Thrones of the Orichas

Afro-Cuban Altars in New Jersey, New York, and Havana

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To make Santo is to make a king, and kariocha *[initiation] is a ceremony of kings, like those of the palace of the Oba Lucumí [Yoruba king].*
(Calixta Morales, priestess Oddedei, in Cabrera 1983b:24 fn.)

[In my work] I favor the Louis XV style...in fact, all the Louises.
(priest/throne maker Ramón Esquivél, May 12, 1987)

We can no longer speak of tradition in terms of the approximate identity of some objective thing that changes while remaining the same. Instead, we must understand tradition as a symbolic process that both presupposes past symbolisms and creatively reinterprets them.
(Handler & Linnekin 1984:287)

Thrones of the *orichas*—special altars for Afro-Cuban deities of Yoruba origin—are often huge, stunning installations. Composed of colorful cloth, porcelain vessels, and beadwork objects, they rise above bountiful spreads of fresh fruit, flowers, and plates of prepared foods. Wherever important ritual events take place—in western Cuba, South Florida, New York, New Jersey, California, Puerto Rico, Venezuela—thrones preside as commanding presences in practitioners' homes. Priests *(santeros)* of the religion popularly known as Santería, La Regla de Ocha, or La Regla Lucumí[1] double as artists, or rely upon specialized throne makers, to construct temporary altar installations that please and honor the *orichas*, impress congregations, and play focal roles in sacred performance.

Curiously, these thrones have received little more than a half-dozen pages of superficial description in all the scholarly literature on Afro-Cuban religion combined (Cabrera 1980:176–79; Brandon 1983:400–42; Drewal 1989b:22–25). Only recently has this important art form been given public exposure in several small exhibitions of thrones built by priests and as a series of reflections by contemporary artists.[2] As this is the first article devoted solely to the subject, I will describe and interpret recently documented examples in the United States and Cuba, and then locate the throne form in a broader ethnohistorical context. Reworked transatlantic ritual object types and familiar Yoruba iconography, previously studied in isolation, are seen to crystallize in a uniquely New World altar form that emerged in Cuba, later to be elaborated in the United States among Cuban migrants. Analysis of the throne form reveals much about emergent Diasporic art history and culture and provides fertile ground for a theoretical critique of processes hitherto characterized by the terms "continuity and change," "syncretism," and "creolization."

Thrones are built to honor and formally present one or more deities, interchangeably called *orichas* or *santos*, of the Lucumí pantheon. The *orichas*, deriving ultimately from the major *òrìsà* of Yorubaland, are customarily adorned as powerful royal presences, with splendid clothwork, costume, and iconographic attributes. If, as priestess Oddedei declared to Lydia Cabrera in 1954 (Cabrera 1983b:24 fn.), the *kariocha* initiation ritual "is a ceremony of kings" as found in Africa, how is it that it came to be expressed with a system of signs and aesthetic preferences that derive apparently from European aristocracy? How is it that a premier black Cuban altar maker and priest of Obatalá, the late Ramón Esquivél, "favor[ed] the Louis XV style" in his worship of Yoruba-derived deities, and that this style is widely regarded among Cuban practitioners as wholly traditional? More generally, how does one approach the question of the Africanity of Lucumí religion? In an art history of Lucumí religious objects for *orichas* of apparent Yoruba provenance, what weight and attention are placed on Yoruba "origins" in understanding Afro-Cuban iconography and meaning? In short, what are the assumptions behind the notion of "tradition" in general and "Yoruba tradition in the New World" in particular?

As domestic altars, constructed in practitioner's homes which double as "houses of *ocha*" (houses of *oricha* worship),[3] thrones provide a sacred portal for supplicants to approach, salute, praise, communicate with, and make offerings to the *orichas*. Yet thrones are creations distinct from the permanent shrines found in those same homes. Thrones are temporary installations, whose scale often requires reallocation of domestic space, and whose duration as an assemblage is

1. Drumming throne *(trono del tambor)* for the thunder god, Changó, of Adolfo Fernández, designed by the late Ramón Esquivél. Red and white, the colors of Changó, are dominant. Shaped cloth squares *(paños)* represent other deities *(orichas):* at left, Yemayá; at right, Ochún; and above, Obatalá. The cloth covering the centered and elevated vessel of Changó is shaped to form a thunder axe, and the triangles formed by the translucent red curtain panels flanking Obatalá also suggest Changó's thunder axe. Elegúá and the warriors are nestled on the floor. A set of three sacred *bata* drums rest on the mat between segments of the drumming ceremony. New Jersey, 1983.

PHOTO: DAVID H. BROWN

coextensive with particular ritual periods, particularly semipublic events in which the community is invited into the "sacred room" *(cuarto sagrado, cuarto de santo,* or *igbodún*[4]) to greet formally presented *orichas.*

Thrones employ a basic dominant form: an installation of colorful cloth creating a canopy overhead, a curtain backdrop behind, and symmetrically parted and tied-back curtains in front—either independent hanging curtains or the suggestion of them in swags of cloth stapled to the wall. The throne's canopy may form the hypotenuse of two converging walls, it may project straight out from a long single wall, or it may even span the entirety of one end of a narrow room. The construction recalls a miniature proscenium stage or an elaborately curtained picture window. Yet it recalls more precisely the baldachins[5] of European royal thrones, church and domestic Catholic altars, whose architecture and imagery historically incorporated throne references, and state beds.

The enclosure radiates the identifying colors of the *oricha* of honor. Squares of cloth called *paños,* color coded to a set of companion *orichas,* punctuate the throne enclosure itself in artistically gathered or pinned configurations, or lie draped over elevated *oricha* vessels containing the deity's "secrets," atop which are placed the appropriate iconographic attributes in beadwork and metalwork.

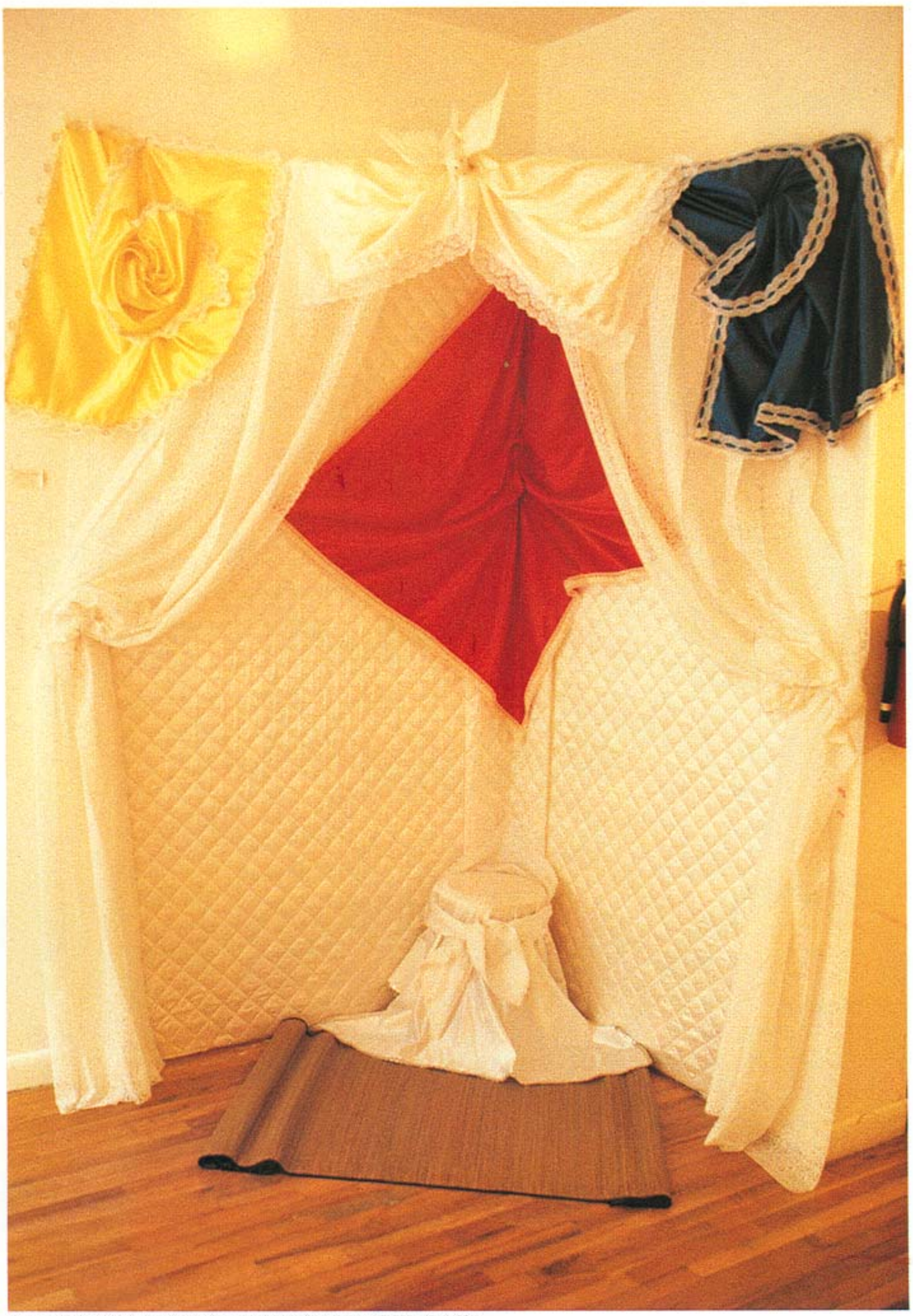
I encountered three main throne configurations keyed to functionally distinct ritual events in houses in New York, New Jersey, Miami, Havana, and Matanzas: thrones built for initiation *(asiento),* for a "saint's birthday" *(cumpleaños),* and for sacred "drummings" *(tambores).*[6]

Initiation Thrones

The initiation throne, or *trono del asiento* (Fig. 2), consists of three basic visible elements: the canopy of cloth, which may be more or less elaborate; a sacred mortar (*pilón* in Spanish, *oddó* in Lucumí) on which the initiate *(iyawó)* may sit; and a reed floormat *(estera).* Completed the night before the initiation, the throne stands for seven days (often Friday to Friday), and is taken down when the newly made priest leaves liminal seclusion for "reincorporation" into the community on the "Day of the Plaza" (Market Day).[7]

The *asiento* is centrally about the creation of a new earthly locus of *oricha* power—that is, the establishment of a shrine—and the parallel birth of a new generation of priesthood to serve and channel that power for human benefit. *Asiento* refers to the "seating" of spiritual power, *aché,* in the material world *(aye).* The ceremony is also called the "coronation," an expression that captures the momentousness of the ritual process of "putting *aché* on the head" *(kariocha* in Lucumí). On the first day (Day of the Asiento), in the *igbodún,* the initiate is seated upon the *pilón* as the *oricha* is "crowned" or "seated" upon the top of the head in a series of secret and guarded procedures. Consistent with the idiom of coronation, the *oricha* is often spoken of as "my crown," a spiritual head that governs, but also confers priestly authority upon, its human servant, a relationship nicely encapsulated by the Lucumí proverb "The head rules the body." Having been crowned atop the *pilón* but outside the throne's domain, the *iyawó* is then installed in the throne and spends that night and the next five nights sleeping under its protective canopy.

The *asiento* throne may be seen to play three metaphorical roles vis-à-vis the initiate, whose name, *iyawó,* translates as "bride of the *oricha*": it is a royal throne for a "new king"; a marriage bed for a new bride and *oricha;* and a container that protects the vulnerable newborn priest from destructive spiritual influences. Not least, the throne plays the symbolic role of "house" or seclu-



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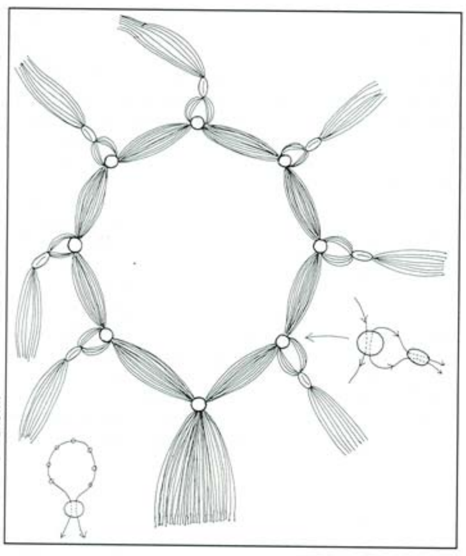
2. Initiation throne *(trono del asiento),* made by Antonio Queiro for exhibition at the Caribbean Cultural Center, New York, 1984. During initiation into the Lucumí priesthood an *oricha* is "seated" or "crowned" on the head of the initiate *(iyawó).* Here that *oricha* is the sky god Obatalá, whose color, white, predominates. The colors of the shaped *paños* reference other protector *orichas* received by the initiate.



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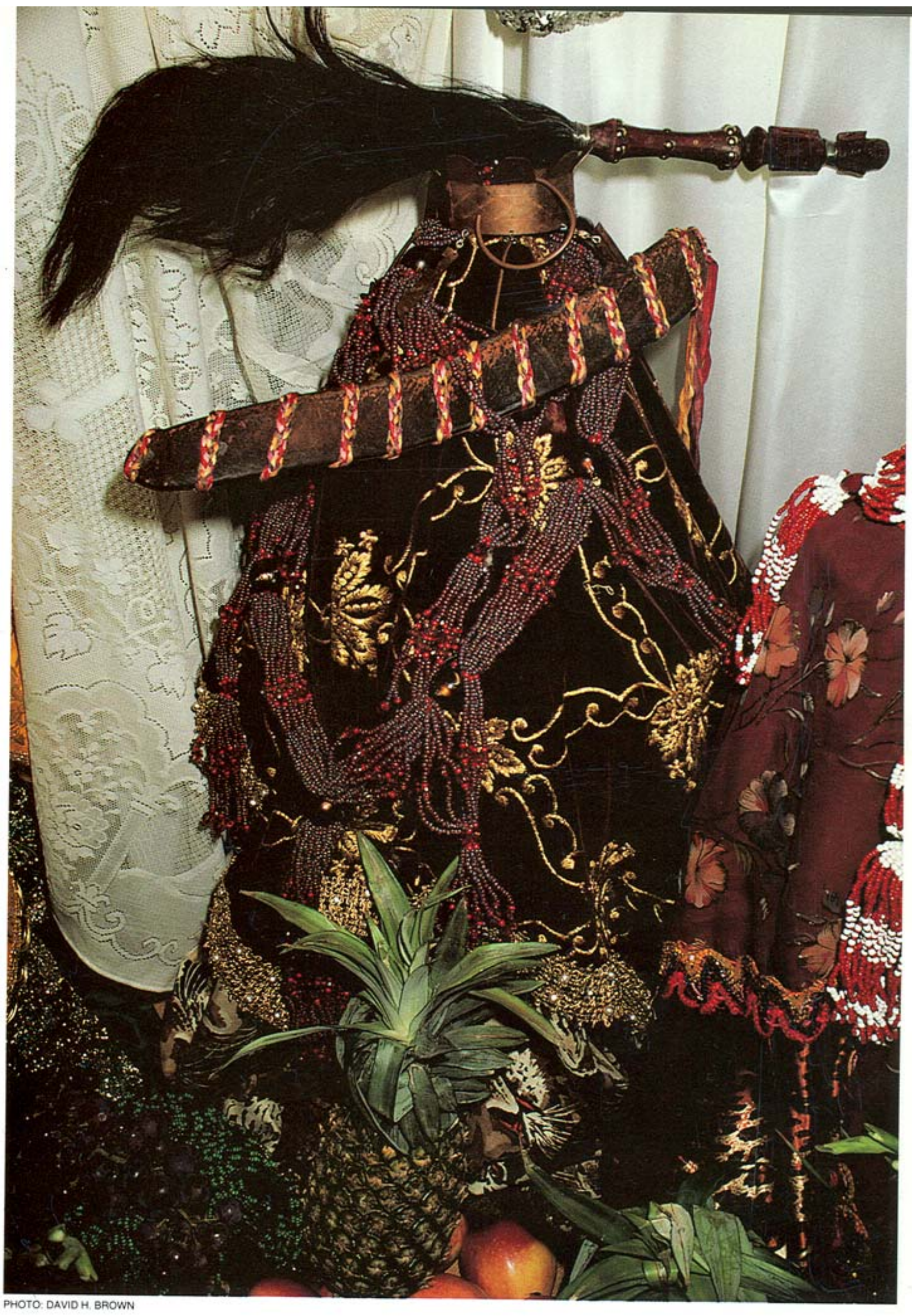
3. ***Collar de mazo*** **for Obatalá, designed by Melba Carillo. This beaded sash consists of more than 12,000 beads and weighs over three pounds. There are 16 strands of beads, 8 large fastening beads called *glorias*, and 8 tassels called *moñas. Collares de mazo* are worn diagonally across the body of the *iyawó* and later draped over the *orichas'* vessels in domestic shrines and on thrones. This drawing is intended to reflect basic construction and does not reflect exact proportions of constituent parts.**



