too soon became silent. Especially during my work of coordination I have become conscious of many important gaps that remain to be filled; but I no longer have Osifekunde to answer my questions, and I can only offer the results of our long and often fruitless conversations. I like to hope that the form in which I have presented these data will be excused by the interest of their source, and above all by the indulgence of my readers.

CHAPTER 9

SAMUEL AJAYI CROWTHER OF OYO

J. F. Ade Ajayi

Samuel Ajayi Crowther is probably the most celebrated of all the authors represented in this volume. His unusual qualities had begun to attract attention when he wrote the story of his capture and travels to the coast. The narrative not only throws light on the Yoruba Wars, it is also a preface to one of the greatest success stories of all time. Rescued from slavery, he became an Anglican bishop well known throughout West Africa, and a household name in many Christian homes in Britain and North America. He was a tireless traveller and scholar who founded churches, reduced his own Yoruba and other languages to writing, translated the Bible, and established schools and training colleges. He is now recognized as one of the most important of the nineteenth-century architects of modern Nigeria.

Crowther’s journeys as a slave boy in the Yoruba country took place in 1821 and 1822. He claimed that he was about thirteen years of age at the time of his capture, but the tradition of his family has usually modified this to about fifteen, and 1806 is generally accepted as the most likely date of his birth. After being loaded in Lagos for

1. Crowther to Commander Bird Allen, 1841, MS in Cape Town Diocesan Archives (henceforth cited as CTM); this recently discovered manuscript was the subject of a brief note by C. T. Wood, “A Crowther Manuscript in Cape Town,” Bulletin of the Society for African Church History, 1:99–100 (December 1964), and is to be published in a future number of the Bulletin. I am grateful to Rev. A. F. Walls, editor of the Bulletin and Secretary of the Society, for advance copy of the manuscript.

shipment to Brazil, he was captured at sea by two vessels of the British antislavery squadron and landed in Freetown on 17 June 1822. He quickly learned to read and write, was baptized in 1825, and spent a few months in 1826–27 at school in Islington, London. In 1827, he was the first student to register at Fourah Bay College in Freetown, now the oldest institution of higher learning in West Africa. He left to get married in 1829, was appointed a government school teacher in 1830, and returned to Fourah Bay as a tutor in 1834.  

Later he accompanied the British Niger Expedition of 1841–42 as a catechist. His published journal was only one of many works written by the members of the expedition, but it much impressed his employers, the Church Missionary Society. They sent him back to the Training College at Islington in 1842. He was then ordained deacon and later priest in 1843, after which he returned, first to Sierra Leone and then to the Yoruba country, where he served as a missionary in Badagry in 1845 and Abeokuta in 1846. He again accompanied Niger expeditions in 1854 and 1857, with still another published work of geographical discovery resulting. Meanwhile, he had also published a study of the Yoruba language in 1843, followed by an augmented edition in 1852.  

His most important work, however, was the Niger Mission, which he founded for the Church Missionary Society in 1857 with an all-African staff. In 1864, he was consecrated bishop, and in the following decade and a half he played a crucial role in opening the lower Niger Valley to British enterprise and the Christian religion. With the 1880s, however, he began to face a more hostile attitude on the part of Sir George Goldie and other British traders. They were gradually displacing African traders, and they therefore demanded European missionaries as well. Crowther was forced to resign in August 1890, and he died on New Year's Eve, 1891, at well over eighty years of age.


7. In the village of Osogun there is an 1888 edition of Jesse Page's Black Bishop which is held in very great esteem. It is kept locked up in a box in the possession of the direct descendants of the first bale of the new settlement. On the flyleaf of the book, there is a memo in Abigail Crowther's hand which reads as follows:

"Abigail Crowther Macaulay. The last surviving daughter of the late Bishop Crowther. For the last 20 years I have been praying for the rebuilding of the town of my father's birth-place Osogun, and as Nehemiah prayed and went to have Jerusalem rebuilt so we went in January 1972 took possession of the ruins of Osogun. The Lord helping us.

"Be it known to all, to whom it may concern, that we the descendants of The
According to traditions recorded by Jesse Page, Crowther’s biographer, Osogun was originally founded by a number of princes from Old Oyo (Oyo Ile) as a breakaway settlement from Iba-Agbakin, probably in the eighteenth century. Such settlements by unsuccessful candidates for the throne were not unusual, and there is in the village of Osogun today a strong tradition of a direct connection with the Oyo royal lineage. Apart from the settlers from Old Oyo, others came from Ketu and the Popo country to the south. Farming, weaving, and dyeing seem to have been the principal occupations. The ruins also show evidence of considerable iron-working, and it is said that iron was smelted in the neighborhood.

Dominated by a central position of the ruins is a huge tree, which marks the central shrine of Obatala (goddess of purity), the town’s most important deity, known more affectionately as Iyalode (the first Lady). Even today in spite of the inroads of Islam and Christianity, Iyalode retains a special place in the beliefs and religious affiliations of the villagers.

According to the tradition of the Crowther family, Samuel’s father was named Aiyemi. He was a descendant of one of the leading migrants from Ketu, and the family was well known for the peculiar type of cloth they wove (aso elerin), probably with an elephant design in the pattern. Crowther himself wrote: “I am the son of a weaver.”

Great King Abiodun have taken full possession of the ruins of the old town Oshogun (the birthplace of the late Bishop Samuel Adjai Crowther, Bishop of the Niger Territory), according to the rites of the Yoruba country. In January 16th 1923, Frank Gurney Venn Macaulay, grandson of the late Bishop Crowther, Obutue the brother of the Bale of Lalite, whose mother was a native of Oshogun, the Bale’s priest and doctor, with 25 men, went to the ruins of Oshogun and took full possession of it with the forest palm trees etc. and all that pertaineth to it for our Heirs.

“I am encouraged and quote a passage in a letter in the Book of the Black Bishop Samuel Adjai Crowther, in writing to Salisbury Square (my kind respects to all who care for the Africans, and I would comfort them that they need not be in despair that shall not return etc. etc.). We are a small band returning to Oshogun. I pray, trust and hope for great things. We are under the Alafin of Oyo.

"Yours truly,
“Abigail Crowther Macaulay with all others, relations, friends, from the town of Oshogun.”

“God helping us.”

