenitor, but transited to the famous "House System" as a corporate unit (Dike, 1956; Jones, 1963; Wariboko, 2007, p. 101). The transition was facilitated by the recruitment of new members to increase the fighting forces of the villages in competition for fishing grounds (Horton, 1969, p. 46), contrary to Dike's (1956, p. 34) position that the "House System" was synonymous with the Atlantic trade. The lineages were no longer too tightly knitted and descent was deemphasized since the House System had become a co-operative trading unit and local government institution (Alagoa 1970, p. 272).

Directly above the lineage is the ward or compound (*polo* or *egwe*), "a number of federated canoe houses" devoid of any gerontocratic system as its composition became more heterogeneous and its governance piloted by head of the most senior canoe house in the federation or *polo dabo* (Wariboko, 2007, p. 101). Since the ward or *polo* evolved from the affiliation of independent or quasi-autonomous lineages or canoe houses, it was customarily required of the *polo dabo* to work in concert and consultation with the heads of all federating lineages. Above the *polo* is the *ama* or village, a conglomeration of *polos*, which social cohesion was primarily defined

by the defence of common territory and sustainable exploitation of available resources for the common good. Its governance is headed by the *amayabo* or *okaanama* from the line of the founding ancestor. Above the *ama* or village is the nation of Andoni or city states of Bonny, Elem Kalabari, Nembe (Brass), Okrika, and Opobo where all the *polo* and *ama* heads form the national assembly (like the Kalabari *Se Kobiri* and Andoni *oru*) presided over by the *Amayanabo* or *Okaan Obolo* and assisted by the national gods, goddesses and deities (Ejituwu 1991, 1995; Eneyo 1991; Wariboko 2007, p. 108; Asuk, 2013).

The fishing economy of the Eastern Niger Delta villages united the members across lineage boundaries while other political, religious and social offices in the village also promoted solidarity and emphasized open criterion of talent (Alagoa, 1971, p. 271). The material basis of socio-political power in the pre-colonial formations of West Africa consisted of trade, slaves and taxes. Therefore, aggressive pursuit of traditional corporate economic and military objectives to achieve and sustain political survival and viability was common. Also, indigenous religion and such values as patriarchy, gerontocracy, and polygyny, the worship of deities, water spirits and veneration of ancestors ultimately defined the cultural character of interpersonal relationships within the nuclear family, house, ward, village, and nation (Law, 1978, pp. 37-52; Wariboko, 2007, p. 101).

The Academic Pedigree of Abi Alabo Derefaka

Abi Alabo Derefaka is an outstanding scholar of international repute who retired from active service in June 2020 at the University of Port Harcourt where he strode for well over three decades. He is one of Africa's foremost scholars of the prehistoric nature and structure, and evolution and character of contemporary African peoples, societies and institutions. He is an accomplished teacher whose numerous academic works in local and foreign outlets have both the depth and clarity of a true scholar. Derefaka is an epitome of scholarship and one of the pillars of the prestigious Department of History and Diplomatic Studies, University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria, where the likes of Emeritus Professor E. J. Alagoa, Professor S. J. S. Cooney, Professor N. Nzenwunwa, Professor J. U. J. Asiegbu, Professor N. C. Ejituwu, Professor Mac Dixon-Fyle, Professor W. E. Wariboko, and others, once plied their academic venture. Derefaka

contributed immensely to the development and shaping of such disciplines as Archaeology, Anthropology, Cultural Resource and Heritage Management as well as Environmental and Cultural Ethics in various universities in Nigeria.