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4. Detail of a birthday throne *(trono del cumpleaños)* for Obatalá by Ramón Esquivél. The *paño*-covered vessel of Oyá has beaded *mazos* by Melba Carillo, a copper crown, and a tourist African flywhisk. The decorated seed pod *(vaina)* is shaken to salute Oyá. Union City, New Jersey, 1987.

sion hut for a week of repose following the initiation.[8]

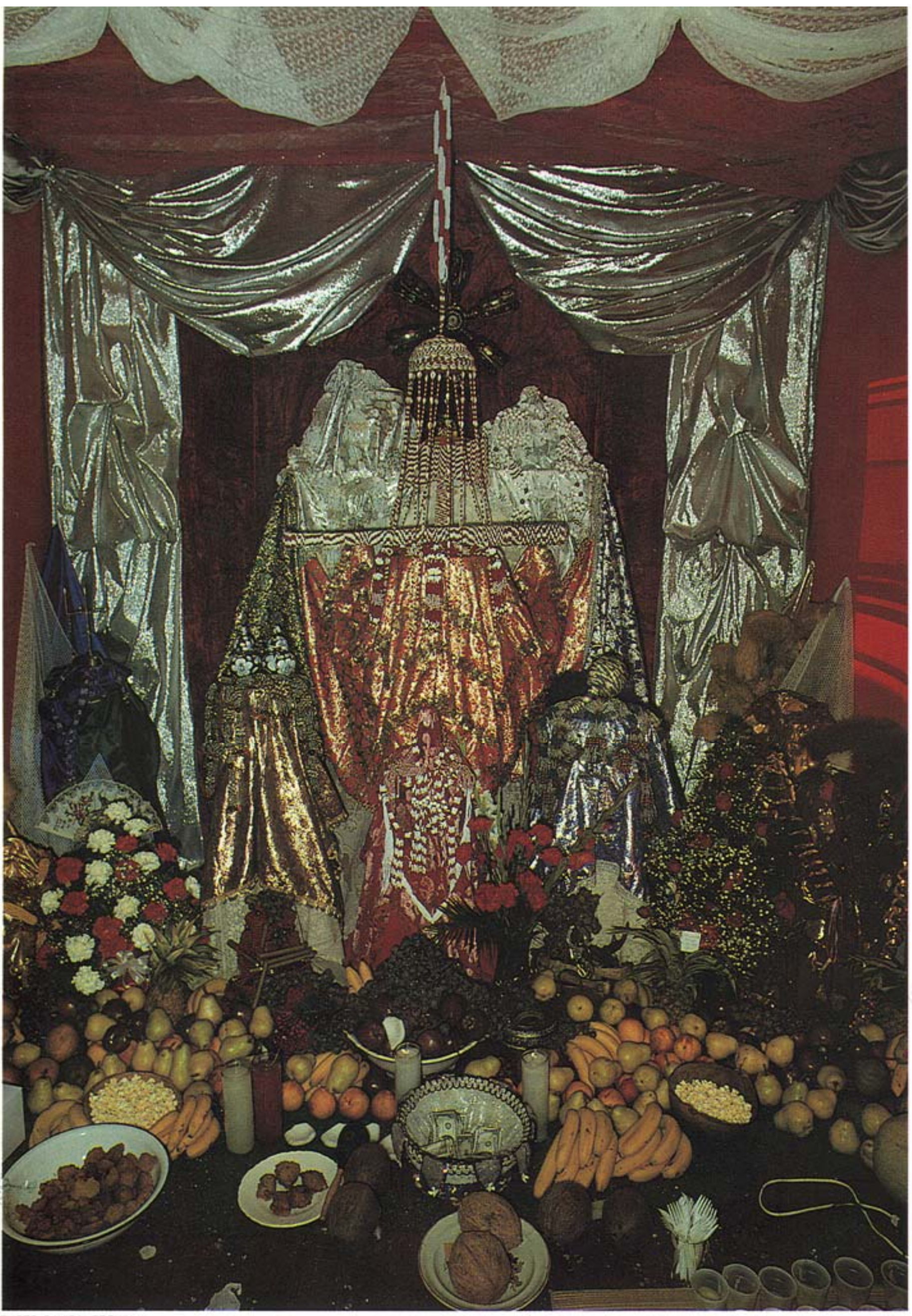
The colors of the canopy and the smaller cloth *paños* around it encode the particular configuration of *orichas* fabricated for the initiate—one previously identified through divination as the "owner," or "guardian angel" *(ángel de guarda)*, of the *iyawó*'s head, and the others a related basic group of protectors. An *asiento* throne constructed for exhibition purposes at the Caribbean Cultural Center in New York in 1984 (Fig. 2) is predominantly white, reflecting the central role of Obatalá as the guardian angel. Three draped, shaped, and pinned *paños* punctuate the curtained front, and one the quilted background: yellow for Ochún, blue bordered in white for Yemayá, red for Changó (and probably Oyá),[9] and at top center, white lace adorned with a dove figure with outspread wings for Obatalá. The maker[10] symmetrically balanced the *paños* for two intimately related female *orichas*, Yemayá and Ochún, and placed the bold red diamond for Changó at rear center—all representing the *orichas* to be "received" by the *iyawó*, in addition to the governing guardian angel Obatalá "made" by the *iyawó*.[11] These lightly floating cloth forms hover about the central space as a kind of supporting cast to the guardian angel's lead.

On the second day in the *igbodún*, the Día del Medio (Middle Day), the initiate is publicly presented in the early afternoon to the community. The *iyawó*, under the immediate influence of the "newly born" *oricha/santo*—referred to as a "new king" or "new queen"—dons elaborate garments called *ropa de santo* (clothes of the saint) or *traje de medio* (suit of the middle day) and appears under the canopied *asiento* throne to receive humble submissions and greetings from family and visitors. The *iyawó* may stand, sit upon the *pilón*, make prone submissions to the floor to salute elders, or else sit on the mat, as the moment demands. The "secrets," or *fundamentos* (foundation), of the *orichas* made and received the previous day are contained in a variety of covered vessels called *soperas*, arrayed in an orderly line on the floor alongside the throne's mat or elsewhere in the *igbodún*.

Thus, in a real sense, the *asiento* throne as a complete altar consists not only of the canopy and the *pilón*—which has been consecrated like any other sacred *oricha* object—but also the ritually prepared, dressed, and iconographically outfitted body of the *iyawó*, who is nothing less than a living altar.

Formal Garments of the Orichas

Initiates who make Obatalá, Yemayá, Oyá, Changó, and Ochún are dressed as crowned palace royalty reposing under lavish cloth thrones of satin, velvet, lamé, and lace (Fig. 6). Their *ropa de santo* ensembles include shimmering pasteboard crowns encrusted with cowries and iconographic details. The warriors *(guerreros)* Eleguá, Ogún, and Ochósi, by contrast, are most frequently figured as



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5. Birthday throne for the Changó of the late priest Adolfo Fernández, designed by Ramón Esquivél in 1985. This throne, composed of lace, satin, velvet, and lamé, celebrates the anniversary of the priest's coronation. *Orichas* are contained in covered vessels *(soperas)* on pedestals, draped with luxurious cloth. Obatalá is represented in white double peaks above the red-and-white Changó, the crown of Dadá descends from the canopy, and the cloth-covered *soperas* of other *orichas* are arrayed below, from left: Ochún, Agayú with Ibeyis atop him, Changó, Yemayá (Obbá behind in the corner), Oyá. In front are the warrior deities *(guerreros)* surrounded by a *plaza* of fruit and food offerings. A calabash for money tributes, coconuts for divination, and a rattle for salutation appear in the foreground. The beaded *mazos* and attributes were made by priestess Melba Carillo. The maker of the Dadá crown is unknown. Union City, New Jersey, 1985.

dwellers of marginal spaces between town and bush, or of the bush itself: guard or farmer, soldier, and hunter, respectively (Fig. 7).[12] As denizens of the forest *(monte)* or countryside *(campo)*, they sport brimmed hats appropriate to their outdoor habitats and stand beneath thrones constructed of natural green leaves, often pine boughs. They sit not upon a lathe-turned wood *pilón* but upon a large, often jagged, heavy stone *(piedra)* brought from their outside domains. Presented on the Día del Medio under the leafy throne in the *igbodún*, each *guerrero* also owns a parallel throne of leaves constructed outside the house *(trono del patio)* where important rituals of the *asiento* were performed. In other words, their particular spiritual power is not wholly containable within the house or the "town."

Formally dressed *iyawós* carry the appropriate dance wand or staff used by their *oricha*. Flywhisks *(rabo)* accompany the outfits of Obatalá and Oyá; fans *(ábanico)* are carried by Yemayá and Ochún; a thunder axe *(hacha)* is held by Changó.[13] Instead of refined implements of palace royalty or aristocracy, the *guerreros* carry rustic and fierce implements of work, war, and hunting: a cutlass *(machete)* for Ogún, a hooked staff *(garabato)* for Eleguá, and a bow and arrow *(arco-y-flecha)* for Ochósi.

Although the form and function of these impressive dance wands and other attributes may be interpreted as Yoruba derived, they have been creatively reworked in an Afro-Cuban idiom. For example, the red and black bead-wrapped hooked staff *(garabato)* of the Afro-Cuban Eleguá reconstitutes the Yoruba Elegba's figurated phallic club *(ogo-elegba)*.[14] Fashioned from the guava tree sacred to that deity, the *garabato* is adapted from the rural Cuban field tool used by farmers and herbalists alike for reaching, hooking, and pulling down foliage, herbs, and crops to be cut with a machete of iron.[15]

Beyond their role as "iconographic representations" or "adornments," these attributes are material embodiments at one with the *oricha*'s constituted bodily presence in the world. For example, the red and black rooster feathers of Eleguá's hat and the male goat hide used for his bag come from sacrificial animals used to feed the deity (interview, Lourdes López, Feb. 21, 1987). The hat's straw and the guava wood are rooted in the earthly landscape he inhabits. Most important, dance wands, when carried, are extensions of the *orichas'* potential for action—what it is the deities *do*—or more specifically how, when properly invoked, they can transform the world (see Drewal 1989:208, 223–29).

Complementing the impressively orchestrated textures and colors of expensive-looking fabrics, modeled on aristocratic styles, are Yoruba-derived color-coded bracelets and sashes in metal and beadwork. *Iyawós* wear on the left wrist a multistrand beaded bracelet *(ide)* in the colors of their *ángel de guarda*; and up to four groups of metal bracelets may be divided between the two wrists, depending upon the *oricha* made: silver dedicated to Yemayá and Obatalá, copper to Oyá, and brass to Ochún.[16]

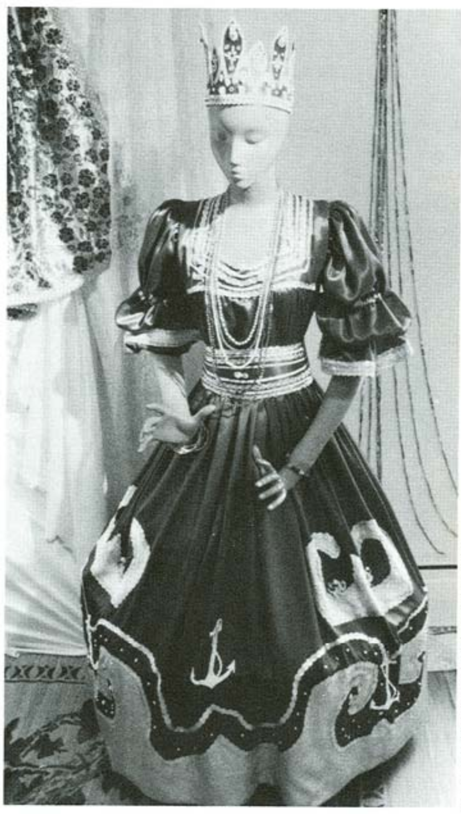
Oricha *Beadwork*

Beaded necklaces and sashes complete the *iyawó*'s Middle Day ensemble. The *iyawó* wears at least five consecrated *oricha* bead necklaces received at an earlier level of initiation. But more prominent, on the occasion of the Middle Day, are the *collares de mazo* (literally bunch or bundle of bead strands), which are saddled around the body (Fig. 3).[17] At least five *mazos* are draped diagonally across the *iyawó*'s chest in two directions, forming an X. Each *mazo* can weigh as much as three pounds and consist of over 12,000 glass, ceramic, and plastic beads.[18] The *iyawó* wears one *mazo* for each of the *orichas* made and received. Painstakingly made by hand, *collares de mazo* consist of multiple strands of beads organized on the basis of an *oricha*'s oracular number and set of counterpointed sacred colors. The thick circle is subdivided into equidistant segments by large, decorative fastening beads called *glorias*. In turn, emanating octopus-like, from each main *gloria*, are multistrand tassels called *moñas* (knots/ties), one of which, the *moña principal* (principal knot), is the most worked and elaborate. The number of segments, the number of strands in the bunch making up the segments, the numbered pattern of beads on each strand, and the number of main *glorias* with attached *moñas* are based on the *orichas'* oracular numbers or multiples thereof.[19]

The *mazos*, like crossed bandoliers over the *ropa de santo*, proudly identify the *iyawó* as a newly consecrated living locus of the *orichas' aché*. The beauty and sheer prodigiousness of the *mazo* signifies wealth, prerogative, and divine authority in a way consistent with cascading cowries and beadwork among the Yoruba (Thompson 1970:8).[20] At the same time, one suspects that the *collar de mazo* was creatively reconstituted in the New World in dialogue with the model of the rosary. The Catholic necklace is mnemonically and numerically organized in segments of ten smaller beads devoted to the *Ave Maria* prayer, punctuated by larger *glorias* and *Padre Nuestros;* it features a depending crucifix whose prominence can be seen to mirror the *moña principal* of the *mazo* (Centro del Rosario n.d; and Brazilian examples in Gleason 1987:241–43). However, the comparison is limited, as the *mazos* radically differ in scale, weight, complexity, and function.

At another register of meaning, *mazos* in their specific ritual context come to mark boldly and bodily the claims particular *orichas* have made upon the initiate's "head." In their life as objects, *mazos* may be activated as spiritual lassos by ritual elders, and by *orichas* when they possess their priests, to ensnare the bodies of those marked for initiation (a dramatic move called *la prendición*).[21] Finally the *mazos'* physical encirclement delineates and reinforces an envelope of spiritual containment or embodiment. Formally worn in concert with *ropa de santo* on only two occasions in the life of a priest, the Día del Medio and the *presentación al tambor* (presentation to the drums),[22] the *mazos* remain, for the rest of the priest's life, draped around the *orichas' soperas* (Fig. 4) or temporarily upon festival thrones. Thus, the *mazo*-encircled body may be seen as an analog to the vessels containing the *orichas' aché*.[23] And at festival time body and vessels are "dressed" formally with cloth to identify and mark *oricha* presence.

