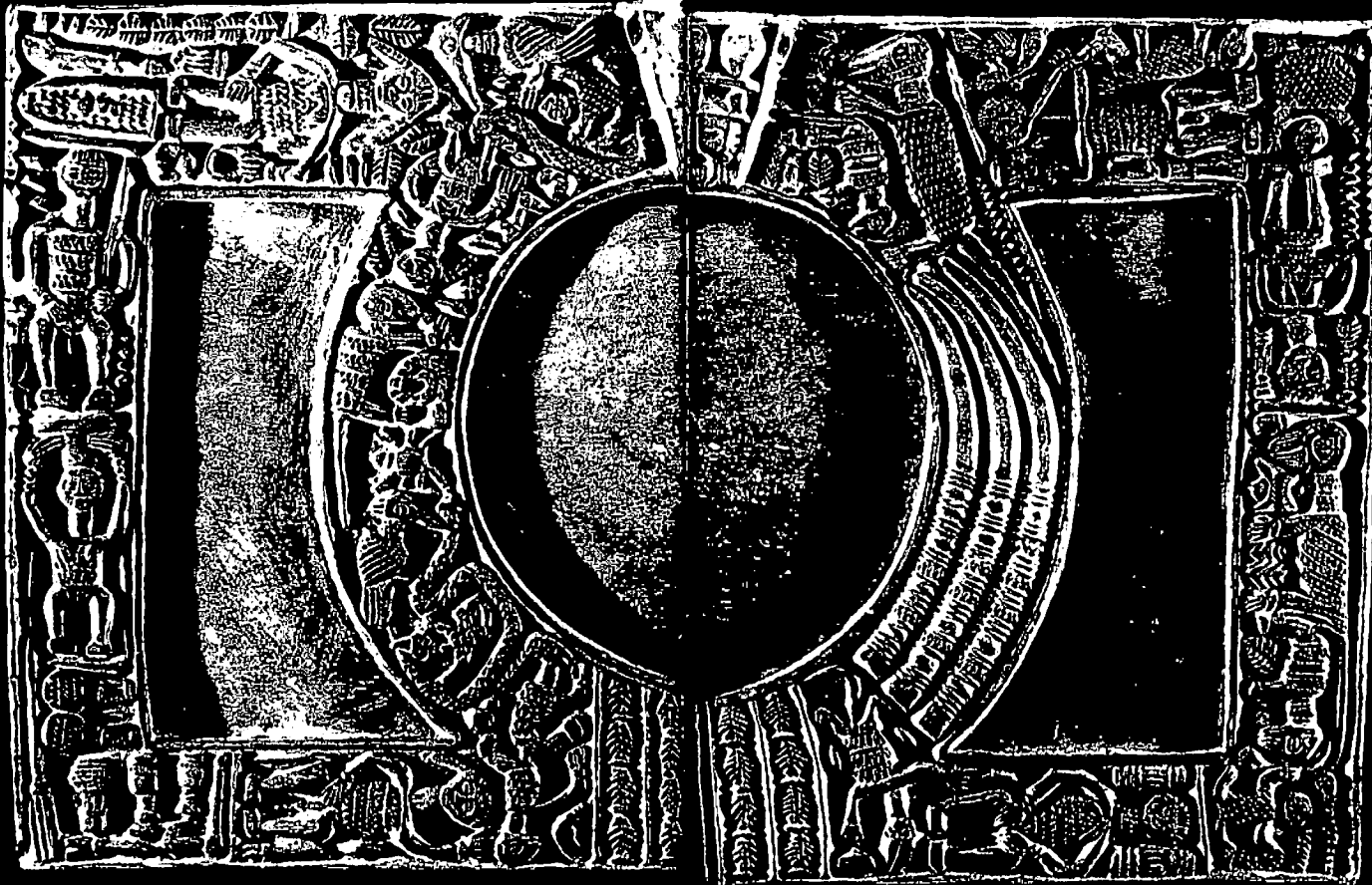


Robert Farris Thompson

FLASH OF THE SPIRIT



African and Afro-American

Art and Philosophy



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One

BLACK SAINTS GO MARCHING IN

Yoruba Art and Culture
in the Americas

One bright morning in the middle of the nineteenth century, a young American missionary, R. H. Stone, ascended a lofty granite boulder and looked down upon the Yoruba city of Abeokuta. He wrote:

What I saw disabused my mind of many errors in regard to . . . Africa. The city extends along the bank of the Ogun for nearly six miles and has a population approximately 200,000 . . . instead of being lazy, naked savages, living on the spontaneous productions of the earth, they were dressed and were industrious . . . [providing] everything that their physical comfort required. The men are builders, blacksmiths, iron-smelters, carpenters, calabash-carvers, weavers, basket-makers, hat-makers, mat-makers, traders, barbers, tanners, tailors, farmers, and workers in leather and morocco . . . they make razors, swords, knives, hoes, bill-hooks, axes, arrow-heads, stirrups. . . women . . . most diligently follow the pursuits which custom has allotted to them. They spin, weave, trade, cook, and dye cotton fabrics. They also make soap, dyes, palm oil, nut-oil, all the native earthenware, and many other things used in the country.¹

The city of Abeokuta seethed with creative activity, belying the condescending Western image of "primitive Africa."

The Yoruba are one of the most urban of the traditional civilizations of black Africa. Yoruba urbanism is ancient, dating to the Middle Ages, when their holy city, Ile-Ife, where the Yoruba believe



PLATE 1

the world began, was flourishing with an artistic force that later provoked the astonishment of the West. At a time, between the tenth and twelfth centuries, when nothing of comparable quality was being produced in Europe, the master sculptors of Ile-Ife were shaping splendid art, as exemplified by a Berlin Museum terra-cotta head (Plate 1).² In the elegant conception of the head, perhaps representing a person of status or a most important spirit, can be seen the signs of spiritual alertness (the searching gaze) and self-

discipline and discretion (the sealed lips), which suggest, in Yoruba symbolic terms, the confidence of the people's monarchic traditions, and the complexity and poise of their urban way of life.

Like ancient Greece, Yorubaland consisted of self-sufficient city-states characterized by artistic and poetic richness. The Yoruba themselves cherish the creators of their aesthetic world, as one of their hunters' ballads states:

not the brave alone, they also praise those who know how to shape images in wood or compose a song.³

When the first missionaries penetrated the city of Abeokuta in the 1840's, they found that the talents of the local master carver Kashi "had procured for him the headship of the artisans in Abeokuta, and he had great influence among the people."⁴

The Yoruba assess everything aesthetically—from the taste and color of a yam to the qualities of a dye, to the dress and deportment of a woman or a man. An entry in one of the earliest dictionaries of their language, published in 1858, was *amewa*, literally "knower-of-beauty," "connoisseur," one who looks for the manifestation of pure artistry.⁵ Beauty is seen in the mean (*iwontúnwonsi*)—in something not too tall or too short, not too beautiful (overhandsome people turn out to be skeletons in disguise in many folktales) or too ugly.⁶ Moreover, the Yoruba appreciate freshness and improvisation *per se* in the arts. These preoccupations are especially evident in the rich and vast body of art works celebrating Yoruba religion.

The Yoruba religion, the worship of various spirits under God, presents a limitless horizon of vivid moral beings, generous yet intimidating. They are messengers and embodiments of *àshe*, spiritual command, the power-to-make-things-happen, God's own enabling light rendered accessible to men and women.⁷ The supreme deity, God Almighty, is called in Yoruba Olorun, master of the skies. Olorun is neither male nor female but a vital force. In other words, Olorun is the supreme quintessence of *àshe*.

When God came down to give the world *àshe*, God appeared in the form of certain animals. *Àshe* descended in the form of the royal python (*ere*), the gaboon viper (*oka olushere*), the earthworm (*ekolo*), the white snail (*lakoshe*), and the woodpecker (*akoko*). God, within these animals, had, according to Yoruba belief, bestowed upon us the power-to-make-things-happen, morally neutral power, power to give, and to take away, to kill and to give life, according

to the purpose and the nature of its bearer. The messengers of *àshe* reflect this complex of powers. Some are essentially dangerous, with curved venomous fangs. Others are patient and slow-moving, teaching deliberation in their careful motion. Even the earthworm has its power, “ventilating and cooling earth without the use of teeth.”⁸

We find the avatars of *àshe* dramatically suggested on the body of a superb ritual ceramic bowl for the thunder god and other deities (*ikoko shango*). Made in Oyo Yoruba territory, perhaps in the late nineteenth century or the early decades of the present century, it was found in a market in the city of Ibadan in 1964. The object (Plate 2) now forms part of the exhibition collection of the Yale University Art Gallery. Deferring for the moment a discussion of the central motif—the square representing the four corners of the earth along with the three concentric circles within the square that are the triple sign of the Yoruba goddess Earth—we note strong zigzag patterns in relief that suggest the coming down of *àshe* in the form of lightning. These patterns also signify the embodiment of *àshe* within the python, gaboon viper, and many other serpent messengers of the deities. Y-shaped representations bespeak the balancing of this fiery enabling power upon thunderstaves, i.e., double meteorites upon a royal scepter. Above these Y-shaped thunderstaves appear smooth rectangular emblems representing thunderstones themselves come from heaven. Time and again the story of the descent of God’s *àshe*, in multiple forms, in multiple avatars, is suggested ideographically upon this important vessel. To the right and left of the central square emblem appear chiefly scepters, underscoring the essential nobility of the persons who embody and comprehend the power-to-make-things-happen. The three concentric circles suggest three stones, the kind Yoruba women use to support their cooking vessels, meaning that adherence to the moral sanctions of Earth supports us all, safeguarding the equilibrium of the country and its people.⁹

Some trees are also thought to be avatars of *àshe*, sentinels guarding the Yoruba universe. The mighty teaklike *iroko* (*Chlorophora excelsa*) is often so honored in traditional towns by the tying of a white cloth to its trunk as an offering.¹⁰ Iron, as time-resistant as the towering *iroko* when specially consecrated, is also believed to contain *àshe*. *Àshe* may also be present in a drop of semen or a drop of blood—for many Yoruba, red, “supreme presence of color,”¹¹ signals *àshe* and potentiality.

Àshe has other formal representations, including iron staffs, iron

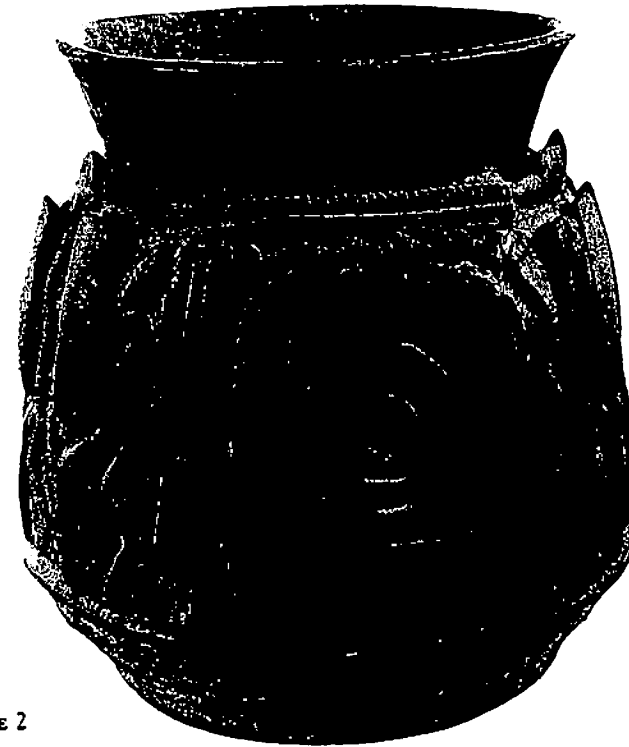


PLATE 2

sculptures of serpents and long-beaked birds, and even the fluid of snails poured over altar emblems.

A thing or a work of art that has *àshe* transcends ordinary questions about its makeup and confinements: it is divine force incarnate. This richest of all privileges is merited by the highest women and men of the land: the master priestesses, the diviners, the kings, the most important chiefs. All have *àshe*. And even their words are susceptible to transposition into spirit-invoking and predictive experiences, for *àshe* literally means “So be it,” “May it happen.”

Yoruba kings provide the highest link between the people, the ancestors, and the gods. Their relation to the Creator is given in the praise poem *Oba alashe ekeji orisha*, “The king, as master of *àshe*, becomes the second of the gods.” Birds, especially those connoting the *àshe* of “the mothers,” those most powerful elderly women with a force capable of mystically annihilating the arrogant, the selfishly rich, or other targets deserving of punishment, are often depicted in

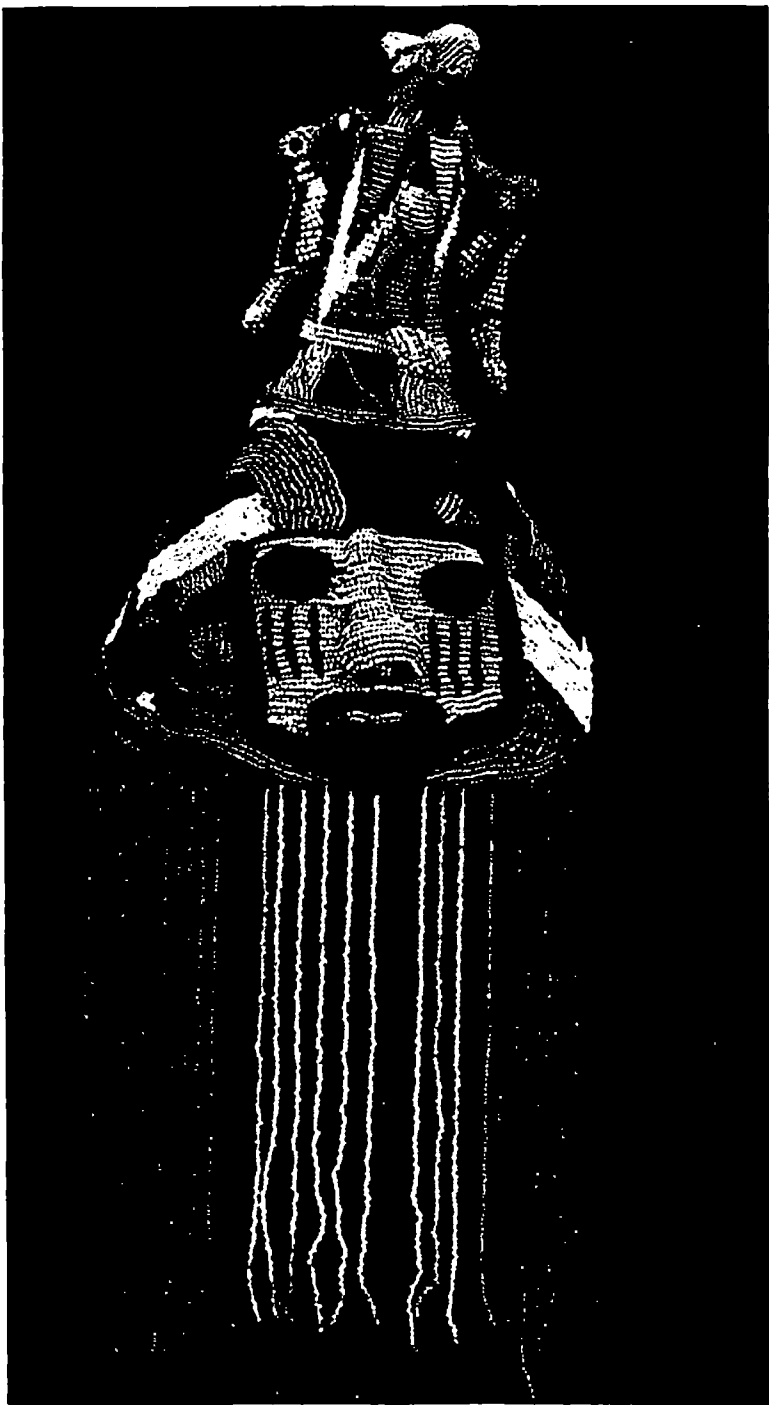


PLATE 3

bead embroidery clustered at the top of the special crowns worn by Yoruba kings (Plate 3) signifying that the king rules by mastering and participating in the divine command personified by them. These feathered avatars brilliantly rendered in shining beads protect the head of the supreme leader. The veil that hangs across the wearer's face protects ordinary men and women from the searing gaze of the king in a state of ritual unity with his forebears.

Ritual contact with divinity underscores the religious aspirations of the Yoruba. To become possessed by the spirit of a Yoruba deity, which is a formal goal of the religion, is to "make the god," to capture numinous flowing force within one's body. When this happens, the face of the devotee usually freezes into a mask, a mask often (but not always) held during the entire time of possession by the spirit. *Àshe* is untranslatable. But it is clearly manifest in prophecy and predictive grace; hence persons possessed by the spirit of a Yoruba deity are believed to speak of things yet to come. They attract large crowds wherever they appear. They look about grandly with fixed expressions, with eyes sometimes wide and protuberant. The radiance of the eyes, the magnification of the gaze, reflects *àshe*, the brightness of the spirit. According to the Yoruba:

The gods have "inner" or "spiritual" eyes (*ojú inún*) with which to see the world of heaven and "outside eyes" (*ojú ode*) with which to view the world of men and women. When a person comes under the influence of a spirit, his ordinary eyes swell to accommodate the inner eyes, the eyes of the god. He will then look very broadly across the whole of all the devotees, he will open his eyes abnormally.¹²

In addition to *àshe*, *iwa* (character) is another crucially important consideration in Yoruba religion and art. The Yoruba impart to many figurations a sense of ideal noble character by details of attitude and gesture as well as the use sometimes of white-colored media. Character is a force infusing physical beauty with everlastingness. "I want to deliberate on this," an elder of Ipokia, capital of the Anago Yoruba, once told me, "beauty is a part of coolness but beauty does not have the force that character has. Beauty comes to an end. Character is forever."¹³

The importance of good character (*iwa rere*), which is virtually synonymous with coolness, with gentle generosity of character (*iwa pele*), is poetically rendered by the Yoruba:

PLATE 4

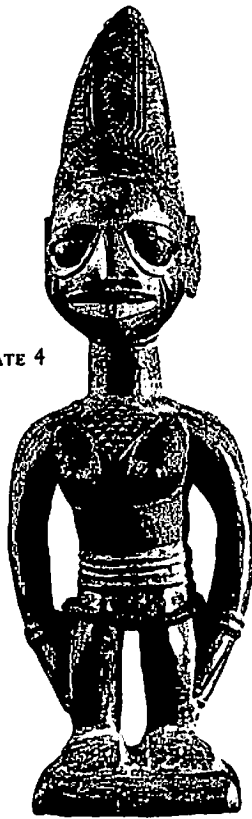


PLATE 5



PLATE 6



A man may be very, very handsome
Handsome as a fish within the water
But if he has no character
He is no more than a wooden doll.¹⁴

According to the Yoruba art historian Babatunde Lawal, the Yoruba see the force of inner character operating as a smoky flame (*eefin n'iwa*) easy to detect, for outward beauty can be burned through by inner ugliness or selfishness.¹⁵

Like *àshe*, good character originates in God. God is praised as Lord of Character (*olu iwa*). Hence, that which attains proximity to the divine generally is progressively imbued with fine character. Artistic signs communicating this noble quality, *iwa*, are often white. Immaculate white cloths may be honorifically draped over sculpture honoring gods or ancestors famed for spotlessness of reputation, as in the case of the cult of Obatala, the god of creativity. Purity of sculptural presentation; symmetry; balance: these qualities can memorably imply *iwa*. *Iwa* also means custom, the traditional ways of life. An image portraying a person fulfilling the canons of the land in terms of fine posture or careful hands-to-the-sides gestures of spiritual alertness (Plate 4), or giving to an elder in the correct and prescribed manner—with both hands—(Plates 5, 6) suggests submission to moral authority or to higher forces.¹⁶

A main focus of the presentation of ideal character in Yoruba art is the human head, magnified and carefully enhanced by detailed coiffure or headgear. This tendency, in combination with the use of the symbolic color of good character, white, is strikingly present in the Yoruba shrine of the head (*ilé ori*). It is often a pointed, crown-like box, lavishly covered with a sheath of cowrie shells (Plate 7) to represent the riches a good head—good character—will bring, for cowries were the traditional currency of Yorubaland.

According to traditional authority, shrines of the head also conceal, in the covering of the shining white shells, an allusion to a certain perching bird, whose white feathers are suggested by the overlapping cowries.¹⁷ This is the "bird of the head" (*eiye ororo*), enshrined in whiteness, the color of *iwa*, and in purity. It is the bird which, according to the Yoruba, God places in the head of man or woman at birth as the emblem of the mind.¹⁸ The image of the descent of the bird of mind fuses with the image of the coming down of God's *àshe* in feathered form.

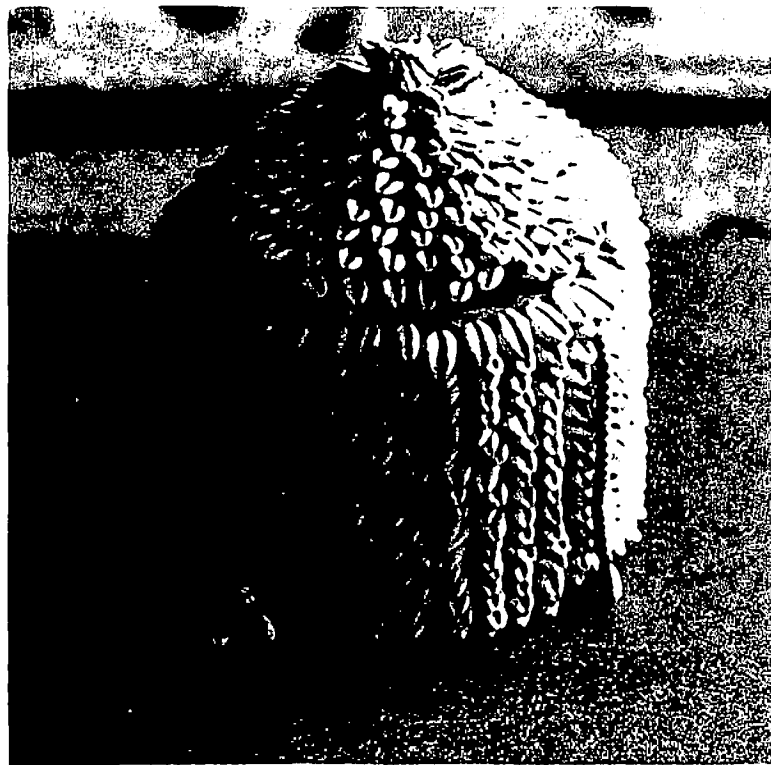
The sense of certainty, which character and *àshe* confer, is enriched by mystic coolness (*itutu*), whose emblematic color is often blue or indigo or green. Lawal introduces us to this sovereign concept, which cuts across virtually the whole of Yoruba figuration:

To tame or pacify is to “cool the face” (*tu l’oju*). Thus, providing the non-figurative symbol of an orisha with sculptured face facilitates the pacification of that orisha, for what has a face is controllable.¹⁹

Much Yoruba art is informed by *itutu*. To carve a calm face upon a represented thunderstone, or upon an abstract divination tray, or to incise it upon the swelling curves of a calabash for sacred things is to provide critical focus for acts of sacrifice and devotion.