8. This opinion is based on field work carried out in Osogun during February to April, 1964, with Mr. Wande Abimbola of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan.

... My father gradually introduced me into the trade of weaving the country cloth as well, as all his relations were of that trade. He also occasionally attended to agriculture” (CTM).

His mother’s family was even more distinguished. Her grandmoth-
er was said to have been a daughter of Alafin Abiodun (1770–89), the last great ruler at Old Oyo. Her father was said by Crowther himself to have been the “eldest” (perhaps the most senior) councillor to the bale of Osogun. She herself, Afala, was an important priestess of Obatala. She had four children, first Bola, a girl, then Ajayi, followed by two other daughters, Lanre and Amosha. Also living with them in the same household was a cousin of Crowther’s, and an adopted son. The household therefore was still relatively young and small when it was disrupted by war. It is not clear, however, whether it was self-contained or part of a larger family compound, with other wives and other brothers of Ayemi. Later references mention Crowther’s half-brother, which seems to imply that Ayemi had a second wife.

In any event, this household was caught up in the Yoruba Wars at the point in time when Afonja and his Fulbe allies made their bid for power in Oyo. And on this phase of the disorder, Crowther’s own account provides some useful evidence. Some writers have been eager to see in the Afonja revolt only an extension of Usman dan Fodio’s jihad in Hausa. But Crowther reports: “The enemies who carried on these wars were principally the Eyo [Oyo] Mahomedans—with whom my country abounds—with the Foulahs [Fulbe], and such foreign slaves as had escaped from their owners, joined together, making a formidable force of about 20,000 who annoyed the whole country.”

Insofar as the impressions of an intelligent boy of thirteen (or fifteen) are reliable, this evidence of a significant role played by Oyo Muslims in the Afonja revolt—and of the spread of Islam in Oyo even before the Fulbe jihad—tends to corroborate hints in the oral traditions collected by Samuel Johnson. These traditions mention a certain Solagberu as leader of the Oyo Muslims, whose quarter in the city of Ilorin was named Oke Suna. It is further supported by the number of Yoruba slaves professing Islam who arrived in Brazil and Sierra Leone in the early nineteenth century.

12. Excerpt from text; see below.

But the presence of a large Islamic population is not proof that the disorders in Oyo were necessarily connected with the Fulbe jihad at a very early date. Afonja, as a military leader seeking to increase his power, sought and received valuable support from Solagberu, the leading Muslim of Ilorin. But the alliance was not necessarily based on religion: Solagberu supported Afonja for the same reasons that others throughout Oyo supported him—friendship, political conviction, or convenience. Solagberu’s support, however, made it possible for Afonja to appeal to discontented Hausa slaves. From these and other discontented Muslims, he constituted bands of war boys, called Jama’a, or followers. They brought in new military techniques, and the defection of the Hausa slaves in particular weakened the cavalry force that remained loyal to the Alafin.

It may also have been Solagberu who was instrumental in inviting Alimi, an important Fulbe mallam, to come to Ilorin (though it was not unusual for important warriors to employ itinerant Muslim mallams as makers of charms and consultants on military, political, and other matters). In any case, Alimi had no official connection with the Fulbe jihad. He did not arrive until the early 1820’s, and the jihad had begun long since, in 1804. He also lacked an official appointment to act as “flagbearer” for the Sokoto government—otherwise, he would have become the emir after the victory. But Alimi brought the Fulbe jihad to Yoruba in a more indirect manner. At Afonja’s urging, he invited his sons to come down from Sokoto. Their arrival just before 1821 brought a new stage in the revolution. Where the father was a pious, shy, and humble cleric, the sons, and particularly Abdulrasul, were fighting statesmen who finally did convert Afonja’s secession into an outgrowth of the movement directed from Sokoto.

Afonja soon began to find the Fulbe and the Jama’a too powerful, and he became suspicious of their intentions. Before he could act against them, however, he was captured and killed. The movement then became clearly religious, though a further struggle for power ensued between Abdulrasul and Solagberu, with Abdulrasul emerging victorious. Much later, in about 1829 or 1830, Abdulrasul
finally received a symbolic flag from the caliph and assumed the title of emir. Ilorin then became part of the Fulbe empire. It is thus possible (though not certain) that this second phase of the Afonja movement began in the opening months of 1821, just at the time of Crowther’s capture. Crowther’s account makes it clear that the particular contingent which destroyed Osogbo was made up mainly of Oyo Muslims, operating from a base in Iseyin, but under conditions of great rivalry between the Yoruba and their Fulbe allies for the larger share of the booty. It may also be significant that the people of Osogbo did not expect to be attacked that day, since Crowther remarks that the Muslim army “used to pass over [our] town before without doing any harm” (CTM).

It would seem, therefore, that Oyo had been more than twenty-five years in crisis before Crowther’s journey began, and the collapse of the Oyo empire was well under way. It was only to be expected that the anarchy in the metropolitan province to the north of Crowther’s Ibarapa would have its impact on this part of southern Oyo. The

17. The Landers were among the rare European visitors to Old Oyo at this period. The growth of Fulbe influence, they reported in 1829:

“Another town of prodigious size has lately sprung into being, which already far surpasses Kauungu [Old Oyo] in wealth, population, and extent. It was at first resorted to by a party of Fulanis, who named it Aloria [Ilorin], and encouraged all the slaves in the country to flee from the oppression of their masters, and join their standard. They reminded the slaves of the constraint under which they laboured, and tempted them by an offer of freedom and protection, and other promises of the most extravagant nature, to declare themselves independent of Yoruba [Yoruba, that is, Oyo]. Accordingly the discontented many miles round eagerly flocked to Aloria in considerable numbers, where they were well received. This took place as far back as forty years, since which other Fulanis have joined their countrymen from Soccato [Sokoto] and Rabba...” (R. and J. Landers, Journal of an Expedition to Explore the Course and Termination of the Niger [2 vols., London, 1832], i:176-90).