Owing to the architectural role cloth can play, the *trono del asiento* effects a "break" in significant space (to use Mircea Eliade's terms), defining a sphere of the *oricha*'s immediate presence and implying the *oricha*'s direct influence and claim upon the individual under it. For Eliade it would constitute a "sacred" space carved out of the surrounding "homogenous" "profane" world (1959:20). Ritually "set apart" by articulated boundaries and prohibitions (see Douglas 1978: chaps. 2, 3), the throne protects the *iyawó* from the potentially dangerous influences carried by disincarnated spirits, *eguns*. At the same time, the uninitiated visitor who intentionally or accidentally crosses the proscenium into the throne's canopied space is subject to the immediate and irrevocable grasp of the *oricha*. That is, the individual must surrender his or her "head" to the *santo*, i.e., the religion: initiation is imminent. The person is encircled immediately with a *collar de mazo* and instructed to get initiated as soon as possible. The seized *mazo*-wearer sooner or later finds him- or herself under the throne on the Día del Medio, dressed in *ropa de santo* and encircled with five *mazos*.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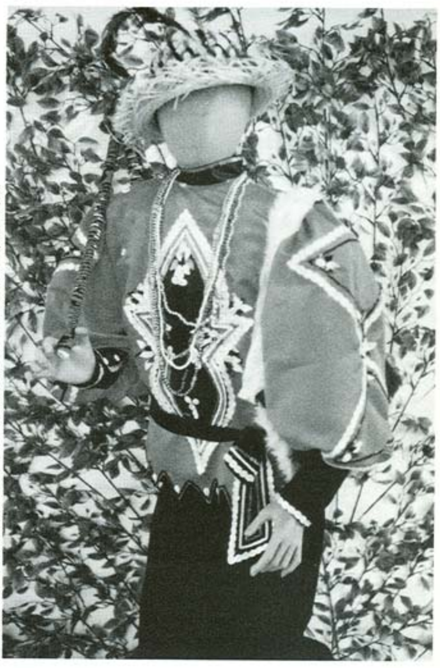
6. Initiate's consecration ensemble *(ropa de santo)* for Yemayá, *oricha* of the sea, by Lourdes López of West New York, New Jersey, exhibited at the Caribbean Cultural Center, New York, 1984. Initiates who "make" Yemayá and most other deities are dressed as royalty wearing pasteboard crowns.

7. Initiate's *ropa de santo* for Eleguá, trickster and guardian of the crossroads, by Lourdes López, exhibited at the Caribbean Cultural Center, 1984. The costume is in the colonial martial or courtier style, with a straw hat of the countryside, beaded dance wand, and adornments taken from sacrificial animals favored by the deity.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The construction of the throne also effects a break in time, constituting a ritual or festival period, as the appearance of royal cloth registers and heralds the immediate or imminent manifestation of *oricha*. On the same principle, the wearers of *ropa de santo* step into a public ritual role for a defined period as the "mounts" of the deity they serve. "What is important about the dressing of the *orisha* here is the act itself," Robert Friedman has written. "The new dressing signifies that it is an *orisha* who is occupying his mount's body and participating in the event" (Friedman 1982:194).

Ropa de santo, and the bolts of cloth and *paños* which comprise the throne, belong exclusively to the *oricha* and may not be worn, displayed, or otherwise used except on ritual occasions.[24] If the cloth is understood to identify or represent iconographically particular *orichas* through a system of color coding, it should also be seen, in more dynamic terms, as actively constitutive of, and materially coextensive in space and time with, embodied *oricha* presence in the world. Indeed, as Ochún priest Ysamur Flores has written, the *ropa de santo* "creates the orisha in the body of the initiate" (Flores 1990:47). In other words, cloth may evoke *oricha* qualities and serves in the invocation of spiritual power, as Henry Drewal, John Pemberton, and Rowland Abiodun (1989) and Margaret Drewal (1989) understand representation in Yoruba sacred arts. Artistic representations not only "acknowledge supernatural forces and events"; in concert with oral praises, music, and dance, they "more importantly evoke, invoke, and activate diverse forces, to marshal and bring them into the phenomenal world" (Drewal, Pemberton & Abiodun 1989:16).

Birthday Thrones and Drumming Thrones

While the *trono del asiento* (initiation throne) serves to publicly present and protect the newly crowned *iyawó*, the *trono del cumpleaños* (birthday throne) presents formally, as a dramatic array, all of the priest's *orichas* themselves (Figs. 5, 10), which have remained in covered vessels and confined in their permanent shrine during the year, most often a set of shelves or a closed cabinet *(canastillero)*.

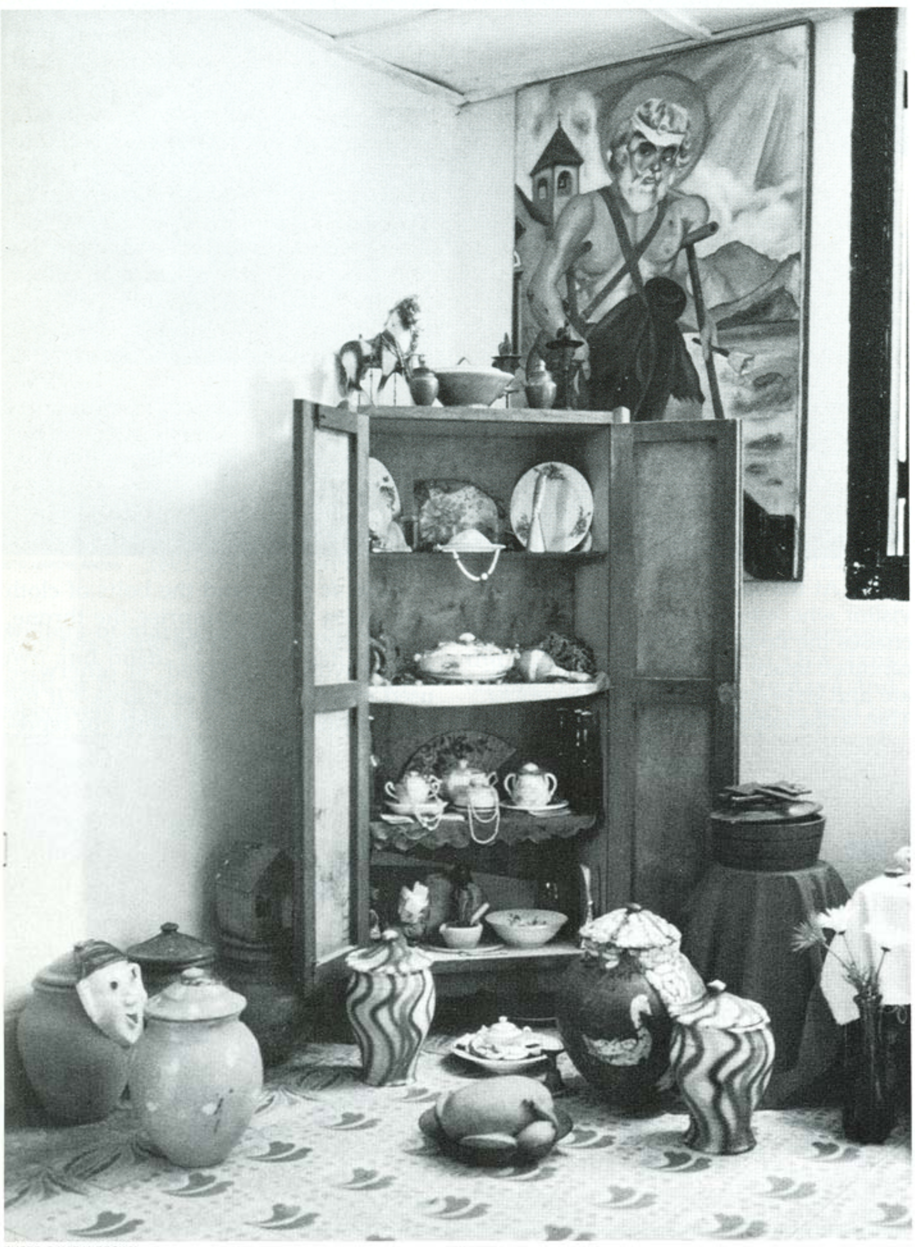
The *canastillero* is the historically preferred and probably most convenient form of domestic shrine or altar form developed by Afro-Cuban practitioners of Lucumí religion. It supports covered vessels—the *soperas*—hierarchically ordered on shelves and surrounded by their beaded attributes, accumulated decorative gifts, and, very often, the *ebos* (sacrifices) of ongoing ritual activity in the house (see Fig. 8 and Gonzalez Huguet 1968:34, 48–49; Cabrera 1983b:plates). The *orichas' soperas*, although adorned with their *mazos* and attributes, are not dressed in cloth *paños* until festival time: drummings *(tambores)* and birthdays *(cumpleaños)*.

The *cumpleaños* throne is erected for the annual *oricha*'s "birthday," that is, the anniversary of a priest's coronation and the birth of his or her "crown." It is a serious, beautiful petition, weighted with wishes for the well-being of the priest who is entering a new year in ritual age (i.e., seniority).

Each year's birthday throne for active priests registers new additions to the original group of *orichas*, as auxiliary protectors called *addimú-orichas* are incrementally "received."[25] Birthday thrones thus inscribe aesthetically a kind of emergent spiritual biography marking a priest's growth in *santo*. At the same time, active priests regularly create new beaded and cloth objects for their own *orichas* or as gifts to *orichas* of ritual kin, registered annually on the throne in an ever growing accumulation of beautiful attributes. Each time the *orichas* are presented formally their stature and iconographic richness appear more expansive, with new objects that tell stories and reflect not only upon the grandeur of the deity but also upon the well-being of the house, its owner, and the ritual family of "godchildren" *(ahijados)* the latter has initiated.[26]

Modeled on the general outlines of the *trono del asiento*, the birthday throne's canopy is erected over spreading straw mats. The *orichas' soperas* are arranged on pedestals so that the original group of *orichas* made and received in the initiation is usually clustered together centrally, while the *addimú-orichas* arc outward toward the two extremes. Consistent with the ranking of *orichas* in their multishelved *canastilleros*, the houses studied here always placed the arch-divinity Obatalá centrally, in a position of absolute ascendance, followed by the priest's *ángel de guarda* (if it is not already Obatalá), followed by the second parent-*oricha*.[27]

A *trono del tambor* is erected for a drumming celebration *(tambor)*. The main formal difference between a *trono del cumpleaños* and a *trono del tambor* is that the former presents the vessels of all the *orichas* a priest has received, while the latter usually presents only the *oricha* of honor (i.e., the *oricha* to whom the celebration is given) and Eleguá, who, along with his companion *guerreros*, must take part in all ritual events; it is they who "clear the way" for the success of any undertaking. In a throne for a 1983 drumming to Changó, only the envesseled secrets of this deity are elevated at center stage, along with the *guerreros* nestled directly below; however, cloth *paños* representing other key *orichas*—in this case Obatalá, Ochún, and Yemayá—are arranged in an outer constellation of silver, gold, and blue and white respectively (Fig. 1).[28] The *cumpleaños* is held every



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8. Typical domestic *oricha* shrine room *(igbodún)* with a *canastillero*, a cabinet that hierarchically organizes *soperas* of the deities. Atop it is the green *sopera* for Orunmila, followed by Obatalá's and Ochún's. Staffs *(osun)* and twin vessels for the Ibeyis also appear atop the cabinet. On the floor are Yemayá's painted clay vessels with encrusted shells and swan, blue vessels for Olokun, spray-painted multicolored vessels for Oyá, and a raised red wood vessel *(batea)* for Changó. The painting represents St. Lázarus/Babalú Ayé. Marianao, Havana, Cuba, 1989.

year on the same date, but drummings can occur at any time during the year, as requested by *orichas* through divination oracles or prophetic (possession) speech, to solve problems, fulfill obligations, bring about health, and so forth.[29]

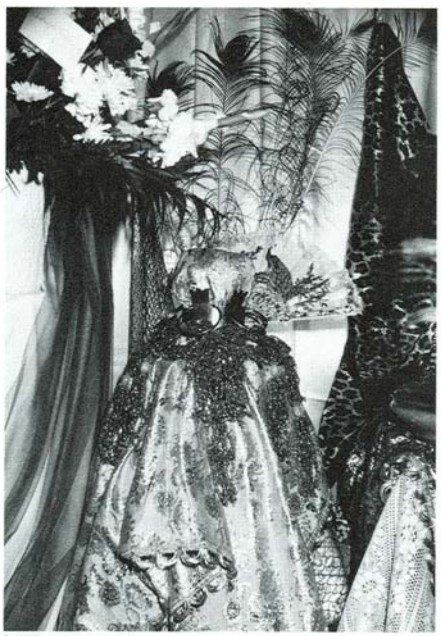
In both the birthday throne and drumming throne the *orichas* are decked out in their finest festive cloth, metalwork crowns, *collares de mazo,* and beaded staffs. They receive a sumptuous spread of fruit and sweets, and special tributes *(derechos)* of coconuts, candles, and money, from godchildren who gather in the house of their godfather *(padrino)* or godmother *(madrina)* to celebrate.

Bolts of cloth of silk brocade, sequins, velvet, lace, lamé, satin, and chiffon, carefully selected for the colors, textures, and patterns associated with particular *orichas,* are purchased in wholesale textile stores (in Manhattan, for example, in the Garment District and on Delancy Street). Cut and fitted with sparkling contrasting borders of silver and gold braid, and often adorned with cowrie shells, they become *paños* to dress and cover the *orichas' soperas.* The most desirable fabrics have printed or brocaded floral sprays with flecks or threads of metallic silver or gold, or else they are densely sequined.

Over the *paño* the *oricha's mazo* can be doubled to encircle the now-covered *sopera,* or draped sash-style. Crowns (a nine-pointed copper one for Oyá, a five-pointed brass one for Ochún[30]) are then placed on top, their dangling attributes radiating out from the center.[31] In order "to make it beautiful," says Josie García, the top of the *paño* is carefully coaxed up through the crown, or pinched and tied if there is no crown, to form a puffy navel or head that she likens to a "bun" (interview, May 21, 1988)(Figs. 9–11). Finally the appropriate beaded or painted staffs, dance wands, or other symbolically resonant attributes owned by the *oricha* are placed on top or slipped through the *mazo,* or nestled nearby against the wall (Fig. 11).[32] The result poses the finely dressed *orichas* like a glorious assembled theatrical cast at a curtain call or, more precisely, like royalty sitting in state.

Offerings for the Orichas

Orichas mounted on birthday and drumming thrones, as well as those newly born orichas reposing on the floor of the *igbodún* on the final day of the initiation period, find a selection of cool *(fresco)* and sweet *(dulce)* fruits and foods arranged before them. This array is called *plaza,* a term which here simply means a bountiful "spread" of food, but which, in a related context, refers to an open-air marketplace (interviews, Melba Carillo and Beatriz Morales, Sept. 9, 1993). The *plaza* is said to refresh *(refrescar)* them before they are addressed through divination with four shards of coconut meat *(obi).* That which is cool, refreshing, and sweet should produce a disposition conducive to positive divinatory responses and is metaphorically consistent with the desired result: tranquility, advancement, health, and well-being.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9. Detail of a birthday throne by Ramón Esquivél. A *paño*-covered vessel of Ochún, draped with beaded *mazos* made by Melba Carillo, has a "bun" or head of cloth pulled up through the deity's brass crown. The paper fan and peacock feathers are attributes of the deity. Union City, New Jersey, 1987.

The aesthetic choices of the *plaza* are guided by *oricha* categories and characteristics, in which shape, color, texture, and even taste are taken into account.[33] Creative throne makers engage in a kind of intimate landscaping. Ochún, for example, receives fruits of her characteristic color and sweetness: mangos, oranges, and grapefruits, as well as "Spanish pumpkins" *(calabazas),* which suggest the contours of the female abdomen. Changó receives bananas and plantains (for their phallic shape), and strawberries and apples (for their red and white color); Obatalá receives Anjou pears, whose light exterior and white interior correspond to his color, while their shape approximates the conical mountain where he lives. Other matches are not as easily explained but are nevertheless traditional: Oyá receives eggplants *(berenjenas),* whose dark color appears to reproduce the shades of the robes of St. Theresa and Our Lady of Candlemas with whom Oyá is associated; Eleguá, Ogún, and Ochósi prefer sugar cane *(caña de azúcar),* perhaps because of its association with the "outside" (the fields) and the aggressive cane-cutting/ground-clearing wielders of machetes (Ogún in particular).[34]

Particular kinds of fruits are placed before or near particular *orichas,* often creatively distributed in symbolically significant configurations and eye-popping alternations of color echoing the counterpoint of *oricha* beadwork. For a 1986 birthday throne to her Ochún (Fig. 10), Josie García of the Bronx spread a central circle of five pineapples (the number five being sacred to Ochún) alternated with four small *calabazas,* in the middle of which rested a large *calabaza.* These pumpkins were doused with honey and sprinkled with sweet, multicolored jimmies. In a 1983 throne for Changó (Fig. 1), Ramón Esquivél arranged Delicious apples on the mat into the shape of the deity's double thunder axe, whose twin points sprouted from a bunch of bananas.

