

TRADE AND TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM IN PRE-COLONIAL ANNANG, AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examines the trade and transportation system in pre-colonial Annang. The study interrogates how the pre-colonial people of Annang traded with their immediate and distant neighbors. The paper examines how the people adapted to their environment and harnessed their human and material resources for effective and efficient production, which primarily met their needs and aspirations and those of their neighbours through trade. The paper extensively relies on primary information from oral interviews and archival sources. The findings show that though there was an exchange of goods, the pre-colonial Annang economy was largely subsistence. The economy was viable, solid, and dynamic. The exchange and transportation systems were efficient and well organized, which helped to meet the needs and demands of society.

Introduction

Annang people occupy the North-Western part of Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria, which lies within the Cross River Basin, between latitudes 40.25' and 70 North and longitudes 70.15' and 90.30' East.¹ Pre-colonial Annang was made up of thirty-four kingdoms (*Aduk*), which included Adiasim, Ekpenyong Atai, Ikpe, Odoro Ikot, Okon, Ukana, Amanyam, Ikot Abia, Nto Edino, Obot Akara, Abak/Midim, Ibesit Nung Ikot, Ito Ika, Ika Annang, Obong, Uruk, Utu, Afaha Adat Ifang, Afaha, Ukanafun, Abak, Ediene, Afaha Obong, Midim, Obio Akpa, Ekparakwa, Ibesit, Inen, Nung Ita, Nung Ikot and Otoro.² these kingdoms had independent political institutions headed by a king (*Okuku*). Therefore, there were thirty-four kings in Annang. During the colonial period, the Annang were majorly found in Ikot Ekpene and Abak Division in Calabar Province, with some other sub-sets occupying 150 square miles in the north of *Opobo* Division in Rivers Province with sixty-eight villages.³ These communities had a common cultural bond,

and they all looked up to Afaha Obong, where the Annang supreme deity is their place of origin and traditional headquarters.⁴ To the North, Annang is bounded by *Lni* and *Ikono* Local Government Areas and to the South, by *Ikot Abasi* Local Government Area of *Akwa Ibom* State. To the West, Annang is bounded by *the Ngwa* and *Azumini* communities of *Abia* State and *the Ndoki* community of *Rivers* State, and to the East by the *Uyo* and *Mkpatenin* Local Government Areas of *Akwa Ibom* State. Geographically, Annang lies almost entirely in the rainforest belt of Southern Nigeria. The area has a landscape of relatively low vegetation and many palms. There is a mean annual rainfall of 2030 - 2540mm. Annang has a tropical climate with wet and dry seasons. The wet season spans from March to October when the monsoon winds blow from the South-West, while the dry season spans from November to February when the harmattan (*ekarika*) blows from the North-East. The landscape is generally flat and low-lying, with no point rising above 300ft and no part less than 100 feet above sea level.⁵

Annang, with a population of more than one million, is the second largest ethnic group in *Akwa Ibom* State.⁶ The Annang are found in eight of the thirty-one Local Government Areas in *Akwa Ibom* State, namely *Abak*, *Essien Udim*, *Etim Ekpo*, *Ika*, *Ikot Ekpene*, *Obot Akara*, *Oruk Anam*, and *Ukanafun*, yet they are culturally homogenous.

Trade

Trade is buying and selling goods and services or exchanging goods and services between parties. Given the multiplicity of kingdoms and villages in Annang, a picture immediately comes to mind that each kingdom was socially and politically independent of others. Nothing could be further from the truth than this. About the delta and the hinterland of Eastern Nigeria, for example, K. O. Dike has pointed out that "beneath the apparent fragmentation of authority lay deep fundamental unities not only in the religious and cultural spheres but also in matters of politics

and economic”.⁷ This was also the case of Annang kingdoms and villages as commerce was an integral aspect of the economic life of the peoples, more so, as some of them produced certain things which others lacked. The Annang have been engaged in internal trade, but economic exigencies arising from surplus or needs often shift from internal to external trade.

