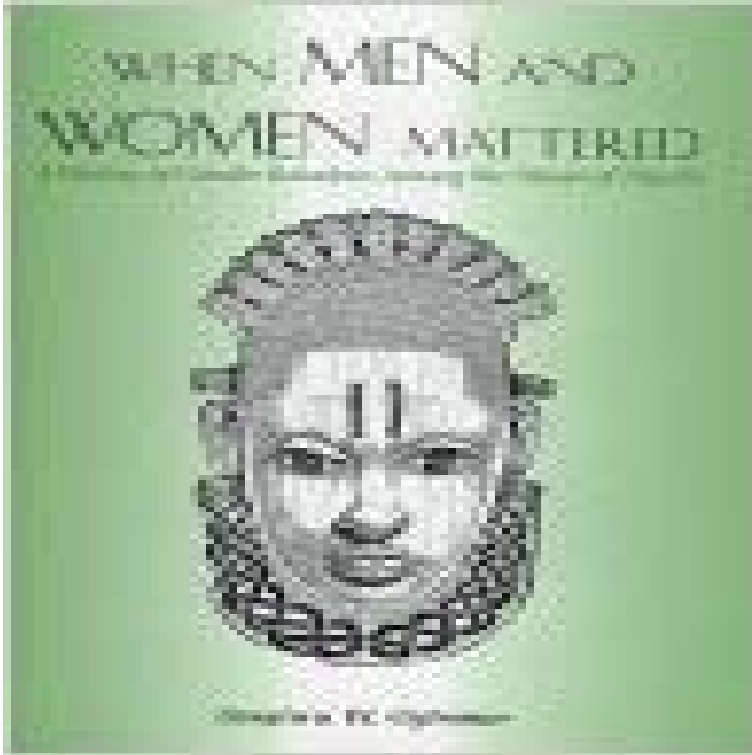


When Men and Women Mattered: A History of Gender Relations Among the Owan of Nigeria



Drawing upon narrative tradition, reenactment ceremonies, legends of gods and goddesses, and the fusion of numerous genealogies, this book examines gender relations among the Owan people of southern Nigeria between c.1320 and the beginning of the twentieth century. The author challenges the orthodox view that patriarchy has been the norm in all societies, adding to our understanding of the origins of patriarchy and placing its development in an historical perspective. He also suggests a new definition of matriarchy, not simply as rule by women, but also as a phase in the history of societies in which gender equality existed. The book argues that the Owan people once had a social order very close to matriarchy. Despite a large influx from neighbouring peoples with a strong patriarchal tradition, Owan women retained their high social status and power because of their virtual control of the cotton trade, but after the demand for cotton decreased sharply after 1700, their social position declined rapidly until the beginning of the twentieth century, when it was altered legally by the establishment of British rule.

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