

## Obituary

KENNETH ONWUKA DIKE, 1917–83

Kenneth Onwuka Dike was born on 17 December 1917, the son of Nzekwe Dike, a merchant of the Igbo town of Awka in eastern Nigeria. From there he went to the ebullient nearby commercial centre of Onitsha to study at the Dennis Memorial Grammar School, a famous institution where he was to make many friends. Following this, the young scholar embarked on an educational pilgrimage that was not uncommon among able and ambitious Nigerians of the time who were chafing at the relative lack of opportunity for further education in their country. He went first to Achimota College in the then Gold Coast for what today would be called sixth form work, then to Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone and on to its validating University of Durham to secure his BA. Dike then chose to concentrate on history and, after gaining an MA at Aberdeen, went to King's College, London, to research under the supervision successively of Professors V. T. Harlow and Gerald Graham. The thesis for which he was awarded his PhD, a version of which was in 1956 published as *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830–1885*, clearly shows its origin in the imperial history of the day, of which Harlow and Graham were leading British exponents. At the time, however, Dike's emphasis on change in the trading towns of the Delta and his exploration of local and, indeed, oral sources, caused his work to be hailed as a first fruit of the indigenous African history that was so much needed by colonial peoples who were seeking independence and nationhood.

In 1950 Dike was one of the first Nigerians appointed to the staff of the University College which had been opened at Ibadan two years earlier. However, he did not initially find the atmosphere in its Department of History helpful to his desire to develop teaching and research in Nigerian history, and he was glad in 1952 to go on secondment as Senior Research Fellow to the West African Institute of Social and Economic Research (also located at Ibadan). From this base he undertook the enquiries that resulted in 1953 in the publication of his important *Report on the Preservation and Administration of Historical Records in Nigeria*. The idea that attention should be given to the preservation of archives in West Africa was not a new one; Dike was well acquainted with developments in the Gold Coast, where a Government Archives Office had been initiated in 1946. But the scope of Dike's recommendations, and also his success in securing government funding to implement them, were both exemplary. By 1956, there was a Federal archives service with a central and regional repository on the campus at Ibadan and with regional repositories at Enugu and Kaduna, and until 1964 Dike was to serve as the Director of the National Archives he had created.

The stimulus which the creation of the National Archives has given to historical research in Nigeria may well prove to be one of Dike's major contributions to scholarship in Nigeria. In 1954 he returned to the History Department at Ibadan as Senior Lecturer, and in 1956 he was elected Ibadan's first Professor of History (and, indeed, one of its first African professors). But from this time on the demands of university administration left him little time for personal research to build on the foundations he had laid in *Trade and Politics*. Apart from a few articles, his subsequent publications were relatively

slight, for example the two *pièces d'occasion* that appeared in 1957, *A Hundred Years of British Rule in Nigeria* and *Origins of the Niger Mission, 1841–1891*, the latter originally a lecture given at the centenary celebration of the Mission at Onitsha. As Head of Department and Professor, Dike saw his first task as one of securing the introduction of an adequate ration of Nigerian and African history into the history syllabus which Ibadan had under the special relationship with the University of London that lasted until it became an independent university in 1962. Secondly he set out to establish a graduate school. The success of this was in due course made manifest by the number of its products who held senior posts in universities throughout Nigeria, and by the many excellent monographs in the *Ibadan History Series* that were published under his general editorship.

By the late 1950s, Dike's reputation as a percipient and forward-looking academic administrator was well established. In addition to his achievements in the history department at Ibadan and with the National Archives, he had in 1954 become Chairman of the Nigerian Antiquities Commission, with its responsibility for archaeology and the preservation of sites, monuments and cultural artefacts throughout the country, and in 1955 he had founded, and became the first President of, the very successful Historical Society of Nigeria. (He was to continue in these two offices until 1967.) It was not surprising, therefore, that in 1958 the Principal of the University College, Dr J. H. Parry, himself a distinguished historian of the third world, secured his appointment as Vice-Principal. When, two years later, Parry left to go to a chair at Harvard, Dike succeeded him as Principal, the first African to hold such office in any of the new university institutions established by the colonial powers in Africa after the second world war. The year 1960 also saw Nigeria secure its independence from Britain, and Dike's first task as Principal was to secure the independence of his institution from the leading reins that had bound it to the University of London. This was smoothly accomplished, and in 1962 the University of Ibadan came into being with Dike as its first Vice-Chancellor.