The centre for internal trade was, of course, the village market, mainly located near the compound of the village head. Markets, the centre of significant marketing activities in most Annang villages, were patronized by traders from within and outside the area. In some villages, there were other minor markets. For example, in the Ukana clan, which was made up of thirty-nine villages, the following significant markets existed: Obo Annang, Ikot Ofiong, Urua Anwa, Edet Akpa Inyang, Etim Ukan, Ura Ete, Ofiong Eto, Ekpa Umo Ekut. The minor markets in the clan included Okob Akama, Ura Usung, Urua Ikot, and Anwa Iyang.⁸ In Ika kingdom with seventeen villages, there were about eight markets that were operating within the bounds of the clan which included Urua Obo Osukpon, Urua Ekpe, Urua Ekpon, Urua Enen Ikot Ekon Urua Enen Ikot Inyan Ese, Urua Inya, Urua Mkpo Idomo and urua Mbe Ede. The following were significant markets: Urua Obo Osukpon, Urua Inyan, and Urua Enen Ikot Okon.⁹

The main markets were periodic. This means the markets are held at regular intervals of three or four days within the eight-day traditional week in Annang. A unique feature was that the markets in each Annang kingdom were arranged so that no two or three villages nearby had their markets on the same day. For example, in Ika kingdom, Urua Obo Osukpon in Ikot Osukpon was held on Obo day, Urua Ekpe at Nto Udo Enwan was held on Etim, Urua Ekpon at Nto Urua was on Offion Ibom, Urua Enen Ikot Ekon at Ikot Ekon was on Ekpo, Urua Enen Ikot Inyan Ese at Ikot Inyan Ese was on Edet, Urua Ekpo Idomo at Ikot Idomo was on Etim and Urua Ebe Ede at Ikot Akpa Offion was held on Offion day.¹⁰ The objective of this arrangement was to ensure

maximum attendance at the markets by the people of the areas. The markets in the areas were well organized as different wares were displayed in the different sections allocated to them. All the buyer needed to do was to go to the sections where particular articles could be bought. As a result of the availability of markets in all the major villages in Annang, local traders could go to the markets either in their locality or at a nearby village and return home on the same day.

The minor markets were usually small and were primarily conducted in every village in Annang. Examples of this type of market in the Ukana kingdom were Okob Akuma, held at Uruabom; Urua Using, held at Ofiong Eto; and Anwa Inyang, held at Etim. These markets were held in between the main markets. There were usually few buyers and sellers in these markets. The reason for these types of markets was also to serve the people's immediate needs. These markets allowed people to buy and sell certain goods between the main market days. Though the people had devised ways and means of preservation, most of the food crops were perishable, so the minor markets provided an avenue for the people to buy whatever they needed before the main market days. The principal commodities traded in these markets by women were cocoyam, fish, pepper, salt, beads, mats, and pottery products, among other items. Men traded on livestock, palm wine, and carved works. Both men and women sold local tobacco, crayfish, and yam, even though men dominated the sale of yam.

The second type of trade that emerged in Annang was the external trade with other communities, such as the Igbos, specifically Ngwa and Azumini, and Ibibio groups, such as Ete, Ikot Akan, Ibekwe, Okun, and Itu. Since most of these communities were essentially rural and affected by social problems like sound transportation systems, the people in these communities worked out an arrangement in which goods were carried from one ecological zone to another by groups of relay traders.¹¹ Relay traders enable goods moved from one area to the other no matter the

distance. So, traders did not need to travel to distant markets to buy and sell their products. All they needed to do was go to the nearest market as the goods moved from one village to another until the final destination.

This trend was accentuated by the migration of early Annang inhabitants from Abak, a process which enabled those in the peripheral villages to establish various forms of contact with their neighbors such as the Ngwa, Azumini, Ndoki, and Aro people who, after that, played the middleman's role between local Annang producers and traders on the one hand and coastal merchants on the other. This development enhanced the degree of geographical mobility of the people concerned. It engendered considerable inter-group trade as inhabitants of these areas were conveniently positioned to attend the periodic markets held in the different cultural areas. Under long-distance trade, a trader buys items from one place and sells them in another, not merely for subsistence but for profit.

Unlike the internal trade, which women dominated, external trade was mainly in the hands of men who could face the tremendous danger involved in such trade. The traders usually arrange overnight stopovers with friends or close relations on the way. This was especially so as there was no known fast means of transportation in Annang. Salt, enslaved people, iron products, and fish were historically the most important articles of external trade in Annang, which came from the Igbo, Efiik, and Ibibio. In supporting the existence of long-distance trade, the Portuguese geographer Duarte Pacheco Pereira gave what today is a historical reference to a sustained and thriving trade relationship between the Eastern Niger Delta and the hinterland up to the sixteen century. He remarked:

They travel a distance of a hundred leagues and more down the river and bring many yams, which are very good here (sic) and

make a tolerable diet, many enslaved people, cows, goats, and sheep....; all this they sell salt to Negroea of the aforesaid village.¹²

Pacheco neither tells us the names of the sea-faring people who "travel distances of a hundred leagues and more down the river" nor that of the salt-making "Negroes" of the "aforesaid village." However, this account of early trade in the area is historically significant. In the first place, his account supports what Annang oral traditions maintain to be centuries-long commercial relationships with the Niger Delta people. For example, the Ibibio and Efik brought salt to Annang markets in exchange for carved products. It was not only the exchange of articles in this commerce; they also established a relationship based on mutual respect. Historically, long-distance trade was a product of geographical and environmental necessities. While large areas of the Cross Rivers were too swampy to support agriculture and stock-raising, most parts of the hinterland needed natural salt deposits.