Further manifestations of aesthetic coolness in Yoruba art include representations of idealized action. We must take care not to stress

PLATE 7



character and coolness as separate semantic structures because they shade into each other and also blur into the existential definition of *àshe*. The interrelation of the concepts is explicitly given in vernacular testimony from the capital of the Anago:

Coolness or gentleness of character is so important in our lives. Coolness is the correct way you represent yourself to a human being. When I saw you, I opened my cap. It is *itutu*, answering past *itutu* you made to me.²⁰

The phrasing is significant—*opening* the cap, instead of doffing or removing it, in Western parlance, is a sign of generosity of response, of coolness in life and art. Thus Yoruba art abounds with images of men or women proffering a vessel. Witness a thunder god scepter-image of a naked kneeling woman supporting her breast, with both hands (Plate 8). This is a sign of giving—“This milk shall be the sustenance of my children.” It relates to another frequent image, the man or woman who presents an open, empty kola bowl (Plate 9), held with both hands, again as a sign of honor and respect. In the case of women, the location of the bowl at the level of the womb deliberately hints at the giving of children to the world.

Generosity, the highest form of morality in Yoruba traditional terms, is suggested yet another way: by the symbolized offering of something by a person to a higher force through the act of kneeling. Thus a senior priest: “If you wish to talk to an elder, you do not stand, you kneel. When presenting a plate of food to someone important, *kneel* as you make the presentation. *Kneel* and give with *both* hands, the left with the right, the ‘mother hand’ and the ‘father hand,’ the hand-which-keeps and the hand-which-acts” (Plate 5).²¹ Giving with both hands, in a gesture of submission, emphasizes in traditional terms the act of giving as an embodiment of character and perfect composure, a point given further focus, in both art and life, by the firmness of the facial expression that accompanies the noble act.

“Constant smiling is not a Yoruba characteristic,” a village elder once told me. Sealed lips, frequent in Yoruba statuary, are a “sign of seriousness.” They, too, imply the coolness of the image, as in an idiom that refers to discretion in ordinary discourse: “His mouth is cool” (*enu è tútù*), which is one of the ways the Yoruba would say, “He fell silent.”²² Like character, coolness ought to be internalized as a governing principle for a person to merit the high praise “His



PLATE 8



PLATE 9

heart is cool" (*okan è tutu*). In becoming sophisticated, a Yoruba adept learns to differentiate between forms of spiritual coolness: (1) direct sacrifice (*ebo*), the cooling of the gods by the giving of cherished objects—such as the proffering of a ram to the thunder god; and (2) propitiation (*irele*), the utterance of conciliatory words or acts to hardened or angered deities, entreating them to become generous and concerned at times of crisis, such as birth, death, or initiation.²³ A three-figure image for the deity Earth (*ere Ogboni*), carved in Abeokuta in the twentieth century (Plate 10), splendidly illustrates cooling by propitiation. Here, where a male helper holds



PLATE 10

a fan, a literal sign of coolness and rank, a woman cools (*tu*) her spiritual superior, the towering Ogboni cult leader with his staff of office, by prostrating herself on her right side. Through this gesture, called *yinrinka*, a female member of a compound traditionally paid her respects every morning to the head man and head woman of the compound. (The corresponding male gesture of submission, *idobale*, involved a complete prostration of the body on the ground. It was used also in saluting superiors.)²⁴ The notion of coolness in Yoruba art extends beyond representations of the act of sacrifice and acts or gestures of propitiation. So heavily charged is this concept with ideas of beauty and correctness that a fine carnelian bead or a passage of exciting drumming may be praised as "cool."

Coolness, then, is a part of character, and character objectifies proper custom. To the degree that we live generously and discreetly, exhibiting grace under pressure, our appearance and our acts gradually assume virtual royal power. As we become noble, fully realizing the spark of creative goodness God endowed us with—the shining *ororo* bird of thought and aspiration—we find the confidence to cope with all kinds of situations. This is *àshe*. This is character. This is mystic coolness. All one. Paradise is regained, for Yoruba art returns the idea of heaven to mankind wherever the ancient ideal attitudes are genuinely manifested.

The Yoruba remain the Yoruba precisely because their culture provides them with ample philosophic means for comprehending, and ultimately transcending, the powers that periodically threaten to dissolve them. That their religion and their art withstood the horrors of the Middle Passage and firmly established themselves in the Americas (New York City, Miami, Havana, Matanzas, Recife, Bahia, Rio de Janeiro) as the slave trade effected a Yoruba diaspora—reflects the triumph of an inexorable communal will.

Yoruba traditional culture and religious art had seemed destined for total obliteration in the wake of the slave trade, civil wars, and modernization. By the early decades of the nineteenth century the stability of western Yorubaland had been destroyed. The protective military arm of the old empire of the Oyo Yoruba, centered in their capital city of Oyo-Ile near the Niger River, collapsed during severe political dislocations following the end of the reign of King Awole in 1796. The western and northwestern groups of Yorubaland were consequently harassed by Dahomean slave-hunting warriors and Fulani horsemen, and later even by other Yoruba. Refugees fled to

the south, where they banded together in new settlements, such as Ibadan and Abeokuta, for protection. These camps rapidly became cities, only to come in conflict with ancient established kingdoms, such as the Ijebu.²⁵

With the restraining hand of Oyo weakened, inevitably civil wars flared, starting with conflict at the ancient city of Owu in 1821. Ijebu began selling Egba and Ibadan captives; Egba and Ibadan retaliated. By 1845 Ibadan, successor to Oyo's power, had evolved into a military state and marched east to capture and sell Ijesha Yoruba, for the latter's capital, Ilesha, was the strongest northeastern kingdom and hence an obvious candidate for conquest in Ibadan's search for expansion into the area.²⁶ While all this was happening, the Yoruba were beset by the Atlantic slave trade.

New World Yoruba emerged from all this strife. Ketu Yoruba men and women captured by the Dahomeans turned up in Haiti and Brazil, where to this day they are called by the Dahomean word *nago*.²⁷ Oyo and other captives of the Fulani were brought to Cuba, Brazil, and the Caribbean, notably Trinidad. The Yoruba of Cuba were called Lucumí, probably after an ancient Yoruba phrase meaning "my friend" (*oluku mi*).²⁸ Thus the deities—the *orisha*—of the city-states of Oyo and Ketu were introduced to Cuba and Brazil, where the names of particular goddesses and gods of abiding fame—Shàngó, Yemoja (often called Yemayá in the New World), Oshoosi, Orisha Oko, Eyinle—derived from the Oyo region. The cults of Oyo and Ketu deities (the latter including especially Obaluaíye, Omoolu, and Nana Bukuu) were reinforced by their encounter with most of the principal Yoruba deities: Eshu, Ifa, Osanyin, Ogun, and Obatala. Yoruba-influenced Ewe, Popo, and Fon slaves from territory directly to the west of Yorubaland brought their own cults and also influenced the syncretism of deities. A remarkable fusion of *orisha*, long separated by civil war and intra-Yoruba migrations, took place in the New World.

What is more, especially in Cuba and Brazil, New World Yoruba were introduced to the cult of Roman Catholic saints, learned their attributes, and worked out a series of parallelisms linking Christian figures and powers to the forces of their ancient deities.²⁹ Thus the smallpox deity was equated, in some places, with Saint Lazarus because of the latter's wounds illustrated in chromolithographs. Thus the Virgin Mary was sometimes equated with the sweet and gentle aspect of the multifaceted goddess of the river, Oshun. Thus

orisha
in the
Lucumí
Eshu
Obaluaíye
to Nago
etc.
write

Shàngó, the Yoruba thunder god, in Cuba was frequently equated with Saint Barbara, whose killers were struck dead by God with lightning.³⁰

Yoruba-Americans, outwardly abiding by the religious proprieties of the Catholics who surrounded them, covertly practiced a system of thought that was a creative reorganization of their own traditional religion. Luminously intact in the memories of black elders from Africa, the goddesses and the gods of the Yoruba entered the modern world of the Americas. They came with their praises (*oriki*), extraordinary poems of prowess that defined the moral and aesthetic reverberation of their presence.

Portraits of Major Orisha

Eshu-Elegba

According to legend, at a crossroads in the history of the Yoruba gods, when each wished to find out who, under God, was supreme, all the deities made their way to heaven, each bearing a rich sacrificial offering on his or her head. All save one. Eshu-Elegbara, wisely honoring beforehand the deity of divination with a sacrifice, had been told by him what to bring to heaven—a single crimson parrot feather (*ekodide*), positioned upright upon his forehead, to signify that he was not to carry burdens on his head. Responding to the fiery flashing of the parrot feather, the very seal of supernatural force and *àshe*, God granted Eshu the force to make all things happen and multiply (*àshe*).³¹ Outward signs of submission and material bounty were no match for wisdom and humility. Once granted his powers of dominion, Eshu, instead of arrogantly subordinating everyone to himself, did the “cool” (generously appropriate) thing: he gave a vast commemorative feast to share his newfound prestige, and to honor God for the priceless treasures of *àshe*. And he warned those who did not recognize his status that he would bend them, “like a string upon a bow,” or pound them “like a shell.”³²

The sign of the crimson feather worn upon the brow, the seat of mind and judgment, was clearly interpreted as a symbol of *àshe* and the techniques of ritual assuagement (*etutu*) that lead to the attainment of *àshe*. Representing both the means and the end, the red parrot feather is seen today in initiatory contexts in the Yoruba religion ranging from the Benin Republic to Bahia in Brazil. *Àshe*

is a privilege of righteous living, not a right, and it can be seriously diminished when someone has slighted a deity or an important person. This means that one must cultivate the art of recognizing significant communications, knowing what is truth and what is falsehood, or else the lessons of the crossroads—the point where doors open or close, where persons have to make decisions that may forever after affect their lives—will be lost.

Eshu consequently came to be regarded as the very embodiment of the crossroads. Eshu-Elegbara is also the messenger of the gods, not only carrying sacrifices, deposited at crucial points of intersection, to the goddesses and to the gods, but sometimes bearing the crossroads to us in verbal form, in messages that test our wisdom and compassion (“Is this true; shall I help him; what larger purpose opens up beyond this message?”). He sometimes even “wears” the crossroads as a cap, colored black on one side, red on the other, provoking in his wake foolish arguments about whether his cap is black or red, wittily insisting by implication that we view a person or a thing from all sides before we form a general judgment.³³

Because of his provocative nature, Eshu has been characterized by missionaries and Western-minded Yoruba alike as “the Devil.”³⁴ Outwardly mischievous but inwardly full of overflowing creative grace, Eshu-Elegbara eludes the coarse nets of characterization. Even his names compound his mystery. Some call him Eshu, “the childless wanderer, alone, moving only as a spirit.”³⁵ Others call him Elegbara (or Elegba), “owner-of-the-power”³⁶ (the ever-multiplying power communicated by the crimson feather that he bore to heaven), a royal child, a prince, a monarch. He is, of course, all these beings and more—the ultimate master of potentiality. Eshu becomes the imperative companion-messenger of each deity, the imperative messenger-companion of the devotee. The cult of Eshu-Elegbara thus transcends the limits of ordinary affiliation and turns up wherever traditionally minded Yoruba may be.

So it was that Eshu-Elegbara became one of the most important images in the black Atlantic world. Blacks honor him in Cuba, for example, where “men or women of African descent pour cool water at crossroads—unobtrusively if white strangers be about—in honor of Eshu.”³⁷ Cuban blacks associate Eshu with change: “favorable, he modifies the worst of fates; hostile, he darkens the most brilliant of happenings.”³⁸ And thousands honor him today in Rio de Janeiro, where candles begging Eshu’s favor may be lit in the gutters

at intersections, in the very shadows of the skyscrapers that line the beaches of Ipanema or Copacabana.³⁹ Aware of the complexity of his nature, whose different sides are symbolized by different names, Afro-Cubans share with Nigerians the belief that Eshu is a homeless wanderer, "whose mood is perpetual evil," while Elegba is demonstrably less difficult.⁴⁰

Witness against this shared exegetic backdrop the richness of art concerning Eshu-Elegbara on both shores of the Atlantic. The most important icons of this spirit in Africa are figures in lateritic earth and clay.⁴¹ These forms took root deeply in Cuba, Brazil, Miami, and Spanish Harlem. Wood sculpture, which is regarded within the cult as less ancient and consequently less essential, is divided in Nigeria and the Benin Republic into several categories: tiny supplicant figurines; paired male and female images united by a richly cowrie-studded strand; large ceremonial, figured dance-hooks, which rest in ceremonial context upon the performer's shoulders; large votive images for decorating shrines and gates to the compounds of the illustrious and the great. Of these, only paired male and female icons sometimes reappeared on New World altars, and even they had attributes—such as an upright knife upon the head,⁴² as an emblem of Eshu's wonder-working powers, the limitlessness of his *àshe*—that were more generally shared and communicated by images in clay in the black Americas.

The descendants of the Yoruba in Cuba tell a myth relating to Eshu's clay imagery:

Once upon a time there was a child named Eshu who was always telling lies. One day young Eshu met a pair of terrifying eyes, shining in the shadows of a shell of a cocoonut, lying by a crossroads.

He told his parents about this marvel (his parents were king and queen) but no one would believe him, such was his reputation for mendacity. And so Eshu was left alone, soon to die a mysterious death, caused by unknown influences emanating from the eyes beside the crossroads. He had not honored these disembodied eyes [which may have been his own!] and that is why he died.

Nor did the members of the court see fit to offer sacrifice beside these eyes, still burning with a sinister light. Suddenly death and disaster struck the world with annihilating force. Divination priests were summoned. Ultimately they found the crossroads where the eyes once gleamed. But by this time the shell had weathered into nothing; the eyes were gone. Whereupon the

priests then selected a certain stone, soothed it with assuaging fluid. By this rite they caused the spirit of the god Eshu to come from the forest to live within this stone, there to receive their profferings of honor. And so Eshu was properly honored, by sacrificial signs of honor and respect, and order returned to the world.⁴³

In Yorubaland itself, the "stone" of atonement was actually a piece of lateritic earth and believed to be the oldest icon of Eshu. Consider a letter, written in 1919 by a Christian convert at Ibadan, relating to Eshu sculpture in wood that once belonged to the writer's father and was probably carved toward the end of the nineteenth century:

My late father was once the chief worshipper of the gods of mischief, Eshu or Elegbara. Formerly these gods were not represented in human form [i.e., figured wood] but were adored in the shape of a stone—a kind of laterite or sandstone—but the number of their worshippers increasing, wood statues of these gods began to be made.⁴⁴

Laterite is said to be the oldest and most important medium for representing Eshu, Eshu-Yangi, father of all Eshu.⁴⁵ I assume that the custom of marking the presence of Eshu with lateritic cones of hard red clay extends at least as far back as 1659; surviving exemplars of relief sculpture representing Eshu at that time indicate that other iconographic particulars of his image were complete.

The cone of laterite (*yangi*) appears in Yoruba markets over which cult officials pour daily offerings of palm oil to maintain Eshu's problematic coolness.⁴⁶ Laterite-cone altars to Eshu recall a myth whereby Eshu devoured enormous quantities of fish and fowl offered to him by his mother, and finally devoured his mother, too. Whereupon his father, the god of divination, alarmed, himself consulted a divination expert and was told to sacrifice a sword, a male goat, and fourteen thousand cowries. The god of divination did as he was told. Consequently, when Eshu threatened to devour him, too, the god took a sword and hacked him to pieces, and the pieces became individual *yangi*, lateritic shards. Orunmila pursued Eshu through nine heavens until finally, in the last heaven, Eshu was pacified by Orunmila and said that all the particles of his spirit, the *yangi* stones and shards, would become his representatives. All Orunmila had to do was to consult them (make sacrifice upon them and ask a blessing)

whenever he wanted to send them on a mystic mission. Eshu then returned his mother, alive, to the world.⁴⁷ His terrifying gluttony had therefore concealed an abundant generosity, the many pieces of laterite, the myriad Eshu. This represents the fact that he can take anything away—or give it back—according to whether his surrogates in clay are worshipped with sacrifice and devotion.

Juana Elbein dos Santos strikes to the core of this legend:

each individual is constituted and accompanied by his personal Eshu, the element which permits his birth, ultimate development, and progeny. . . . in order that [Eshu] can fulfill harmoniously a person's cycle of existence, the person must without fail restore, through sacrifices, the *àshe* devoured, in a real or metaphoric way, by his principle of individualized existence.⁴⁸

Eshu the prince devoured the truth by lying, never sacrificing, heedless of the damage done, and paid for his arrogance, when he finally told the truth, by dying. Thus in the Afro-Cuban myth Eshu devours himself but once again returns when proper sacrifice, centered upon a piece of stone, is made. The story of Eshu is an intricate retelling of the Yoruba belief that the highest form of morality is sharing and generosity—the strongest talisman to hold against jealousy.

At some time the lateritic cones and pillars, which stand to remind the world of Eshu's power to disintegrate or multiply all happening, became figured. Adding a note of literal sacrifice, cowrie shells, the ancient Yoruba coinage, mark the eyes and mouth of these figures of Eshu. Such images, like *yangi* before them, could be fashioned within a shrine or at a crossroads or upon a threshold. They appear very widely in Yoruba and Yoruba-influenced lands.

From western Togo comes an arresting exemplar (Plate 11). It was collected at Misahöhe, Togo, in 1912 and is now in the Linden Museum, in Stuttgart. Here Legba (Elegbara) is a tiny rounded head of whitened clay, set on a rounded neck and shoulders also made of clay, the whole set, with feathers, within an earthenware dish similarly coated with whitish clay. This silent, staring little sprite, like the head and shoulders of a human embryo suddenly exposed, projects an image that is at once spectral and unfinished-looking. The gazing eyes recall the Afro-Cuban myth's burning orbs within the shell beside the crossroads. Diminutive dimensions and the use of clay as the main material recall the original animate fragments of laterite into which Eshu was divided.



PLATE 11

The custom of making small votive images for Eshu was strongly reinstated in western Cuba. Many images were made of clay in Cuba, while some, in stone, were given eyes and mouths either by incisions or with paint, including a *sui generis* image, shown in a work published by Lydia Cabrera in 1954, carved in the form of a profile of the little spirit's head.⁴⁹ Clay heads positioned in an earthenware pan (*cazuela de barro*), analogous to the Ewe mode, emerged also in western Cuba. This is a hint that the rising style acquired its force through fusion of both Ewe/Dahomean (Arará) and Yoruba (Lucumi) manners of formal exposition.⁵⁰ Moreover, clay and small stone sculpture were portable artifacts easy to hide from strangers, even under conditions of far-reaching oppression.

The vitality of reemergence is evinced by the numerous modes of Afro-Cuban clay statuary for Elegba. An elegantly innovative example of a style that apparently flourished in Havana in the nineteenth century was given as a gift to Lydia Cabrera by Asikpa, El Moro, a follower of the Yoruba gods. The artist took the round earthenware bowl and centered in it the image, as an inspiration for creative repetition of its circular shape, in a ring of gleaming cowries marking the shoulders of the figure, and, in a secondary ring, the neck.⁵¹

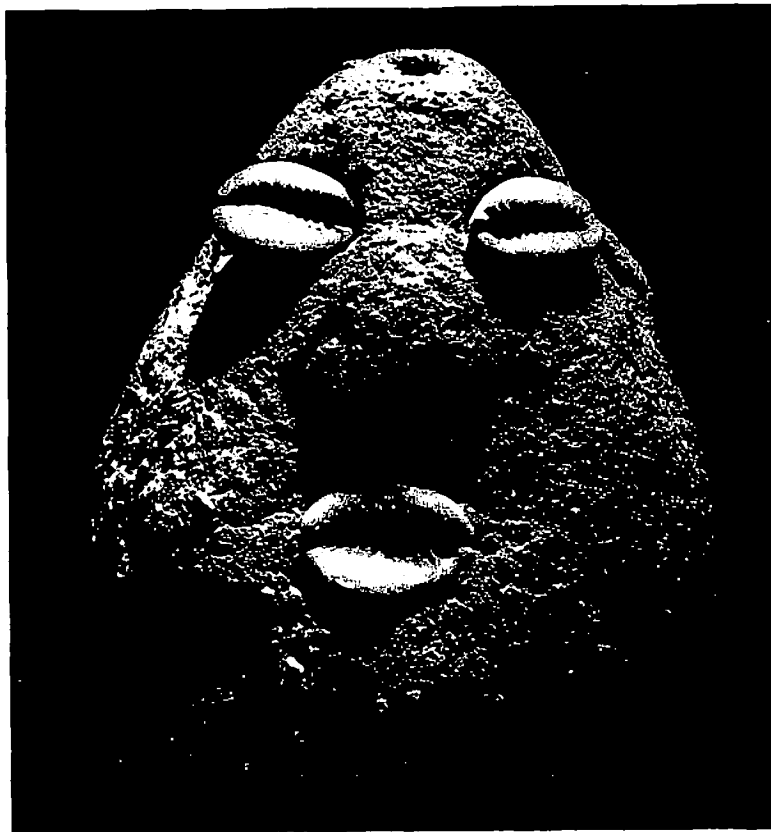


PLATE 12

The ways of rendering Elegba in stone and clay were countered in the twentieth century by yet another Afro-Cuban mode, Elegba rendered in concrete. By 1954 the mode was well established in Havana, where Sidney W. Mintz collected an example at a market in the summer of 1956 (Plate 12).⁵² Such images, essentially conical in shape, were creole transformations, as it were, of the ancient market cone of laterite. Here the tip of the cone is perforated, to receive a single nail, which is meant to suggest the wonder-working knife of Eshu Odara, who worked miracles with a knife erect upon his head.⁵³

The original lateritic shards became two hundred Eshu, and then two hundred more, in the telling of the origin of Eshu-Yangi (Eshu-the-Mound-of-Laterite). And, similarly, Afro-Cuban Eshu images

multiplied wondrously. As the guardian of the threshold and keeper of the gate, not unlike the earthen Legba outside the compound entrances of Dahomey, they were placed in containers and concealed behind the main entrance to a person's house. "Fed, there is no danger, but forgotten, something begins to happen," a Cuban woman told me in 1979.⁵⁴

The tradition of guarding homes with images of Eshu came with black Hispanic people from the Caribbean to New York City and Miami in the decades after World War II. Today clay or concrete images for Elegba in the United States number in the hundreds.

