



ADDITIONAL NOTES

The Niger Delta Peoples

The peoples of the Niger Delta can be divided into Ibibios, Ijaws, Urhobos, etc. Slave trade was rife in this area in the 17th and 18th centuries. The people were mostly traders and farmers. The basis of political cum social organization in this area was very small units, referred to as the “house” system, complete with extended families, age grades and secret societies. The latter played an important role among the Ibibios particularly, where control of political institutions was in the hands of members of the secret societies rather than lineage groups, as was the case in Igboland.

A “house” consisted of a farmer or trader, his slaves, his own descendants, and those of his slaves. A number of “houses” comprised a city-state. Inter-house disputes were settled by a city assembly made up of house chiefs and presided over by an elected chief.

The Ijaws were divided into four main clans or city-states: Nembe, Kalabari, Brass, and Warri. The town assembly was responsible for communal policy making. The “Sakapu” secret society exercised both administrative and judicial functions. The mode of organization of the Urhobos was similar to that of the Ijaws in all respects. However, one group in the Niger Delta, the Itsekiri, had a centralized kinship pattern of government, similar to those of the Bini and the Yoruba.

As time went on, in certain areas the house system changed. With increased involvement in the booming overseas slave trade and later in legitimate trade, the house system, previously organized on the basis of lineage groups, was replaced by what was known as the “canoe house system.” Under this system, people from different lineage groups combined to form a corporation for the purpose of trade.

The Tallensi

The Tallensi occupy the northern territories of the old Gold Coast (now Ghana). Today, they are peasant farmers, engaged mainly in the cultivation of cereal crops. The essential feature of their traditional agriculture is mixed farming, involving permanent and stable settlements, which profoundly influenced the social organization which was based on the clan system.

Clusters of homesteads were known as “suman.” A residential aggregate constituted a clan, or a group of clans, members of which were kinfolk by consanguinity. Rights and duties, privileges and obligations were vested in corporate units, and any authorized member could act on behalf of the unit or clan. Each lineage was