Elaborate *plazas* also feature a host of home-prepared and purchased desserts and snacks. Eleguá loves hard candies *(caramelas)* and popcorn *(rositas de maiz).* Ochún gets *dulces finos* (syrup-soaked yellow cakes) and *natilla con canela* (sweet egg custard with cinnamon). Obatalá takes *arroz con leche* (rice pudding, but unsweetened), white rolls and *merengues* (swirled puffs of white sugar) in multiples of eight and a large, conical "tower" *(torre)* of *merengue* that represents the white, heavenly mountain upon which he lives. Yemayá likes *coco dulce,* made of grated coconut with brown sugar and *melao* (molasses or dark cane syrup), and also often receives *mala-rabia* and *boniatillo,* sweet potatoes *(boniato)* blended to be chunky and smooth, respectively. Oyá receives a dish of chocolate pudding, really a custard of the same base as Ochún's *natilla* with chocolate added. Changó is served *amalá-ilá* (cornmeal and okra) (interviews, Melba Carillo, 1987 and Aug. 1993). The prize of the prepared sweets is a large frosted birthday cake featuring the *oricha* of honor's name. After a period of time on the mat as offerings to the *oricha,* pieces of the cake and the rest of the throne's fruits are distributed back to birthday guests.

Oricha *Thronescapes*[35]

Throne makers like the masterful Ramón Esquivél employ cloth as a plastic medium to create thrones that dramatically announce *oricha* presence through their signature colors, that reference architecture and the sacralized natural landscape, and that inscribe a hierarchical model of the cosmos. The *oricha* of honor customarily is elevated and centralized, fronted by Eleguá upon the mat and transcended by Obatalá above. Eleguá is always placed on the floor in the center, near where priests make their prone salutations *(moforibale)* and deposit a monetary tribute *(derecho)* in the calabash *(jícara)* on the mat (Figs. 1, 5, 10). He is the *guardiero* (guardian) of crossroads, thresholds, marketplace, and house; the diminutive "messenger" who ferries communications and sacrifices to other *orichas*; the *oricha* addressed, fed, and assuaged before all others. He thus stands guard with the other *guerreros* before the *orichas* elevated behind him, at a kind of threshold or crossroads that links them with the throne's human supplicants.

Fruits and foods as products of the earth distributed on mats of straw find direct vertical opposition in the rising celestial canopy, often made of sheer white fabric, lace or crepe, suggesting clouds in the sky and rising mountains (Fig. 5). This is the sphere of Obatalá, sky *oricha* and pure "King of the White Cloth." In a 1983 drumming throne for Changó (Fig. 1), behind the sheer red curtains joined at the apex by the silver lamé "shield" of Obatalá, white mountain peaks rise above the horizontal bar spanning the two converging walls, while bunted lace "clouds" depend below. Beneath this firmament in cloth, the striking *paños* and the covered, elevated vessel of Changó are set against against the blazon-like dominant background of alternating vertical pillars of red and white bolts of cloth, forming the counterpointed signature colors of Changó, the *oricha* of honor.

In a 1985 birthday throne for Changó (Fig. 5), Ramón Esquivél shaped the silver and white brocade *paños* covering the *soperas* of two Obatalás to form double peaks, referencing the deity's mythological residence, the "hill of Oke," that towers above all of the other *orichas* (interview, Ramón Esquivél, Aug. 17, 1986). Oke is Obatalá's faithful companion *oricha*, his rock-solid support or "staff" *(bastón)* (interview, Melba Carillo, Nov. 14, 1987; see also Angarica n.d:21). Thus Esquivél rendered in his thronescape not only a hierarchicalized landscape of sky and earth but also an understanding of Obatalá—who, by rights, is "higher" than the other deities presented—as the spiritual "head of all the *orichas*." Obatalá crowned atop the "hill" bridges and mediates "sky" and "earth," playing the *axis mundi* role to which Eliade refers (1959:36–37).

In a marvelous instance of cultural bricolage, Esquivél mounted on the wall an elaborate golden spoked metal lamp in the form of the monstrance of the Host, the Christian God's Holy Sacrament *(Santíssimo Sacramento)*. The lamp, with bulbs of different colors, rises just above and behind the twin peaks of Obatalá. A priest fleshed out the sense of this striking juxtaposition in an explanation to me of an Obatalá drumming throne that Esquivél made for him. The throne's central upward-aspiring white and silver *paño* was an "airplane going to heaven…you know, *height!*, like something that looks toward the sky. Because Obatalá, is, you know, God's son. Like Jesus, Obatalá is like Jesus. It's like something [going] to his father, very symbolic…to open the ways to Heaven from Earth" (interview, Idalberto Cardenas, Nov. 29, 1986).

Thus the spiritual landscape as inscribed in throne architecture suggests something of a reconciliation of Yoruba and Western Christian cosmology based, undoubtedly, in a historically emergent Cuban and Latino popular religious conception. Yet though the throne presents an image structured by a Western spirit-matter hierarchy of "heaven" and "earth," heaven is not at all a distant or otherworldly one as in certain Christian conceptions. Reflecting its foundation as an African-derived shrine, the throne-as-altar embodies spiritual power in envesseled earthly material objects, a power manifested in an immediate, intimate, and voluptuous way, right here, amid an otherwise mundane domestic domain.

These same canopies that structure vertical mediations between "sky" and "earth" provide the dramatic stage for some of Esquivél's most powerful and large-scale evocations of the thunder god Changó and his *oricha* "sister" Dadá, who is known in Cuba as the "crown of the Saints" (Angarica n.d.:45–49). In the 1985 birthday throne Esquivél built for Changó (Fig. 5), the magnificent beaded and cowrie-encrusted crown of Dadá descends from the canopy on clustered strands of red and white beads and cowries.[36] Hovering above the covered vessel and pedestal of Changó, its twelve long cowrie-studded fringes dangle beneath it and encircle a red and gold floral *paño*, atop which are arranged Changó's beaded thunder axe *(oché)*, beaded baseball bat *(bate)*,[37] and *collares de mazo*. In Yorubaland the prototype of the New World version of the crown is worn by special priests of Shàngó called to pay homage to their thunder god when houses are struck by lightning (Abraham 1946:121, 622).[38] Here the descending crown of Dadá appears as the very embodiment of Changó's lightning (his *aché*) arcing from sky to ground, condensing in the beaded attributes of Changó and the covered vessel that contains his thunderstones *(edun ará)*. Esquivél echoed lightning's descent with the vertical chevron pattern of sequins embroidered across the surface of the *paño* itself. As if that were not enough, Esquivél shaped the *paño* further by draping and tacking its upper edge in the form of zigzagged horns, evocations of lightning and of the ox horns that represent Changó's companion-*oricha* Oggue. In a stunning repeat performance in 1987 (Fig. 12), Esquivél shaped the same red and gold *paño* into repeating diamond-shaped lightning bolts falling downward beside the uncovered vessel *(batea)* and pedestal *(pilón)* of Changó. Having seen, in 1986, photographs of decoratively painted Changó vessels and pedestals on display in a Havana museum, he decided to reconstitute this tradition in the United States.[39]

Numerous other possibilities exist for employing throne curtains and *paños* iconographically. Esquivél and other throne makers shape cloth creatively as flowers and butterflies for the feminine water *orichas* Yemayá and Ochún (Figs. 2, 10) and thunder axes for Changó (Fig. 10). Esquivél's 1983 drumming throne for Changó (Fig. 1) features a fiery red *paño* crackling with gold sequins, shaped to the form of the *oricha*'s double thunder axe at the center of the throne. Most dramatically, the front curtains are parted sharply so that the two opposing triangular areas of sheer red cloth appear to compose a huge overarching double thunder axe.

The 1986 birthday throne built by Josie García for her Ochún expands the possibilities of rendering cosmology in cloth, as it reorients a more strictly hierarchicalized sky/earth landscape into underwaterscape (Fig. 10). And it suggests a fluid reinscription of aesthetic emphases around the values of the cult of Ochún. While Obatalá still sits ascendant, he is dominated by Ochún's colors; there is no sky or mountain range rendered in puffy white lace or crepe. The canopy was, in fact, conceived by Josie García as a running river's surface as seen from below, for the throne maker understands her particular manifestation, or "road," of Ochún as having "lived in a river in a cave." The dominant colors are "honey" and gold, representing all of Ochún's "sweet things," especially the "sweet water" of the river she "owns." The canopy's lacy gold border glistens and bubbles; its gold dimpled ceiling suggests running rapids; its pleated vertical drapes at left and right are like water lapping riverbanks. The gentle curves of the central butterfly shape—a beautiful avatar of the female *oricha* Ochún—double as a figure of emanating, concentric "waves," as its maker explained (interview, Josie García, May 16, 1986). Peacock feathers, from one of Ochún's central avatars, adorn the outer drapes as well as Ochún's central *paño*. Layered in with these references to Ochún's sweet things are the counterpointed bead colors of this Ochún: the alternating vertical bars of amber and green. (This road of Ochún employs green because of her intimate association with Orunmila, whose colors are yellow and green.)

The meaning of the throne and its objects is not exhausted by an account of its iconography, not least because most of its constituents are quite abstract. How is one to understand, for example, the ris-

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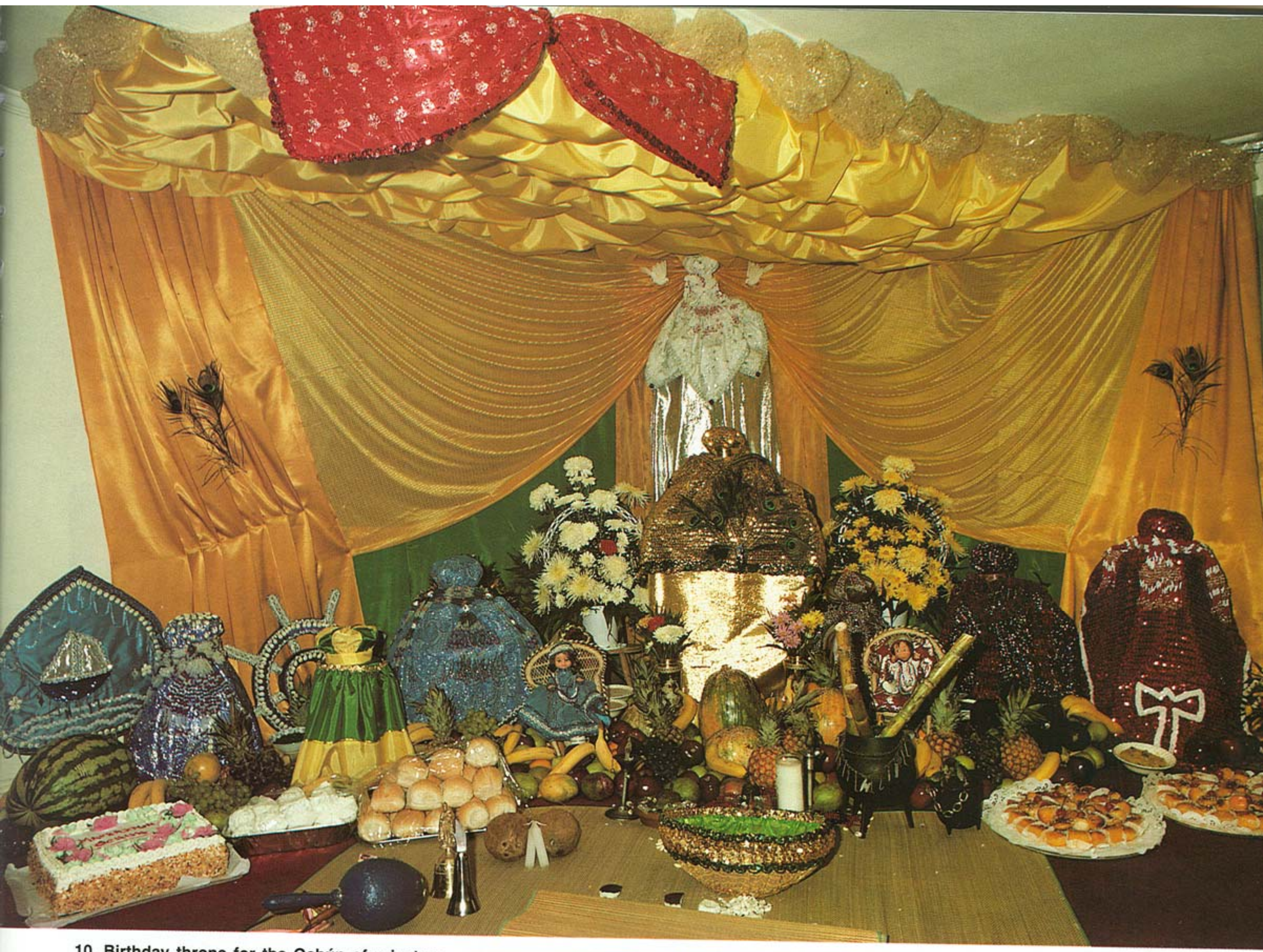
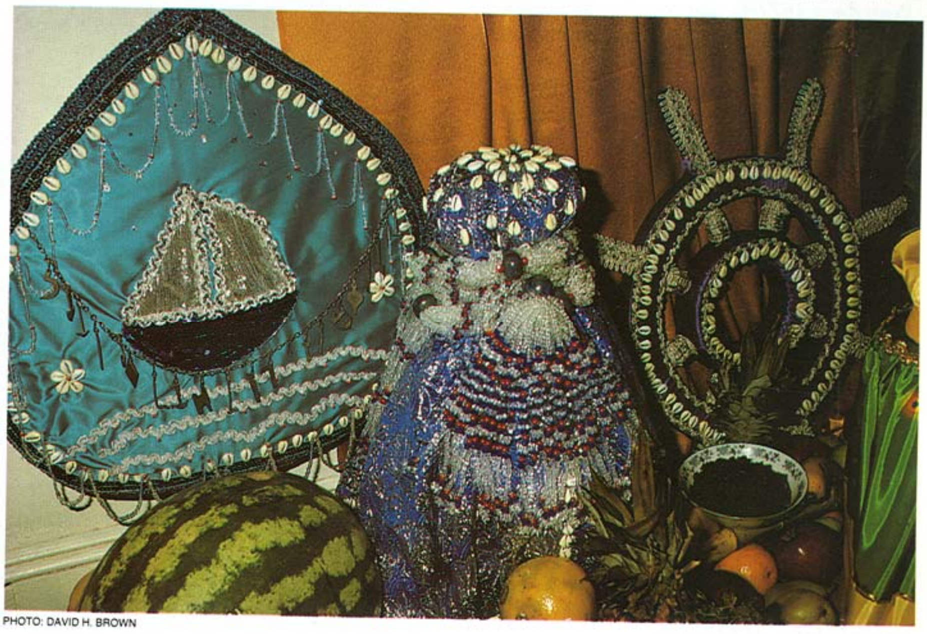


10. Birthday throne for the Ochún of priestess Josie García, made by García for her fifth *cumpleaños*. The golds and "honey" colors identify this *oricha* of "sweet water" (the river). Obatalá is above Ochún in the center. To Ochún's left are Olokun, Kofá de Orula, and Yemayá, with the twins Ibeyi (represented by dolls). Warrior *orichas* appear in front. To the right of Ochún are Agayú, Oyá, and Changó. At the top, a red *paño* is shaped like Changó's thunder axe. The beaded *mazos* were made by Melba Carillo. New York, 1986.



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11. Detail of the birthday throne in Figure 10, showing various *oricha* attributes: a fan and a cowrie-encrusted ship's wheel for Yemayá, multistrand bead sashes *(mazos)* over the vessel for Olokun, which is draped with cowrie-encrusted cloth.