Eshu statuary is strongly rooted in Spanish-speaking New York City. Some fine examples—from the collection of Christopher Oliana, himself one of the founding fathers of the Yoruba religion among mainland blacks in New York City—grace the permanent exhibition of Afro-Americana at the Museum of Natural History.

In the northeast of Brazil at the end of the nineteenth century Eshu-Bara was represented by anthills.⁵⁵ Given the incontestable impact of Kongo and Angola cultures upon black Brazil, as well as the importance of the termite mound as a sign of the dead in those portions of Central Africa, arriving Fon, Ewe, and Yoruba slaves may have merged an already well-established mystic usage of earthen mounds with the concept of the lateritic cones of Eshu.

The Yoruba of Bahia and their cultural allies, the Brazilian descendants of the Ewe (Gege) and the Fon, reintroduced the ancient household altar of Eshu—small head and shoulders set within a dish or bowl. From a turn-of-the-century account: "a ball of clay congealed with the blood of a bird, palm oil, and an infusion of sacred herbs, reproduces a human face, the eyes and mouth of which are represented by three small shells or cowries, inserted in the mass before it dries."⁵⁶

At some point a nineteenth-century continuity was complicated by a quest for a novel form, a building up of the image within a bowl in such a manner that it would rise up out of its container and begin to gesture. The latter trend was apparent by 1945 in Recife (though it may well have occurred before that time), where an Eshu-Bara was photographed.⁵⁷

Rio conceals its share of clay Eshu mounted in bowls. But this former Brazilian capital, like Havana, is heir to a modern mode in which concrete is used in the making of such images. Consider a smoothly finished "Eshu Boi" now in the Museu de Polícia (Plate

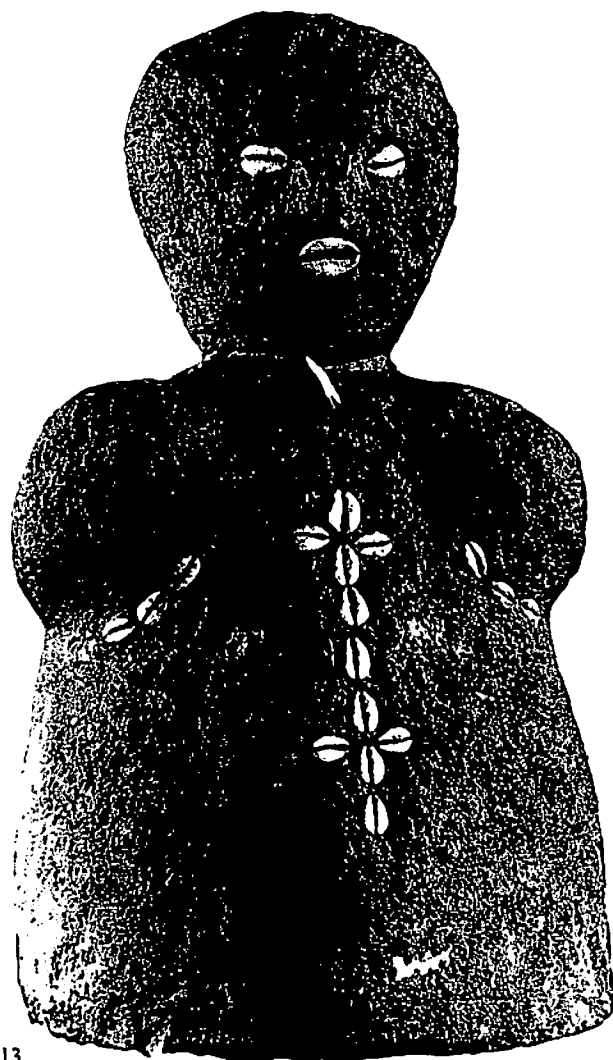


PLATE 13

13) that was probably made before 1941.⁵⁸ In Dahomean Yorubaland, around Ouidah, I have seen large freestanding images for Elegba with mystic signs of the divination deity marked in inserted cowries on the chest of the image that are precisely one of the distinguishing characteristics of the Rio icon. The solid oval head of this image is hinged to an equally solid mass of truncal concrete, with

the latter's starkness relieved by rounded suggestions of shoulders, arms, and trunk. Affection for Eshu softens the hardness of the medium, not unlike a stone transmuted into a child's stuffed animal, and this is appropriate to Eshu's fusion of valences that are both childlike (insatiable eating) and mature (restitution of what is right to those who sacrifice).

Clay and concrete Eshu have symbolic resonance—sacrificial shells, where embedded, bring to life the spirit who, though reduced to shards, has nonetheless retained the energies upon which the development of our individuality depends.

The powers of Elegba are similarly retold in Nigerian Yoruba wood sculpture, e.g., indigo-painted images of a man and a woman joined by a cowrie-studded leather strap of the kind worn by women devotees, which is deliberately displayed upsidedown. An early European document of the genre appeared in an engraving (Plate 14) in



PLATE 14

a book about missionary life in the village of Oshielle, eight miles east of the city of Abeokuta. The book was published in 1857.⁵⁹ In fact the engraving was based upon a drawing made in Oshielle of an actual specimen of paired male and female Eshu sculptures, which Reverend Townsend, a missionary, took back to Exeter, England, in 1868 (Plate 15).⁶⁰ The engraving and the original both show a cylindrical base from which hang strands of cowries and a calabash-of-power (*ado iran*), communicating Eshu's ability to endlessly multiply his force.

Some Egbado Yoruba villagers say such images represent Elegba and his wife. This complements a deeper interpretation of Eshu as the principle of life and individuality who combines male and female valences. Here both the male and female figures have bulging eyes, which for Yoruba embody the power-to-make-things-happen, the gift Eshu received from God in heaven. This hint of awesome potentiality is softened by the generosity of the woman's gesture, a giving of her breasts, but sharpened by the male's presentation of arms both real (a club or sword) and mystic (a calabash containing power). Their protruding eyes and the male's calabash foretell a miracle that unfolds upon their heads, from which springs up a bladelike element structurally equivalent to the knife-atop-the-head that identifies Eshu in some of his clay and concrete avatars. Here the knives have been transformed into serpent heads, recalling a praise poem for Eshu, who "makes a whistle from the head of a serpent" (Plate 16).⁶¹ As if to emphasize the limitlessness of Eshu's wonder-working, calabash containers of self-multiplying power surmount the serpents' heads.

When a knifelike element rises out of Elegba's head, it is a sign that the display of his powers has begun, the illustration of the wonder (*ara*) from which his special name, Eshu Odara, "the Wonder-Worker," derives.⁶² Songs for Odara in Ilodo and Ouidah in West Africa mention this wondrous knife as a reference to the fact that the pointed head of Eshu cannot shoulder ordinary burdens.⁶³ Slightly modified, these songs reemerged among the blacks of Bahia and Havana and, later, in Hispanic New York City and Miami.⁶⁴ Their lyrics conceal a visual pun on the single crimson feather that Eshu wore erect upon his head in the presence of the Almighty. Both feather and knife are described as preventing Eshu's head from being used to support an ordinary burden.

In the wake of this continuing and systematic lore, it was inevita-

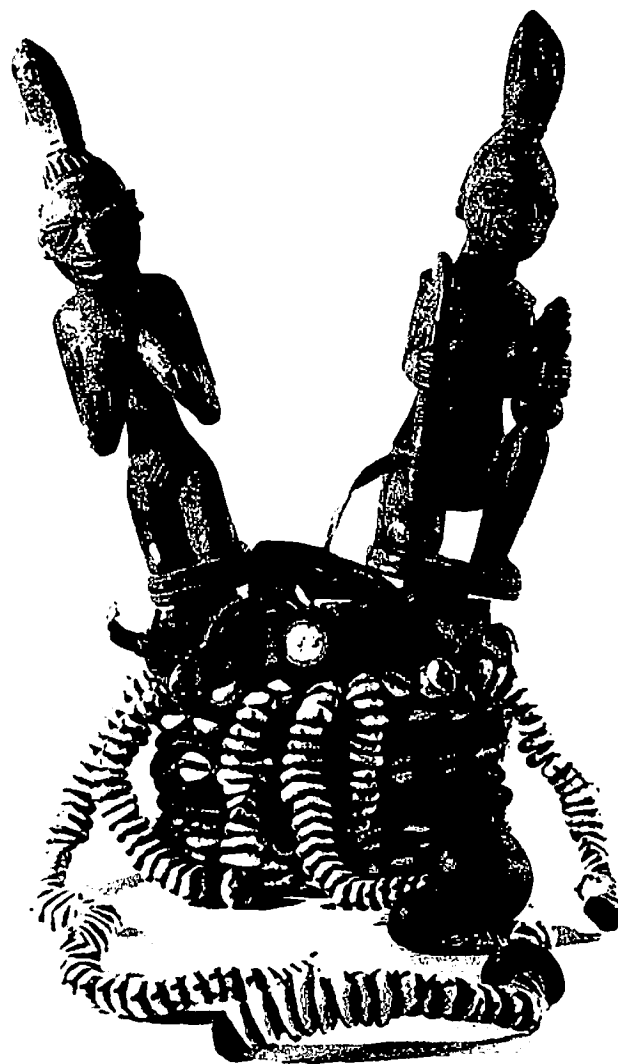


PLATE 15

ble that nails and other objects would be used to simulate the knife atop the head of Eshu in the clay and concrete sculptures of Havana and Harlem. The sharply pointed knife (*shonsho abe*) that crowns the head of Eshu is the striking element of a wooden image of him that was collected (probably in 1927) by Arthur Ramos in Bahia

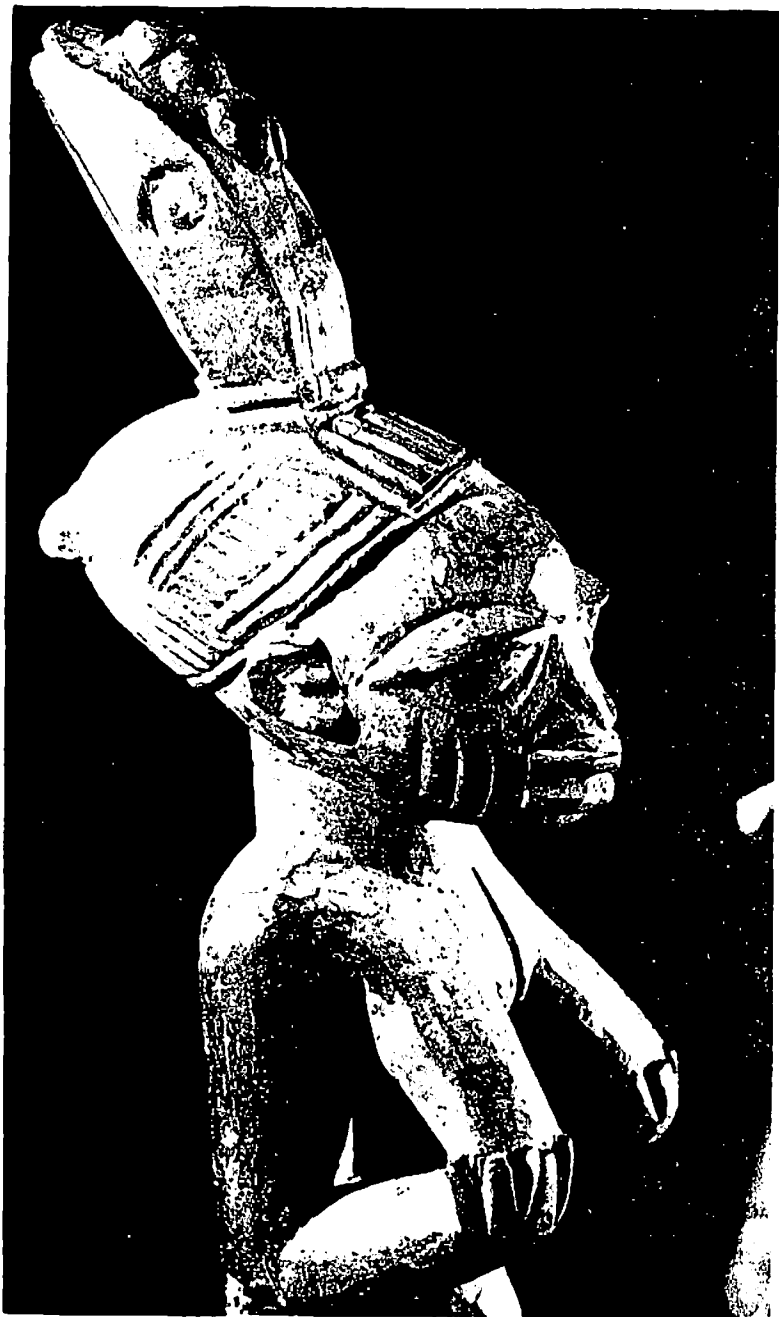


PLATE 16



PLATE 17

(Plate 17).⁶⁵ The Ramos piece compares nicely with the Townsend images in Exeter (Plate 15). The expressive play of mass that enlivens the Nigerian images is, however, muted in Brazil. There the simple renderings of line and silhouette are indicative of the maker's apparent wish for leanness of expression. The Brazilian Elegba image holds the calabash-of-power, flaunting the power to make things multiply. This charming Afro-Brazilian figure is in the strongest tradition of visually rendering the Eshu knife.



PLATE 18

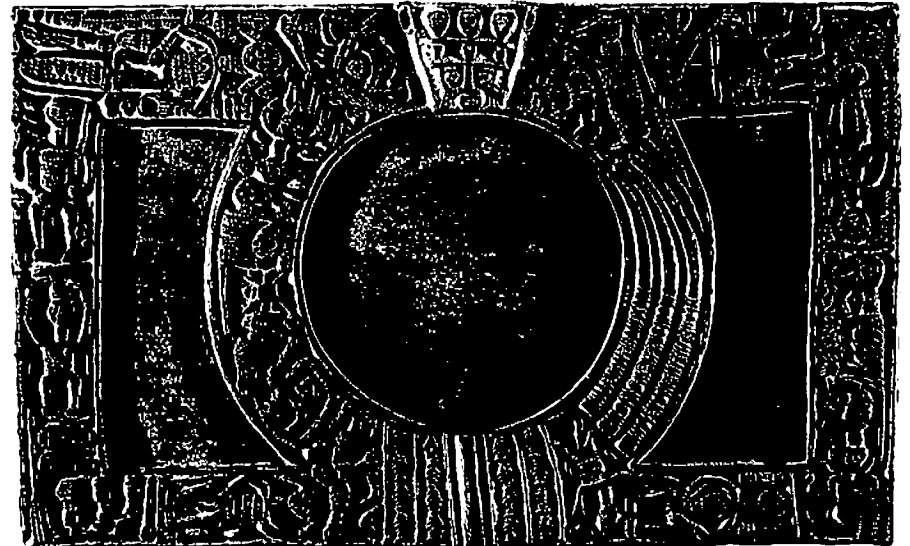
Further transatlantic reinstatements extend the attributes of Elegba. His dance-hook or club becomes a simple hook in Cuba, sometimes painted red and black.⁶⁶ The Ulm Ifá divination tray, one of the oldest known pieces of Yoruba wood sculpture and carved before 1659 (Plate 19), includes, at “seven o’clock” in the interior circle, an image of Eshu with tailed headdress, sucking his thumb. In the upper right-hand quadrant of the outer square there is another image, perhaps Elegba, smoking a pipe. These are ancient representations of the flagrant orality of Elegba, hints of a propensity to absorb and to devour. His pipe remains an important emblem and

so he appears in Cuba, shaped in clay and set in a vessel in the Ewe manner, with a pipe beside him.⁶⁷ The icons of Elegba seemingly are infinite. They are figures representing the supreme importance of attaining spiritual coolness through direct sacrifice (*ebo*) and ritual reconciliation (*irele*), acts that protect the mirroring imperative of the actualization of individuality—points intuited in a final example of Eshu sculpture, an image in wood that once graced the compound entrance of Ogabunna, chief of Ikija quarter, Abeokuta, during the first half of the nineteenth century (Plate 18). Here kneeling suggests submission, sacrifice, and propitiation, while the carefully positioned clublike element and the towering headdress are intimations of *àshe*, and multiplication of the self.

Ifá

Whenever traditional Yoruba encounter change or challenge in the world of Eshu, the limitations of individual calm and wisdom become acute. In such a case a person relies on the accumulated insights of the poetic chants of the Yoruba divination system called Ifá to place his or her individual problem in perspective. Thus Abimbola: “Ifá divination is performed by the Yoruba during all their important rites of passage such as naming and marriage ceremonies, funeral rites and the installation of kings. In traditional Yoruba society, the authority of Ifá permeated every aspect of life

PLATE 19



because the Yoruba regard Ifá as the voice of the divinities and the wisdom of the ancestors."⁶⁸

There are many forms of countering uncertainty with divination in Yoruba culture, including the throwing of kola nuts (*obi*) on the ground, the casting of cowrie shells (*owo*), water-gazing, mirror-gazing, and receiving ecstatic prophecy from a deity speaking through an initiated priest or priestess.⁶⁹ Over these systems Ifá rules supreme. The lifetime study demanded to maintain Ifá and the respect traditional Yoruba have for the analytic reach of its verses can be indicated by a single proverb: "Stargazing is no substitute for Ifá's knowledge."⁷⁰

The literature of Ifá divination divides into sixteen main parts called *odu*. Each *odu* bears the name of an ancient prince. To hear the verses is to come into the presence of a royal voice imparting insight and infinite experience. The priest of divination himself is called the father of the secrets (*babalawo*), and he is allowed to possess, like the Yoruba divine kings, beaded treasure and regalia.

Ikin, "The Sixteen Sacred Palm-Nuts," are held the most ancient and important of the instruments of divination. They come from the sacred palm tree of Ifá (*ope ifa*). Myth tells us how and why these natural elements became an august sign.

Once Ifá reigned upon the earth and there dispensed his precious wisdom. But one day a son of Ifá arrogantly refused to bow down before his father, whereupon Ifá withdrew to heaven.

When the light in the eyes of Eshu dimmed by the road and disappeared, the world began to die. Similarly, the translation of Ifá to heaven occasioned such a terrifying blast of sterility and drought that starving animals attempted to devour sharp razors scattered on the ground, and river basins were covered with dead leaves. The world again was dying. The children of Ifá climbed the sacred palm tree to beg their father to return, and he gave each of them sixteen palm nuts as a concentrated essence of his healing wisdom, replacing himself on earth with the sixteen sacred palm nuts, the *ikin*. Order and life were again restored.⁷¹

Thus, like the division of Eshu into myriad fragments of raw laterite, the division of Ifá into sixteen kernels taken direct from nature restores life. These powerful beliefs give sanction and authority to the most important form of Ifá divination, which involves the use of the *ikin* and is usually reserved for crucial moments, such as the investiture of a king.

In such cases, the diviner strews fine divination powder (*iyerosun*) obtained from the irosun tree (or powdered dry bamboo) on an Ifá divination tray, here illustrated by perhaps the oldest known example, carved before 1659 (Plate 19), and smooths it over. Then, with his middle finger, he traces either a single line or two lines in the powder, depending on the number of *ikin-ifá* that remain in his hand when he attempts to pick up sixteen *ikin* in his right hand. If two palm nuts remain, he marks parallel lines on the tray, or, if one *ikin* remains, one vertical stroke, and so on, until by divining four times with the *ikin* in this way, one out of a possible set of sixteen patterns completes itself upon the divination tray.

The sign of a particular section (*odu*) of the verbal literature of Ifá has now appeared. The diviner recites the verses associated with this sign in three parts: (1) an exemplary myth from the lore of the goddesses and the gods; (2) what happens to the deities within each myth, i.e., cautionary tales on the consequences of failure to make sacrifices indicated by Ifá; and (3) application of these themes to the client's problem.⁷² The last part usually opens with the phrase "Ifá says," for the client has now placed himself within range of the very voice of the god of divination, speaking through the ritual moves and counters:

Ifá says that a man should not be covetous and that he should not strive to win a position from the person who holds the position by right. [Ifá also says] that he should make appeasement lest the people of the world take his role from him and give it to another.⁷³

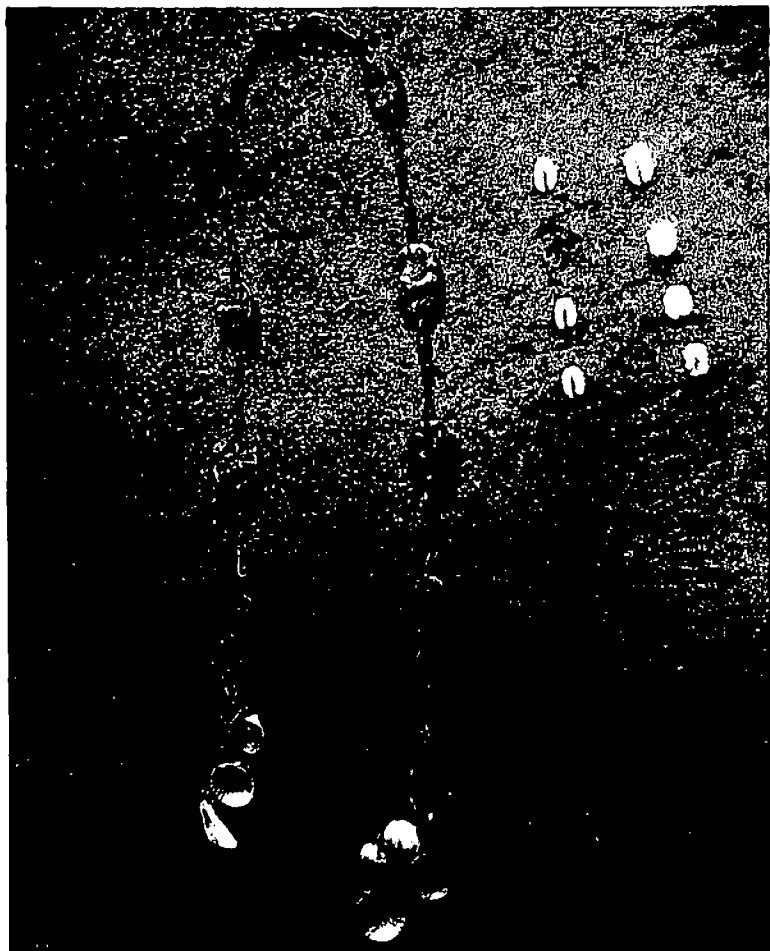
The client himself interprets such verses, for the *babalawo* is not allowed to know the precise nature of the client's problem. In the verse just mentioned, he might find evidence that an excess of ambitious maneuvering on his part may have angered certain elders who had secretly caused a swift and inexplicable decline in his fortune. Proper sacrifices would be indicated, and he would offer them gladly, knowing that he was making amends suggested by the gods themselves.