Despite the lack of clarity in Pacheco's account, however, Dike has postulated that the sea-farming people mentioned in the account may have been the people that are contiguous to the Annang but more ethnologically and commercially associated with Bonny. Right from its foundation, traders from coastal areas of the Niger Delta, such as Bonny and Opobo, adapted water transport by using canoes that made it easy to travel to supply the Annang with most of the items they needed from the coastal area of Niger Delta.¹³ Up to the late eighteenth century, local (internal) trade remained the dominant form of trade in Annang before complex social and economic forces led to the development of long-distance trade.

Trade Routes

The trade routes cut across all the kingdoms in Annang, stretching from Obot Akara to Ikot Ekpene through Abak, Edine to Afaha Obong to Midim to Obio Akpa to Ekparakwa Ikot Ibritam where it turned and ran south through Ibesit to Inen to Ndot to Nung It to nung Ikot to Ibesit Nung Ikot to Abak Midim.¹⁴ Other major trade routes were from Ikot Ekpene through Abak to Ikparakwa through East to Ukanafun to Etim Ekpo with a diversion to Ika through to Adiasm to Afaha through to Ekpenyong Atai to Ikpe to Odoro Ikot to Okon to Ukana to Ikot Abia to Nto Edino to Obot Akara. Other routes linked Annang with her immediate neighbors. For example, Abak through Ikot Ekpene to Umuahia, Abak through to Etim Ekpo to Azumini, Obot Akara through Ikot Ekpene to Uyo. Within these routes are transit posts where traders who found themselves overloaded with goods rested and sold off some of those goods.

Regulation of Trade

There were specific rules and regulations guiding trading activities among the Annang. The various traditional rulers in any of the Annang villages had great control over the trade routes in their communities. They introduced rules and regulations, such as settling disputes, collecting fines and dues, and law and order along trade routes to guide the trade between their people and immediate and distant neighbors. These regulations ensured security and peace for traders and were enforced in the markets through market heads (*mbong Urua*), who helped the traditional rulers to maintain law and order.¹⁵ They supervised transactions and settled minor disputes between the traders while collecting fines and dues on behalf of their village heads. This was because the maintenance of law and order along the trade routes in any Annang village rested with the village heads of the connected routes. Occasionally, on an agreed date and time, able-bodied men from adjoining villages met to clear the routes linking them to the market.

A particular tree usually marked the boundaries between the villages. A tree that usually marks the boundaries between the villages is called chloroform excelsa (*ukpo* or *uno*), jointly planted by the villages involved. Usually, at the end of the clearing of the routes that linked the market, the traditional rulers provided food and palm wine for the villagers who did the clearing. After that, the people of the various villages that made up the market swore to maintain their friendship. It was, therefore, not typical for robbers from one village to attack traders from other villages with whom their people had taken an oath of friendship. This was because their word was expected to be their bond. However, if attacks happened, a rare situation, the village head of the victim's village contacted the village head of the suspected attacker. If the attackers were found, they were made to pay back what they stole from the victim. If, on the other hand, the attacks were not found, the village head directed his chief priest to invoke the wrath of the gods and ancestors against the attackers. Because the people feared repercussions from such an action, the incidence of robbery or attackers of traders along the trading routes was almost non-existent in Annang. So unlike what was the case with some other African societies where trade routes were associated with innumerable obstacles and problems (such as attacks by bandits), in Annang, this problem was handled by the cooperation of the various village heads. As such, there was no need for traders in Annang to employ guard services. All these rules and regulations affected both the local and long-distance trade.

Means of Exchange

A medium of exchange is any item that is widely acceptable in exchange for goods and services. The exchange became necessary in Annang because products from agricultural and other industries were far above the subsistence level. The economy could generate excess quantities of products that had to be disposed of. Thus, the people had to exchange products that they had

in excess for those that other relatives possessed in more significant quantities beyond their requirement. Again, the exchange became necessary because every individual and community was independent and self-sufficient regarding resources. The first significant means of exchanging goods among the Annang was through the barter system, which involved exchanging some quantities of one type of commodity with an acceptable quantity of another commodity.