The reference to the movement beginning some forty years before is reasonably consonant with the present view that anarchy began in Oyo during the 1790’s. The Landers’ further statement that the Fulbe had “recently” forced from the Alalia “a declaration of independence” probably refers to the time when Alafia lost control of the movement, not to his initial revolt. Alafia’s first revolt is usually dated 1817 on evidence from Muhammadan Emigrants of Nigeria (London, 1935), pp. 251-54; K. V. Elphinstone, The Gazetteer of Ilorin Province [London, 1921], p. 15). Furthermore, Alafia’s second step of defection to the Fulbe took place while the Owo War was still in progress; that is, ca. 1818 or 1820 to 1825 (see I. A. Akinkogbin, “The Prelude to the Yoruba Civil Wars of the Nineteenth Century,” Odo, 1 [new ser.], 24-46 [1963]). Crowther’s information that the Yoruba still dominated among his attackers in 1821, though relations were beginning to be strained, suggests that Alafia’s loss of control took place at about that time, or between 1821 and 1825.
have the happiness to enjoy the privilege of the Gospel, I give you a short account of it; hoping I may be excused if I should prove rather tedious in some particulars.

I suppose some time about the commencement of the year 1821, I was in my native country, enjoying the comforts of father and mother, and the affectionate love of brothers and sisters. From this period I must date the unhappy, but which I am now taught, in other respects, to call blessed day, which I shall never forget in my life. I call it unhappy day, because it was the day in which I was violently turned out of my father’s house, and separated from relations; and in which I was made to experience what is called to be in slavery—with regard to its being called blessed, it being the day which Providence had marked out for me to set out on my journey from the land of heathenism, superstition, and vice, to a place where His Gospel is preached.

For some years, war had been carried on in my Eyò [Oyo], Country, which was always attended with much devastation and bloodshed; the women, such men as had surrendered or were caught, with the children, were taken captives. The enemies who carried on these wars were principally the Oyo Mahomedans, with whom my country abounds—with the Foulahs [Fulbe], and such foreign slaves as had escaped from their owners, joined together, making a formidable force of about 20,000, who annoyed the whole country.

18. The usual time for the conduct of wars and raids was from January to April, in the dry season, when the floods began to subside and the rivers could be easily forded, and while there were still crops in the fields and warriors could live on the land.

19. Eyò is a variant of Oyo. (In early Yoruba orthography, it was for a while suggested that diacritical marks might be better above, rather than below letters.) The Oyo were the largest subgroup of the Yoruba. Other subgroups were Ife, Ijebu, Egba, Egbado, Ijesha, Ekiti, Ondo, Owa, and Akoko, each with its own dialect. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, there seems to have been no common name for all the subgroups. Yoruba (Yarriba) was the dialect of the Oyo people. Largely owing to the influence of Crowther, it was a modified version of this dialect that was popularized by the missionaries as the standard written form of the language of all the subgroups. In this and other ways the term Yoruba came to describe the language, country, and people of all the subgroups. (See J. F. Ade Ajai and R. S. Smith, Yoruba Warfare in the Nineteenth Century [Cambridge, 1964], pp. 1–2; J. A. B. Horton, West African Countries and Peoples [London, 1869], p. 150, quoted in T. Hodgkin, Nigerian Perspectives [London, 1966], p. 285.)

20. In describing the “enemies,” CTM puts the Fulbe before the Oyo Muslims: “The army was composed of Foulahs, Yorubas Mahomedans and slaves of every description who had run away from their masters. These collected together into an army of about 20,000 having strong swift horses, they became a plague to the kingdom of Yorriba.”

The military might of the Old Oyo empire depended very much on its cavalry force.
They had no other employment but selling slaves to the Spaniards and Portuguese on the coast.

The morning in which my town, Ocho-gu [Osogun], shared the same fate which many others had experienced, was fair and delightful; and most of the inhabitants were engaged in their respective occupations. We were preparing breakfast without any apprehension, when, about 9 o’clock A.M., a rumour was spread in the town, that the enemies had approached with intentions of hostility. It was not long after when they had almost surrounded the town, to prevent any escape of the inhabitants; the town being rudely fortified with a wooden fence, about four miles in circumference, containing about 12,000 inhabitants, which would produce 3,000 fighting men. The inhabitants not being duly prepared, some not being at home; those who were, having about six gates to defend, as well as many weak places about the fence to guard against, and, to say in a few words, the men being surprised, and therefore confounded—the enemies entered the town after about three or four hours’ resistance. Here a most sor-

rowful scene imaginable was to be witnessed!—women, some with three, four, or six children clinging to their arms, with the infants on their backs, and such baggage as they could carry on their heads, running as fast as they could through prickly shrubs, which, hooking their blies and other loads, drew them down from the heads of the bearers. While they found it impossible to go along with their loads, they endeavoured only to save themselves and their children: even this was impracticable with those who had many children to care for. While they were endeavouring to disentangle themselves from the rosy shrubs, they were overtaken and caught by the enemies with a noose of rope thrown over the neck of every individual, to be led in the manner of goats tied together, under the drove of one man. In many cases a family was violently divided between three or four enemies, who each led his away, to see one another no more. Your humble servant was thus caught—with his mother, two sisters (one an infant about ten months old), and a cousin—while endeavouring to escape in the manner above described. My load consisted in nothing else than my bow, and five arrows in the quiver, the bow I had lost in the shrub, while I was extricating myself, before I could think of making any use of it against my enemies. The last view I had of my father was when he came from the fight, to give us the signal to flee: he entered into our house, which was burnt some time back for some offence which were picked up in large quantities by the early settlers. This differs from the Crowther story, but is more in line with the usual Fulbe tactics of attacking towns early in the morning, sometimes sending a flight of doves with lighted tapers onto the roofs of houses, and then frightening the people into mass surrender by blocking exits with skilled bowmen.

21. Or Osogun. As with many Yoruba place names, it is difficult to find out what Osogun means. Jesse Page records an ingenious explanation, presumably from Crowther himself, that it means "it is not like medicine, that is, wisdom being the gift of the gods, unlike medicine, is freely imparted from man to man." It is now generally taken to mean Os-ogun, the ones that make medicine, being a shortened form of Osogun-teni eya, the ones that make medicine with birds’ beaks.

22. CTM adds: "as they used to pass over [our] town before without doing any harm, we thought they would do so at this time also."

23. CTM adds: "The day being fine as was above mentioned, several of the men went to their farms. Those who were at home being confused by the sudden approach and having four or five gates to defend and many decayed places about the town to guard against, they could not resist the approach of their enemies into the town." 