At the famous King's College, Lagos, where he obtained his West African School Certificate (WASC) and Higher School Certificate (HSC), young Derefaka won the national highly-coveted John F. Kennedy Memorial Essay Competition in 1970. King's College, Lagos, nurtured in the young Derefaka the flair for scholarship in the arts. After leaving King's College, Lagos, in 1970, he proceeded to the University of Lagos where he narrowly missed a First-Class and graduated with honours in the Second-Class Upper Division bagging a Bachelor of Arts Degree in History as the Best Graduating Student in 1974. On completion of the compulsory one-year National Service at the Bassawa Teachers College, Kaduna, Northern Nigeria (July 1974 to July 1975) which, in the aftermath of the Nigerian Civil War, all Nigerian graduates below thirty years were mandated to undertake outside their regions of origin as part of the national integration process and policy of the Federal Government, Derefaka joined the growing community of Nigerians in search of the almost illusive Golden Fleece and landed at the Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, United States of America, in 1976. At Indiana University, Derefaka remained in the league of academic high-flyers as his name was a permanent fixture on the Chairman's List. In 1978, Derefaka earned a Master's of Arts Degree in African Anthropology, with emphasis on Archaeology, following the completion of his dissertation entitled: "Cordage, Fabric and Basketry of the Tichitt Tradition: A Later Prehistoric Complex of the Southwestern Sahara."

After his brief stay at Indiana University, Derefaka returned to Nigeria and enrolled for his doctorate at the University of Port Harcourt where he was awarded a Ph.D. in 1992 in History with specialization in Archaeology based on his thesis entitled: "Archaeology and Cultural History in the Central Niger Delta: Aspects of Central Ijo Culture History." Derefaka's teaching career started at the Boys High School, Borikiri, Port Harcourt, where he taught from January to July 1971 as his modest contribution to restarting the youths after the Nigerian Civil War disrupted and punctuated academic activities for thirty months. In December 1975,

he was appointed Research Assistant at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, and a Lecturer in September 1978 in the then fledgling Department of Archaeology, University of Ibadan. He transferred to the Department of History (rechristened Department of History and Diplomatic Studies in 2003), University of Port Harcourt, in September 1984 and retired in June 2020. Prior to his retirement, Derefaka served as Acting Head of Department between 1997 and 1999, and 2003 and 2005; Director, University of Port Harcourt Museum, 1992-2020; and Pioneer Director, Institute of Niger Delta Studies, 2011-2020. He had served as Assistant to the Chair holder, UNESCO Chair in Cultural Heritage.

The Archaeology of Derefaka and Historical Reconstruction of the Niger Delta

Archaeological reconstruction has so much interest in prehistory, which paid more attention to the development of social groups and societies, and the whole gamut of human activities, than to events. African prehistory revolves around “the Old Three Age system”: Early Stone Age, Middle Stone Age, and Neolithic/Late Stone or Metal Age. Archaeology sought to provide more concreteness and more chronological base to historical reconstruction and resolve such problems as subjectivity in historical narratives, ethnocentrism, and temporal centricism, which oral traditions struggle to overcome (Derefaka, 1998, pp. 111-112). As a professional archaeologist and anthropologist, Derefaka investigated the material remains of past cultures of Niger Delta societies to recreate their histories and determine the nature of the cultural systems that gave rise to the concepts of proto history, prehistory, history, and post history. The interpretations of the artefacts gathered from Derefaka’s archaeological activities in the Central and Eastern Niger Delta revealed the process of the development and evolution of cultural institutions, processes of change and continuity, informed settlement patterns, economic and occupational practices, and intra and inter regional interactions within the spatial distribution of Ijo ethnic group from Andoniland to Apoiland (Derefaka, 1998, pp. 115-117).

The archaeological data gathered from the excavated sites in the Central and Eastern Niger Delta demonstrated an expansive common occurrence of pottery and locally made clay smoking pipes in Niger Delta prior to the advent of Europeans and validated the oral tradition

evidence that leaves of bush mango (*Irvingagabonensis*) tree were collected and processed for smoking before the introduction of tobacco by Europeans (Derefaka, 1998, pp. 123-124). The chronological evidence from the archaeological findings situated the settlement period in the Niger Delta not later than the first millennium A. D., the Neolithic/Late Stone or Metal Age, characterized by bronze and iron workings. It showed that Okochiri in Okrika and the popular Igbo-Ukwu “appear to have been occupied at the same time ...” (Derefaka, 1998, pp. 124-125). The archaeological discoveries also show that there existed a markedly “stable socio-economic situation during the first millennium A.D., which must have aided the development of the city states of Okrika, Bonny, Andoni, Nembe, and Kalabari in the Eastern Delta and the various *Ibe* of the Central Niger Delta,” indicating a historical process of state formation in the Niger Delta (Derefaka, 1998, p. 126; Alagoa, 1970).