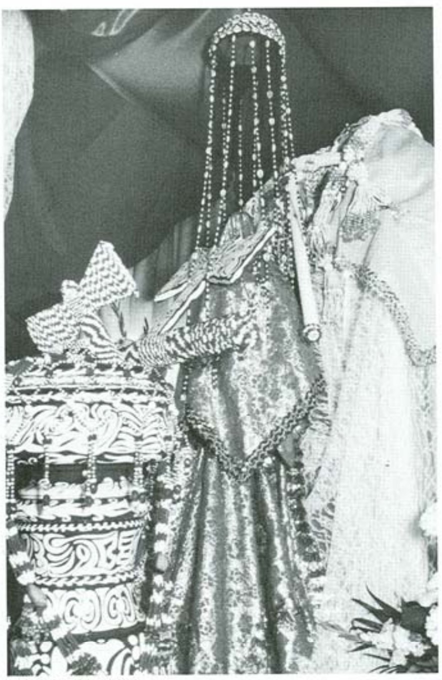
ing, moundlike figures in lavish cloth beneath the throne's canopy (Figs. 4, 9)? A hierarchy and differentiation of aesthetic density—the lavishness of cloth, decorative embellishment, and concentration of gathered objects—throws into relief the *paño*-covered *oricha* vessels against the dominant areas of the throne itself. It is certainly the *paños*, with their rich gold and silver fabrics, that appear most expensive. Clearly density of design and apparent value index and localize the presence of each *oricha*.[40] Yet, in a visual paradox, the apparent invitation to knowledge of this display—especially given the open curtains which promote the experience of revelation—is at the same time precisely about containment and concealment of the secret. The effect echoes Judith Gleason's observations of Yoruba Egungun masquerades and suggests something of a transatlantic tradition of sacred clothwork. The masquerades use "a dramatizing of the surfaces in order to stress the depth of what is thereby concealed. The delighted eye teases the mind to contemplation of the unseen force behind the apparition" (Gleason 1987:102).

The crowns and globe-like gatherings of cloth rise like heads atop a conical body draped with beads. Dance wands or other hand-held attributes sprout atop them. The assemblage is at once readable as hierarchical and anthropomorphic on the one hand, and as a discontinuous, additive, metonymic clustering of forms on the other. Robert Plant Armstrong has referred to this latter additive aesthetic formation as a process of "syndesis," in which the intentional addition and piling up of forms, including material objects, songs, praises, and sacrifices, serve to invoke and sustain "presence"—in this case *oricha* power, *aché*—for particular ritual applications and passages (Armstrong 1981).[41] If the mound is a kind of body, a "grammatically animate" (Jackson 1989:144) body that "stores" *aché* (Apter 1987:246–47), diacritically distinguished by its attributes from its neighbor, it is both similar to and distinct from the more clearly hierarchically organized, kinetically animate body of the priest whose body may be possessed and danced by the *oricha*.[42]

Finally, while the throne is accessible in this extended moment for visual contemplation, an effect heightened by its objectification in a photograph, the process of the accumulation of its objects is masked or internalized. And the "meaning" of the throne is certainly not reduceable to the results of a single static iconographic "decoding operation" (Bourdieu 1977:1). Its constituents accumulate prior to the throne's construction in an additive way, unsystematically over time, in numerous exchanges and encounters—a field of actions and moves that could be encapsulated by the term "practice"—between individuals, within ritual families, and in the setting of modern urban culture. Many of these moments of addition gain their significance in the context of promises made, obligations fulfilled, and personal struggles and desires as mediated by the *orichas'* involvement in priests' daily experience. Thus an important level of "meaning" must be identified in what Richard and Sally Price call "social meaning" (1980:188–93), that which is embedded in the micro-exchanges of everyday life—in this case as marked ritual exchanges.

Exchange and the Ritualized Circulation of Objects

As a special festival altar, the throne structures communication—drummed and chanted praises rendered, and divinatory dialogue conducted, through *obi* divination (the coconuts)—between two worlds, and witnesses a wealth of gift exchanges between *orichas* and followers. Upon their arrival at houses celebrating an *oricha*'s birthday, priests immediately "throw themselves to the throne" *(moforibale)* to show respect for the *oricha* of honor, salute the *oricha* musically with a shaker or bell, and deposit monetary tributes in a calabash *(jícara)* or basket on the floor. The birthday thrones of godparents who have large ritual families become, in the course of a day, veritable groves of coconuts and candles which their godchildren must bring as a special tribute, and whose *jícaras* overflow with money.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12. A crown of Dadá hangs from the canopy of a birthday throne for the Changó of Adolfo Fernández. The throne design and painted pedestal and vessel of Changó are by Ramón Esquivél. The *mazos*, beaded thunder axe and baseball bat for Changó, and white beaded cane for Obatalá are by Melba Carillo. The maker of the Dadá crown is unknown. Union City, New Jersey, 1987.

The spread of the basic *plaza* arranged by the throne maker grows in proportion to the arrival of the gift-bearing faithful to the house, and ebbs as the cornucopia is later distributed and consumed. Just about "everything sweet is given out to the people" (interview, Melba Carillo, Mar. 20, 1987). Gifts initially made to the *oricha* cycle back to refresh the givers anew with food that has absorbed the *orichas' aché*. The cutting and serving of the *oricha*'s birthday cake happily borrow a secular form in dramatizing the distribution of sweet blessings. By the end of the evening the mat of the throne is virtually defoliated. Within thirty-six hours its contents have traveled from supermarket bins to the throne—from actual *plaza* (market) to the throne's *plaza;* have been presented to the *orichas* and then reciprocated, to be eaten immediately or taken home, often in the same shopping plastic or brown paper bags used to purchase the fruit in the first place. The fruit taken home is eaten by the guests' family and friends in an exponential spreading of the *oricha*'s blessing.

Finally, the gift cycle includes many constituents of the throne itself. New additions of cloth and beaded objects make for considerable variation in throne design from year to year. Whereas some objects are purchased or made for one's own *orichas*, others come to the house as gifts from godchildren and, in fact, from other *orichas*. When *orichas* "come down" at drummings, they often give away the *paños* and even the very *ropa de santo* in which they have been dressed. The *paños* may soon appear upon the blessed recipient's own enthroned *orichas*. Thus, the composition of a throne and its attendant meanings are produced collectively through the circulation of status gifts, some of which do not remain for long in the same house, suggesting an informal and fluid inner-city gift-exchange network, which interfaces with the mass marketplace of commodities.[43]

Thrones of Oricha *Royalty in Afro-Cuban Cultural History*

Lydia Cabrera in 1954 remarked upon the royal protocol—a set of gestures and images—evident in everyday Afro-Cuban Lucumí religious practice and most powerfully in the *asiento* or *kariocha* (initiation) of priests and priestesses. The elder priestess Oddedei (Calixta Morales) explained to her that "to make Santo is to make a king, and *kariocha* is a ceremony of kings, like those of the palace of the Oba Lucumí" (Yoruba king).[44] And, she stated, the priests and priestesses of Afro-Cuban Lucumí religion, "the babalao, and the mamalochas, formed a court like the one there" (in Africa)(Cabrera 1983b:24 fn.). The pageantry of the Día del Medio existed, Cabrera was told by her informants, "for the simple reason, 'that the *Orichas* were kings' " (Cabrera 1980:179).

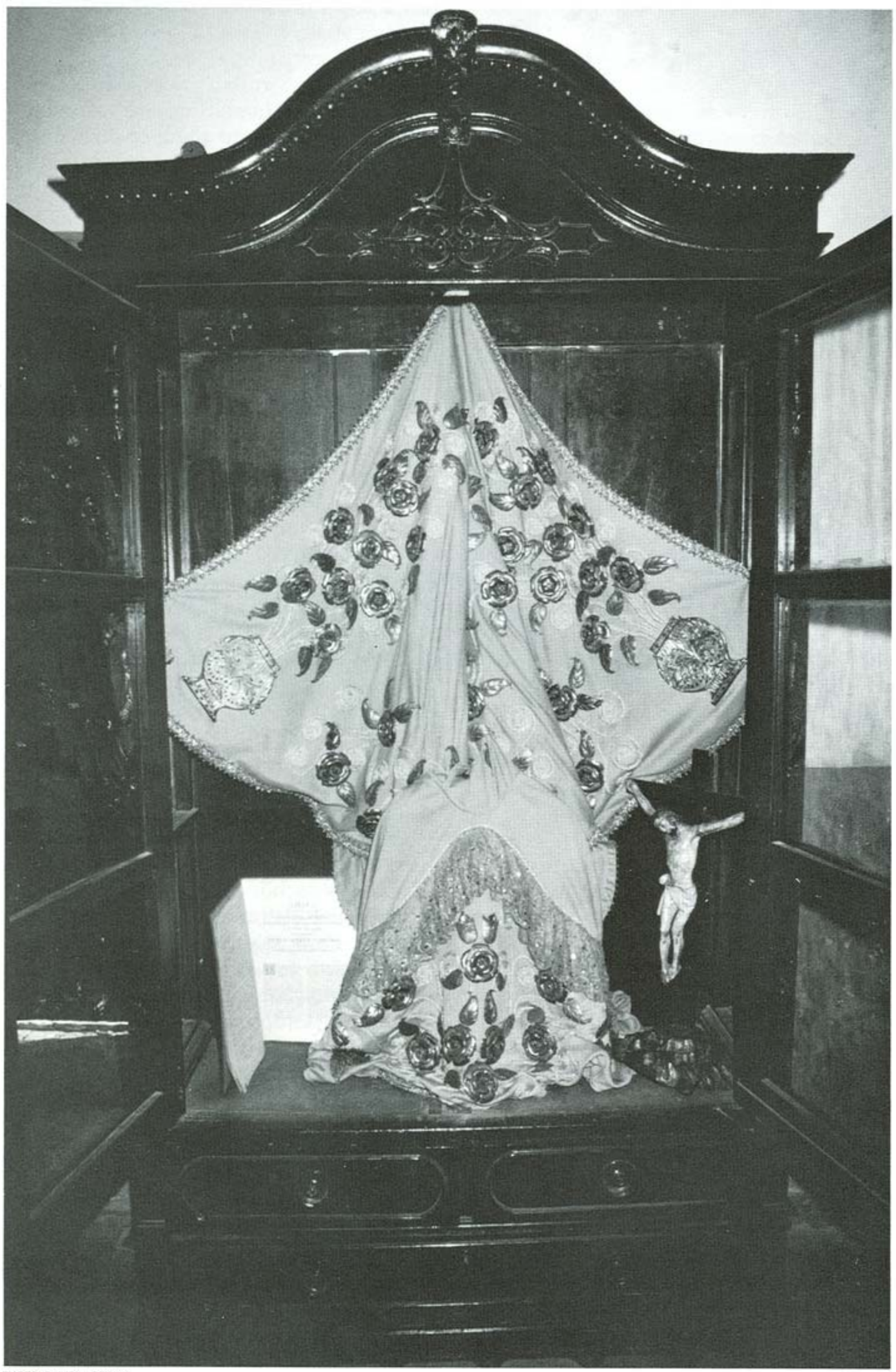
Though we might want to qualify Oddedei's allusion by distinguishing ethnographically between the ritual enthroning of Yoruba divine rulers on the one hand and the initiation of cult members on the other, she in fact invokes a mythico-historical understanding common to the Yoruba themselves: that the *òrìsà* were "princes of the royal family" of Oduduwa, founder and first Oni of Ifé, princes "who traveled away from their home in all directions to found new kingdoms and dynasties" (Smith 1969:19–20). As Obas—new kings of their respective domains—each of them bore a crown as a sign of their rightful office. Today, the possession of such a crown and genealogical links to Oduduwa legitimate the authority of Yoruba kings. In effect, kings are officially the descendants of certain *òrìsà*.[45] It is no less significant that Yoruba cult members, the *aworo,* are considered not only as the "kings" (*aládé,* crown wearers) of their ritual domains—their shrines—but also the "kingmakers," for the king who wears the beaded crown is dependent upon them to "safeguard the crown and revitalize its powers," his *ashe,* in annual festivals (Apter 1992:103–5).

While all agree that West African Yoruba ritual is the *ultimate* source of Lucumí practice, many have observed that African traditions were creatively reworked and reorganized in the Americas (e.g., Mintz & Price 1976; Bastide 1978; Thompson 1983:18). In late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Cuba, the important *proximate,* contextual source for the emergence of Lucumí royal religious symbolism is to be found in stylistic traditions elaborated during and after the colonial period within Afro-Cuban religious brotherhoods called *cabildos* (Bastide 1972:95; Brandon 1983:61–94; Palmié 1989). The "focus" of African-derived religious practice—what William Bascom defined as "stones, herbs, and blood" (Bascom 1950) along with African patterns of divination, sacred music, spirit possession, and structures of leadership—was reembedded in a set of expressions congruent with the island's distinctive cultural history. The authority and splendor of elected or hereditary *cabildo* officeholders—kings, queens, courtiers, and military aides—were encoded in symbols creatively borrowed from Spanish or colonial Cuban iconography of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. European aristocratic styles were endlessly copied and revived in colonial Cuba by an emerging bourgeoisie of merchants and planters: lavishly draped and layered floral cloths, gold-gilt adornment, porcelain, and faience. Appropriated, in turn, by Afro-Cubans, these objects and styles became traditionalized as status objects in the presentation of Lucumí *orichas*. That is, Afro-Cubans brilliantly reinvested colonial Cuban forms with new significance in constructing the "royal" setting for initiatory and ceremonial practice.

Change occurred not through a single agentless encounter between "Spanish" and "African" traditions, but through a dynamic socio-cultural history in which Africans and creoles built institutions and actively engaged in constructing and presenting themselves in relation to their changing surroundings. This involved both the preservation of Yoruba ritual patterns precisely through a conscientious reworking of them, and the borrowing, copying, or appropriating of available symbolic elements and whole stylistic systems for enjoyment and empowerment. The kinds of transformations that historically occur in creole settings, Karl Reisman insists, involve "not merely the passive results of history" (1970:131).

Cultural borrowing does not necessarily represent dilution, loss, or corruption, as implied in recent Yoruba Reversionist writing seeking to "purify" the tradition of foreign elements (see Mason 1985). To my mind, "copying" and "imitation" remain uncomfortable concepts only if one acquiesces to the hegemonic conceit that people easily succumb to assimilating pressures; we should look for creative behavior, practical and tactical processes of resistance through transformation, or what recent theorists have called "critical revision" (Gates 1988; Apter 1992).

A deemphasis of "origins" as primary and determinant in cultural investi-



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13. Mantle *(manto)* of the Virgin of Regla, displayed in its cabinet. The statue of the Virgin, the Catholic counterpart of the *oricha* Yemayá, is dressed in this *manto* when it is taken out of the church for a procession on her feast day, September 7. The *paños* covering enthroned *orichas* were modeled after the mantles draping figures of Catholic saints. Church of the Virgin of Regla, Regla, Havana, Cuba, 1989.

gation is in order, for the processes and products of cultural change defy the teasing out of "pure" strands or elements as essences organically continuous with some putative point of origin in the past. If we follow recent work by Handler and Linnekin, moreover, we are forced to relinquish the formalist, essentialist, or natural science point of view, which "identifies the essential attributes of culture traits rather than to understand our own and our subjects' interpretive models" (Handler & Linnekin 1984:274).

Lydia Cabrera suggested, probably based upon readings of Fernando Ortiz (1921), that the Afro-Cuban religious brotherhoods *(cabildos)* during the colonial period carried on traditions of kingship that appeared to mirror those of Africa. The "royal honors" that were rendered to *cabildo* kings and queens, perhaps as late as the 1880s, were reflected in certain "courtly reminders," that is, an "etiquette shown by junior priests toward their most distinguished elders," that she observed in the 1950s and were reported to her by her elderly informant Oddedei (Cabrera 1983b:24 fn.).

In 1853 the Swedish traveler Frederika Bremer visited a wealthy, well-appointed and well-staffed Lucumí *cabildo* in a black barrio just outside the walled city now known as Old Havana. She described its elegant king and queen as possessed of "a throne with a canopy over it," under which stood their seats and near which was a crown painted on the wall. Greeted by the king and queen, she watched festive drumming and dancing proceed before the throne in what may be read as a religious celebration complete with spirit possession. A conscientious observer of customs, Bremer made a tribute of money to a male dancer apparently possessed by the deity Changó as well as to the society's coffers (Bremer 1853, vol. 2:380–81).

In journalistic reports of the first half of the nineteenth century, observers of Carnival on the January 6th Day of Kings described *cabildo* queens as they emerged

> in dress the style of the whites, covered with fine Spanish lace, sash of precious stones, belt and scepter of gold, pendant earrings and necklace of pearls....Each queen had her court of young slaves, in imitation of her aristocratic mistresses [female masters], decked out luxuriously.
>
> (Ortiz 1921:6–9)

One *cabildo* king was described as wearing "a genuine costume of a king of the Middle Ages, a very proper red, close coat, velvet vest and a magnificent gilt paper crown" (Aimes 1905:20–21). Other officers such as the Mayor de Plaza (Chief of Ceremonies) wore "long military coats, starched shirts...flamboyant doublepeaked hats, gold braid...swords on the belt...[etc.]...All of these adornments," noted Ortiz, "were taken principally from the Spanish Army" (1921:6–9).