For example, some quantities of carved works like masquerade heads from Ikot Ekpene, Abiasim, Ekpenyong Atai, Ikpe, Ukana, Amayam, Ikot Abia, and Obot Akara could be exchanged with some quantities of ironwork from Ukanafun, Etim Ekpo, and Ika. Some pottery products such as pots from Abak, Ukanafun Midim, Ediene, Obio Akpa, Ekparakwa, Ibesit, Inen, Nung Ita, Nung Ikot, Abak Midim, and Ibesit Nung Ikot could also be exchanged with some quantities of carved works from Ekpene, Abiasim, Ekpenyong Atai, Ikpe, Ukana, Amayam, Ikot Abia, and Obot Akara. Again, farmers also exchanged their farm produce, such as some quantities of yam, with aquatic products from the coastal areas. This form of the exchange went beyond the immediate neighbors to distant ones. For example, the people of Ikot Ekpene were known to have changed their carved items with their Ngwa neighbours for iron products.

With the increase in the volume of trade and the expansion of the Annang economy due to the constant interactions between Annang and their neighbors, it became difficult to measure the exchange rate, making the barter system obsolete. With the significant weakness of the barter system, particularly the double coincidence of wants, there was the need for a new means of exchange of goods that could enhance trade among the people. This development led to the introduction of commodities currencies among the Annang people, as examined below.

Currency

Currency is a medium of exchange for goods and services. The first significant currency in Annang was commodity currency, which included a piece of cloth and salt. People used these commodities to buy goods within the Annang society or with their immediate and distant neighbours. However, by the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, these commodity currencies needed to be updated due to the contact of the people of Annang with Europeans, primarily through Aro traders and King Jaja of Opobo, who served as middlemen. As a result of this development, copper rods, brass, and manilas came into use in Annang as a means of exchange between the Annang traders, on the one hand, and their neighbours, such as the Aro traders and middlemen from Opobo, on the other hand. Consequently, the volume of trade in the area increased, a trend that was accentuated by the demand of European traders for palm produce, such as palm oil and palm kernels, that were always available in Annang.

Beginning from the last decade of the century, manilas became the dominant and most widely used currency in Annang as it was the most acceptable type of currency in the Eastern Delta, including the Annang area.¹⁶By the middle of the twentieth century, the use of manilas was outlawed by the colonial authorities, and thus ceased to be a legal tender. This development led to the introduction of the British West African currency, the British pound, in Annang. Following this, trade by barter between the various trading interests in Annang, such as Aro traders and King Jaja of Opobo, became an exception rather than the rule. This aligns with Basden's assertion about the Eastern Delta trade that "all goods were sold in terms of the local currency, as there was no battering of commodities in exchange for commodities" as from the 1930s.¹⁷

Credit and Saving Facilities

The examination of the traditional indigenous economy of Annang has touched on some salient aspects such as production, trade, markets, and means of exchange and currency. A question to ask is, given this predominantly rural, agrarian economy without banking facilities, how did the people raise capital to meet their economic obligations? The answer to this question is that over the centuries, the Annang has evolved into various traditional ways of solving such financial problems without recourse to banks or sophisticated financial institutions like those in modern societies. These methods included trade by borrowing from wealthier neighbors, friends, and relations.

For instance, a person with no acceptable commodity to exchange for a desired article could obtain such an article on credit (*edene* or *ison*).¹⁸ Similarly, credit facilities continued to exist with the introduction of currency. In either case, modalities were put in place to ensure that the seller could recover his money or article in case of default. The Annang society had various methods of collecting payments from debtors. For example, in the case of trade by barter, a creditor could seize the property of his debtor in the event of a refusal or inability to pay the debt. With the introduction of currency, several people became debt collectors (*mbo ison*). A creditor who could not collect his debt could hire a debt collector, such as a member of *the Ekpo* cult, to do so for him. However, before calling on *ekpo* members to help collect a debt, the creditor was expected to have made several direct and indirect attempts to collect such debt. An indirect attempt could include sending emissaries, reporting the matter to the debtor's extended family head, and using threats. Where a debtor was unwilling to or incapable of paying the debt, his family member was called upon to come to his rescue or his property was sized and auctioned, and the proceeds were used to pay the debt. In rare cases, the debtor was sold into slavery.¹⁹