Moreover, the prevalence of ritual activities suggested well worked-out worldviews and religious practices by the indigenous peoples of the Niger Delta that acted as the fulcrum on which their interactions with the Europeans from the fifteenth century were conducted, and survived into the era of post Christian civilization. Archaeology produced an integrated approach to the reconstruction of the settlement history, socio-economic history, political history, and religious life of the societies of the Niger Delta, a geo-cultural region of Nigeria. It provided the basis to explain the progressive development of these communities from an economic baseline of hunting and gathering, farming, salt making, and fishing to local long distance trading, canoe carving, wood carving, gin making, as well as urbanization. Derefaka’s archaeological investigations gave concreteness to the argument that the impetus for change was previously initiated by indigenous vectors of internal dynamics prior to the post-contact external influences of Western Europe (Alagoa, 1970).

Comparing the material cultures of the Central and Eastern Niger Delta, the archaeological excavations proved that there were certain commonalities like the animal skin drums, metal gongs, and talking drums, same dressing patterns, and big bride wealth marriage between the two sub regions. They also had same pattern of rectangular house structures constructed with wooden frames and

raffia palm leaves thatched roofs, but different settlement outlines. While the Central Niger Delta was identified with sprawling lengthwise settlements along the creek or river bank, the Eastern Niger Delta showed settlements on islands beginning from the waterfronts and gradually spreading inside in time. Furthermore, the division of settlements into wards or quarters, and the concept of town squares for markets, recreational, political and ritual purposes were common to both zones. However, in the Eastern Niger Delta, the periodic markets were located on the mainland as border markets to facilitate trade and exchange with the hinterland neighbours (Derefaka, 2003, pp. 208-9).

Analysing the smoking pipes artefacts, Derefaka (2003, p. 212) shows that the manufacturing and use of locally made smoking pipes in Ogolomabegan sometime between 1255 and 1410 AD and continued beyond 1840 AD until the introduction and importation of European smoking pipes and tobacco destroyed the thriving indigenous industry. The resolution of the question of the movement of a family, a social structure, from a previous settlement to found another lies in the cooperation of the historian, anthropologist, and archaeologist (Ejituwu, 1998, p. 143; Leis, 1998, p. 185). Regarding the controversial question of origins and migrations, Derefaka (2003, p. 221) shows that the executed archaeological excavations in the Niger Delta did not prove that communities of the Eastern Niger Delta migrated from the Central Niger Delta as demonstrated by Alagoa (1972). For instance, the oldest date from Central Niger Delta (Isomabou) was the 11th century as against AD 770-1270 for Ke and AD 850-1500 for Okochiri in the Eastern Niger Delta. Alagoa (1987, p. 236) applauds the archaeologists for successfully reconstructing the cultural and economic history of the Niger Delta, but suggests that the oldest sites in the Central Niger Delta were yet to be located and excavated. This same suggestion also applies to the Eastern Niger Delta as some older settlements and dispersal centres, like Asaramatoru, have not been excavated.

Following therefrom, Derefaka (2003, pp. 221-222) suggests the identification, location and excavation of more dispersal centres in the Central, Eastern and Western Niger Delta, and submits that while some Eastern Niger Delta Ijo might find their 'roots' in the Central Niger Delta, others might find their ancestral home located in the Eastern Niger Delta. Thus, historical reconstruction needs to

be systematically documented with the support of archaeological evidence to provide records of indigenous knowledge and achievements which attrition by the adoption of Western strategies have become more evident.