Many observers regarded such formal expressions of *cabildo* courtly hierarchy as grotesque and humorous "imitations" of "the adornments and dress of the whites." I suggest, following Roger Abrahams (1983:26), that *cabildo* processions in stylized court and military dress artfully presented subversive public models of royal wealth, order, power, and alternative authority. The presentations were strategically masked by the ambiguity of the signs and thus were "safe": these were just slaves and of course it was just entertaining—"slavish"—imitation.

Karl Reisman suggests that the symbolic technique of "taking on" dominant cultural forms and "remodeling" them has characterized the emergence of creole cultures in the Caribbean. In a range of practices, Caribbean people "reshap[e] the forms of symbols to resemble as closely as possible both the historical source and the forms current in the environment" (Reisman 1970). The case of Yoruba kings and *cabildo* kingship seems to be a good example of this. While Oddedei's reference is to the "palace of the Oba Lucumí" "there" in Africa, this is not necessarily the same Yoruba king that the contemporary ethnographer knows. Her language is reoriented to, and shaped by, the uniquely and historically Cuban ethnic nomenclature for the Yoruba—"Lucumí"—the nearest ("emic") rather than the more remote ("etic") term.

How might the creation of Afro-Cuban royalty be understood in terms of the creolization model? First off, a new language or system of signs is not created through the simple synthesis, blend, or reconciliation of two different languages—in other words on the popular A+B=C syncretism model or the binary "tourist-guide" model (Decamp 1971:21–22). The process requires at least three languages and an available pidgin grammatical system; it might involve, for example, two or more minority groups under colonization or conquest, establishing a new common language by drawing lexical items into the pidgin grammar from the third language—the tongue of the colonizer—as well as usable terms from their respective mother tongues (a process known as "relexification") (Decamp 1971).

In the Lucumí context, it is Africans and their descendants of diverse Yoruba ethnicities and related regional peoples who occupied subordinate status in the slave society and its aftermath, constructing an emergent Afro-Cuban culture in relation to, and against, the dominant Spanish-Cuban system of signs.[46] In the religious domain, the core ritual patterns were reworked, having been wrenched from their "wealth of institutional and ritual detail" (Bascom 1950:68) in Africa and reembedded in new socio-ritual and aesthetic frameworks in the New World (Bastide 1978). The fundamentals of stones, herbs, blood, and patterns of divination, drumming, and spirit possession were not lost but reworked and critically differentiated from dominant Catholic practice at the same time that they borrowed aesthetic ideas and even structural patterns from it. A "creole"—uniquely New World—"mother tongue," religiously speaking, emerged, through relexification and elaboration, ritually and aesthetically. African stones and shells—the *fundamento* of the *orichas*—came to be fed in prestige copies of rococo porcelain soup tureens, initiations consummated under grand canopied thrones, and initiates presented in the royal or quasi-military garments on the models of those described to us by nineteenth-century *cabildo* observers.

Using the terminology of historical linguistics, Roger Abrahams and John Szwed suggest that many borrowed performance elements—the equivalent of lexical items—are "loan translations" or "calques" incorporated according to the "ethical and esthetic demands of a conceptual system shared by Africans and Afro-Americans....Many of these features (such as the oratorical variety of Standard English) were introduced into ceremonial proceedings as a substitution for similar prestige varieties used for oratory in West Africa" (Abrahams & Szwed 1983:36). In short, *cabildo* kings, queens, and their courts may be seen as Afro-Cuban creolizations of African structures of authority and centers of power (see Aimes 1905). With historical changes like the suppression of the *cabildos* and emancipation in the 1880s, Afro-Cubans continued to transform themselves and their religions (Ortiz 1921; Scott 1985). The framework of popular religion among Cubans and Afro-Cubans, which included African religion and "folk" Catholicism—a Catholicism that Cubans say they practice "in my own way" *(en mi manera)*—was and remains one such local or regional "conceptual system."

Whereas the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century *cabildo* leaders called kings and queens possessed a formalized administrative role and political relationship (as official "ambassadors") to the colonial power, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries specifically religious houses of the *oricha* (houses of *ocha)* emerged from the institutional base of the extinct old-style *cabildos.* When the politico-administrative structure fell away and *oricha* houses split off and went underground,

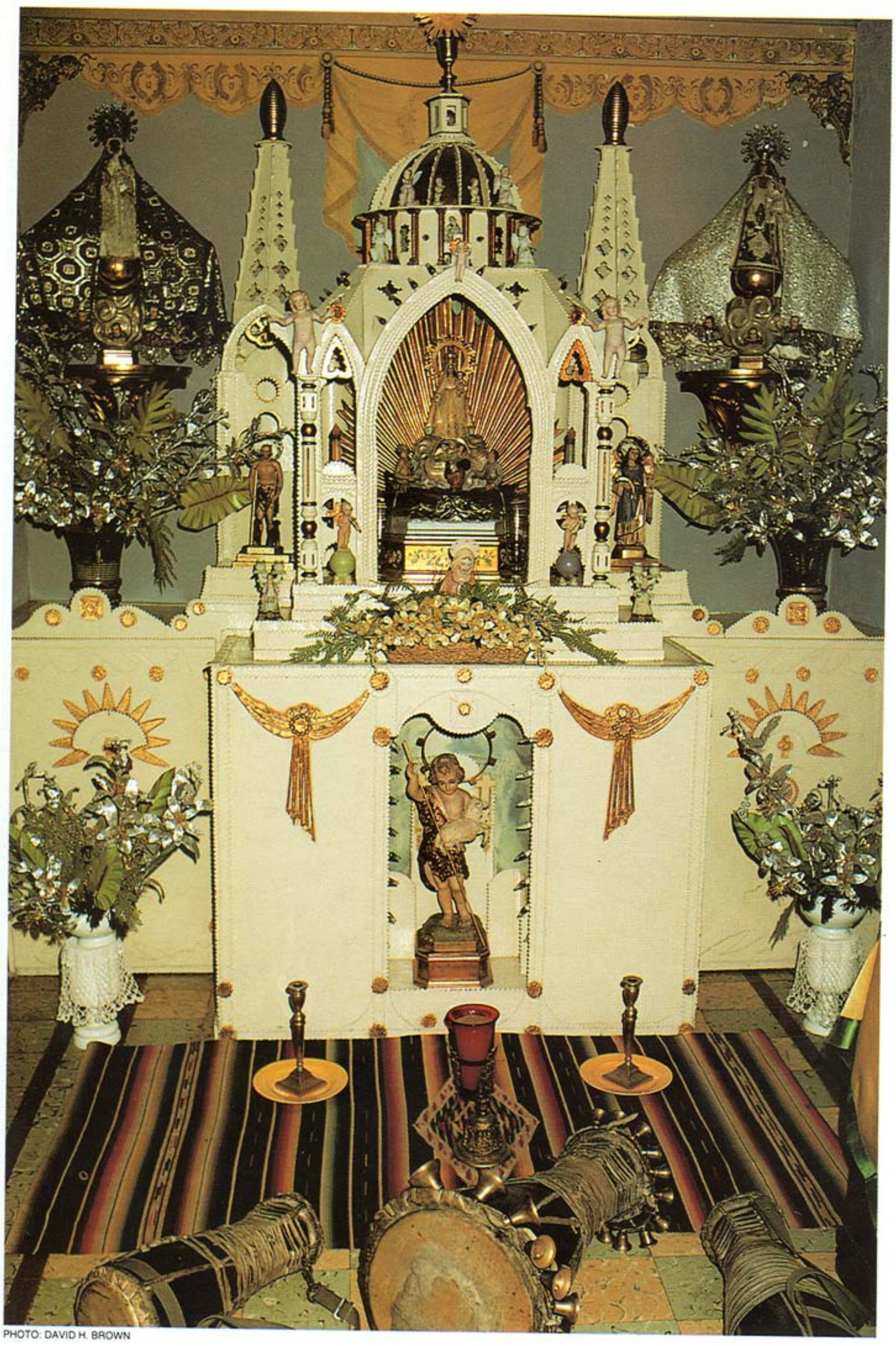


PHOTO: DAVID H. BROWN

14. Domestic shrine for Our Lady of Charity (Caridad de Cobre), who is associated with Ochún, in the house of the late Ochún priest Rigoberto Rodríguez. The house is now an ethnographic museum maintained by the priest's widow, Fredesvinda Rosell. The Catholic shrine's cosmic organization, symmetry, and flatness probably provided one model for aspects of Lucumí throne organization. The *batá* drums belong to the National Folklore Group of Cuba. Madruga, Havana, Cuba, 1989.

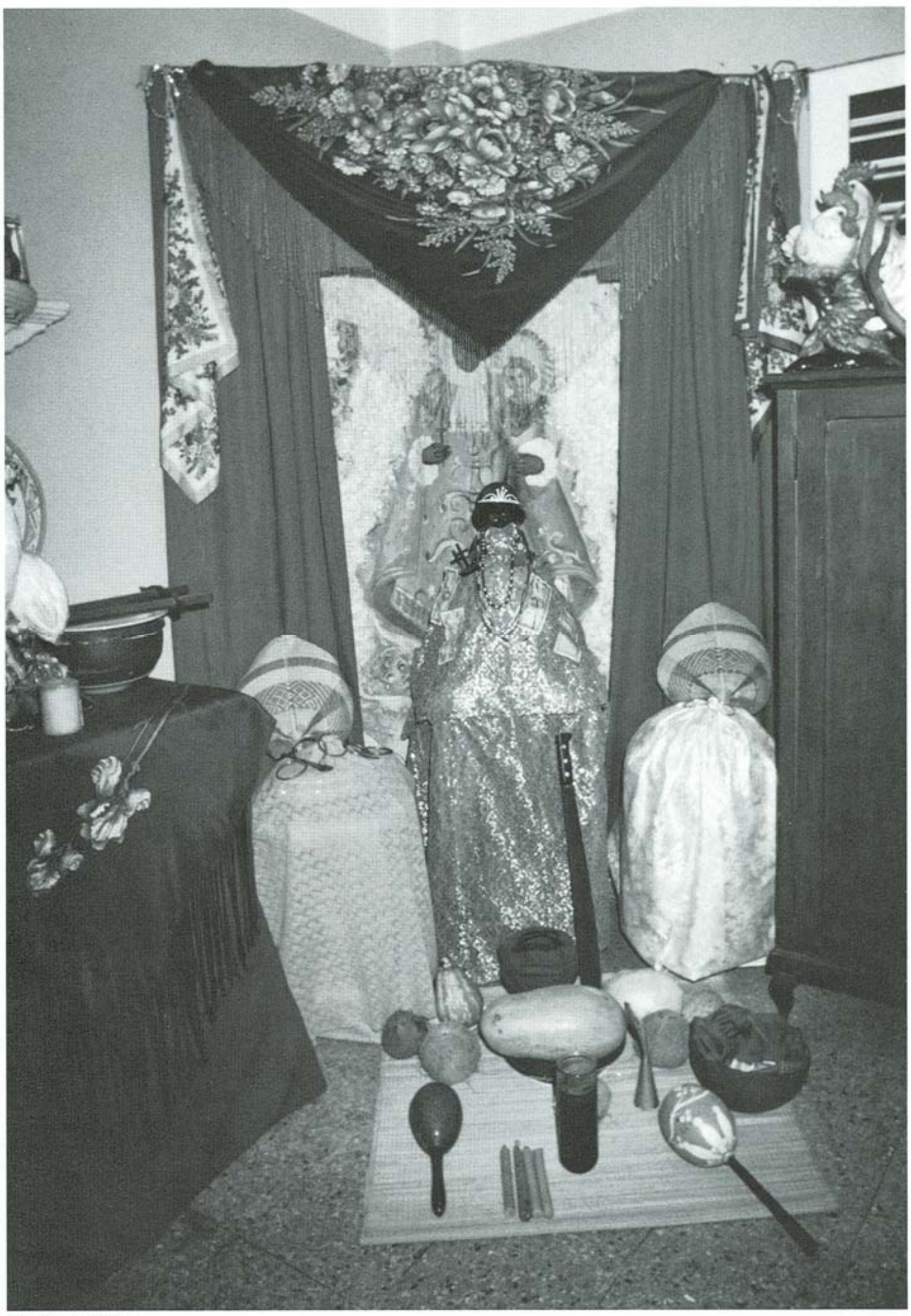
powerful priests and priestesses remained as leaders, notably the emerging ritual specialist-administrator within the house of *ocha* called the *obá-oriaté* (king or head of ritual proceedings and divination). *Babalawos*—Ifá diviners—within their own organizations ranked themselves with nomenclature that derived from Yoruba titles, including that of *obá* (king). This history lends suggestive context to Oddedei's remark that the "*babalao,* [and] the *mamalochas* formed a court, just like there" (in Africa) (Cabrera 1983b:24 fn.).

At the same time, it seems, the glorious symbolic styles from the period of the old-style *cabildo* royalty have remained to this day as the distinctive adornment of the *orichas* themselves who are seen as "kings" and "queens." When Oddedei located the origin of ritual coronation in African royal traditions, she was correct; yet the materials and styles in which their royalty was figured—thrones, formal festive costume, crowns—in great part were elaborations upon models derived from the proximate source of the *cabildo* hierarchy of kings and queens, combined, of course, with reworked Yoruba-derived models of beadwork and *oricha* iconography.

Royal canopied thrones and garments of specifically religious initiation were modeled after, or emerged historically in tandem with, *cabildo* royal styles, which themselves were imitations or appropriations of colonial Cuban models. In speaking about the religious throne and costuming tradition, it is historically erroneous, if not insensitive, to refer to it as "Spanish" or "European." What I have called its proximate source—*cabildo* material culture—was *already* Afro-Cubanized and traditionalized within the institution of *cabildo* kingship. New Jersey priestess and seamstress of ritual garments Lourdes López was taken aback when I suggested that her designs were European in style; she responded that they were Cuban, as taught to her by her godmother in *ocha* (interview, Feb. 21, 1987). What is Cuban is complexly creole and emergent in ways that defy formalistic readings that focus upon putative ultimate origins, leapfrogging a whole cultural process of contextually embedded choices by creative New World people.

If emergent *oricha* thrones and garment styles were nourished by the material culture of the rising Cuban bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century, throne makers drew also from Catholic forms of sacred presentation. For example, the draping of cloth upon altars (the dossal) and over the saints (their mantles, or *mantos),* and the symmetrical, cosmically soaring architecture and gold-gilt ornamentation of church and domestic altars (see Fig. 14) offered visual inspiration. Such discrete propitiatory media as candles, flowers, and ex-votos came to serve the needs of the *orichas*.

The *paños* covering enthroned *orichas* were undoubtedly modeled after the style of draping statues of Catholic saints. These statues are dressed in lavish, sparkling, brocaded *mantos* or *paños* that fall cape-like over the shoulders and back, often combined with a *mantilla* that covers the head. Ornamental gold crowns (and halos) grace their heads. For example, as displayed in its own *canastillero*-like cabinet in the chapel behind the main altar of her church, the capacious sea-blue *manto* of the Virgin of Regla, bordered in silver braid and surfaced with silver floral patterns (Fig. 13), looks to be the inspiration of a common *paño* type hung upon an *oricha* throne.[47] The Virgin is specially dressed in the *manto* on her feast day, September 7, when she heads a procession through the streets of the town of Regla. Lourdes López, in fact, has used the saints' garments and accessories "as a model"



15. Throne for Yemayá, incorporating a tapestry of her Catholic counterpart, the Virgin of Regla. The skirt of a doll representing the Virgin covers Yemayá's sacred vessel. House of the "Sons of San Lazaro" of Enriquito Hernández Almenteros, La Hata, Guanabacoa, Havana, Cuba, 1989.

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when she makes crowns and *ropa de santo.* She pointed to the large statue of La Virgen de las Mercedes (The Virgin of Mercy) atop her antique white *canastillero,* comparing the saint's crown to one she had recently made for Obatalá, the significant difference being one of detail (interview, Lourdes López, Feb. 21, 1987). Yet far from being "Catholic elements," the clothes and accessories of the saints are artfully recontextualized signs of prestige for the greater glory of Lucumí *orichas.*

The flat, symmetrical, soaring architecture of church and domestic Catholic altars, in which the saint of honor is centered and supported by a constellation of angels and companion saints who also wear brocaded *mantos,* suggests itself as one important model for Lucumí thronework (Fig. 14).[48] Yet the means of throne construction are wholly different, employing cloth as opposed to stone or wood architecture.