In terms of savings, the Annang did not produce above their immediate needs as production was generally geared towards meeting the family needs with some surplus which was stored against the next planting season, or towards meeting specified demands such as marriage, initiation into secret societies, or for the festival, hence the need to save for the future. The immediate aspiration of the individual determined the mode of saving in Annang. The traditional saving methods in Annang could also be regarded as intricately related to the re-investment of the individual disposable surplus. For instance, a man with successive good yam harvests could decide to be initiated into secret societies such as *ekpo* or take additional wives. In either case, his saving (disposable surplus) was re-invested because in taking up membership in a secret society, he not only gained the prestige attached to such a society but also gained its privileges, the most important of which was the right to also harvest palm fruits in the land allocated to such a secret society. Similarly, in taking a new wife, he invested in additional labour.²⁰

Introducing currency such as manila in Annang encouraged *utibe* (co-operative society). It was a small group in which members contributed a fixed amount of money to each other in rotation or the act of contributing anything to each other on a rotational basis. *Utibe* became a significant source of capital for various socio-economic needs. For instance, at the primary group level (extended family), when members of the extended family combined to build a house for their member, no payment was made by the beneficiary. Other members of the group benefited on a rotational basis. The act helped to strengthen the group's solidarity.

Transportation

Transportation is the movement of humans, animals, and goods from one location to another. The need to move goods and services from one point to another in any type of economy, simple or complex, subsistence or market, must be emphasized. Transportation played a vital role in

allowing goods and services to move from the point of production to marketplaces. As K. T. Healey puts it:

Man wanted a variety of nature's products, but nature did not put them in one place, hence the need for people to move from one place to another. But even if it were possible for nature to gather and put its entire products in one place, man would still move about for leisure, if for nothing else.²¹

The above statement adequately captures the situation in Annang, as its various clans had different resources due to environmental factors such as rivers and geographical location. Those from the coastal area, such as Inen and Warafa, were primarily fishermen, while those from the upland, such as Abak and Ikot Ekpene, were mainly farmers. Transportation, therefore, became a channel for the effective distribution of what was produced from one ecological zone to another. There are two forms of transportation in Annang: road and water. While road transportation was widespread in all parts of Annang, water transportation was limited to coastal areas such as Inen and Warafe.

Road Transportation: Human portage was the oldest and most widespread form of transportation in Annang. The people travelled on foot to various places with their goods in what could be called relay trade through road. For example, traders from Ikot Okoro could carry their goods on their heads to markets either at Abak or Ikot Ekpene, etc, just like traders from Abak could also carry their goods on their heads to Etim Ekpo, Abak, or Ikot Okoro. Trading activities were conducted similarly between Ibesit and Ikot Akpan Essien, Ikot Ibritim or Ikot Okoro, and vice versa. The same applied to the movement between Ibesit, Ukanafun, and Nung Ikot. Long-distance trade had a similar character. Traders from Ukanafun could carry their goods to Abak, Ikot Ekpene, Ikot Okoro, Ikot Ibritim, and even beyond. Because of the distance involved, the goods were put down at intervals to allow for a rest. In this kind of trade,

the traders could set out a day or a few days before the actual market day in a distant market within or outside Annang. For example, trade between Annang and their neighbours, especially the Igbo, Ibibio and Andoni fall into this category.

Water Transportation: As earlier mentioned, water transportation was limited to the coastal parts of Annang, such as Inen and Warafe. Annang's parts used canoe to transport goods and passengers to the hinterland markets. Overall, the pre-colonial Annang transportation system served the pre-colonial Annang economy well as it was considered suitable for the economy and relatively efficient. It satisfied the needs of the people.²²

Conclusion

Pre-colonial Annang production was mainly aimed at satisfying personal needs. However, the idea of production for absolute subsistence could be more correct as evidence abounds in favor of a surplus in production for exchange. The development in various aspects of the pre-colonial Annang economy, such as agriculture and the crafts industry, motivated the people to produce far more than their immediate needs and facilitated their trade capacity. The highly organized trading system aided in disposing of the surplus through trade with each other and their neighbours. This was made possible by a web of markets and the vast extent of local and distant trade. The various currencies in the pre-colonial period facilitate the exchange of goods and services in pre-colonial Annang. It could be seen from the paper that the trade and transportation sectors of the economy witnessed the efficient and effective distribution of goods and services between the people and their immediate and distant neighbours as the people of Annang put in place economic structures that encouraged every member of the society to contribute to the growth and development of the society. This paved the way for the people to carry out their economic activities in a peaceful environment, leading to high productivity. The

effects of all of these were the emergence of an economically viable society that was not only self-sufficient but also had surpluses to exchange with their immediate and distant neighbours.

Endnotes

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