24. CTM adds: "After some skirmishes, they entered the town, and set the houses on fire so that the inhabitants fled. There was not much slaughter as the aim was to capture as many as they could."

The tradition in the village of Osogun today is that the town was surprised early in the morning while the people slept; that the town was riddled with arrows, remnants of
given by my father’s adopted son. Hence I never saw him more.—Here I must take thy leave, unhappy, comfortless father!—I learned, some time afterward, that he was killed in another battle.

Our conquerors were Oyo Mahomedans, who led us away through the town. On our way, we met a man sadly wounded on the head, struggling between life and death. Before we got half way through the town, some Foulahs [FULBE], among the enemies themselves, hostily separated my cousin from our number. Here also I must take thy leave, my fellow captive cousin! His mother was living in another village. The town on fire—the houses being built with mud, some about twelve feet from the ground with high roofs, in square forms, of different dimensions and spacious areas: several of these belonged to one man, adjoined to, with passages communicating with each other. The flame was very high. We were led by my grandfather’s house, already desolate; and in a few minutes after,

Shango became the imperial cult of Oyo, and as the empire spread the cult spread with it. (See E. B. Idowu, *Oladumare: God in Yoruba Belief* [London, 1962], pp. 89–95.)

28. The practice of adopting children (usually those of friends or relatives) was not uncommon in Yoruba country. A wealthy and indulgent parent might give someone else a child to bring up, partly for fear of spoiling the child and partly as a mark of courtesy. A girl would usually be given to a female friend or relation, and a boy to a male friend. If the arrangement worked well, the child might live with the adopted parent till he became an adult, married, and was ready to establish his own household. This type of adoption was in line with the extended family system, which encouraged a less personal and more communal form of family relationship.

29. The CTM version is more explicit. “In attempting to escape in the crowd with my mother, two sisters and a cousin, we were taken by two Yoruba [Yoruba] Mahomedans who immediately threw nooses of cords around our necks and led us away as their prey. . . . Scarcely had we got to the middle of the town when two Foulahs [FULBE] men attacked our captors and contended with them about dividing their prey as they had not gone in time to get any. My cousin was violently held on both sides; and my mother hearing the threats from the Foulahs to cut the poor fellow to pieces if our captors did not let him go; she struggled them rather to give him over to the Foulahs instead of having him killed; our captors having some feelings of humanity, let the boy to them with whom they ran off with the fury of a tiger. We four now remaining, great care was taken lest we should also be lost in like manner, as the soldiers were no little robbers among themselves.”

30. The traditional Yoruba compound (agbola—“where the males and their wives and unmarried children live,” in R. C. Abraham, *Dictionary of Modern Yoruba* [London, 1958]) consisted of a number of houses with common verandahs, grouped around an open space for cooking and recreation. The size varied from place to place, depending not only on the size of the particular extended family, but also on how quickly the lineage segmented. Usually, brothers continued to live together with their wives and children in the same compound, but by the time the sons began to marry, the older brothers would tend to move out and establish their own compounds.

31. CTM makes clear that this was the maternal grandfather. Presumably, Crowther’s own house was near to, or perhaps was part of, the paternal grandfather’s family compound.

32. For the Yoruba, to die abroad is a hard lot. Even today there remains a longing to retire, die, and be buried at home near the bones of the ancestors.

33. Sometimes spelled Isehin. By 1837, Crowther was already grappling with the problems of Yoruba orthography, particularly with the nasal sounds. Four years later, in CTM, he spells the name “Isehin.” See J. F. Ade Ajayi, “How Yoruba Was Reduced to Writing,” *Odu*, No. 8, pp. 49–50 (October 1960).

34. The distance by bush path would have been a little more than twenty-five miles, but in the circumstances, this was a good estimate.

35. In CTM, Crowther describes the crowd. He says they left the town “in company with thousands of our fellow townsman, companions in affliction, in the midst of wicked men, extending in the plain before and behind, beyond the reach of the eye, marching to the large and populous town of Isehin.”

36. CTM says: “Think how hard it must have been for many children who were younger than myself and for these women who were bowed with age: go they must or be killed on the spot.”

37. CTM says this stream was about seven or eight miles from Osogbo. The normal walking rate was about four miles an hour, but with the crowd it probably took some three hours to reach the stream. Crowther said the attack came about 9 A.M.; there was resistance for three or four hours. The taking of captives, the burning of the town, and the departure must have taken another hour or two, so that it would have been near evening when they reached the stream, which was probably part of the headwaters of the Opeki River.

38. Both manuscripts speak of “breakfast” here, although it was evening. Hours earlier, when the town was invaded, the victim had been about to eat breakfast.
parched corn and dried meat previously prepared by our victors for themselves.

During our march to Iseyin, we passed several towns and villages which had been reduced to ashes. It was almost midnight before we reached the town, where we passed our doleful first night in bondage. It was not perhaps a mile from the wall of Iseyin when an old woman of about sixty was threatened in the manner above described. What had become of her I could not learn.

On the next morning, our cords being taken off our necks, we were brought to the Chief of our captors—for there were many other Chiefs—as trophies at his feet. In a little while, a separation took place, when my sister and I fell to the share of the Chief, and my mother and the infant to the victors. We dared not vent our grief by loud cries, but by very heavy sobs. My mother, with the infant, was led away, comforted with the promise that she should see us again, when we should leave Iseyin for Dah’dah [Dada], the town of the Chief. In a few hours after, it was soon agreed upon that I should be battered for a horse in Iseyin, that very day. Thus was I separated from my mother and sister for the first time in my life; and the latter not to be seen more in this world. Thus, in the space of twenty-four hours, being deprived of liberty and all other comforts, I

39. CTM says “parched corn and preserved dried meat, both well seasoned with pepper.” This was the usual traveller’s diet, especially for warriors; women traders travelling in caravans might have had agidi (steamed corn pudding) and bean cakes, specially prepared to last two or three days.

40. They had travelled about twenty-five miles in something like ten hours, which for a crowd including old women and children was a fast pace. CTM adds that they “had occasionally to rest.”

41. The treatment of the old woman left a clear impression on Crowther. Four years later, in CTM, he gave more detail: “I heard an aged woman of about 60 who had kept up as far as fifty yards of the wall of Isekihi threatened in this manner; she was worn out with the long march; poor fellow, she was staggering from one side of the road to the other like a drunken person.”