At the same time, the Yoruba brought definite patterns of altar making to Cuba, whose organization was not inimical to Catholic forms. John Pemberton studied shrines for Eshu in Ila-Orangun, Nigeria:

> Some are large chambers which open upon a main corridor, with raised altars that can be seen through an entrance resembling a proscenium arch....the pedestal is called *ijoko* Eshu ("seat of Eshu") and the calabash is simply referred to as *igba* Eshu ("calabash of Eshu")....Cloths of appropriate colors, dance vestments with long strands of cowrie shells, and dance wands hang on the wall behind the calabash, enhancing the importance of the central symbol just as a dossal frames the cross on a Christian altar.
>
> (Pemberton 1975:20–22)

Eshu's shrine is at once altar and throne, whose presentational form reminded Pemberton of something Western. Africans in the New World apparently found something in the material culture of the Cuban church and state which reminded them of something African.[49]

Recently documented examples of thrones in Cuba dramatically combine the foregoing sensibilities. In one a dossal bearing the image of the Virgin of Regla frames the elevated vessel of Yemayá covered by the protective, embracing blue skirts of a black doll that may be read multivocally as the Virgin herself (she carries a crucifix and the Christ child) and as a spirit doll representing a servant of Yemayá (Fig. 15). Bascom observed this up-down configuration of saint over *oricha*:

> While chromolithographs and plaster images of the Catholic saints are prominently displayed in the shrines and houses of the santeros, they are regarded as empty ornaments or decorations, which may be dispensed with. The real power of the *santos* resides in the stones, hidden behind a curtain in the lower part of the altar, without which no santería shrine could exist.
>
> (Bascom 1950:65)

The concealing of *orichas* with cloth of the saints may have been historically a strategy of defensive masking (Reisman 1970; Bastide 1978:260; Metraux 1972: chap. 6; Thompson 1983:18)—and still may represent a safely ambiguous front where persecution has not abated. But it has at the same time become traditionalized as a cherished mode of presentation in what emerged as a popular religion that located saints and *orichas* in distinct, sometimes parallel and sometimes hierarchical registers of spiritual being (see Murphy 1988: chap. 11; Wafer 1991:14–15). In some of the most "traditional" houses of *ocha* in Cuba, saint statues are highly prized. I dare anyone to try to take them away from their owners. Yet variant traditions do exist: some houses and ritual lineages emphasize the saints while others do not. Thrones I observed in New York, New Jersey, Miami, and some houses in

Havana do dispense with the saints, resulting in far more abstract tableaux.

Historically, while individual creative choices were important in the emerging throne art of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these must be seen in the larger context of class and the international marketplace. What circle of options affected or constrained the rising style? To begin with, we see the vigorous nineteenth-century trade in mass-produced export-porcelain and luxury objects for the consumption of the emergent Cuban urban bourgeoisie made rich between 1820 and 1860 by slave-produced sugar (Faniel 1957; Thomas 1971). The versions of royal styles that this class copied from France and Spain (Thomas 1971:142–48; Faniel 1957:38)[50] became available for appropriation by Afro-Cubans because of an expanding marketplace.

The *sopera* (soup tureen), for example, became a prized object in Cuban homes of all classes, saturated with the meanings of domestic family nurture, well-being, and status. The *sopera* styles that became traditionalized in Afro-Cuban religion were the most popular oval and octagonal forms of the Chinese export trade and European-centered manufacture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, mass-manufactured and shipped throughout the world increasingly in the first half of the nineteenth century. Copies of copies of the "original" styles remain universally popular (Fig. 16) (Fay-Halle & Mundt 1983:11–12; Palmer 1976; Godden 1979).

In the nineteenth century also, the most lavish thrones and ritual garments appear to have utilized an extraordinary array of African adornments that were being imported in the "lucrative trade carried on by Canary Islanders who plied the West Coast of Africa to supply themselves with goods to sell to priests of the Lucumí cult and other African cults in Cuba" (Cabrera 1980:176). Combining adornments such as African animal skins, horns, beads, cloths, rugs, and cowries, as well as European-derived luxuries, the thrones and garments of these late-nineteenth-century houses of *ocha* must have appeared as remarkably creative bricolaged assemblages. The logical extension of this international trading and marketing phenomenon in the twentieth century is the extraordinary specialized market for ritual goods, called the *botánica,* found in most major U.S. cities (Fig. 16).

With such a trade in mind we can revise the acculturative stereotype of irreversible dilution from some primordially pure state. Perhaps, bereft of African materials as a result of the Middle Passage, ritual assemblages were re-Africanized over the course of the nineteenth century (see Bastide 1978:66, 165) even as they appropriated styles from the Cuban bourgeoisie. Urban ethnic culture can thus be renewed thanks to the marketplace rather than withering in the face of it (see Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1983).

While it is clear that only the wealthiest houses of *ocha* could afford the most expensive trade objects, they may have set stylistic trends that were copied in budget media by the less fortunate. Cheaper objects nevertheless sent similar messages of prestige. Cabrera's informants reported that in nineteenth-century houses of *ocha* that initiated light-skinned creole women who were kept by wealthy Spanish gentlemen, the thrones were astonishing in their extravagance; while those in poorer houses were "nothing of luxury!," consisting of white sheets hung from the wall, often painted with floral designs (Cabrera 1980:176–77). Shrines in more impoverished houses have relied upon brightly painted clay vessels *(tinajas)* (Fig. 8) or *chumbas* consisting of two bowls, one inverted as a lid (Ortiz 1973:79), adding the highly prized *soperas* when possible. On the other hand, certain orthodox houses may have have resisted creolizing trends by falling back on more "purely" African models, retaining, for example, the use of lidded natural calabashes instead of porcelain *soperas* (González Huguet 1968:34).

What appears to us in this history—not forgetting, of course, powerful preservations of core practices—is a great chain of imitations, appropriations, borrowings, importations, and renovations across space, time, and class, given the largest context of global changes. It culminates, in our moment, with Lucumí thrones and garments made all the more luxurious by Cubans in the United States in the last three decades.

If these traditions have resulted from the process of Caribbean creolization and migration, it does not mean that other agents might not subject them to further shifts according to their own aesthetic and ethical demands. I have in mind the ideological agenda of Black Nationalism in the United States. The first black Americans initiated by Cubans in Matanzas in 1959 inaugurated a movement of black American Yoruba which has sought to "purify" the religion of European and Catholic elements, a strategy later called "Yoruba Reversionism" (Mason 1985:iv–v). Their wearing of Yoruba clothes and rejection of saint statues contributed to a split with New York Cuban priests (Hunt 1979:27). Their changes can be seen as self-conscious relexifications in an ethical and ideological context in which elements of the Cuban creole tradition are seen as irrelevant or antagonistic to black American identity. Thus they decisively reworked their practice as a "neo-Yoruba" religion (Omari 1991), which departs radically from an aesthetic and cultural history that Cubans and other Latinos share. ☐

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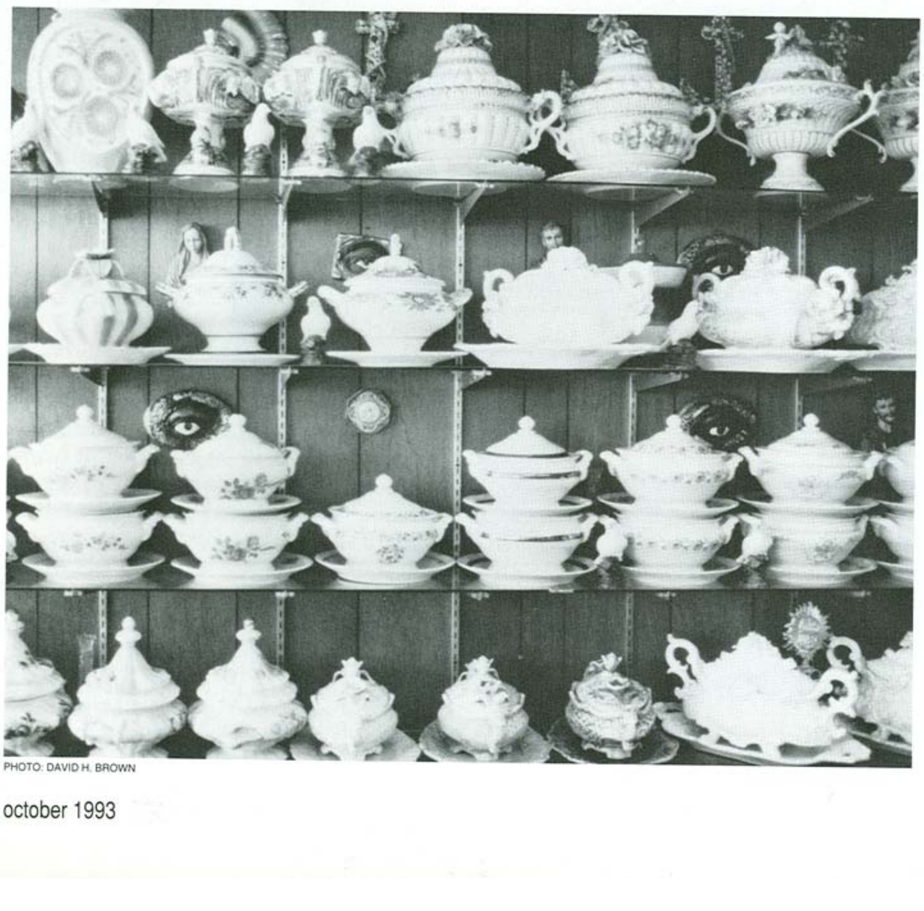

PHOTO: DAVID H. BROWN

16. Decorative soup tureens *(soperas)* in a range of styles, available for sale in a U.S. *botánica.* The *soperas* are used to contain *oricha* secrets. Botánica Nena, Miami, Florida, 1984.

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[This revised manuscript was accepted for publication in June 1993.]

This article is dedicated to the memory of the late Ramón Esquivél's masterful throne making. He died in the spring of 1993.

The work presented here represents a rewriting and rethinking of parts of chapters 1 and 7 of my Ph.D. dissertation in American Studies, directed by Robert Farris Thompson (D. Brown 1989). It derives in part from dissertation research conducted in New Jersey, New York, and Miami with the support of a pre-doctoral research grant by the Wenner Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research in 1987, from dissertation writing with support from the Charlotte Newcombe Fellowship (Woodrow Wilson Fellowship Foundation) in 1987–1988, and from research in Cuba in 1989 as part of a post-doctoral fellowship at the Office of Folklife Programs of the Smithsonian Institution.

I cannot thank enough the following priests and priestesses for their patience, cooperation, and generosity: Luís Castillo, Melba Carillo, Idalberto Cardenas, Lourdes López, Luís Bauzó, Ernesto Pichardo, Zenaida Villanueva Justíz, Hermes Valera Ramírez, and the late Adolfo Fernández. I would also like to thank Judith Bettelheim and Donald Cosentino for encouraging me to seek publication of this material in *African Arts*, Michael A. Mason for reading and commenting upon a draft of this manuscript, and Ysamur Flores for giving me the opportunity to present the conference paper that contained the working version of my cultural history argument (the final section here) at his American Folklore Society panel in October 1992.

1. Santería means "the way of the saints." La Regla de Ocha means the "order of the o[ri]cha," *ocha* being a contraction of the Yoruba-derived word for deity. (A note on orthography: throughout I use the Spanish form *oricha* in Cuban contexts, which is how it is spelled and pronounced there, as well as the Spanish names for the deities—Ochún, Changó, etc.) Members of various Yoruba ethnic subgroups, brought to Cuba as slaves in the greatest numbers between the last decade of the eighteenth century and about 1865, were known as the Lucumí (or Lukumi) (Lachatañeré 1961:3). For data on numbers of Yoruba slaves that were taken to Cuba see Curtin 1969.

The religion of the Lukumí, always ensconced and secret within the colonial period's *cabildos* (religious brotherhoods) and later houses of *ocha*, has been intermittently persecuted or ignored until quite recently. From the 1940s to 1980 hundreds of thousands of Cubans emigrated to the United States in four major waves, the greatest numbers arriving following the installation of the current Cuban revolutionary government in 1959. Priest/throne maker Ramón Esquivél was one of those who arrived from Havana with the 1980 Mariel Exodus. More than one million Cubans now live in the United States (Clarke 1981; Dixon 1983, 1986). La Regla de Ocha has been established in New York, New Jersey, Miami, and California, as well as Puerto Rico, Venezuela, and Mexico.

2. Including Caribbean Cultural Center 1984; Miralda & Mason 1985; Abramson & Rodríguez 1985; Boza 1986; López & Keiro 1987; Lindsay 1992. Some of the constituent ritual objects (vessels, dance wands, clothwork and other Yoruba-derived iconography) have been studied and exhibited individually or documented in related domestic altar configurations, yet apart from their most dramatic presentation within thrones themselves (Cabrera 1983b; "Orichas" 1964; González Huguet 1968; Dornbach 1977; Gómez Abreu 1982; Center for African Studies 1982; Thompson 1983; Bolívar Aróstegui 1990; Flores 1990).

3. However, I did much work in one house of *ocha* (also *casa de santo* or *ilé-ocha)* that was not a practitioner's home but a house exclusively dedicated to *ocha* ritual work.

4. *Igbodún* means "sacred grove of the festival" as translated from the Yoruba, a place for the receiving of spiritual power (see Brown 1989:272, fn. 30 for a developed etymology).

5. *Baldachins* were of silk and gold thread, rich brocade, suspended from the roof, supported on columns, or projected from walls.

6. I say "three main" configurations or types, yet the throne form has influenced other functionally distinct rituals. The throne form was used by Ramón Esquivél to fete a Palo Monte (Kongo-Cuban) spirit. At the same time, a throne is not always erected for a birthday, where economic means and other factors may be at play.

7. See Turner 1967 and 1969 for the theoretical and ethnographic use of these terms which form the tripartite moments of the "rite-of-passage" model: separation, liminality, reincorporation. In Lucumí religion, the initiate's ritual at the "river" the night before the main initiation rites might be seen to mark the beginning of his/her "separation"; entering the room, the formal commencement of his/her "liminality"; and the trip out of the house to the market, the moment of "reincorporation."

While the term *asiento* can refer generally to the whole weeklong period/process of initiation, it more strictly refers to the key ritual events of the initiate's first full day in the room, the Day of the Asiento or "coronation," followed by the Día del Medio (Middle Day) and the Día del Itá, a day of intensive divination. See D. Brown 1989:chaps. 3, 4, 7 for more detailed description, as well as Cabrera 1980, Brandon 1983, Murphy 1988.

8. I am indebted to Brandon (1983:388) for a way to describe these proceedings in terms of the controlling metaphors of bride, king, and infant. *Iyawó* is a surviving Yoruba ritual metaphor which in Africa situates the structurally feminized body of the initiate as subject to the penetration of the structurally male and ruling *òrìsà* (see Matory 1986; 1991:pt. 3, chap. 11, app. 6).

9. Traditionally, Oyá is "received" along with Yemayá, Changó, and Ochún when Obatalá is "made." She may or may not be represented with her own *paño* on an *asiento* throne. In any case, the four colors—white, blue, red, yellow—not only represent particular *orichas* but also can signify groups of like temperament. For example, red can stand for, evoke, and invoke warriors and generally "hot" *orichas* such as Eleguá, Ogún, Changó, Agayú, Oyá; blue may do so for Yemayá and Ochósi, as in the ceremony of painting the head during the *asiento* (see Ecun 1985:210, 66; Angarica n.d.:72–73).

10. The maker was Antonio Queiro (also spelled Keiro), according to exhibition brochures (Caribbean Cultural Center 1984, López & Keiro 1987).

11. In the Cuban-Lucumí ritual idiom the guardian angel is said to be "made," while the others are "received." The identity of the *oricha* to be made determines which are received. Most *iyawós* emerge with Obatalá, Yemayá, Changó, and Ochún, and some, additionally, with Oyá or Agayú. All have already received their Eleguá, Ogún, and Ochósi in prior rituals, and possibly other *orichas* like Olokun and St. Lazarus (Babalú Ayé). See Brown 1989, chaps. 3, 7; and Ecun 1985.