Derefaka's Works and the Reconstruction of Niger Delta's Cultural and Socio-political History

A review of Derefaka's few scholarly works is necessary to show their relevance to the historians' efforts in the reconstruction of Niger Delta's cultural and socio-political history. His *Archaeology and Cultural History in the Central Niger Delta* (2003) synthesized the settlement hierarchy or chronology of the communities of the Central Niger Delta and the development of its cultural history, and also provided evidence of evolution of cultural institutions and links between the Central and Eastern Delta communities. These critical data provide a reasonable basis for historians interested in the reconstruction of the evolution of the component elements of the people's cultural and socio-political history. His "Cultural Heritage Management" (2002, pp. 247-257) emphasized that the significance of the products of the material culture of the people expressed in objects produced in wood, stone, clay, bone, and metal were derived from their ritual forms, ceremonies, utilitarian phenomena (music, dance, story-telling, festivals) and other cultural sets, which survived from the past into the present. These artefacts or cultural antiquities of the people deposited in the museum or other repositories from his archaeological excavations serve as veritable resources for the historian reconstructing the cultural and socio-political history of the Niger Delta for their preservation promotes cultural property in relation to values and facts of history.

Derefaka's "Prehistoric Developments" (2002, pp. 261-275) revealed the immense contribution of archaeological research and documentation to the historians' knowledge of development processes and transitions among the various communities of the Eastern Niger Delta from the distant past, and identified some abandoned indigenous industries. It provided the economic historian with useful documents of change and continuity in regional evolution. Likewise, his "Indigenous Technology" (1999, pp. 174-179) showed that the indigenous knowledge of the people is reflected and conveyed through material culture, land use and settlement

patterns, cultural institutions, value systems, systems of production, consumption and waste management, processes of resource identification, procurement, utilization and conservation. In this work Derefaka documented the indigenous technology of equipment production and fish smoking process for preservation, storage and packaging associated with their traditional fishing occupation; identified independent local technological developments as manufacture of ceramic and carving of canoes, furniture, ornamental objects, tools and weapons; cordage for fabric; production of salt, palm oil, palm wine, honey and native gin; indigenous technologies of orthopaedic and physiotherapy, and healing using leaves and roots of trees, as well as preservation and disposal of the dead. He recommended the systematic documentation of all these developments within a chronological framework, the duty of the historian.

Derefaka's "Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage Management in Nigeria" (2007, pp. 61-74) established the significance of indigenous knowledge to sustainable development. Indigenous knowledge relates to the people's cultural heritage and history in the production of crafts to reflect the exploitation of their environment as societies evolved. Such knowledge ascribed an intellectual property right (IPR) to a people in the diverse traditions of creativity. In this regard, Derefaka's archaeological record and ethnographic information are important tools in the documentation of indigenous technological achievements of Niger Delta cultures in relation to "how objects were made, what they were used for, and the nature of the organization of the process of their production", as well as the organization of economic activities and exchange, development of cultural and socio-political institutions and structures for interactions.

Conclusion

This article draws attention to the important contributions and degree of the connection of archaeology and anthropology to the reconstruction of the cultural history of the Niger Delta region. It succinctly demonstrates that the application of 'the archaeological science' to the process of reconstructing Niger Delta history is an authentication of the relevance of the multidisciplinary approach to the study of African history. It sustains the claim that archaeology

and anthropology are sources of history. Through their concern with the material remains of a people, they assist the historian in the study of the past of humanity. The material remains recovered by the archaeologist and anthropologist enable the reconstruction of the sequences of past events of a people and the indication of their relevance to contemporary Niger Delta. More so, since archaeological investigation demonstrates more interest in the prehistoric aspects of human beings and the development of social groups and societies, and the whole gamut of human past activities than to events, Niger Delta historical reconstruction is deeply enriched.

Archaeological excavations in the Niger Delta provided more concreteness and more chronological base to its communities' historical reconstruction and resolved some problems that oral traditions could not overcome. Derefaka's investigations of the material remains of past cultures of Niger Delta communities recreated their histories to determine the nature of the cultural systems that gave rise to the concepts of proto history, prehistory, history, and post history of the region. The interpretations of the artefacts gathered from Derefaka's archaeological activities in the Central and Eastern Niger Delta were useful to the understanding of the processes of the development and evolution of cultural institutions, processes of change and continuity, informed settlement patterns, economic and occupational practices. Perhaps, more importantly, is the fact that Abi Alabo Derefaka, in pursuing his professional career, played a prominent role in the enlightenment of his people about the past.

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