42. The army apparently consisted of different contingents supplied by a number of Yoruba chiefs and their Fulbe allies. Each contingent reported to their chief with the bulk of their booty.

43. CTM spells it Dada. The ruins of Dada lie a few miles from the village marked on the maps as Ipofin Owu. As at Osogbo, there is now only a hamlet beside the old ruins. It is not clear at what point in the Yoruba Wars the town was destroyed. There is, however, evidence to suggest that it was a town of considerable importance, with a crowned head as ruler. The present ruler, a queen, attempts to keep up the tradition. The surrounding district has been opened for cultivation, and there is now an important market for yams and cocoa.

was made the property of three different persons. About the space of two months, when the Chief was to leave Iseyin for his own town, the horse, which was then only taken on trial, not being approved of, I was restored to the Chief, who took me to Dada, where I had the happiness to meet my mother and infant sister again with joy, which could be described by nothing else but tears of love and affection; and on the part of my infant sister, with leaps of joy in every manner possible. Here I lived for about three months, going for grass for horses with my fellow captives. I now and then visited my mother and sister in our captor’s house, without any fears or thoughts of being separated any more. My mother told me that she had heard of my sister; but I never saw her more.

At last, an unhappy evening arrived, when I was sent with a man to get some money at a neighbouring house. I went; but with some fears, for which I could not account; and, to my great astonishment, in a few minutes I was added to the number of many other captives, enfettered, to be led to the market-town early the next morning. My sleep went from me; I spent almost the whole night in thinking of my doleful situation, with tears and sobs, especially as my mother was in the same town, whom I had not visited for a day or two. There was another boy in the same situation with me: his mother was in Dada. Being sleepless, I heard the first cock-crow. Scarcely the signal was given, when the traders arose, and loaded the men slaves with baggage. With one hand chained to the neck, we left the town. My little companion in affliction cried and begged much to be permitted to see his mother, but was soon silenced by punishment. Seeing this, I dared not speak, although I thought we passed by the very house my mother was in. Thus was I separated from my mother and sister, my then only comforts, to meet no more in this world of misery. After a few days’ travel, we came to the market-town, I
jah'i [Ijaye]. Here I saw many who had escaped in our town to this place; or those who were in search of their relations, to set at liberty as many as they had the means of redeeming. Here we were under very close inspection, as there were many persons in search of their relations; and through that, many had escaped from their owners. In a few days I was sold to a Mahomedan woman, with whom I travelled to many towns in our way to the Popo country, on the coast, much resorted to by the Portugese, to buy slaves. When we left Ijaye, after many halts, we came to a town called To-ko [Itoko].

On arriving in Abeokuta, Crowther heard about them and sent for them. He later described the reunion:

"The text for today in the Christian Almanac is 'Thou art the Helper of the fatherless.' I have never felt the force of this text more than I did this day, as I have so relate that my mother, from whom I was torn away five and twenty years ago, came with my brother in quest of me. When she saw me she trembled. She could not believe her own eyes. We grasped one another, looking at one another in silence and great astonishment, while the big tears rolled down her emaciated cheeks. She trembled as she held me by the hand and called me by the familiar names which I well remember I used to be called by my grandmother who has since died in slavery. We could not say much, but sat still, casting many an affectionate look towards each other, a look which violence and oppression had long checked; an affection which twenty-five years had not extinguished. My two sisters, who were captured with me, and their children are all residing with my mother. I cannot describe my feelings. I had given up all hope, and now, after a separation of twenty-five years, without any plan or device of mine, we were brought together again."

Afala then came to live with her son, and some eighteen months later she was converted to Christianity and baptized Hannah. She continued to live with Crowther until she was nearly 100 years old, dying in Lagos, 15 October 1883 (Page, Black Bishop, pp. 94–97, 349–50; see also Macaulay, "A Yoruba Boy Named Adjii").

46. CTM uses the modern spelling. Ijaye in 1821 was on the northern fringe of the Egba forest. It was a town of the Egba Gbagun, one of the three main subdivisions of the Egba people, and an important route center. It apparently had a central market, where the Oyo brought slaves and other goods to exchange with the Egba for goods from the coast. Sometime before 1850, Ijaye was captured by Oyo warriors and the Egba were pushed southward. The new Ijaye was in turn destroyed by Jhadin forces in 1862.

47. The Popo, also known as Egun or Gun, inhabit the coastal region from Badagry to west of Porto Novo (called Ajase by the Yoruba). Porto Novo in particular was the outlet of Oyo trade in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Crowther's new mistress, the "Mahomedan woman," was Oyo-speaking. She seemed to have made Itoko her home, and apart from trading, she did some weaving (CTM). She obviously traded to the coast toward Badagry, rather than toward the Ijebu country.


49. This is one of the last recorded journeys through the Egba country before it was disrupted by wars which pushed them southward and westward to their present location based on Abeokuta. These wars took place between 1821 and 1850 and resulted in the enslavement of Joseph Wright (see Chap. 10).

50. Sacred shrines and groves of the polytheists.

51. Perhaps the woman trader took a liking to her sharp and intelligent slave. Crowther became a companion to her son. He was a domestic slave, probably sleeping on the same mat as the son, and eating from the same plate. The longer this continued the more Crowther have become a regular member of the household, with less and less likelihood of being sold. Or perhaps, as Crowther suspected, the woman was only waiting for a favorable opportunity to take him down to Badagry for sale. However, she does not appear to have been essentially a slave trader. She seems to have regarded the slave trade as a means of recruiting domestic labor, rather than as providing the principal article of trade.
Lord forgive me this sin! I determined, next, that I would leap out of the canoe into the river, when we should cross it in our way to that country. Thus was I thinking, when my owner, perceiving the great alteration which took place in me, sold me to some persons. Thus the Lord, while I knew Him not, led me not into temptation and delivered me from evil. After my price had been counted before my own eyes, I was delivered up to my new owners, with great grief and dejection of spirit, not knowing where I was now to be led. About the first cock-crowing, which was the usual time to set out with the slaves, to prevent their being much acquainted with the way, for fear an escape should be made, we set out for Jabbo [Ijebu], the third dialect from mine.