12. See Barnes (1989) for discussion of these roles in Africa as played by Ogún; Thompson (1983:18–33, 52–60) on relationships between Elegba, Ogun, and Oshosi; Karen Brown (1989) on Ogun's military history in Haiti; Murphy (1988:70–73) on these three "warriors."

13. In Lucumí they are called *iruke* (flywhisk), *abebé* (fan), *oché-changó* (thunder axe), *adá-ogún* (sword of Ogún). There are nuances and exceptions to these characterizations that are too extensive to be covered here. For example, Changó is also seen as a *guerrero*; there are younger and more aggressive roads of Obatalá that carry swords; and Oyá can fight carrying a machete.

14. See discussions of the West African Yoruba *ogo-elegba* in Wescott 1962, Pemberton 1975, and Thompson 1976; and its manifestation as an Afro-Cuban hooked staff in Thompson 1983:32.

15. *Garabato* and machete in concert evoke concretely one of the ways Eleguá and Ogún may be seen to "work" together. The hook permits Eleguá, the trickster and glutton, to trip up unsuspecting travelers and grab what he wants. The traditional Afro-Cuban *campesino*'s straw hat *(yaréy)* and the rustic sidebag *(cartera)* of goat hide *(chivo)* mark this Eleguá as a rural-dweller from outside the "town." Ochósi, the Hunter, carries a sidebag of deer hide.

16. There is one silver bracelet for Obatalá, and then nine copper for Oyá, seven silver for Yemayá, and five brass for Ochún. The system of bracelet coding/wearing is too complex to elaborate upon here. However, it can be said that Oyá's bracelets and Yemayá's are never worn on the same wrist as they are antagonists. Obatalá's is always worn on the left wrist. People who make male *orichas* do not wear the bracelets under the throne. People who make female *orichas* do wear the bracelets, but of them only the women wear them later, on the street.

17. *Mazos* are not always available or affordable, as in contemporary Cuba; for example, *mazos* are not seen in Figure 8 over the *soperas*. They are sold, in abundance, at *botánicas* in U.S. cities, at prices ranging from $65 to over $100. Beadworker and priestess Melba Carillo understands the *mazo* as the descendant of the cascades of cowrie shells worn by priests/deities "in Africa" which she has seen in photographs. Examples of cascading cowries are seen in the art of Eshu-Elegba (see Pemberton 1975) and Oshumare (Verger 1954). With respect to clusters of beads, William Bascom notes that priests of certain orisha wear "large bunches of beads ("ìdíleke") around their waists, walk up and down until they are possessed by the deity" (1944:35).

18. I arrived at the approximation of three pounds by picking up several examples and comparing their weights against my three-pound Nikon F2 camera. The number 12,000 comes from a study of one example in which I counted its constituent beads. It actually had 12,615 beads (see Fig. 3).

19. The term *moña* was taught to me by beadworker and Obatalá priestess Melba Carillo of New York. The *moña principal* is formed when the two extremes of a length of beaded strands is brought together and threaded through a *gloria*—sometimes a triad of *glorias*. A *mazo* for Ochún, which is based on fifteen strands (her number 5 x 3), results in a *moña principal* of thirty strands. This *mazo* will have five main segments junctioned by five main *glorias*. With the *moña principal* already formed by the joining of the circle, each of the remaining four *moñas* is then tied to the main circle at each of the four junctions, so that each appears to emanate from one of the large main *glorias*. A *collar de mazo* for Obatalá-Ayáguna (Fig. 3), whose colors are white punctuated by red and whose basic number is 8 (and related multiples 16, 24, 32), is comprised of a main circle of sixteen strands with eight main *glorias* and eight *moñas*. Its *moña principal* has thirty-two strands. A *mazo* for Yemayá would have seven *moñas* and bead-strand clusters/patterns in multiples of the number 7; Changó, six and its multiples, in red and white; Ochún, five, beaded in yellow and amber with punctuations of red or green; Oyá, nine, in brown or caramel beads with black and white stripes; Elegua, three, in red and black.

20. Robert Farris Thompson writes: "The gods of the Yoruba long ago chose beaded strands as emblems....Indeed the prerogative of beaded objects is restricted to those who represent the gods, kings and priests; and those with whom the gods communicate, kings, priests, diviners, and native doctors" (Thompson 1970:8).

21. In a pre-initiatory ritual called the "first *prendición*," according to Cabrera, the neophyte, when "distracted" and "least expecting it," is snared with the white *mazo* of Obatalá (Cabrera 1980:146–47). Obatalá's *mazo* is used because he is the arch-divinity who has authority over, or "owns all" heads.

22. *La presentación al tambor* is a procession of the *iyawó* entailing the initiate's delivery of a tribute *(derecho)* to the sacred *bata* drums *(tambores de añá* or *de fundamento)*, a ritual submission to the drums and ritual elders, and finally, the initiate's dancing for the first time before the drums. All this is dedicated to authorizing the *iyawó* to actively participate in drumming rituals that can involve spirit possession (for those destined to become possessed). Only two *mazos* are worn of the *oricha*-mother and -father, crisscrossed over the chest for the *presentación al tambor*.

23. See Matory 1986 and 1991 for brilliant discussions of the role of bodies and vessels as structurally homologous forms of containment of spiritual power.

24. However, exceptions have been made here and in Cuba for exhibitions and folkloric performances by cultural institutions. The former is, of course, the source of Figures 2, 6, 7.

25. *Addimú-orichas* received may include Olokun, St. Lazarus, the Ibeyi (twins), Oricha-Oko, Obba, Odúa (Oduduwa), and Dadá, among others (see Brown 1989, chap. 3).

26. This continues the tradition Karin Barber documents in Yorubaland: "Each devotee concentrates on her own *òrìsà* and tries to enhance its glory through her attentions. This involves not only making offerings and chanting *oriki*, but also spending money as lavishly as possible on their day to give the feast. In return, the *òrìsà* is asked to give blessings and protection....Personal magnificence enhances reputation: it is the outward sign of greatness, and is described in images of riches, sumptuous garments, beads, beauty, elegance, graceful dancing, and so on." With these visual and verbal praises, the devotee's "concern is...to elevate and enhance her own [*òrìsà*] so that it will be able to bless and protect her....[I]t is the devotees who spend conspicuously to increase the prestige of their *òrìsà*. Indeed, the devotee seems here to be combining the roles of supporter and Big Man. He adulates his *òrìsà*. and by doing so increases his own stature" (Barber 1981:735–37).

27. If a male *ángel de guarda* was made, the initiate "received" a female *oricha* as second parent or "mother" from the original group. If the *ángel de guarda* was female, the initiate received a *male* second parent or "father"—as determined by divination.

28. In the case of sacred *bata* drums, which are considered to embody an *oricha* in their own right (the spirit Añá), the drums, in effect, become an altar/part of the throne-as-altar. Drummings may variously, as the occasion demands, employ the goblet-shaped, double-headed sacred *bata* drums called *fundamentos*; unconsecrated *bata* drums called *aberinkulá;* a *güiro* ensemble of gourd shakers called *chekere* or *güiros*, conga, and bell; or even a violin ensemble to play sweet romantic music for Ochún *(las violinas para Ochún)*. For detail and analysis of Lucumí drumming celebrations, see

Robert Alan Friedman's fine study of drumming, drummers, and ritual performance in Lucumí religion (Friedman 1982).

29. I have encountered cases of drummings added to birthday festivities where drumming proceeds before the birthday throne type.

30. Oyá and Ochún are the only two *orichas* that wear metalwork crowns, apparently because they are the two, sometimes competing, wives and queens of Changó. There are, however, examples of silver crowns for Yemayá in Cuban ethnographic collections (The Fernando Ortiz Collection of the Casa de Africa in Havana). The program of brass (Ochún), copper (Oyá) and silver (Yemayá) crowns for these three female *orichas* is identical to that found in the Brazilian Candomblé (see Carybé 1980).

31. Oyá's crown bears the tools of Ogún's forge, in copper, while Ochún's has five brass depending oars or bracelets.

32. *Oricha* objects are produced in a substantial cottage industry that draws on the Garment District for bulk beads and cloth of startling variety, and on *botánicas* and specialty stores for the objects used by the *orichas*. Tourist-industry figurated flywhisks, carved statues, and Asian masks are drawn from specialty importers of African and Oriental objects. The metalwork *(herramientas)* in brass, copper, and iron, such as the bracelets of Oyá, Yemayá, and Ochún, the tools of Ogún, and the crowns of Oyá and Ochún, is forged in small workshops and apparently then sold to larger outlets such as Almacenes Shangó ("Shangó's Warehouse") on Madison at 111th Street in Manhattan.

33. It is interesting to note that in the U.S. more commonly available fruits combine with more specialized tropical fruits that ethnically diversifying supermarkets are increasingly carrying, which were more traditionally used in Cuba. See Angarica (n.d.:87–89) for a list of fruits and foods traditional for the *orichas* prior to 1955 in Cuba, many of which are not found or used in the United States.

34. For developed studies of *oricha* food, see Edwards & Mason 1981 and Miralda & Mason 1985.

35. I coined the term "thronescape."

36. The crown of Dadá is composed of alternated concentric bands of cowries and beads—four bands of cowries with one in the center at the very top, four bands of rows of beads. From widest band to center: A) cowries; B) four rows of red and white beads in the pattern 2W/4R/2W/4R, etc.; C) five rows of red and white in the pattern 2W/2R/2W/2R, etc.; D) cowries; E) four rows of red and white in the pattern 2W/4R/2W/4R, etc.; F) cowries; G) four rows of 2W/4R/2W/4R, etc.; H) finally a single cowrie at its zenith. Each "leg" of fringe consists of twelve cowries divided by units of red and white beads in the pattern 2R/2W/2R/2W/2R/2W/2R/2W, twelve units in all.

37. The bat, an emblem of phallic shape and great force, is used by Changó to enforce justice and defend his children, as he often also does with a whip (interview, Melba Carillo, Aug. 17, 1985).

38. In Cuba Dadá is called La Corona de los Santos ("The Crown of the Saints") and La Hermana de Changó ("Changó's Sister") in La Regla de Ocha. The relatively rare Afro-Cuban Dadá is the last of a series of auxiliary *orichas* received by senior priests. She is often called Bañaní interchangeably. In Yorubaland the crown, called *baàyòn:nì*, is worn only by priests of Shango, while in Lucumí Afro-Cuban religion, priests of any *oricha* can receive the crown if necessary.

39. I am inspired here by Thompson's discussion of artistic representations of the descent of Shango's lightning (Thompson 1983:84–97). I went to Cuba for the first time in 1986 and took photographs of examples of Changó mortars and vessels in the collection of Fredesvinda Rosell, which were on exhibit at the Museum of Fine Arts in Havana and in her own small ethnographic museum in Madruga, east of Havana. Esquivél saw these photographs following my return during that summer. In the spring of 1986 he painted the vessel and pedestal, which were then unveiled on his friend's birthday throne of August 17, 1987, in Union City, New Jersey.

40. I am grateful to my colleague Alice Jarrard for these observations.

41. My thoughts here emerged in conversations with my colleague Michael A. Mason, who originally suggested the Armstrong text to me.

42. "Grammatically animate" means to me a *subject* of discourse, a spiritual interlocutor endowed with independent agency to effect change and mount bodies in order to act, heal, speak, and so forth.

43. My thoughts on the circulation and exchange of objects have been shaped by Appadurai 1986.

44. As an example of royal etiquette, Cabrera reported that following the coronation ceremony, "[around] [t]he *iyawó*, now installed on the *apotí* [mortar], with barefeet, the Iyalochas sit on the mat, also barefoot, and there [the *iyawó*] remains like a king surrounded by his court, until sundown, receiving homage from those who come to salute him and deposit, in a calabash placed before him on the ground, a tribute of money" (Cabrera 1980:177).

45. Conjoined here are two distinct but related notions, one the "royalty" of the gods as founder-kings, and the other the divinity of Yoruba kings themselves; the former is an earthly metaphor that images divinity, and the latter a heavenly metaphor that officially authorizes the king's power.

46. Mintz and Price argue that syncretism or creolization occurred between African peoples in the New World as much as it ever did, if at all, between Africans and Europeans (Mintz & Price 1976).

47. One wonders if it always was displayed in this way or if the church (re)appropriated this manner of display as a strategy of cooptation to draw *santeros* into the church and stress the primacy of the Virgin over Yemayá.

48. The elaborate domestic shrine for Our Lady of Charity (Caridad de Cobre) (Fig. 14) in an eclectic but predominantly neoclassical style occupies the front room, facing the street, in the house of a famous deceased *santero*, Rigoberto Rodríguez, in Madruga, outside Havana.

49. The Yoruba conception of altar clearly bears the double reference of place of sacrifice and throne of dignified authority. The Yoruba term for "sacrificial altar"—the place in the shrine where offerings are made—is *ojú ebó* (literally "face" *[ojú]* + "sacrifice" *[e̱bo̱])*. *Ojú* can mean "face," "eye," "mouth," "presence," "surface," "edge" in different contexts, all relevant considerations for the nature of an altar as a mediating threshold, a place of encountering a deity in relation to whom "speaking," and "eating" are potent metaphors. See Abraham 1946:460–62, and Thompson 1983:58. Thompson, inspired by the meanings of *ojú ebó*, has taught Yale Seminars in Yoruba Art called "Face of the Gods," which I was privileged to take. Yoruba linguist Michael Oladejo Afolayan translates *ojú* as "throne" in this fragment of praise poetry collected by Apter: "Bí Olókun lé mi le̱gbee/ ó ye yín ye̱ye̱ lójú òdee" ("Walking with self-composed dignity like Olokun/ It befits you and befits the *throne* in the open place") (Apter 1987:261).

50. To express their new elevation the Cuban bourgeoisie bought royal titles for tens of thousands of dollars, were "'indolently fond of rich and gaudy furniture and apparel'" and spent "great sums...on houses, fountains, renaissance ceilings, marble staircases, and baths....Next to the [Moorish] palaces of the 16th and 17th centuries, and baroque adaptations of the 18th, there now arose classical palaces inspired by the French Revolution" (Thomas 1971:142, 146–48).

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contributors

articles

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Wescott, Joan. 1962. "The Sculpture and Myths of Eshu-Elegba, the Yoruba Trickster," pp. 336–54.

HART: *Notes, from page 71*

My thanks to Dora Thornton and John Cherry of the British Museum's Department of Medieval and Later Antiquities who made it possible for me to examine the horn in London.

1. In addition to the copper mounts at each end, there seem to have been two copper bands around the horn, of which only one survives. The two iron rings and chain, by which the horn was suspended, are of a different, cruder character.

2. Sapi was the name given by the Portuguese to the indigenous peoples of Sierra Leone and adjacent parts of the coast.

3. From Sloane's Catalogue of Miscellanies, which is kept in the Museum of Mankind. The horn is numbered 2021. A second "ivory hunting horn or trumpet," 723 on Sloane's list, may be the Museum's oliphant N.N.25 (now renumbered 1979 Af1 3156), which is no. 83 in Bassani and Fagg's *catalogue raisonne* (1988).

4. For a provisional list of objects documented as having been in Europe before 1700, see the catalogue *Ouvertures sur l'art africain* (Musée Dapper, 1986). The relevant section, "Oeuvres d'Art et Objets Africains dans l'Europe du XVII Siècle," is by Ezio Bassani.

5. A copy of "Catalogue of the Rarities to be seen at Adams's at the Royal Swan, in Kingsland Road, 3rd ed., 1756" is in the British Library.

6. Three ivory oliphants were listed in an inventory of the possessions of Cosimo I, Grand Duke of Tuscany, in 1553 (Bassani & Fagg 1988:47).

7. "Two ivory saltcellars from Calicut [Kozhikod on India's Malabar Coast]" which Albrecht Dürer bought on a trip to the Low Countries in 1520–21 seem more likely to have been African, since Indo-Portuguese or Indian ivory saltcellars are unknown from this period (Dürer 1918:74).

8. Ivory spoons and a saltcellar from Sierra Leone were among objects inventoried in Schloss Ambras in the Tyrol at the death of Archduke Ferdinand II in 1596 (Heger 1899:101–9).

9. John Hawkins called at Sierra Leone three times in the 1560s. He was followed by Drake (1580), Fenton (1582),