There is another Ifá divining method, involving the use of a divining chain (*opele*) made of string or metal with four half-nuts of the *opele* fruit attached to each half of the chain. Each *opele* nut has a smooth outside surface and a rough inside surface. When the divining chain is thrown, away from the diviner, it falls upon the ground in a rough U shape, with four *opele* seeds on one side, four

on the other, each possibly falling a different way. There are thus sixteen possible forms of presentation, the mystic number of Ifá, and each of these presentation forms of the divining chain stands for an *odu*. If the *odu* that emerges is the one called *Eji Ogbe*, the diviner writes its sign upon the divining tray.⁷⁴

If the *odu*, on the other hand, turns up as *Oyeku Meji*, the appropriate signature to mark in the *iyerosun* dust takes another form. And

PLATE 20



so on. In an example of divining-chain divination in Dahomean Yorubaland at Takon in Benin (Plate 20), all eight seeds have fallen "open," the sign of the richly favorable *odu Eji Ogbe*. This sign has also been permanently rendered in cowrie-shell mosaic (from which one shell is missing) in the floor at the threshold of the owner of the divining chain, to charge the gateway to the house of a chief with good luck and well-being. Thus chain-divining cuts through to *odu* in a manner similar to the use of *ikin*. The "readings" occur faster in the case of the chain, which is more commonly used.

Both systems expose Yoruba to the principal sixteen verses of Ifá divination and thus lead to treasures of African verbal poetry and wisdom. It is believed that Ifá encompasses the whole of the wisdom of the ancestors, the whole of the wisdom of the deities, and thus safeguards "everything that is considered memorable in Yoruba culture throughout the ages." Hence the splendor of the image of Ifá:

The life of Ifá surpasses water's coolness
 The life of Ifá surpasses water's coolness,
 The speaker-of-all-languages married a woman
 who herself bathed only in water that is cold
 The life of Ifá surpasses water in its coolness.⁷⁵

Wande Abimbola points out that the survival of Yoruba tradition through its turbulent history depended in large measure on a cadre of wise and disciplined diviners steeped in the secrets of the ancestors and of the gods. Thus one can well imagine how cultural treasures were brought across the Atlantic by men who remembered the lore of the *odu*, the divination verses.

In Cuba the amazing continuity of Nigerian *odu* was established in a landmark publication by William Bascom, in 1952, in which he proved that the *babalao* (creole equivalent to the original Nigerian diviners) had reinstated the *odu*, with names and explanatory tales virtually intact.⁷⁶ In the process, Yoruba divining trays, divining chains (Plate 21), and sacred sixteen *ikin* were introduced to Cuba.⁷⁷

Of the Cuban divination trays, most are round, like an example from northern Yorubaland (Plate 22), or rectangular, with staring Eshu heads facing each other, and some are called *atefa*, a Ketu word and thus a hint of the Ketu Yoruba origins of the mode. The divination trays of Bahia are also called *atefa*, with the same implications. The Museu de Arte Popular, in Bahia, included in its 1968

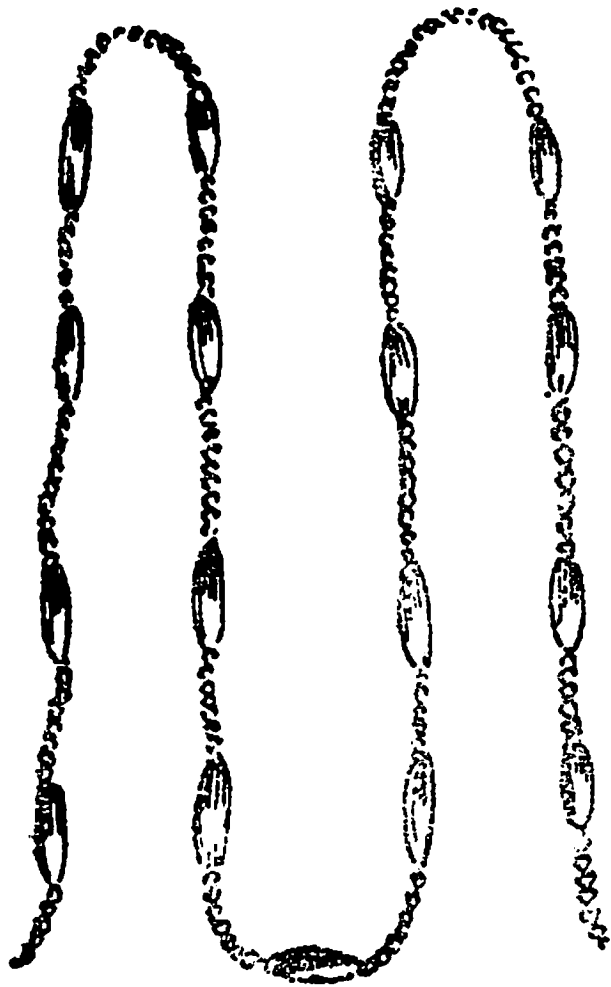


PLATE 21

Afro-Brazilian exhibition a magnificent *atefa*, attributed to an unknown nineteenth-century carver (Plate 23). The purity of his handling of the ancient themes is manifest in his use of the circle and the head of Eshu (Plate 24), which interrupts the flow of the elaborately carved border, as in the case of the ancient Ulm tray (Plate 19).⁷⁸ In the Brazilian example, two heads of Eshu stare at each other across the cosmic circle. There are similarly paired segments of ornamental carving filled with depictions of honorific cowrie shells



PLATE 22



PLATE 23



PLATE 24



PLATE 25

and V-form elements which may relate cryptically to thunderstones or the Y-like prongs of the thunder ax.

Yoruba sculptors also make caryatid cups (*agere ifa*) as vessels for the sacred *ikin-ifa* or the divining chain.⁷⁹

A Nigerian caryatid figure by Labintan of Otta (Plate 25) supports the Ifá bowl with his head and the soles of his feet. He rests on his elbows and bends up his legs. This marvelously realized gesture conceals, in apparent playfulness, serious submission to predictive grace.

It is important to grasp the style of Labintan because one of his Ifá divination carvings, an *agere* emboldened with strongly postured human figures supporting the bowl on their heads, washed up on the shores of Brazil (Plate 26). It was found on the beach at Calçado do Bomfim, Bahia, wrapped in linen, an indication that it had been used by an Afro-Bahian priest or priestess. Apparently upon the death of the owner, the cup had been tossed into the sea to return with the soul of its departed owner to Yorubaland.⁸⁰

This piece establishes that some Afro-Bahian works of art of the

turn of the century were actually carved in Yorubaland, in this case Otta. Attribution to Labintan can be demonstrated by shared traits, including deeply drilled human pupils, hooked noses, hairpin ears, sharply pointed chins, identical hinges, and identically shaped shallow bowls.



PLATE 26

The ties that bind the "Rome of the Africans," Bahia, to the Yoruba of Nigeria were never more directly instanced. But most of the New World forms of Ifá divination art were indigenously continued and elaborated, giving rise to the *atefa* of Bahia and Havana, the *opele* of western Cuba,⁸¹ and the use and knowledge of the green and yellow beads of Ifá throughout the Atlantic world.

Osanyin

The art and lore of the cult of Osanyin, god of herbalistic medicine, embody a richness of positive assertion comparable to that of Ifá. In Osanyin's name the Yoruba undertook a vast study of the leaves and herbs and roots of the forests, classifying them with regard to their therapeutic properties, and combining them to make the master medicines of initiation and *àshe*.

Osanyin initiates master this taxonomic knowledge, learning what species of forest herbs to collect, mix, and pound to make medicine to soothe a feverish body or to calm an agitated mind. Leaves and roots as elements of healing are to Osanyin what the sixteen *ikin* and the art divination are to Ifá. As we shall see, rich traditions of verbal art and literature also traveled with his worship to the New World.

In Cuba, for example, traditional segments of the black population honor Osanyin and link him to a deeper belief in the spirituality of the forest. There the faithful honor the forest, *el monte* (literally, "the mountain") as a source of healing power. They realize that this standing cathedral of shade and moistness belongs to Osanyin and to God, and so they leave small sacrifices in payment for herbs and roots subtracted from his realm, "for every tree, every shrub and herb has its master, and its protocol."⁸² Each *orisha* is served by its own sacralizing herbs, taken with permission from Osanyin, just as each deity is accompanied by his or her Eshu, source of individualizing power and vitality.

And yet for all his glory, Osanyin is physically bizarre, having only one eye, one arm, one leg, which are the stigmata of a quondam selfish life, when Osanyin tried to keep all the medicines and leaves to himself. According to legend:

Diviner said he was suffering because he could find no food nor sustenance because all of the work which he might be doing with the leaves was being done by Osanyin. Eshu said that he would help. Eshu caused the stones of the house of Osanyin to fall and maim the deity. Lacking a leg and an arm and an eye, he now

needed diviner, urgently, to collect his leaves and continue with the curing of people. And since that time diviners and Osanyin have been working hand in hand.⁸³

It is said that Osanyin also failed to make a proper sacrifice commanded by Ifá and, consequently, lost his voice. Thereafter whenever he opened his mouth to speak, only a comically squeaky voice was heard. Diminished, even vocally, Osanyin is a warning as to what happens to persons who are callously unsharing.⁸⁴

His is an image now indelibly Atlantic. Both in western Nigeria and eastern Benin, as well as in western Cuba and northeastern Brazil, most of his followers speak of his one-legged, one-armed, one-eyed appearance and his tiny, high-pitched voice. This basic image has been complicated by imaginative additions in Cuba and Hispanic New York. Some Afro-Cuban followers of Osanyin say that one of his ears is of monstrous size but hears absolutely nothing, while the other ear is diminutive but picks up the noise of butterflies in flight,⁸⁵ a balance of elements coarse and fine that is reminiscent of Eshu's idiom of extremity. As a matter of fact, both Eshu and Osanyin share the attribute of one-leggedness, and like Eshu, Osanyin was once a prince.

Osanyin, so it is believed in Ijebu Yoruba country, was born with beads shining about his body. Moreover, beads are important to Osanyin because he associates their colors with the hues and qualities of the forest herbs. Thus some of the sylvan fronds are said to be bright green, while other herbs are yellow, black, red, or even white, and each hue denotes a special kind of curing power. In some parts of Yorubaland the beads of Osanyin, in their colors and cool glitter, equal the work of multiple, differently colored, healing herbs.⁸⁶ I recall an incident at Edunabon in the south of Oyo country in the winter of 1963–64, when a man regarded an ancient, polished blood-red carnelian bead and pronounced it "cool" (*tutu*). But the beads of Osanyin are cool not only in the general sense of giving aesthetic pleasure but in a literal sense of referral to leaf like qualities of refreshing taste or smell, and—most important—powers of restoration.

Heralded by gongs, Osanyin is the crippled king who, crushed to half his size, gained insight into the human condition. He comes not in the body of a possession devotee but in that of a tiny doll, given voice and motion by trained ventriloquists who are also Osanyin priests and healers. Ventriloquism, in fact, is one of the marvels of

the cult of the lord of leaves not only in Nigeria but also in Cuba. His tiny voice was once heard also in Brazil, where priests of ancestral spirits attached to their bodies small store-bought rubber dolls of the kind that squeaked when pinched, to suggest the tiny voice of Osanyin—an ingenious “bending” of a modern object in the direction of tradition.

Osanyin ventriloquists appeared in the 1950's in and around certain villages of the province of Havana—Perico, Alacranes, Mantilla:

The Osanyin image of old Federico was a doll. The old man used to sit behind his door, half ajar, to smoke his pipe. One day I happened to be there, and heard a doll say, “Federico, here comes a woman all dressed in white, looking for a remedy for her husband.”⁸⁷

Healing, art, and ventriloquism were thus combined in Osanyin worship to provide a striking, theatrical form of consultation to the blacks of Ijebu, Abeokuta, the Orozco sugar mill in Cuba, and other places where the full tradition has been reported or witnessed. I saw the Osanyin puppet in action in southern Ijebu on various occasions in the early 1960's; wearing a miniature beaded veil and beaded gown, it was made to speak in the tiniest of squeaks by the priest-ventriloquist. The reinstatement of this custom in Cuba may not be the work only of the Yoruba and their descendants: Henry and Margaret Drewall found in a study of the Age (hunting deity) cult in Togo in the summer of 1975 that Age is also “a forest sprite who heals with leaves, has one eye and one leg and whose priest practices ventriloquism.”

Certain groups in Nigerian Yorubaland allege that the sound of Osanyin's voice relates “to a little bird that represents him.” According to this tradition, this bird not only speaks when the deity is consulted, but also lives in the sacred calabash of Osanyin kept upon his altar.

Voice-throwing and bird imagery are integral to the cult of Osanyin, and they explain an important province of Osanyin art: myriad forms of a wrought-iron staff surmounted by one or more birds in iron. Ifá says there are sixteen styles of the Osanyin wrought-iron staff. One kind carries a single “head” (a single bird poised at the summit of the staff), while another carries two heads and still another displays three heads and so on until the highest number is achieved, sixteen birds in iron. The last is especially prestigious, “for

the highest people calculate their power by sixteen.” The divination literature tells us that proliferating bird motifs allude to an ancient time, when Osanyin was magician of the gods, working miracles with one, then two, then three, then four, and, finally, sixteen heads, or birds.⁸⁸ The persistent equation of bird with head, as the seat of power and personal destiny, is of the essence in comprehending elaborations of this fundamental metaphor, including staffs (1) showing a single iron bird set upon a single disk of iron surmounting several bells of iron, the *osun* staff or *orere*, (2) a bird set over a radiating display of miniature iron implements for the iron god, Ogún, sometimes interspersed with miniature emblems of other “hard” deities, (3) a superbly fashioned bird in a commanding position over a circle of smaller, less elaborately decorated birds. The three staff types appear in various New World cities, notably Rio, Bahia, Gonaïves (Haiti), Havana, and New York, but rarely simultaneously.

The myth of the maiming of Osanyin tells us why he needs Ifá and warns us that the knowledge of the leaves must be shared. But the obverse is equally true: Ifá needs Osanyin. Without the lord of leaves and his many medicines, Ifá's effectiveness would be seriously diminished. And so the diviner-herbalist and the herbalist come to share the *osun* staff, an extraordinary “text” wrought in iron on the power to comprehend and check disease.

Odeleogun, a master blacksmith of Efon-Alaiye who flourished toward the end of the last century, is believed to have made our Nigerian example of the genre (Plate 27). It is a work that gracefully illustrates the *osun* structure: a single iron bird over a single iron disk that covers and conceals parts of the four inverted iron bells radiating out from a single point along the staff below the disk and formally “answered” by four more bells, hanging right side up, below this point.

Osun, transmuted into *ase* by the Popo and the Fon of what is now Benin, have been enriched there by generations of expressive elaboration since 1659 and earlier. There the single bird often rests upon the canonical disk, but the latter element can be fashioned to seal completely the mouth of a single inverted conical container, under which appears a small sphere or sometimes (as in this instance) a hard-shelled seed, which is pierced by the axis of the staff (Plate 28).

From Ekiti (northeastern Yorubaland) to Dahomey the associa-

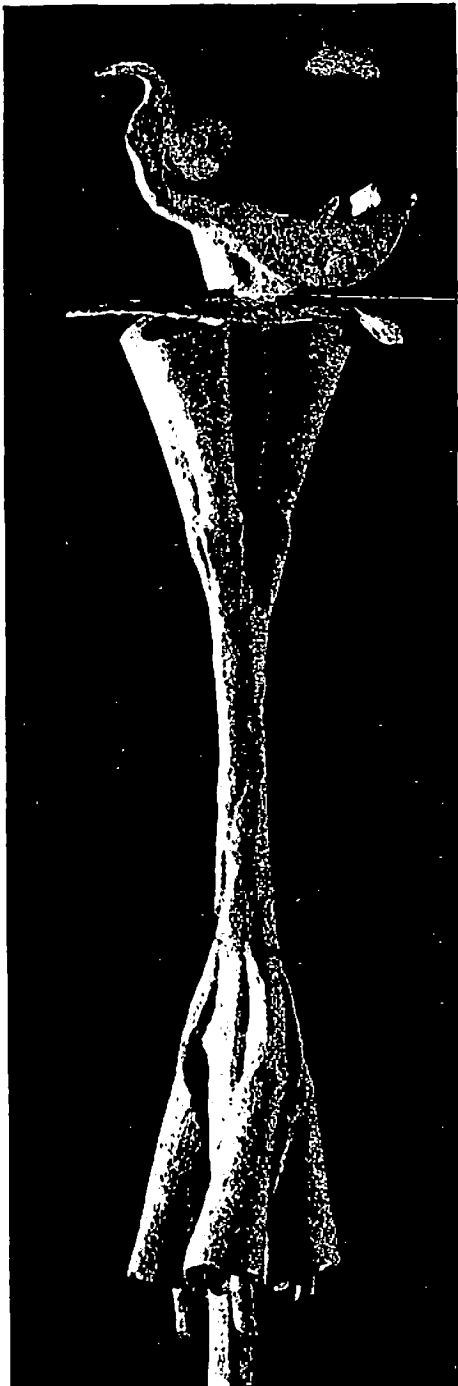


PLATE 27

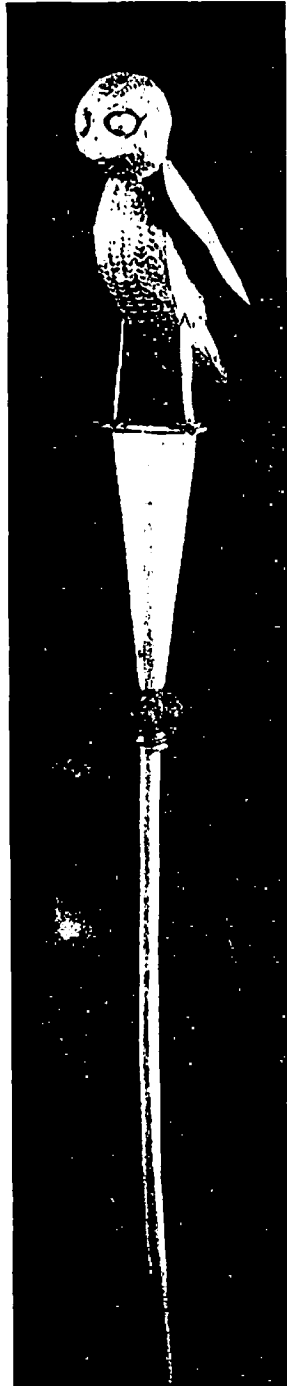


PLATE 28

tion of the presiding bird figure with war on witchcraft is more or less consistent. An informant at Igogo-Ekiti in the summer of 1965 alleged that a bird atop a healer's staff shows "the mothers" how powerful the healer is with his herbs. Dahomean chiefs in the city of Abomey told me in 1968 that the bird atop the *ase* staff (Plate 28) represented the power of King Glele in overcoming not only the armies of Mahi but the "bird" (i.e., sorcerous potentiality) of the leader of the enemy forces as well. In addition, a healer at Ipokia, capital of the Anago Yoruba, revealed in December 1962 that the bells on such staffs are sometimes interpreted as metaphoric leaves; the disk is meant to cover the leaflike bells so that uninitiated eyes cannot see what is inside them.

A seed as an occasional element on the *osun* or other Osanyin-related staffs, and the use of bells, express the lore of the guards of Ifá. It is told that Ifá brandished a certain seed before the witches of feathered form, saying, "Witch is not fierce, she cannot eat the hard seed."⁸⁹ It is also told that Ifá, informed by Eshu of the secret vulnerabilities of "the mothers," brandished, among many effective objects, the leaf called *agogo igun* (bell of the vulture's beak) "so that everything he asks for, by means of *agogo* bells will be obtained."

Thus the metaphor of a text in iron is not to be taken lightly; the bird is both the mind of the healer and a warning to the mothers that he knows their forms and the powers that they inform; the disk covers his secret antidotes to their deadly propensities; and the bells and the seed are guards or extensions of the neutralizing impact of herbalistic medicine.

The association of a bird with the head or mind of a person is revealed during the initiation of a person into the service of the Yoruba gods in Cuba and Cuban-influenced portions of Miami and New York City. The full ceremony includes one of the most impressive reinstatements of the literature of Osanyin on New World soil—a chanting of some sixteen to twenty-one songs, many based on the same melody. These songs are among the most ancient and precious testaments of Yoruba oral literature that we have in the Americas; they go back at least to the late eighteenth century, and one includes a reference to the immortality of God, unmovable stone under water (*oyiyigi ota l'omi o oyiyigi ota l'omi*).⁹⁰ These songs accompany the preparation of the leaves of Osanyin, to complete "the water of the calm," the "water of the cool" (*omi ero*) needed for sacralizing the postulant and the paraphernalia he or she will receive.