After having arrived at Ik-ke-ku Ye-re [Ikereku-iwere], another town, we halted. In this place I renewed my attempt of strangling, several times at night; but could not effect my purpose. It was very singular, that no thought of making use of a knife ever entered my mind. However, it was not long before I was bartered, for tobacco, rum, and other articles. I remained here, in fetters, alone, for some time, before my owner could get as many slaves as he wanted. He feigned to treat us more civilly, by allowing us to sip a few drops of White Man’s liquor, rum; which was so estimable an article, that none but Chiefs could pay for a jar or glass vessel of four or five gallons: so much dreaded it was, that no one should take breath before he swallowed every sip, for fear of having the string of his throat cut by the spirit of the liquor. This made it so much more valuable.

52. The previous sentence seems to suggest that this was an Ijebu town, and that from Ijoko Crowther travelled directly south out of Egbá country toward Ijebu. But in fact he traversed the Egbá country toward the east. CTM makes this clearer: “From Ijaye to Ikereku, about four or five days journey, the people speak the Egbá dialect.” Crowther was sold for money (that is, for cowrie shells, as CTM explicitly states), but he tells us nothing about his buyers. They might have been Egbá traders who thought they could make a profit if they bought slaves from the Oyo at Ijoko and sold them to the Ijebu at Ikereku-iwere.

I have not been able to locate the precise physical site of Ikereku-iwere (or Small Ikereku), but it is clear from the later journal of the missionary, Hinderer (15 December 1854, CMS, CA 2049) and from Irving (“The Ijebu Country,” p. 224) that it was within an hour’s walk of Ibadan on the road to the south. It should not be confused with Ikereku-Idan (or Great Ikereku) near the Ass River in the Oke-Ona region.

53. Crowther was bought by a trader, in this case an Ijebu trader, bringing tobacco, rum, and other articles from the coast in exchange for slaves which he intended to sell there.
I had to remain alone, again, in another town in Ijebu, the name of which I do not now remember, for about two months. From hence I was brought, after a few days' walk, to a slave-market, called I'-ko- sy [Ikosi], on the coast, on the bank of a large river, which very probably was the Lagos on which we were afterwards captured. The sight of the river terrified me exceedingly, for I had never seen any thing like it in my life. The people on the opposite bank are called E'-ko. Before sun-set, being bartered again for tobacco, I became another owner's. Nothing now terrified me more than the river, and the thought of going into another world. Crying was nothing now, to vent out my sorrow: my whole body became stiff. I was now bade to enter the river, to ford it to the canoe. Being fearful at my entering this extensive water, and being so cautious in every step I took, as if the next would bring me to the bottom, my motion was very awkward indeed. Night coming on, and the men having very little time to spare, soon carried me into the canoe, and placed me among the corn-bags, and supplied me with an Ab-alab [abala] for my dinner. Almost in the same position I was placed I remained, with my abala in my hand quite confused in my thoughts, waiting only every moment our arrival at the new world; which we did not reach till about 4 o'clock in the morning. Here I got once more into another dialect, the fourth from mine; if I may not call it altogether another language, on account of now and then, in some words, there being a faint shadow of my own. Here I must remark that during the

54. Perhaps Ovon or Makun, in central Ijebu-Remo. Crowther was now in the hands of professional slave traders. He was no longer a domestic slave, but a slave in transit pending departure overseas.

55. The Yoruba name for the town of Lagos, not for the people. The journey from Ikosi to Lagos involved a crossing to the southern side of the lagoon, but it was even more an east-west coastal trip down the lagoon. There seems to be a slight confusion here. CTM explains that he was "sold to the people from a town on the opposite shore or rather an island in the Lagos River." This is therefore not necessarily a reference to Lagos (though it is indeed an island in the lagoon), but to the traders who handled the traffic between Ikosi and Lagos.

56. Defined by R. C. Abrahams in *Dictionary of Modern Yoruba* as "Yoruba rice-pudding." More likely it was a steamed pudding made from maize or plantains, often used by travellers because it kept better than bran pudding, but I have nowhere found this called abala. In Oyo it is sanpala; in Ekiti, abari.

57. It is not clear why the traders chose to travel at night. It might have been because of the tides, or to avoid pirates and kidnappers. But it could have been out of fear of British antislavery patrols.

58. There is little evidence about the Lagos dialect at this period, but it is remarkable that Crowther found only faint echoes of Yoruba. A strong influence from Benin and
whole night’s voyage in the canoe, not a single thought of leaping into the river had entered my mind; but, on the contrary, the fear of the river occupied my thoughts.

Having now entered Eko [Lagos], I was permitted to go any way I pleased; there being no way of escape, on account of the river. In this place I met my two nephews, belonging to different masters. One part of the town was occupied by the Portuguese and Spaniards, who had come to buy slaves. Although I was in Lagos more than three months, I never once saw a White Man, until one evening, when they took a walk, in company of about six, and came to the street of the house in which I was living. Even then I had not the boldness to appear distinctly to look at them, being always suspicious that they had come for me; and my suspicion was not a fanciful one; for, in a few days after, I was made the eighth in number of the slaves of the Portuguese. Being a veteran in slavery, if I may be allowed the expression, and having no more hope of ever going to my country again, I patiently took whatever came; although it was not without a great fear and trembling that I received, for the first time, the touch of a White Man, who examined me whether I was sound or not. Men and boys were at first chained together, with a chain of about six fathoms in length, thrust through an iron fetter on the neck of every individual, and fastened at both ends with padlocks. In this situation the boys suffered the most: the men sometimes, getting angry, would draw the chain so violently, as seldom went without bruises on their poor little necks; especially the time to sleep, when they drew the chain so close to ease themselves of its weight, in order to be able to lie more conveniently, that we were almost suffocated.

Gun would be expected, and perhaps also from Portuguese. After 1851, the strong invasion of literary Yoruba has reduced the foreign element in the dialect.

59. It is remarkable that although the Ijebu slave traders seemed to have felt so unsafe on the Lagos lagoon that they chose to travel by night, at Lagos itself, protected by the solid political backing of the Lagos monarchy, the Portuguese traders were completely at their ease. Their only problem was to choose the right time to elude the squadron until they were on the high seas.

60. These were likely to be sons of half-brothers or half-sisters much older than himself. Thus although Crowther nowhere mentions other wives of his father, there must have been at least one other, probably senior to Afaa.

