

Expatriate Researchers and the Historiography of Calabar, 1650 - 1960: A Reappraisal

David Lishilinimle Imbua and Patience O. Erim

*Department of History and International Studies, University of Calabar, P.M.B. 1115,
Cross River State, Nigeria*

KEYWORDS History. Orality. Colonialism. Missionary. Old Calabar

ABSTRACT Among expatriates of note who lived and worked in the ancient city of Calabar were researchers, who recorded events as they occurred or as they were told by the aborigines. Over the years, rather than commending expatriate researchers, most local historians do not only criticize and condemn their researches for Eurocentric prejudices, limitations, generalizations and erroneous judgments but also refer to them as garbage of no historical value. Opposed to this general view, this paper argues that studies by expatriate observers and chroniclers of events in Old Calabar remain invaluable in the reconstruction of the early history of this region of Nigeria. Expatriate researchers of this period (1650 - 1960) did not only contribute in placing Calabar on the World map but also ensured that researchers of pre-literate Calabar society are not frustrated by the lack of records or left entirely at the mercy of oral tradition. The paper concludes that if viewed with a critical eye, researchers and students will find works of expatriate researchers on Calabar indispensable mines of information with which to corroborate and expand existing studies on this cosmopolitan community in which the Efik, the Efut, the Qua and other ethnicities and nationalities lived in relatively peaceful coexistence. The materials used in putting this paper together were drawn from written and non-written sources, which complement and validate each other. The use of oral sources in this study becomes imperative when it is realized that some of the records we made reference to were written by foreigners and such records have limitation, which can be compensated by emic sources. The written sources include published and unpublished materials deposited at the University of Calabar Library, Old Residency Museum Calabar and the Nigerian National Archives.