And then comes the moment when the *àshe* received by the initiate is sealed in a small incision cut at the uppermost portion of his shaved head and within the container of his personal *osun* bird-staff with disk and bells:

to make *osun* is an extremely secret, sacred matter. . . . Once the person serving as a barber has shaved the initiate's head entirely, he proceeds to paint it white, indigo blue, red and yellow [each color forming a concentric band around the center of his crown]. . . . when the initiator or initiatrix has finished the application of the colors, he or she cuts small incisions at the uppermost portion of the crown and there inserts four important materials, *obi kola*, *eru*, *tushe*, and *osun* ["the indispensable seeds of the consagracion, seeds imported from Africa"].⁹¹

The four basic seeds—*osun*, *eru*, *tushe*, and *obi kola*—placed within the private bird-staff (*osun*) of the initiate seal the same protective forces that went into his head inside the inverted cone or container beneath the bird of the *osun* staff. This establishes the bird in iron or metal as the eternal companion and guardian of the initiate. Elements of the ancient "text" are reintegrated here—bird, head, seeds, and bells.⁹²

Many Cuban *osun* are strongly African in style, as attested by the older examples of *osun* staffs in the National Museum in Havana.⁹³ The latter are remarkable not only for the retention of inverted cones or a single cone in metal under the disk that supports the bird, but also for a shaping of the bird more or less as a flattened, iconic element. Lydia Cabrera published in 1954 a photograph documenting this older style—well-nigh concealed behind a welter of cult detail—at the top of a many-tiered altar to Eshu.⁹⁴ Careful study of this area reveals the unmistakable silhouette of an Africanizing *osun* staff, with its flat, gracefully curving bird at the summit over the disk and inverted cones.

By 1954 creole transformations had already occurred. The new forms had absorbed Western industrial or cultural fragments—the hubcap of an automobile, a metal rooster from a weather vane or discarded garden furniture, store-bought jingle bells—and invested them with new meaning. The rooster replaced the flattened bird of the elders, the hubcap sometimes became the base, and the jingle bells recalled the *agogo* gongs. Most important, the single inverted cone underneath the disk became a metal cup (into which the spirit-protecting seeds were placed). It is this modernist form that

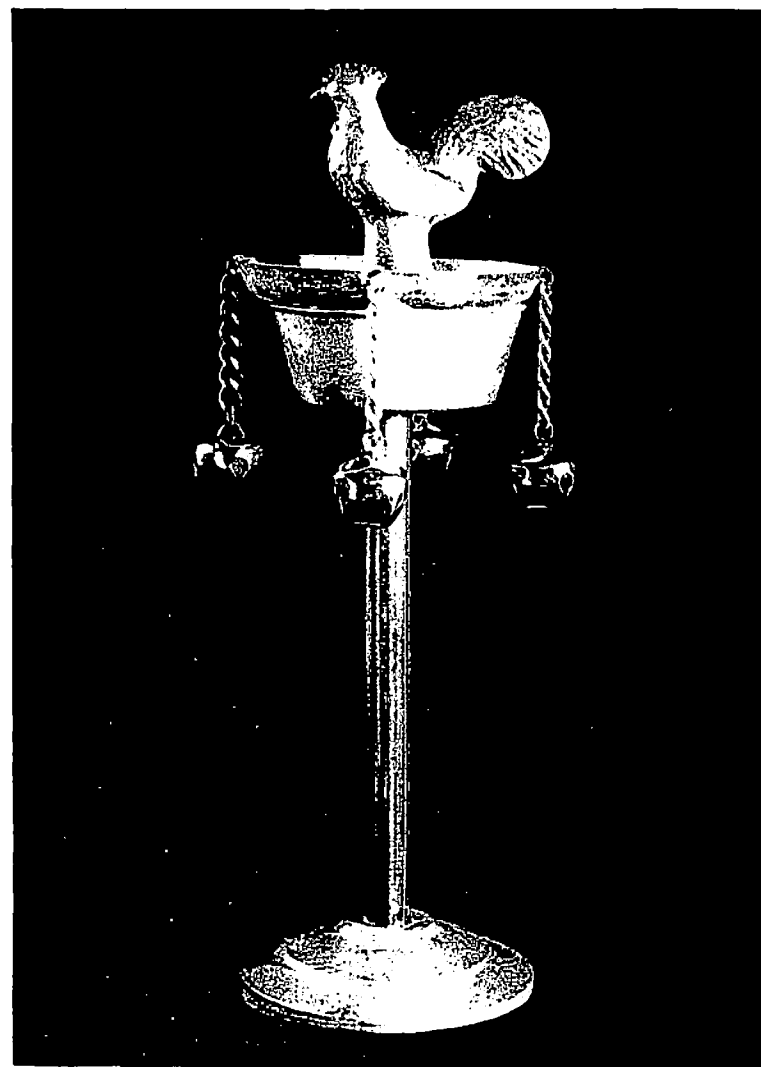


PLATE 29

is most frequently seen today in the Cuban-influenced *botánicas* of Miami, New Jersey, and New York (Plate 29). In these stores, where herbal charms and medicines frequently are sold, the sign of Osanyin appropriately reappears.

There is a further reinstatement of Osanyin iron across the Atlantic that involves staffs with a senior bird of mind or healing posi-

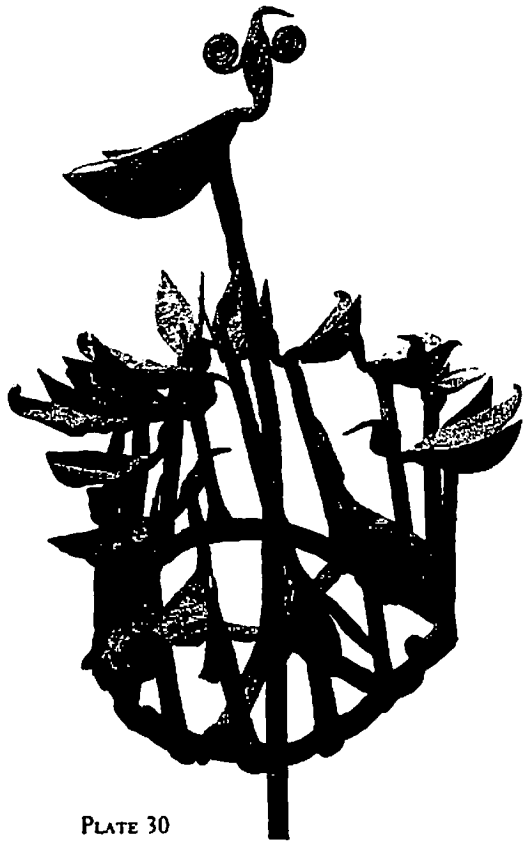


PLATE 30

tioned at the summit of the staff, above a round of minor birds (Plate 30). Odeleogun of Efon-Alaiye made our Nigerian example, probably in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.⁹⁵ This strong and elegant bird-staff carries within its forms a universal thought: the triumph of the mind over the annihilating circle of destruction and disease. The double, spiraled plume of the bird at the summit suggests double power held at once, and displays the ever-multiplying presence of Osanyin, or other healing spirits like Erinle.

An echo of this form in Bahia in Brazil is lean and simplified, and was made by an Afro-Brazilian blacksmith, José Adario dos Santos, at his atelier on the Ladeira da Conceição above the port of Salvador in the spring of 1968 (Plate 31). A single stylized bird surmounts six raking bars of pointed iron, suggesting, in one version, Osanyin

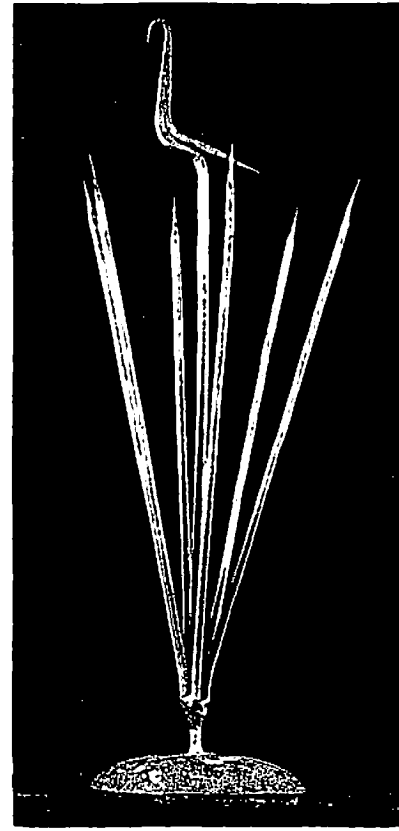


PLATE 31

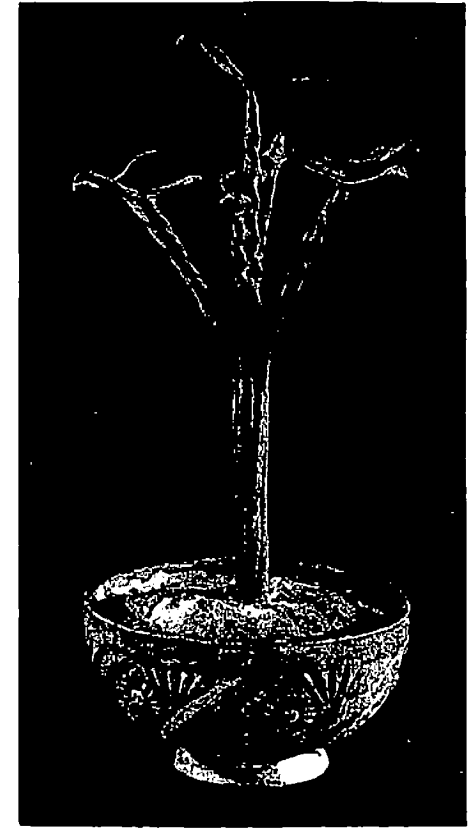


PLATE 32

above the crossroads of Eshu and iron, or, in another, the bird of Osanyin above the sharpened points of Ogun's iron, or, in still another, the bird of Osanyin in the branches of a tree.⁹⁶ These ideas receive a full embodiment in Rio de Janeiro, where a bird-staff in iron for Osanyin was collected, perhaps around 1941 (Plate 32). Here the bars below the senior bird suggest again the branches of a tree, each displaying a single minor bird beneath the commanding spirit at the summit. There seems to be a lesson in the cherishing of this ancient image: the senior bird of mind and healing, "the bird that shows the 'mothers' how powerful the healer is about his herbs,"⁹⁷ teaches that the woods and their medicines are grander than any document, and that one who assumes this privileged forest is hers or his alone will be answerable to God.⁹⁸

Ogún

The art of Ogún reflects his nature as a "hard god," a deity of war and iron. He lives in the flames of the blacksmith's forge, on the battlefield, and more particularly on the cutting edge of iron.⁹⁹ He addresses the forest with a sharpened machete; his spirit moves in the clearing of the bush, in the hoes and knives of cultivators. His worship is a means of thanksgiving for the ambivalent civilizing force of iron and iron-made implements. Ogún served the very creator of the world, so it is believed, by clearing the primordial forests with his iron, making the first sixteen roads that radiate from the ancient holy capital, the roads upon which the original sixteen sons of the first king traveled forth to found the sixteen originating kingships.¹⁰⁰

Praise-chants for Ogún, those collected in ancient towns like Ire and Ketu and Ilesha, illustrate his ambivalent nature: his power to destroy as well as to construct:

[from the towns of Aramoko and Ilesha]

Ogún, master of the world, support of the newborn child
Ogún is virile
Ogún, master of the yam I cut . . .
Ogún, with coronet of blood
Burns the forest, burns the bush
Leaves the forest screaming in the sound of flames

[from Ire town]

Ogún cuts, in large or small fragments
He kills the husband on the face of fire
He kills the wife on the hearth
He kills the little people who flee outside
Even with water present in the house,
he washes himself with blood.
Sudden as lightning, he terrifies the lazy.

[from the town of Ilesha]

Ogún promenades, serpent poised about his neck
Ogún, King of Ire, lord, great sovereign of iron.
With stripes about his body,
Such as one sees only on the skin of the wild doe
Unless it be Akisale, born of the Gaboon viper
Unless it be Akisale, born of the python.

[from the town of Ketu]

Ogún, allied to the man with a quick hand
Ogún, owner of high fringes of palm fronds
Ogún ties on his cutlass with a belt of cotton
Ogún of the sharp black cutlass

Hoe is the child of Ogún
Axe is the child of Ogún
Gun is the child of Ogún

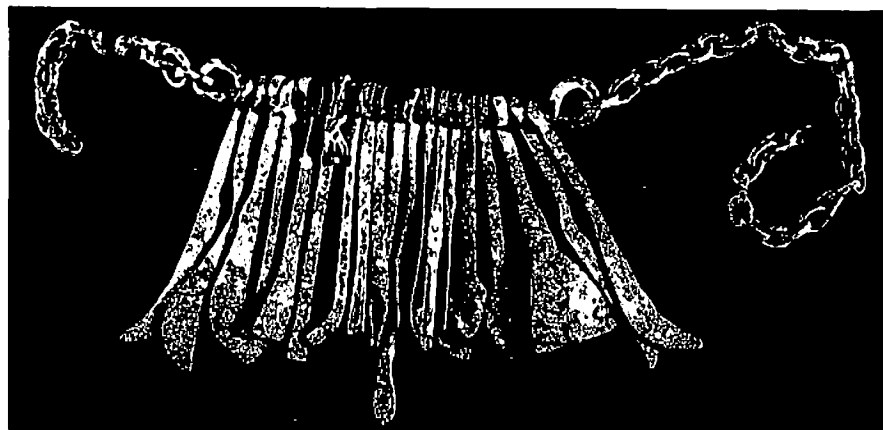
Ogún, salute of iron on stone
The blacksmith of all heaven.¹⁰¹

Ogún therefore lives in the piercing or slashing action of all iron. Lord of the cutting edge, he is present even in the speeding bullet or railway locomotive.

He is honored by liturgical jewelry, iron or brass. For example, in the region of Ilesha, whence came many captives to western Cuba and northeastern Brazil, important priests, Aworo and Owari, wear each year during the Obanifun festival a splendid brass pendant of miniature metal emblems, symbolizing iron's self-multiplying powers and potentiality (Plate 33).¹⁰² This fine display of metal emblems is the pendant of Ogún (*amula ogun*). Our example comes from the old Ilesha forge of Oginnin Ajirotitu.

According to the recollection of the late blacksmith's surviving son, Oginnin completed this pendant for Ogún at some point between 1900 and 1925.¹⁰³ Richly patinated, the signs of the *àshe* of Ogún are here specially made in brass, the customary medium used by Oginnin.

PLATE 33



The *amula* bristles with twenty miniaturized Ogún emblems: three curved swords of the kind special to the Ogún cult; an iron hairpin called *ikoti*; an implement given as *oyiya* (obscured in the photograph); a flaring instrument used for tapping palm wine; a smaller version of the same implement; a strip of chain symbolizing Ogún's uniting force; the curved clapper of an iron bell; a miniature *agogo* bell for Osanyin; pincers for Osanyin and for Ogún; a snake "fighting for Ogún"; the penis of Ogún, partially obscuring a further curved clapper or, alternatively, a curved stick for drumming; a needle; two iron arrows; a large ceremonial iron bell; a knife for the patron deity, Owari; a sword for Owari.¹⁰⁴ The emblems, counting the heavy chain from which they hang, make up twenty-one separate pieces, a multiple of the characteristic number of Ogún, seven.¹⁰⁵

Major and minor versions of the same basic implements sometimes appear together here, and a constellation of further objects united by a kind of visual pun—i.e., penis-stick-needle—further deepens our appreciation of the infinity of Ogún's power, for implements in iron are to his cult as pieces of lateritic stone are to Elegba, or palm nuts to Ifá.

The imaginative force of this visual tradition swept across the Yoruba New World. For example, evidence of Yoruba emblematic

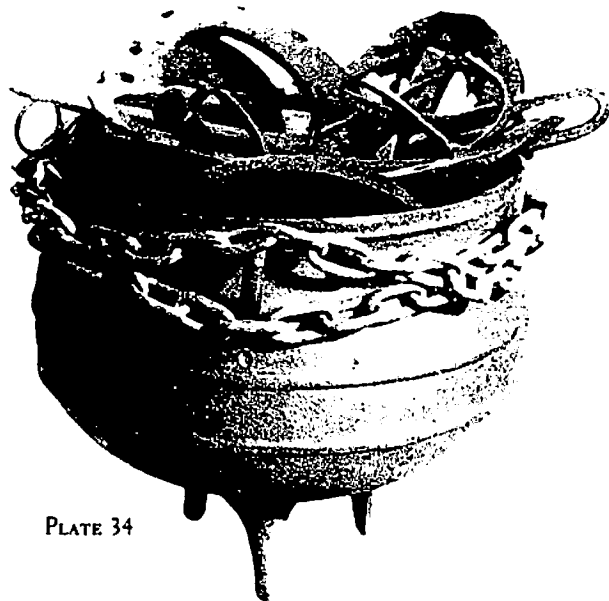


PLATE 34

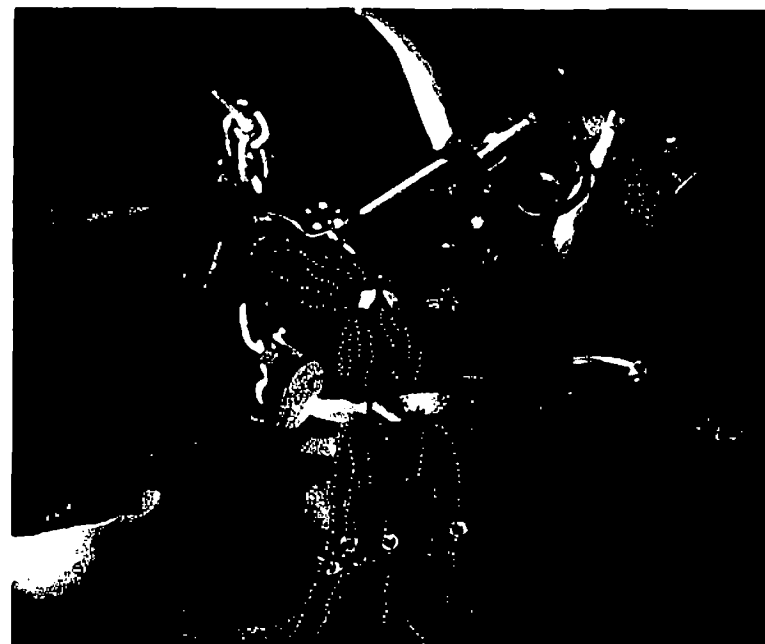


PLATE 35

iron appeared in Cuba no later than 1868: "in Guanabacoa an iron bar was found, one third sunk into the ground, with a crescent-form ornament at the top, from the sides of which hung four hooks with blood-sprinkled trinkets in the form of shovels, hoes, knives, and hammers".¹⁰⁶

Ogún art in Cuba today includes the bucket-shaped iron cauldron (*caldero de ogún*). Such objects (Plate 34) are full of various expressions of ironwork, such as nails, iron bows and arrows, horseshoes, and fetters, thus fusing token pieces of his medium within the programmatic arrangements of the *amula* with an iron cooking vessel, as if to prepare a mighty broth of iron.¹⁰⁷ Note that the illustrated cauldron for Ogún is tightly wrapped with chains of iron, echoing a major element of the *amula*. The Cuban migration to North America has resulted in the establishment of the *caldero de ogún* tradition in Miami and New York, with fanciful additions, such as a shrine in the New York area in 1979 that has a *caldero de ogún* with an actual pistol (Plate 35).¹⁰⁸

Ogún is one of the most popular of the *orisha* among Brazilian

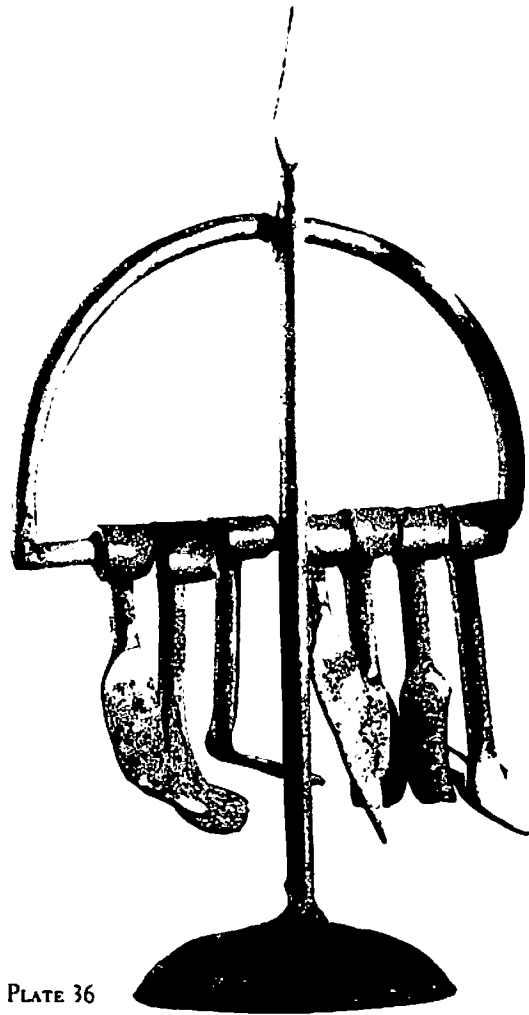


PLATE 36

blacks. Again, as in Nigeria and the Benin Republic, Brazilians honor Ogún by placing upon his altar separate pieces of iron as well as special miniaturized examples of his implements, called in Bahia *ferramentas de ogún* (Ogún irons), which, like giant beads or pendants, are often pierced and threaded through a length of wire or piece of chain or thread. Recife is a rich source of such objects, but Salvador is perhaps the Brazilian city most famous for Yoruba symbolic iron. There, in the summer of 1968, I found José Adario dos

Santos making *ferramentas de Ogún* at his forge on the Ladeira da Conceição above the harbor.

Earlier, in the spring of 1965, Richard and Emerante Morse collected one of his works in the Mercado Modelo (Plate 36), illustrating how Dos Santos follows firm Yoruba canons of expression while at the same time designating modern tools of iron as extensions of Ogún's realm. Here Dos Santos suspends seven iron implements—knife, sword, hoe, spear, knifelike object, shovel, pick—from the iron bow of the hunter-god, Oshoosi, Ogún's mythic brother and companion. The number of the pendants is significant, for in the *candomblés* of Bahia the deity is praised as "Seven Ogún" (Ogún Meje),¹⁰⁹ which alludes to the multiplication of his *àshe* in tools of iron, and this reflects the influence of Nigerian Yoruba praise poetry and lore, as in an Oyo ballad of the hunters where the deity of war and smithing is saluted with the phrase "seven iron signs of the god of iron." But there are also emblems with twenty-one miniature pieces of iron in Bahia, as at Ilesha and in Dahomey.