61. The main residential area of Lagos was at the time what is now called Isale-Eko, around the palace. The Europeans—or more likely Brazilian and Cuban—traders probably lived on the Marina or what later became the Brazilian quarter around the Holy Cross Cathedral.

or bruised to death, in a room with one door, which was fastened as soon as we entered in, with no other passage for communicating the air than the openings under the eaves-drop. Very often at night, when two or three individuals quarrelled or fought, the whole drove suffered punishment, without any distinction. At last, we boys had the happiness to be separated from the men, when their number was increased, and no more chain to spare: we were corded together, by ourselves. Thus we were going in and out, bathing together, and so on. The female sex fared not much better. Thus we were for nearly the space of four months.

About this time, intelligence was given that the English were cruising the coast. This was another subject of sorrow with us—that there must be war also on the sea as well as on land—a thing never heard of before, or imagined practicable. This delayed our embarkation. In the meanwhile, the other slaves which were collected in Popo, and were intended to be conveyed into the vessel the nearest way from that place, were brought into Lagos, among us. Among this number was Joseph Bartholomew, my Brother in the service of the Church Missionary Society.

After a few weeks’ delay, we were embarked, at night in canoes, from Lagos to the beach; and on the following morning were put on

62. It would appear from this that Crowther spent about seven months altogether in Lagos—more than three months at Isale-Eko, nearly four months in chains—but this was probably an exaggeration, especially as to the time spent in chains awaiting embarkation. In 1851 when the vigilance of the British squadron was still so inadequate, it was unlikely that no opportunity considered favorable for eluding them should turn up in four months. CTM mentions only about three months “in this factory called by the natives Eko,” before he was sold to the Portuguese, and says nothing about the period spent in chains. In my calculations, I have allowed only four to five months for the stay in Lagos.

63. By this time, the British anti-slave-trade squadron had been reinforced to a normal strength of six ships, and they were enjoying a period of relative success in capturing slave traders. Between 21 February and 9 April 1852, they captured nine vessels, five of them on the same day; and in June, Commodore Sir Robert Mends wrote to the Admiralty: “Within a very short period, the ships of war on this coast have boarded forty-five vessels engaged in the Slave Trade of which sixteen were captured having on board 2,481 slaves. . . . [These captures] show beyond the possibility of doubt or contradiction, the preponderance of France (19) and Portugal (19) in this traffic” (Mends to Admiralty, 17 April and 20 June 1852, Public Record Office, London, ADM 1/2188). But the chance of capture was still slight; since the Royal Navy was not yet permitted to seize vessels unless slaves were actually found on board, and it was limited by treaty in its operations south of the equator (see C. Lloyd, The Navy and the Slave Trade [London, 1949]).
board the vessel, which immediately sailed away. The crew being busy embarking us, 187 in number, had no time to give us either breakfast or supper; and we, being unaccustomed to the motion of the vessel, employed the whole of this day in sea-sickness, which rendered the greater part of us less fit to take any food whatever. On the very same evening, we were surprised by two English men-of-war; and on the next morning found ourselves in the hands of new conquerors, whom we at first very much dreaded, they being armed with long swords. In the morning, being called up from the hold, we were astonished to find ourselves among two very large men-of-war and several other brigs. The men-of-war were, His Majesty's ships Myrmidon, Captain H. J. Leeke, and Iphigenia, Captain Sir Robert Mends, who captured us on the 7th of April 1822, on the river Lagos.

Our owner was bound with his sailors; except the cook, who was preparing our breakfast. Hunger rendered us bold; and not being threatened at first attempts to get some fruits from the stern, we in a short time took the liberty of ranging about the vessel, in search of plunder of every kind. Now we began to entertain a good opinion of our conquerors. Very soon after breakfast, we were divided into several of the vessels around us. This was now cause of new fears, not knowing where our misery would end. Being now, as it were, one family, we began to take leave of those who were first transshipped, not knowing what would become of them and ourselves. About this time, six of us, friends in affliction, among whom was my Brother Joseph Bartholomew, kept very close together, that we might be carried away at the same time. It was not long before we six were conveyed into the Myrmidon, in which we discovered not any trace of those who were transshipped before us. We soon came to a conclusion of what had become of them, when we saw parts of a hog hanging, the skin of which was white—a thing we never saw before; for a hog was always roasted on fire, to clear it of the hair, in my country; and a number of cannon shots were arranged along the deck. The former we supposed to be the flesh, and the latter the heads of the individuals who had been killed for meat. But we were soon undeceived, by a close examination of the flesh with a clowen foot, which resembled that of a hog; and, by a cautious approach to the shot, that they were iron.

In a few days we were quite at home in the man-of-war: being only six in number, we were selected by the sailors, for their boys; and were soon furnished with clothes. Our Portuguese owner and his son were brought over into the same vessel, bound in fetters; and, thinking that I should no more get into his hand, I had the boldness to strike him on the head, while he was shaving by his son—an act, however, very wicked and unkind in its nature. His vessel was towed along by the man-of-war, with the remainder of the slaves therein. But after a few weeks, the slaves being transshipped from her, and being stripped of her rigging, the schooner was left alone on the ocean—"Destroyed at sea by caprors, being found unseaworthy, in consequence of being a dull sailor."

One of the brigs, which contained a part of the slaves, was
wrecked on a sand-bank: happily, another vessel was near, and all the lives were saved. It was not long before another brig sunk, during a tempest, with all the slaves and sailors, with the exception of about five of the latter, who were found in a boat after four or five days, reduced almost to mere skeletons, and were so feeble, that they could not stand on their feet. One hundred and two of our number were lost on this occasion.

After nearly two months and a half cruising on the coast, we were landed at Sierra Leone, on the 17th of June 1822. The same day we were sent to Bathurst, formerly Leopold, under the care of Mr. [Thomas] Davey. Here we had the pleasure of meeting many of our country people, but none were known before. They assured us of our liberty and freedom; and we very soon believed them. But a few days after our arrival at Bathurst, we had the mortification of being sent for at Freetown, to testify against our Portuguese owner. It being hinted to us that we should be delivered up to him again, notwithstanding all the persuasion of Mr. Davey that we should return, we entirely refused to go ourselves, unless we were carried. I could not but think of my ill-conduct to our owner in the man-of-war. But as time was passing away, and our consent could not be got, we were compelled to go by being whipped; and it was not a small joy to us to return to Bathurst again, in the evening, to our friends.