The University of Ibadan was greatly developed during the six years of Dike's stewardship. Student numbers were tripled to some 3000 and new halls of residence built. A Faculty of Social Sciences was set up to fill a major gap in the original plan, and a host of significant new academic activities was initiated, including Arabic and Islamic studies, languages and linguistics, drama, biochemistry, forestry, veterinary medicine and a research Institute of African Studies, of which Dike himself was the first Director. Perhaps Dike's main achievement, indeed, was to emphasize on the wider front what he had already stressed in the Department of History, namely the importance of developing postgraduate studies. In his eyes, as he said at his Foundation Day address in 1960, Ibadan had a 'clear mission' to train new generations of scholars and scientists, not only to meet the needs of its own development but also that of the nation at large and of a growing number of new Nigerian universities. As early as 1955, led by Dr Azikiwe, the legislature of Dike's own Eastern Region had enacted legislation to set up the University of Nigeria at Nsukka. Unlike Ibadan, this was to be an independent university from the outset and was to be conducted more on the lines of the American state universities. However, teaching at Nsukka did not begin until 1960 and, before then, one of the principal consequences of this new initiative had been

the setting up by the Federal authorities of a commission chaired by Sir Eric (later Lord) Ashby to enquire generally into the provision of higher education throughout Nigeria. Dike was proud to be a member of this body, which in 1960 recommended in effect that each region of Nigeria should have its own university. This principle was accepted and, of course after the Civil War, extended beyond the three original regions to all the states of the Federation.

The implementation of the Ashby principle was symptomatic of the stresses and strains that were affecting the Federation of Nigeria and which were to lead to the secession of the Eastern Region and the outbreak of the Civil War in 1967. Dike was the Igbo Vice-Chancellor of a university which, for all its status as a federal institution and as the parent university, was situated in the heartland of the Yoruba. The question of the ethnic origins of people appointed to posts and to office at Ibadan soon became critical. When a conflict of opinion developed between Dike and the Registrar, who was a Yoruba, the university was split down the middle and became virtually ungovernable. When in January 1966 the first military coup occurred, the Registrar had been suspended and Dike had gone on extended leave. He chose not to return, and in 1967 accepted an appointment to be the Chairman of the planning committee for a new university that was due to open at Port Harcourt in the Eastern Region. But before this could happen, the Civil War had broken out, and this and its aftermath thwarted the plans. In these unhappy circumstances, Dike could see no alternative but to accept an invitation initiated by his old friend and former colleague, John Parry, to join him as Harvard's first Professor of African History. In 1971, he moved to Harvard where two years later he was given the title of the Andrew W. Mellon Professor.

By this time, Dike had already become a considerable figure on the international academic stage. In 1960, he had been one of those participating in the small African section of the Twenty-fifth International Congress of Orientalists that met in Moscow, and there he joined with Professors Daryll Forde of the UK and the IAI, Melville J. Herskovits of the USA, and Ivan Potekhin of the USSR in conceiving a new International Congress of Africanists (later known as the International Congress of African Studies). In due course he became Chairman of the organizing committee of this Congress, which met for the first time in Accra in Ghana in 1963, and then until 1967 he was the Chairman of its Permanent Bureau. In 1965–66, he was the Chairman of the Association of Commonwealth Universities, and from 1964 to 1975 he was a Vice-Chairman of the International African Institute. He received the first of some fifteen honorary degrees, fittingly from Aberdeen, one of the universities at which he had studied, in 1961. In 1972 he was elected Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Dike was never wholly reconciled to academic exile. He might participate fully in the teaching at Harvard, but he did not find it easy so far from his homeland to concentrate on the research he knew he should do. In 1980, then, he was happy to respond to an invitation to return as President of the new Anambra State University of Technology at Enugu, and it was there that he died, on 26 October 1983, after a brief illness. He is survived by his wife Ona and by five children, all of whom are proceeding to enterprising careers. He will be remembered by many as a quiet but impressive man, firm but just in his opinions, a good man to know.

J. D. FAGE