Ogún's absorption of industrially made iron implements in his arsenal of ritual attributes is paralleled by the advance of the same elements into the realm of Afro-Brazilian myths:

[Ogún] . . . wished to find his brother [Oshoosi]. He entered his father's forge and there made seven instruments—pick, pick-axe, axe, scythe, spear, cutlass, and shovel. He carried them over his shoulder and entered the forest. . . . [By means of these implements] he forced his way into the forest until he found his brother . . . put him on his shoulders, and returned home.¹¹⁰

Thus, across the Atlantic, iron instruments are all, in the end, the children of Ogún, carried on his broad and mighty shoulders. He directs their energies to benefit those who earn his love through ties of kinship and those who make sacrifices and festivals in his name. The icons of Ogún are not, however, for the lazy or the irreverent. Ogún marches only with the spiritually vital and the quick of hand.

Oshoosi

The brother of Ogún, Oshoosi, himself quick and strong, ultimately emerged as the deity of the hunters, the fabled archer of the gods.

The power of this deity is manifest in the speed and accuracy of his arrow, in prideful assertion of mind and muscle that have been wonderfully honed by the disciplines of forest hunting:

He is all alone and very handsome
 Handsome even in quality of voice
 Vital, he arises in the morning.
 Bow and arrow already about his neck.
 Small or hugely-built, the hunter is stronger than most men
 Oshoosi quickly unleashes his arrow.
 We see him only to embrace a shadow.¹¹¹

When this man of determined muscle becomes a shadow, all that remains is his hunter's fly whisk (*irukere*), his arrow (*ofa*), and his bow (*orun*). His arrow and his bow have been specially rendered in honorific iron or brass since time immemorial. These metal representations of a single arrow heraldically crossing a single bow at its center (Plate 37) form, in Nigerian Yorubaland, part of the traditional Oshoosi sacrificial altar (*ojubo oshoosi*). In the winter of 1964 I visited such a shrine, under the famous Olumo Rock of the Egba and Egbado metropolis of Abeokuta. An early European notice of a shrine for Oshoosi is dated 1857: "a huge iron bow, heavy with the weight of hundreds of strings of cowries hanging from it, and from small iron cylinders in which are miniature arrows."¹¹²

The relationship between the cult of Oshoosi and the actual practice of archery in traditional Yorubaland can only be surmised, given present evidence, but it is worth mentioning that in the nineteenth century the English explorer Lander claimed that the Oyo Yoruba "have the reputation of being the best bowmen in Africa," and that Yoruba arrows carried iron heads.¹¹³ This provides another, practical reason for the close association between Oshoosi and the lord of iron.

In Bahia, Oshoosi represents the pantheon of the hunters of the Yoruba. He is one of the *orisha* most worshipped by persons of Ketu Yoruba descent. Therefore, the search for antecedents to aspects of Bahian worship of Oshoosi logically begins in Ketu in the People's Republic of Benin. There Deoscoredes dos Santos found that the fly whisk for Oshoosi and its associated lore were similar to Bahian expressions. More important, he found in Ketu a strange, bramble-like shrine, the *ojubo oshoosi*, for sacrifice to Oshoosi that is similar to certain altars in Bahia for the same deity.¹¹⁴ If the hunter's fly whisk illustrates the medicine that Oshoosi carries with him into the forest, the bramblelike sacrificial shrine—dry, leafless branches placed in a careful pile on the earth—mysteriously brings the forest to the village.

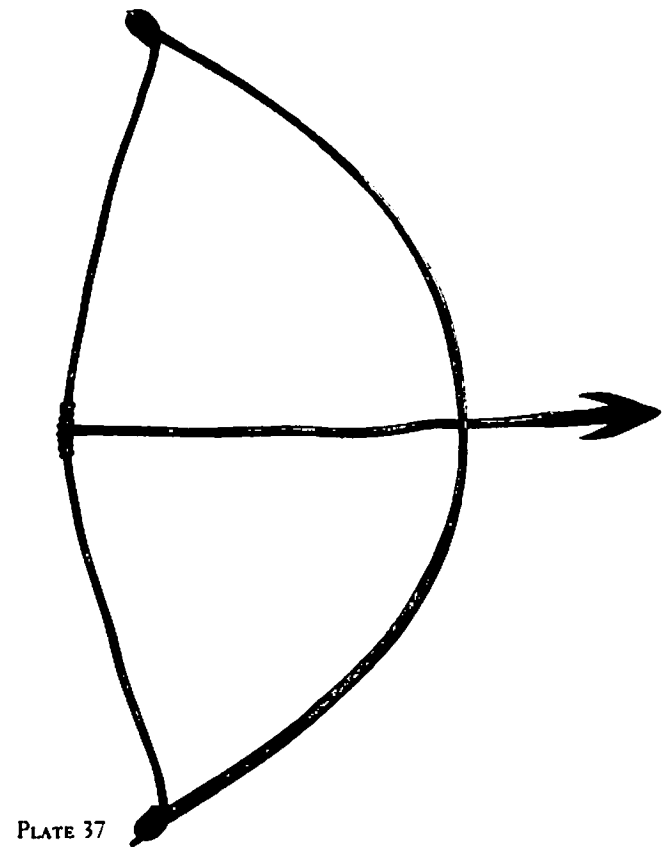


PLATE 37

Metal bows and arrows for Oshoosi, fashioned in the Nigerian ideographic pattern, took root in Bahia. Among the blacks of Bahia the emblem was sometimes called *damata oshoosi*, based on a praise-verse that describes the archer as a man who combines the strength of three hunters (*ode meta*) within a single person. It is a praise-verse that came to western Cuba as well as to northeastern Brazil. The interconnections between Oshoosi and Ogún fit the fact that the sign of the lord of the hunters is frequently shown together with the pendant iron implements of Ogún both in Brazil and Cuba. Afro-Bahian versions are straightforwardly additive; they have a metal bow and arrow, the bow of which serves as a bar on which to suspend the seven or twenty-one pendant miniature implements of Ogún (Plate 36). The arrow is the vertical accent and is soldered to a stand

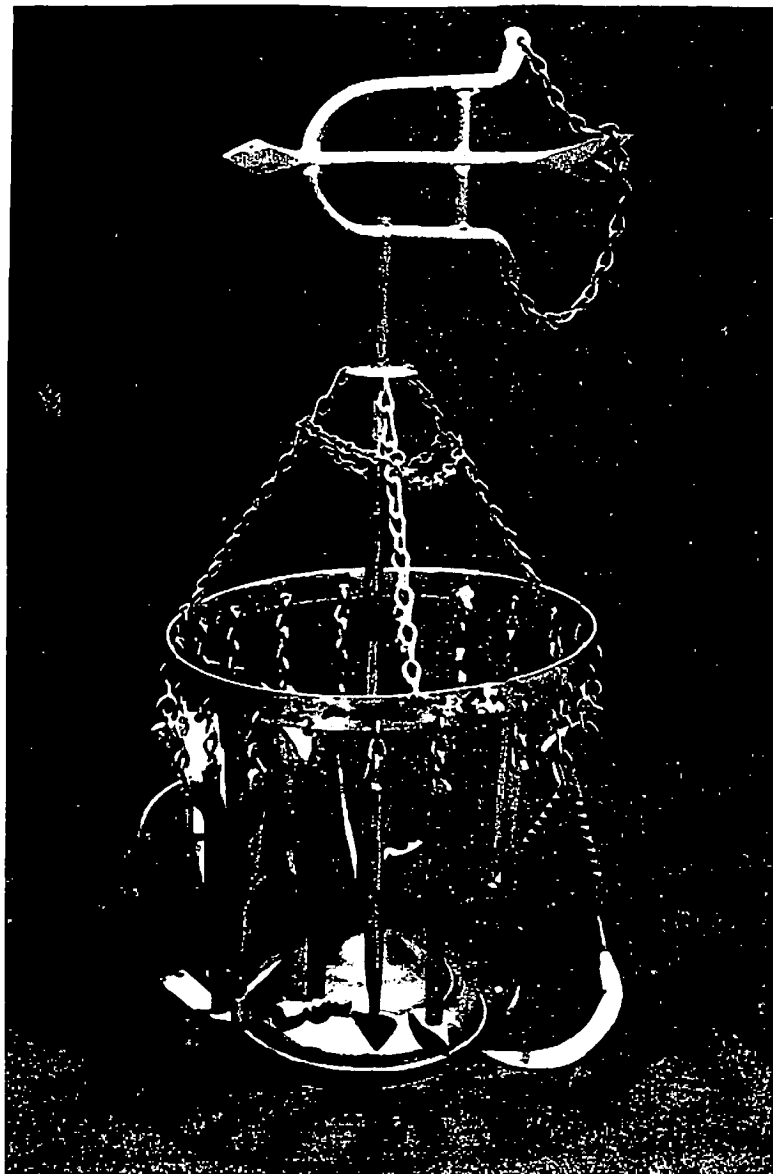


PLATE 38

or is sharpened at both ends so that it can be driven into the earthen floor of a traditional shrine or altar.

In Cuba combined signs of Ogún and Oshoosi have flourished since the nineteenth century, and most of these are simplified statements. But occasionally craftsmen have made elaborate fusions of art for Oshoosi and Ogún, as in an apparently twentieth-century exam-

ple now in the Institute of Ethnography in Havana (Plate 38). Here the sign of Oshoosi, like a flag of Nimrod, presides over the emblems of Ogún Alagbede (Ogún the Blacksmith). The metal sign of Oshoosi is set atop a kind of carousel of rotating avatars of iron—lengths of chain, a horseshoe, a pick, an ax, a hammer, an arrow, a sledgehammer, a hook, a scythe, and many other objects. Particularly affective is the garlanding of the whole with ornamental pieces of chain, the ancient Yoruba ideogram for the unifying power of the deities. Since World War II similar objects, usually reduced in scale and degree of elaboration, have appeared in the Hispanic barrios of some cities in New England, New Jersey, and New York.

Wherever Oshoosi is honored, the canon of his icon has remained intact. He seems to have lifted, invisibly, his bow and arrow, and taken aim, as if to protect the panoply of Ogún's iron, as if to return the debt established when Ogún marched with these implements to find his brother in the forest.

Obaluaiye

Obaluaiye's power to heal or conjure smallpox (or other dread disease) makes his cult feared and respected in Yorubaland. He is an earth deity who strikes down the arrogant and the immoral alike with "spears" of pestilence and fever. Informants have spoken of the danger of walking alone when the sun is hot at noon, when Obaluaiye and his followers, all dressed in scarlet, are believed to haunt the earth, and of the danger of wearing red or loud patterns for fear the deity, enraged at the appropriation of his prerogatives, might harm them.¹¹⁵

British colonial authorities banned the cult in Nigeria in 1917, when Obaluaiye priests were accused of deliberately spreading smallpox.¹¹⁶ But members of the cult, confident of their insights and their moral worth, refused to be intimidated. They took their worship underground. They worshipped Obaluaiye under different names, e.g., the Lord (Oluwa). The strength of his lore in modern Nigeria is illustrated by the continuity of the old belief that it was dangerous to call him by his name, for one would thereby spread his dread disease, *shoPONNON* (smallpox). Today even some English-speaking Yoruba use the circumlocution "S.P." when alluding to smallpox.¹¹⁷

The terror can be harnessed, however, to shock the thoughtless into social awareness and concern:

If you are rich, you do not laugh at the poor—
 Little people can become grand
 When you come into the world
 You own neither a wife, nor a car, nor a bike
 Nothing you have brought and
 No one knows the future.¹¹⁸

These verses suggest that epidemics—the fiery, annihilating hand of Obaluaiye—can bring about social conscience because they could topple the rich and the powerful. Once aroused by arrogant behavior, the spirit of Obaluaiye is dangerously difficult to appease: “The glowing embers are difficult to stamp out.”¹¹⁹ Obaluaiye is thus a complex god, who inspires a complex set of verses in which the themes of terror and moral retribution are interwoven in a thousand different ways. The following conveys some sense of the peculiar beauty of the poetry chanted in his name:

Wild animal, with whom we have been entrusted
 Your bird cannot strike my bird.
 King of precious beads, death who flees at dawn.
 Leaf poised upon the surface of the water.
 Black hunter, physique covered by a gown of raffia
 Falls mightily, blocks the road, as a thorn.
 Thorn penetrates, man enters town with limp.
 No one should walk alone at noon.¹²⁰

The images caught within these verses are almost filmic, so swiftly realized are the shifting nightmare changes. Obaluaiye emerges, dressed in broomlike strands of raffia straw, then is suddenly transformed into a mighty force—falling like a tree that blocks the road, and then becomes a thorn.

The thorn is a metaphor for the pestilential needle of his morally aroused vengeance. Hence a hapless person—foolish enough to ignore warnings not to walk alone at noon when the sun is at its strongest and the sands, domain of the deity, literally heat up between his toes—is pricked by the thorn. We recoil in horror, knowing that with his limp he brings doom to the village.

Thorn imagery suggests the specially planted species of cactus dedicated to Obaluaiye and found on public shrines in the Ketu Yoruba area of eastern Benin.¹²¹ It also leads to two of the mystic weapons of his arsenal of disease: an arrowlike object (*esin*) wrapped in scarlet cloth and kept on his shrine; and a lance (*oko*), sometimes plain, sometimes decorated with cowrie shells and special tassels.

Both are extensions of the idea of something that pricks the flesh and inflames with lethal pain. Obaluaiye's full complement of attributes also includes the club, one of the most ancient and rudimentary of the weapons of the Yoruba—in this case, the rather generously sized specimen known as the *kumo*, covered with rust-colored camwood paste.

There is a line of poetry praising the deity as a man covered with raffia fiber, as if he were a walking broom—a Yoruba traditional whisk broom with a short handle and long fiber. As a matter of fact, extensive broom imagery characterizes the cult of Obaluaiye.

The Yoruba whisk broom, sacralized by the addition of medicines and camwood paste sprinkled on the straw, is one of the more formidable and famous of Obaluaiye's emblems. Ifá tells us that when he is enraged, Obaluaiye takes this special broom and spreads sesame seeds (*yamoti*) on the earth before him, then sweeps the seeds before him, in ever-widening circles. As the broom begins to touch the dust and the dust begins to rise, the seeds, like miniature pockmarks, ride the wind with their annihilating powers: the force of a smallpox epidemic is thereby unleashed.¹²² According to Dos Santos, the cult name for this horrific broom, *shashara*, is said to represent a fusion of two roots in Yoruba, “pitting with smallpox” (*shasha*) and “human body” (*ara*).¹²³

The worship of the deity is widely known in the Benin Republic under the Fon term *Sakpata*. Some of the more beautiful of the verses in his honor have been elaborated at his festival in Abomey, Benin. The Dahomean elaboration of his cult traveled, with the Yoruba version, to Cuba and to Brazil, and there they reinforced themselves. For example, the deity is known by a creole Yoruba term in Cuba, “Babalú Ayé,” the title of a famous Afro-Cuban café song of the 1940's, but his broom is called by the Dahomean term *ha* (spelled *já* in Spanish), and is richly beaded and decked with cowries (Plate 39), as in Dahomey, here illustrated with royal beaded Yoruba-Cuban fly whisks for the gods.

Dahomean style is also reflected in the shaping of the smallpox broom in Brazil. The original *ha* of the region of Abomey has a special medicated handle covered with crimson cloth decked with rich, ornamental bands of cowrie-shell embroidery. Emerging from the handle are the long, bound center fibers of the leaf of the *palma vinifera*. There is a hint of the “bush” in the manner in which the fibers of the *ha* explode this way and that in a twisting of strands

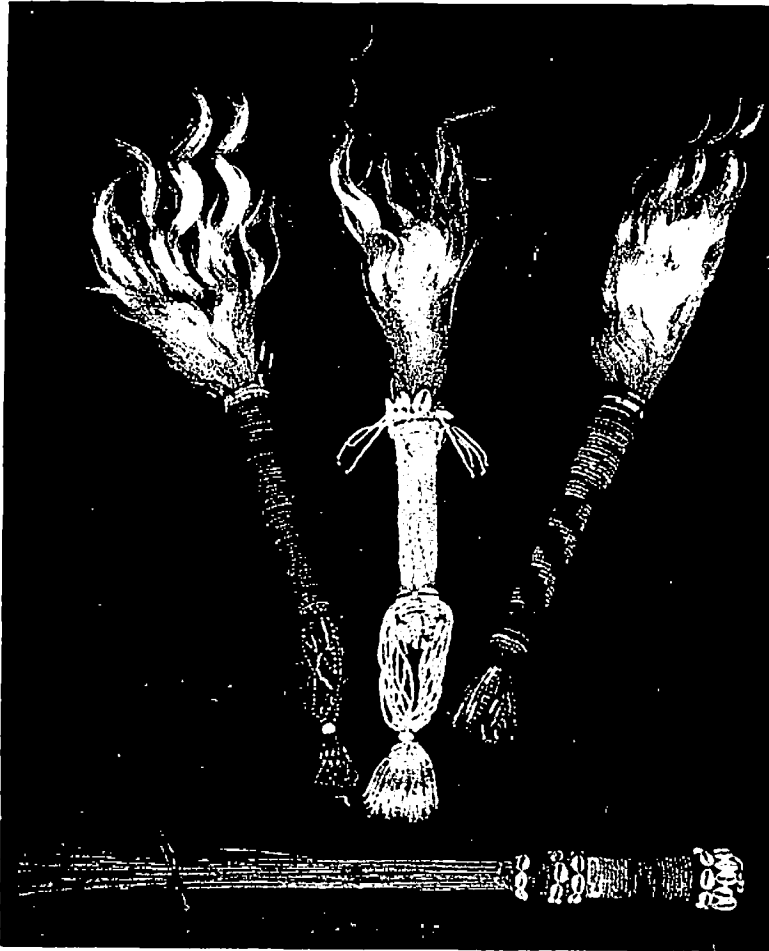


PLATE 39

at the working end of the instrument, whereas the fibers at the base are tightly bound together. The smallpox priest who carries this mystic broom is dressed in special garments, including a bonnet and armbands, all embellished with cowrie-shell embroidery.

The latter elements of Dahomean ritual dress, brilliantly miniaturized and recombined in the making of the creole smallpox brooms of Bahia, give rise to one of the most beautiful objects of the black Atlantic world (Plate 40). The *ja* of Dahomey in the process of transformation into the *shashara* of Bahia acquires the noble still-

ness of a column, so neatly cut and tightly bound are the fibers, which are enclosed by bands of ornamental leather often sited near the bottom and at the middle of the broom fibers as well as at the handle. These bands are richly appliquéd, in the Dahomean manner, with cowrie shells. They dress the object with the logic of a Dahomean priest's attire. In the end a whisk broom, glittering with crimson, white, black, and other colors, becomes a kind of abstract jewelry, made of shells and straw and leather.

These changes parallel an apparent shift in function. When Obaluaie appears, dressed in his appropriate raiment, in the dances of the temples of Bahian blacks, he rarely carries, so it is reported, his club or arrow. Instead, he bears a lance or broom with motions underscoring a gentler mood. The broom is "danced" with gestures that are smooth and orchestrated, as if to suggest a sweeping away of terror, light-years removed from the scattering of sesame seeds amid dark clouds of dust. In short, the Afro-Bahian *shashara* is more a royal scepter than an object of use—hence the almost speculative manner in which its ancient functions are recalled.

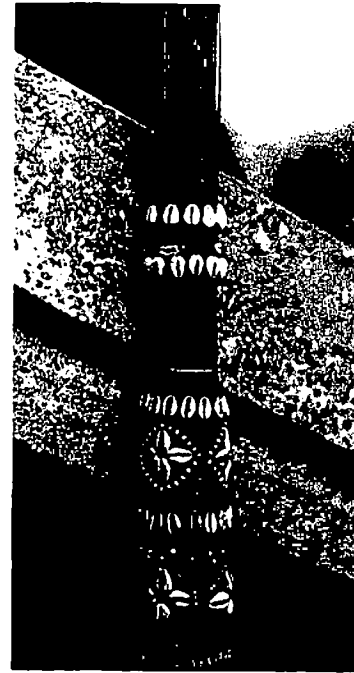


PLATE 40

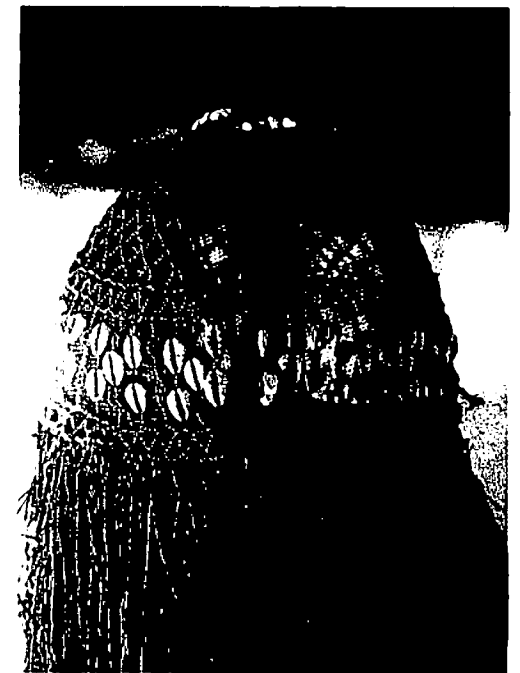


PLATE 41

But there is nothing muted about the intimation of African forest energies and fierceness projected in the impressive all-raffia crown (*ade iko*) (Plate 41) and all-raffia gown (*ewu iko*) that are prepared by specialists in Bahia for possession-devotees to wear when the spirit of Obaluaiye fills them. This is a form of dress that directly recalls

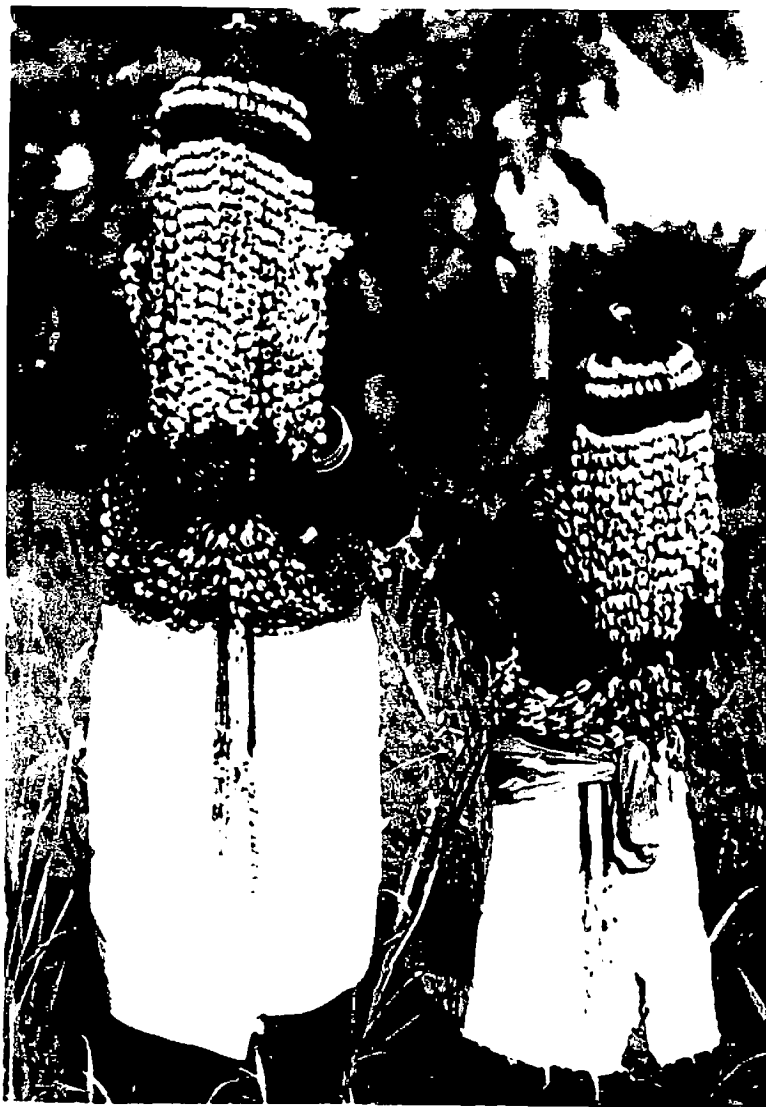


PLATE 42

not only the Nigerian verse about "black hunter, physique covered by a gown of raffia" but also the conical shape and veil of both Dahomean smallpox deity costuming and one of the main forms of Yoruba royal headgear (Plates 42 and 43).