From this period I have been under the care of the Church Missionary Society; and in about six months after my arrival at Sierra Leone, I was able to read the New Testament with some degree of freedom; and was made a Monitor, for which I was rewarded with sevenpence-halfpenny per month. The Lord was pleased to open my heart to hearken to those things which were spoken by His servants;

68. The multiplicity of vessels which appears in Crowther's account at this point is explained by the fact that the Iphigenia and the Myrmidon continued their cruise to the eastward. On 15 April 1822, they came on five loaded slavers in the Bonny River of the Niger Delta, all of which were captured "after a sharp action" (Mends to Admiralty, 17 April 1822, ADM 1/2188). The Myrmidon thus continued to take other receptives on board, until Crowther's original group had grown to some seventy-three before the ship finally reached Freetown in June.

70. In the event that the Court of Mixed Commission did not condemn the Esmerance Felix and confiscate the cargo. Slaves were usually left on board until the judicial process was completed; but in this case the vessel had been abandoned at sea, and the receptives had arrived in Sierra Leone aboard a variety of different ships.

and being convinced that I was a sinner, and desired to obtain pardon through Jesus Christ, I was baptized on the 17th of December, 1825, by the Rev. J. Raban. I had the short privilege of visiting your happy and favour'd land in the year 1826. It was my desire to remain for a good while, to be qualified as a Teacher to my fellow-creatures; but Providence ordered it so, that, at my return, I had the wished-for instruction under the tuition of the Rev. C. L. F. Haensel, who landed in Sierra Leone in 1827, through whose instrumentality I have been qualified so far, as to be able to render some help, in the service of the Church Missionary Society, to my fellow-creatures. May I ever have a fresh desire to be engaged in the service of Christ, for it is perfect freedom!

Thus much I think necessary to acquaint you of the kindness of Providence concerning me. Thus the day of my captivity was to me a blessed day, when considered in this respect; though certainly it must be unhappy also, in my being deprived on it of my father, mother, sisters, and all other relations. I must also remark, that I could not as yet find a dozen Osogun people among the inhabitants of Sierra Leone.

I was married to a Christian woman on the 21st of September 1829. She was captured by His Majesty's Ship Barn, Capt. Charles

71. The name Samuel Crowther, which he took at this time, was chosen to honor an English benefactor of the Church Missionary Society (Fyle, Sierra Leone, p. 172).

72. He accompanied Rev. and Mrs. Thomas Davey, his first guardians at Bathurst, to Britain in 1826 and for a few months attended the parish school at Liverpool Street, Islington, North London.

73. Haensel was a Bavarian who had formerly worked for the Basel Missionary Institution. He was sent out to revive the C.M.S. training college and to alter its character from a trade school to a seminary. To this end, the college was transferred from the village of Regent to Foureah Bay, then just outside Freetown. It was designed to be a nursery for the C.M.S. Training Institution in Islington, but at the same time it offered a liberal education in English, the classics, and Arabic. When it opened in its new quarters on 3 April 1827, Crowther was the first student enrolled. He was also the only one adequately prepared. Three others were accepted on probation. See D. L. Summer, Education in Sierra Leone (Freetown, 1965); T. J. Thompson, The Jubilee and Centenary Volume of Foureah Bay College, Freetown (Freetown, 1930), pp. 9-10; Fyle, Sierra Leone, p. 172.

74. Susan Anno Crowther, née Thompson. There is a tradition that she was a granddaughter of Alase Ife, the first Alase at present-day Oyo (through her mother, Siya). Samuel and Susan grew up together under the Davys. Susan was a trained schoolmistress, and she later opened schools for girls in Abeokuta and Lagos. She died 19 October 1850 (Macaulay, “A Yoruba Boy Named Adjasi”; Page, Black Bishop, pp. 348-49).
Phillips, on the 31st October 1822. Since, the Lord has blessed us with three children—a son, and two daughters.  

That the time may come when the Heathen shall be fully given to Christ for His inheritance, and the uttermost part of the earth for His possession, is the earnest prayer of Your humble, thankful, and obedient Servant, Samuel Crowther

75. Samuel Crowther, Jr., had some medical training in England and for a time operated a dispensary in Abeokuta. Later, he took to trade and then became an architect and draftsman of some note.

Abigail Crowther was also educated in England. In 1854, she married Rev. T. B. Macaulay, who later founded and became the first principal of the Lagos C.M.S. Grammar School. She was the mother of Herbert Macaulay, the prominent Nigerian political leader of the early twentieth century.

Susan Crowther married Rev. G. C. Nicol, for a time government chaplain at Bathurst in Gambia.

Crowther later had three other children: Josiah, who became a businessman; Julianah, who married Thompson, another businessman; and Dandston, who became an archdeacon in the Niger Delta Pastorate.

CHAPTER 10

JOSEPH WRIGHT OF THE EGBA

Philip D. Curtin

Joseph Wright was the latest-born and latest-enslaved of the four Nigerian narrators. Nevertheless he was captured at the earliest phase of the crisis as it affected his particular city and his family, since Egba was only drawn into the general Yoruba collapse at a late date. Wright's narrative therefore has a special charm, as he looks back on the relatively stable world of his early years. It is also one of the few that have survived in manuscript form, written in what is presumably his own hand and free of editorial corrections by European friends. It was also written within a dozen years after his capture, and before his period of education in England. Wright later became a thoroughly educated man, whose letters during his career as a missionary for the Wesleyan-Methodist Missionary Society read like those of the European missionaries, but this narrative is recounted by a man not yet fully within the Western tradition, though he was already on his way to prominence in Sierra Leone.

Wright belonged to the Egba Alake, one of the three major subdivisions of the Egba people, along with Gbagura and Oke-Ona. The Egba Alake were essentially a forest people, north of the more open land of Ijebu and well south of the savanna. Their many walled towns were apparently virtually independent of one another, serving as small centers whose inhabitants worked at crafts or went out to hunt or practice shifting cultivation. Whatever political unity they enjoyed was a loose confederation under the leadership of the alake, or ruler, of the town of Ake, who was chosen in turn by an inner cir-