The roots of the Afro-Bahian raffia gown are therefore various.



PLATE 43

North of the Fon in the Benin Republic there is a famous shrine to the mother of Obaluaiye, Nana Bukúu, on a platform by a baobab tree, overlooking the Yoruba settlement of Dassa-Zoumé (Plate 44).¹²⁴ Here there is a standing cylinder of clay over which has been fitted a raffia garment, communicating the presence of a spirit and bringing to mind the image of a whisk broom given animate solidity and form. Obaluaiye is an earth deity and here the body of his mother, as it were, like Eleggba, acquires a flesh of laterite, a flesh covered over with raw fiber, the dress of spirits across West Africa. The summit of this strange image is surmounted by a raffia crown with a stemmed finial, also in raffia—details matched by the style of the Afro-Bahian crown for Obaluaiye (cf. Plate 44 with Plate 41).¹²⁵

According to the Lagosian cult of Ejiwa, the earth deity gave Eshu, when the latter was scarred with smallpox marks, a garment made of raffia, of a thickness sufficient to keep flies from swarming about his wounds. Hence, Ifá tells us, the Ejiwa (Eshu) masquerader to this day appears completely shrouded in raffia.¹²⁶ Lagos, of course, was intimately linked to Bahia in the Atlantic trade, as were territories to the north of the Fon. The primary image of the Ejiwa cult is a most suggestive clue in the search for the origins of the idea of concealment by raffia of the signs of smallpox. In fact, Afro-Bahian informants explicitly claim that the raffia veil of Obaluaiye hides a face ravaged by the disease.

Nana Bukúu

Nana Bukúu is the mother of Obaluaiye, and such is her importance in Dahomey that there she has come to be considered the grand ancestress of all the Yoruba-derived (Anagonu) deities of the pantheon of the Fon. The name of Nana is famous from Ife in Nigeria to Siade and Tchari in Ghana. It is believed that none other than the kings of Asante and Dagomba sent gifts to her shrines in time of war. These kings sought her blessing because of her fabled powers to bring a city victory, to render in ruins the cities of one's enemies. She herself was a superlative warrior, utterly fearless, who razed the mythic city of Teju-ade.¹²⁷

Nana Bukúu is the courage and accomplishment of women, sublimed to the form of an *orisha*. She knows terrifying secrets. She shares with her son, Obaluaiye, the smallpox god, master symbols: raffia-made regalia. Nana and her son are both represented by special



PLATE 44

staffs made of palm-frond fibers tied together, which collectively symbolize the ancestors and cryptically communicate awesome levels of initiation.

Her primary icon is the *ileeshin* (a Ketu term). It is essentially from Ketu, this ancient settlement, its cultural provinces, and neigh-



PLATE 45

boring territory that the cult of Nana was brought to Bahia, where she is spectacularly honored with the *ileeshin*. Made from the same materials as the broom of Obaluaie, the *ileeshin* is, however, an entirely original instrument with its own logic of form and function. It is not loosely structured at its summit like the *ha* of the Fon. Instead, its strawlike elements almost disappear beneath rich coatings of camwood paste and leather-covered sections often dyed the darkest blue (Plate 45). The summit of the staff is striking—it curls back upon itself, like the tail of a leopard, leaving a strange oval space outlined at the top. This noose-shaped tip is believed to embody Nana's *àshe*, Nana's intimidating powers:

The *ileeshin* cannot touch a man or boy. Its tip is dangerous. And if a woman holds it, all during the time that it rests in her hand she must not speak any evil of an animal or a man. But, if a cruel and horrible person stands before her, she can take the *ileeshin gogo*, thrust it out horizontally before her and strike its looped tip against the belly of the man.¹²⁸

Instantly the man would fall back, arms outspread in a gesture of pain and shock, stomach instantly bloated.¹²⁹ Then he would die. Attacking an evil person in the region of the belly, causing it to swell even as the person dies, suggests that Nana presides over the giving—pregnancy—and the taking away of life itself. She is equally capable of bringing children into the world or causing doom, depending on a person's goodness or lack of character.¹³⁰

The nooselike tip of Nana's staff is glossed by a legend recorded by Dos Santos:

Nana has possessed a certain staff from the beginning of her life on earth. The name of the staff was *Ìbiriri*. She was born with this staff; it was not given to her by anyone. . . . when she was born the staff was embedded in the placenta. Ornamental cowries decked this curled staff, and fine ornaments. After it was born it curled into a noose (*ó sù ká kóróbójó*). Then they cut it from the placenta and they put it inside the earth. But surprisingly, as the infant grew, the staff grew, too. It was the very staff that Nana used when she went to war against the Teju-ade and it was her son who dug it out of the earth. That is why they call it *Ìbiriri*, my son-found-it-and brought-back-to-me. She used this staff as a medicine of victory. Many modes of mystic potentiality open up for the person who holds this staff. If the people of a town know to use this staff they will be able to prevent war. . . .¹³¹

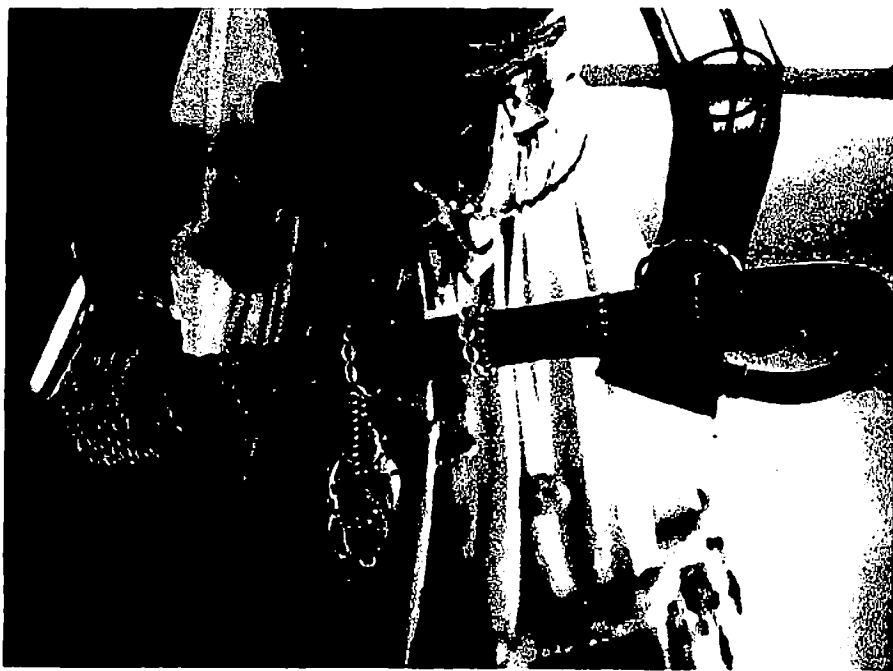


PLATE 46

The Yoruba staff was creatively transformed in northeastern Brazil, where the *ileeshin* is called *ibiri*. Appropriately, this emblem of the mother of the smallpox deity is fashioned in Bahia by the Asogba, the supreme head of the devotees of Obaluaiye. The Asogba consecrates, makes, and entrusts to the priestesses mounted by Nana the *ibiri* of Bahia, and conceals powerful medicines in the base of the object. Our example (Plate 46), photographed in the Museu de Arte Popular in Bahia in 1968, captures the degree of artistic independence of the Brazilian form: there is at once a diminishing of the Ketu tradition of heavily coating the fibers of the object with red camwood and a heightening of the Ketu manner of encircling the straw with strips of leather. A war medicine becomes a work of art.

Yemoja (Yemayá)

Yoruba riverain goddesses are represented by round fans (*abebe*), crowns (*ade*)—some with beaded fringes—and earthenware vessels (*awota*) filled with water collected from the river or from the sea, rounded stones, and sand. Those who worship these powerful underwater women long ago devised an artistic strategy, the use of the round fan as an emblem embodying the coolness and command of these spirits of the water.

Myths explain the meaning of the roundness of the fans. According to the verses of Ifá, the round fan was a fashion of the goddesses of ancient Ife.¹³² And it came to pass that Ifá, god of divination, after a quarrel with the river goddesses, departed from the holy city, whereupon a terrifying famine struck the world. Ifá hid in the forest, in a round house made of leaves and saplings (oddly recalling Pygmy structures of Central Africa). As the crisis worsened people consulted diviners. Speaking through the sacred divination instruments, Ifá said that only the river goddesses themselves, including Yemoja, noted for her use of a round fan, could persuade him to return. Each female spirit took a fan, like the round one of Yemoja, and together they all went into the forest seeking the spirit of Ifá, throwing stones at anything solid that they saw. When they threw stones at the round house of Ifá, he shouted, “Who is throwing stones at my house!” (*Tani só kò lò run!*). They replied, “We are, and we wish to see you.” When they saw him standing before his round house, they immediately started to fan him, then begged him as they fanned him, gave him a special feast and fanned him again. And Ifá was persuaded to return and the famine ended.¹³³

This is a retelling of a myth with a thousand voices, the myth of conflict that threatens to destroy the world and of the discovery of antidotes in mystic coolness. In another version two round droplets of water remaining in the mouth of a single fish reconstitute the peace that brought back order into the world.¹³⁴ Here, in the legend of Yemoja and Ifá, a special rounded fan—like a giant soothing drop of water—restores peace and calm, associating itself with the image of Ifá’s cool round house made of herbs and leaves. An indelible current of association links the roundness of habitations to the roundness of things pertaining to riverain goddesses.¹³⁵

But the coolness of the riverain goddesses is problematic. Vengeance, doom, and danger also lurk within the holy depths (*ibu*) of the rivers where the goddesses are believed to dwell. In the nineteenth-century Yoruba civil wars, warriors from Ibadan and Ijaiye, after killing the king of Owu, were terrified by what the aroused spirit of the murdered king might do. So they temporarily dammed the river Oshun, buried the king’s body in the river basin, and then released the waters.¹³⁶ The logic: to bury the king deep beneath the rippling surfaces of the river would muffle the roar of his spirit and neutralize and appease his awesome powers of *àshe*. Similarly, the cool, dark depths of the river may shield mankind from the full blast

of the fiery powers of witchcraft harnessed by the river goddesses.

What is more, a fan can be dangerous if brandished by a person steeped in moral and medicinal lore. For Yemoja and all the other riverain goddesses, especially Oshun and Oya, who presides over the river Niger, are famed for their "witchcraft." They are supreme in the arts of mystic retribution and protection against all evil.

Many riverain goddesses are visualized as women with swords. The sword, together with the negative uses of the fan, may be said to form in part an image of what Judith Hoch-Smith calls "radical Yoruba female sexuality":

Without the concept of witchcraft, power would have flowed naturally through society, lodging only in socially structured positions, most of which were held by men in the traditional Yoruba patrilineage. However, the concept of witchcraft permitted great quantities of power to become lodged in women, who in turn were thought to use that power against the institutions of society. In this sense, witchcraft symbolizes the eternal struggle of the sexes in Yoruba society over control of the life-force.¹³⁷

Witchcraft, in fact, militates against not only total male dominance but the threat of class formation and drastically unequal distribution of wealth. At the core of the all-powerful council of male elders, the Ogboni Society, lies the awesome image of their deity, Earth, all-devouring, all-seeing. It is believed that man as such and woman as such asked themselves, "Who is supreme?" And out of the earth came the white-hot message: I AM SUPREME!¹³⁸ And Earth was, in a manner beyond sex or class or any consideration contaminated by singleness of expectation. Just as we arrive among the western Yoruba in the presence of God to discover that "he" is not he, nor she, but a pure force—*àshe* of *àshe*—so the impartial laserlike precision of the punishing vision of Earth, who was here before the goddesses and before the gods, implies a power beyond "her" sex.¹³⁹

Imperially presiding in the palaces beneath the sands at the bottom of the river, the riverain goddesses are peculiarly close to Earth. In the positive breeze of their fans, the ripple of their water, there is coolness. In the darkness of their depths and in the flashing of their swords, there is witchcraft. And within the shell-strewn floor of their underwater province there is bounteous wealth. Yoruba riverain goddesses are therefore not only the arbiters of the happiness of their people but militant witches. Their negative power is alluded to in oral literature:

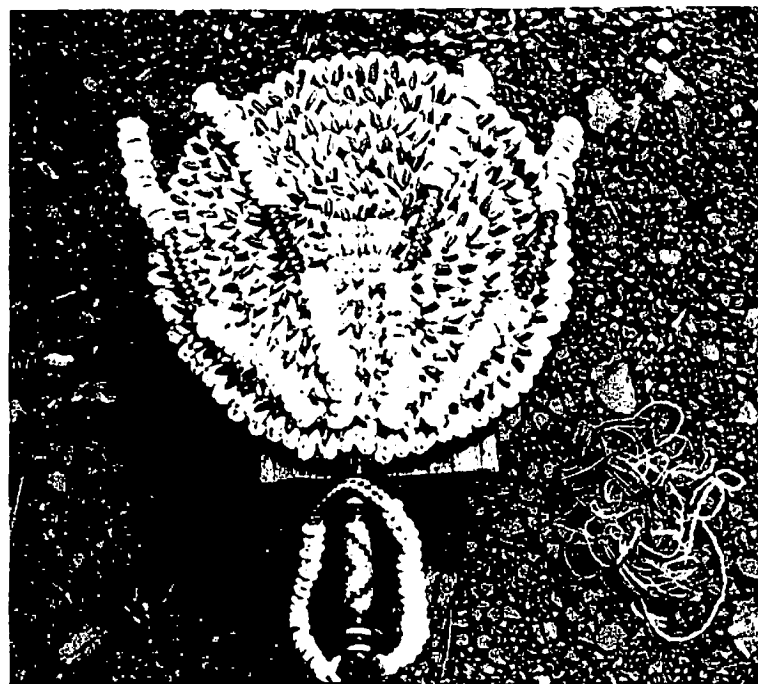


PLATE 47

Yemoja, the wind that whirls with force into the land.

Yemoja, angered water that smashes down the metal bridge.¹⁴⁰

But this is power used against the human arrogance of Western technocratic structures. The natural goodness within the evil of these water spirits is invoked by righteous devotion. Thus, in Cuba, when a divination priest warned women that a certain river goddess had become dangerously angry, senior priestesses, like Yemoja and her circle before Ifá, would face the altar of the offended spirit and fan her image with strong concerted motions.¹⁴¹

Like an Ipokia shrine of the river goddess Yewa and the forest dwelling of Orunmila, and like the ancient fans of Ile-Ife, the Afro-Cuban ritual fans are round. They are decorated with a richness of material—beads, cowrie shells, jingle bells, even peacock feathers—surpassing that of the originals. For example, a Ketu Yoruba round fan for the goddess Are, wife of the founding deity Ondo, tutelary spirit for many groups of the western Yoruba, is luxuriously embroidered with cowrie shells (Plate 47). The structure and allusiveness

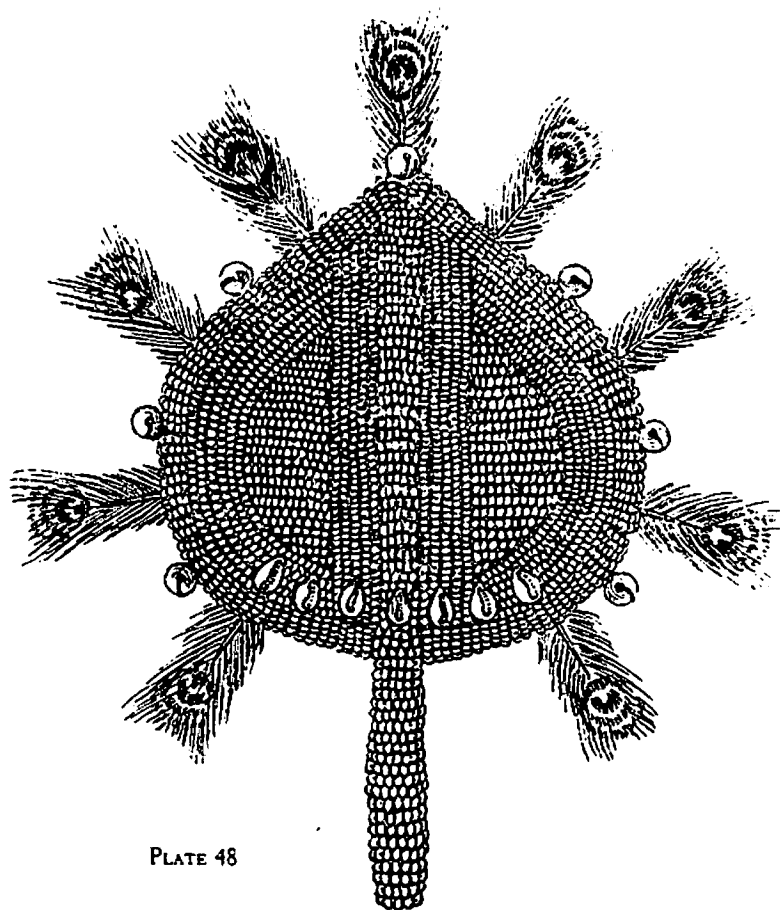


PLATE 48

of the round, shell-embroidered fan were complicated in Cuba by metallic or feathered embellishments. Thus a fan for the goddess of the sea, Yemayá, made in Cuba before 1952 but probably in this century, displays a brilliant surface entirely covered with beads in geometric sections (Plate 48). The design includes a lunette on the right, a lunette on the left, both separated by an ascending column of beaded surface that continues the axis of the handle to the very tip of this pointed fan. Seven cowrie shells in a smooth curve decorate the bottom portion of the fan. Nine peacock feathers, with seven jingle bells, add both pleasing sound and swaying movement. (Nine is one of the numbers of Yemayá in Africa, as in the Abeokuta

praise verse, "open river, divided into nine parts.")¹⁴² The feathers are seductively beautiful, but they all carry a charge associated with some birds, namely, witchcraft. The shells suggest the goddesses' money—all underwater creatures, who are close to the sources of the traditional cowrie currency and to the corals from which, in the ancient imagination, much wealth derived, are believed to be quite rich. The bells provide a gentle watery tinkle recalling a poem praising the goddess of the river Oshun that mentions copper bracelets chiming against each other underwater.¹⁴³

The religious history of the blacks of Rio is a palimpsest marked by Kongo, Yoruba, and Roman Catholic infusions, as will be elaborated on in the following chapter. Suffice it to say here that in the fusion of these elements—in the rise of the macumba religious groups of Rio—the arrow or the dagger and the heart of the Most Holy Virgin have combined with the imagery of Yemayá in the belief that both the Virgin and the goddess of the sea share qualities of sacred love, faith, and purity. In the creole fusion-image of Yemayá and the Virgin Mary, "sung points" strike through in the macumba shrines of Rio to an oceanic presence behind a Roman Catholic mask:

O Virgin Mary
 Like a flower superb
 Celestially harmonious . . .
 Reigning monarch of the seas.¹⁴⁴

In a superb white metal fan for Yemayá, probably made in the present century (but no later than August 1939, at which point it was accessioned by the National Historical Museum in Rio), the heart of Mary is returned to the sea in a petaled flower image (Plate 49) of Yemayá, with reflections of the latter's underwater wealth and celestial love suggested by pendants of miniature hearts and nineteenth-century Brazilian coinage. There is the crucial detail of the touching of the bottom of the heart by a sharpened, arrowheadlike point at the top of the handle of the fan, as in the "drawn point" that accompanies Rio sacred songs for Yemayá/the Virgin Mary. This is, of course, the seal of Nossa Senhora das Dôres, blending with the Yoruba tradition of honoring powerful underwater denizens with honorific fans. Finally, the scalloped edge circumscribes the entire composition with a sign of water.

The petals surrounding the inner heart suggest a floral image within water, which is implied by the wavy edge of the fan.¹⁴⁵ Each

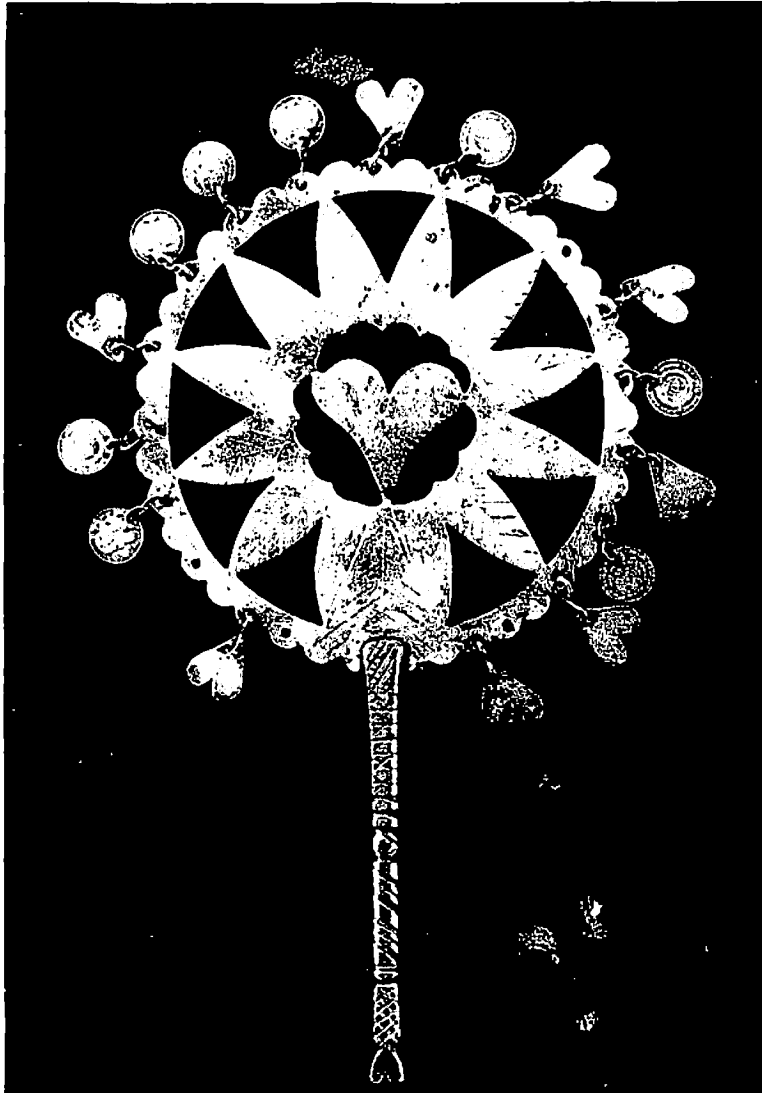


PLATE 49

New Year's Eve thousands upon thousands of black and white worshippers descend from the hills above and around the city of Rio and crowd the famous beaches of Copacabana and Ipanema in one of the most celebrated of the festivals for Yemayá in the western hemisphere. And one of the acts rendered, then, in her honor,

involves the tossing of sacrificial flowers into the breakers of the sea. Pierre Verger has photographed flowers in a container to be sunk beneath the waves in honor of Yemayá in Bahia. The image of flowers within the depths is another recollection of tradition in Yoruba New World worship. It recalls the ending of the festival of the riverain goddess, Oshun, with the throwing of flowers into her stream at Oshogbo, in Nigeria.¹⁴⁶

Oshun

Divination literature tells us that Oshun was once married to Ifá but fell into a more passionate involvement with the fiery thunder god, who carried her into his vast brass palace, where she ruled with him; she bore him twins and accumulated, as mothers of twins in Yorubaland are wont to do, money and splendid things galore. She owned a wealth of bracelets, staffs, needles, earrings—all in brass, the metal the Yoruba regard as most precious. When she died, she took these things to the bottom of the river. There she reigns in glory, within the sacred depths, fully aware that so much treasure means that she must counter inevitable waves of jealous witchcraft by constant giving, constant acts of intricate generosity. Even so, she is sometimes seen, crowned, in images of warlock capacity and power, brandishing a lethal sword, ready to burn and destroy immoral persons who incur her wrath, qualities vividly contrasting with her sweetness, love, and calm:

2

She greets the most important word within the water
 She is the orisha you see healing by means of water that is cool
 Iworo bird with brilliant plume upon her head
 Titled woman who heals the children . . .
 Witness of a person's ecstasy renewed
 She says: bad head—become good!
 Mistress of àshe, of full predictive power,
 She greets the most important matter in the water.
 Strong woman who burns a person.
 She cures without fee; gives honey to children
 Has lots of money, speaks sweetly to the multitude.

Nowhere is the kingly power of Oshun not renowned
 Oshun has a mortar made of brass
 Sweet is the touch of an infant's hand
 Kare, King of the holy depths
 She dances, she takes the crown . . .

The chiming bracelets of her dance.
 She smites the belly of the liar with her bell.
 Mother, O Mother of cool water,
 You, who sired the soothing osun herb.¹⁴⁷

Ecstatic praise literature. It is easy in the context of these verses and Oshun's reputation for great beauty to appreciate why she was romantically transmuted into the "love goddess" of many Yoruba-influenced blacks in the western hemisphere. But there are dark aspects to her love and the singers of her praises in Nigeria do not hesitate to mention them: her masculine prowess in war; her skill in the art of mixing deadly potions, of using knives as she flies through the night:

Woman wearing manly crown, oh so rare
 Owner of a piercing knife, I take my haven by your side
 You own the inner court, where witch-owl lays her eggs.
 You kill this owl, and make of her a strange cuisine . . .
 Arriving, trouble vanishes in coolness.
 Yeye Kare . . .
 You hollow out sands beneath the sea,
 You're putting money in there
 The water sounds, *wanran-wanran-wanran*, like the bracelets
 of Oshun.¹⁴⁸

But Oshun's darker side is ultimately protective of her people. This accounts for the famous material expression of her positive witchcraft among Cuban and New York Hispanic blacks, the *oshun kole* ornament that is hung from the ceiling of the house of its owner: "Oshun Kole lives in a calabash adorned with five turkey buzzard feathers, a calabash which is suspended from the ceiling."¹⁴⁹ The spray of "witch feathers" renders this suspended vessel into a kind of elevated devouring force. Like certain charms suspended from the rafters of reception porches used by some northern Yoruba chiefs and kings, the *oshun kole* is believed to protect the habitation from all evil. Our example, dated 1968 (Plate 50), was made in Hispanic New York and indicates a change in continuity from Nigeria via Cuba: the buzzard feathers have been replaced by store-bought plumes; the calabash is missing; and a single strand of brilliant copper-colored *oshun* beads with cowrie shell has been added.

Elderly informants of Lydia Cabrera remembered the use, at the turn of the century, of crowns with beaded fringes for Oshun in



PLATE 50

Havana. The praise-verse "Crowned Woman, O so rare" is brought to life by a proliferation of crowns for priests and priestesses of Oshun and riverain spirits in Brazil, many with veils that fall across the wearer's face in the ancient Yoruba manner.

Oshun's positive witchcraft gave rise to feathered charms in Cuba and New York. Her sovereign powers are celebrated by the crowns for Oshun in Brazil. But perhaps the most significant of her New World emblems are her round metallic fans. The idea of Oshun among the Ijesha Yoruba of Nigeria is brilliantly realized in circular fans of polished brass with chased and hammered figuration. One of the finest examples of the genre comes from Ilesha, the capital of the Ijesha; it was made in sheet brass around the turn of the century by the master brassmith Oginnin Ajirotitu Arode Onishona (Plate 51).

The symbols on the Oginnin fan are remarkable for their richness of allusion. First there is a link between the riverain goddess and the ultimate powers of Earth made explicit in praise literature. Here the closeness of the goddess of the water to the Supreme Being is manifested by the handle. From the bottom of the handle hang three chains, the mystic number of Earth. There are also two pairs of three small hearts chased within the surface of the handle. Altogether there are three statements of the power of Earth, who witnesses two-party vows and covenants.

The son of Oginnin explained the many meanings embedded in this fan as his father had explained them.¹⁵⁰ The summit of the



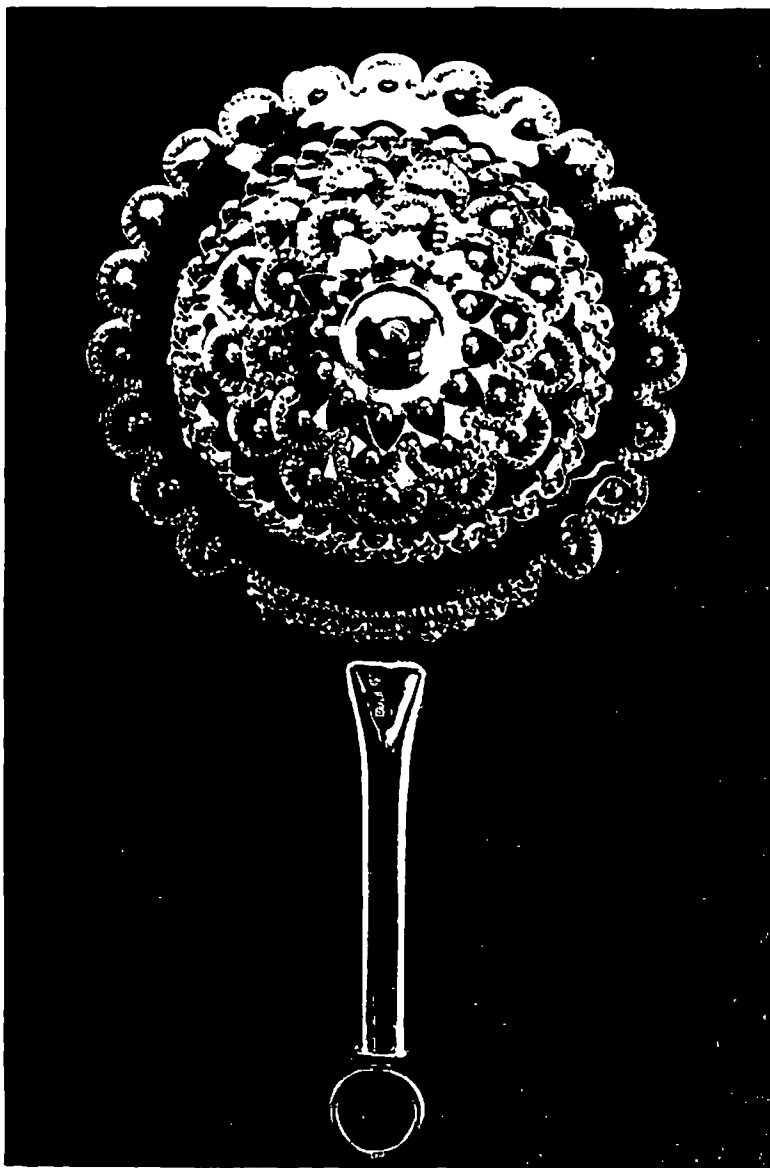
PLATE 51

program of decorative detail is dominated by the figure of Oshun herself, shown with hands held high above her head, "to greet a person with the sign of gladness, not by song." She unifies the world by holding a length of chain about her head, an action called I-tie-all-my-people-together (*mo so awon enia mi po*). Fish, in which her spirit moves within the river, appear as motifs, left and lower right.

Alluding to the feathered avatars in which she and her circle fly, there is a "bird of the river" (*karo*) standing beneath the fish on the right. Serpents also appear; they are messengers of Ogún's iron—"fighting evil men."

For all the signs of witchcraft and the clash of iron, lessons of the cool and antidotes to evil and to envy are richly given, too: a giant rat (*okete*), "not for the gods but for the cooling of the witches"; a tortoise (*ajapa*), "sacrifice to Osanyin, master of the medicines by which we live"; a cock; a hen; a Muslim writing-tablet ("carved with Ogún's iron"); and the image of a young woman with a bridal hairdo who brings a calabash filled with kola "for the greeting of the gods." These all connote giving and assuagement, acts that still the wind and calm the surface of the water. And all these images float timelessly about the central icon of the paired heads of Owari and Obanifun, spirits of war and creativity. The tip of the cartouche in which these male valences are contained touches the vagina of Oshun. The implication of the fan's program of symbols is precisely this: without constant rhythms of giving and responsibility, the fruitful union of Owari/Obanifun and Oshun would be no more and the withering famine described in many myths would return.

The buzz of mythic voices was silenced, as it were, when the brass fans were brought to Bahia. The chasing of symbols upon the surface in the Ilesha manner was apparently lost. All that remains of the originating tradition is the characteristic shaping of the fan in the round manner of the ancients and the use of polished metal as the medium. But metal fans for the river goddesses in Bahia have a creole richness of their own, as attested by a fan for Oshun made by Clodimir Menezes da Silva in August 1968 (Plate 52). They fuse basic Yoruba style (round outline, metal medium) with an element of Dahomeanizing design (the use of what might be termed "metal appliqué," i.e., the bolting together of various levels of sheet metal to form a composition, as in the great metal standing figures of Abomey). In addition, some artists actually sometimes seal sacred liquid within the hollow, syringelike handle of the fan. In other words, the handle loses its flattened textural quality in the manner of Ilesha and becomes a polished cylinder, a vial. Thus the artists of Bahia have extended the image of the fan of Oshun and the riverain goddesses with an object that mimes, as it were, the balancing of a single, multipetaled sacrificial flower on the rolling, scalloped, chiming waters of Oshun.



Shàngó

The tempestuous mythic third king of the Yoruba, Shàngó is an Oyo deity. He is the thunder god, and his consort is the whirlwind, the goddess Oya, who is also the goddess of the Niger River. As an alleged medieval monarch, he has come to symbolize the powers of

the Oyo kings. His royal cult plays an integral role in the installation of each king of the Oyo. In the palace of the Oyo kings there is a special priestess, Iya Naso, who is charged with palace worship of the thunder god, and her disciple Iya Aaafin Iku is responsible for Shàngó's sacred ram (the motion of whose horns are poetically compared to the thrust and parry of the lightning bolt).¹⁵¹ These palace customs reach a climax at the annual Beere festival when a masked priest, said to represent Shàngó's own ancestral spirit, Alakoro, perambulates the palace walls while gesticulating and, in his robe of blazing red and shining mask of polished brass, looking like a crimson ghost. Before each of the main gates to the palace he gestures to heaven and then to earth, to heaven and earth again, and moves on to the next point of blessing.¹⁵²

Once upon a time, as myth would have it, Shàngó was recklessly experimenting with a leaf that had the power to bring down lightning from the skies and inadvertently caused the roof of the palace of Oyo to be set afire by lightning. In the blaze his wife and children were killed. Half crazed with grief and guilt, Shàngó went to a spot outside his royal capital and hanged himself from the branches of an ayan tree. He thus suffered the consequences of playing arrogantly with God's fire, and became lightning itself.¹⁵³ Like Eshu at the Cuban crossroads, in the lightning bolt Shàngó met himself. He became an eternal moral presence, rumbling in the clouds, outraged by impure human acts, targeting the homes of adulterers, liars, and thieves for destruction. "He dances in the courtyard of the impertinent," as composers of his praise-poetry envision his transformation of lightning into moral action. Praise singers among the western Yoruba realize a vision of his spirit in poetry charged with flashing images:

Water by the side of fire at the center of the sky
 A strange thing, on the road to Teji Oku
 He strikes a stone in the forest, stone bleeds blood
 He carries a heavy stone upon his head without a cushion.
 Shàngó splits the wall with his falling thunderbolt.

He makes a detour in telegraphic wire
 Leopard of the flaming eyes
 Lord who wears the sawtooth-bordered cloth of returning
 ancestors (*egun*)
 Storm on the edge of a knife.

Earthworm, despite no eyes, plunges deep into the earth
He dances savagely in the courtyard of the impertinent
He sets the liar's roof on fire
He carries fire as burden on his head
The gaze of this leopard sets the roof on fire

Father, grant us the intelligence to avoid saying stupid things.
Against the unforeseen, let us do things together.
Swift king, appearing like the evening moon.
His very gaze exalts a person.
I have an assassin as a lover.
Beads of wealth blaze upon his frame.
Who opens wide his eyes
Leopard of the flaming eyes
Fire, friend of hearth.
Leopard, of the copper-flashing eyes
Fire, friend of hearth.
Lord with flashing, metallic, eyes,
With which he terrifies all thieves.¹⁵⁴

The power of Shàngó streaks down in meteorites and thunderstones, stones both symbolic and real. The *àshe* of Shàngó is found within a stone, the flaming stone that only he and his brave followers know how to balance unsupported on their heads. Flaming stones have become a metaphoric burden: the possession priest or priestess often balances a vessel containing burning oil upon his or her head. The earthworm, one of the first of God's messengers of *àshe*, plunges like lightning into the soil and, ventilating the earth, creates sustenance for plants. Likewise, Shàngó, as pestle, crushes the fritter that it may properly be prepared, just as Shàngó's favorite yams and maize must first be pounded. Only by being broken down do substances yield nourishment. Only through chastisement does the liar ideally change and grow.

Shàngó sits upon a sacred inverted mortar (*odo*) when he fills the body of his possession-devotee. *Àshe* within his meteoric stones also flashes within his eyes, the eyes of the possessed, whose gaze is believed capable of igniting houses. Shàngó's *àshe* flashes dangerously in the amazingly wide-open eyes of thunder priests and in the gaze of the royal leopard, who will kill all felons and enemies of the state.

The metaphoric and moral range of this poetry is matched by that of the images of the altars of Shàngó.¹⁵⁵ The thunder ax (*oshe*) is

one of his most pervasive attributes. The character of Shàngó's moral retribution and the control of this power by his followers are represented in one of the earliest *oshe* brought to Europe, a fine specimen taken to England before 1853 by Lt. W. R. Bent of the Royal Navy (Plate 8). It is now in the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter. Twinned thunderstones appear above the head of a female follower of Shàngó. There they are balanced, like the meteorites that Shàngó carries upon his head. Character and propitiating coolness (*irele*) are exemplified in her poise; she kneels to show honor, holding her breasts as an offertory. She wears the characteristic red and white beads of the thunder god that refer to, among other images, a line of the praise-poem, "water by the side of fire at the center of the sky." The two colors also suggest the friendship of fiery "red" Shàngó and Obatala, deity of creativity, whose honorific color is white.

Metaphoric fire balanced on the head of the thunder-god follower is an image that traveled to Bahia, in Brazil, where actual dancing with loads of fire has been reported:

In the cycle of festivals for Shàngó in the shrine of São Gonçalo there is an impressive ceremony, only realized there, wherein the daughters of Shàngó, possessed by their orisha, dance with a vessel that contains material in flames, upon their heads. The fire does not harm them, nor does it burn the hands with which they secure the burning vessel. Later, while still moving in the dance, they eat flaming balls of cotton dipped in oil.¹⁵⁶

These miracles indicate to believers that Shàngó's possession of his followers is actual, not a sham. The balancing of twin bolts of meteoric fire on the head of the devotee is also meant to convey a promise of moral vengeance. This powerful dual metaphor spread to the far corners of the Atlantic Yoruba world. It appears with particular strength in Bahia (Plate 53), where in the late nineteenth century the butterflylike shape of the thunderstones balanced on the represented worshipper's head revealed influence from Ketu, where thunder axes frequently are shaped this way.

Some Western Yoruba believe that when Shàngó blinks, a lightning bolt will crash down at that instant. And when a devotee is infused, in spirit-possession, with Shàngó's *àshe*, the devotee's eyes will bulge. Notice the cause and effect. This fine piece of nineteenth-century Yoruba sculpture in Brazil also shows the servitor with hands on her stomach, making of her midriff an offertory vessel of life and continuity.



PLATE 53

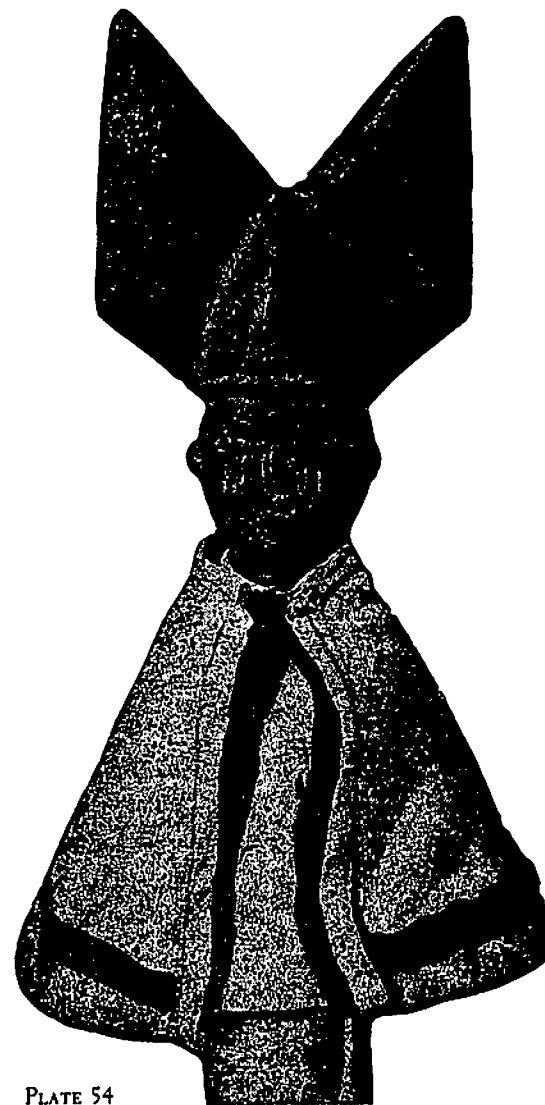


PLATE 54

Afro-Cuban association of the thunder god with Saint Barbara sometimes gave rise on the island to superbly complex renderings. Our example (Plate 54) dates perhaps from the end of the nineteenth century, and apparently was collected in the region of Havana. The artist affirmed the Catholic aspect but transcended it. He dressed a Shàngó follower in a red and white chasuble, deliber-

ately creating raking angles in the phrasing of the garment, so as to harmonize it with and mirror the higher angulation of the thunderstones. The calm, pert face of the devotee has slight indications of the markings of Yoruba patrilineal descent groups. This compact little sculpture is a fusion of images from two cultures and two visions under God.

Many Brazilian and Cuban *oshe* reflect trade ties and strong ethnicity. But there is another kind of thunder ax made in the Americas, among United States blacks who dropped their Anglo-Saxon names in favor of Ifá-indicated Yoruba titles or self-assigned names. Adefunmi, the founder of the Yoruba Temple in Harlem in 1960, a Detroit-born black, learned Yoruba initiatory art and lore in Matanzas, Cuba, and brought an originally Afro-Cubanizing form of Yoruba *orisha* worship to Harlem. But Adefunmi's imagination was restless, and he ceaselessly studied the Yoruba language, handbooks with illustrations of the classical art of the Yoruba, lectures by New York-area Africanists, and many other sources. In the process, the art of New York Yoruba became a willed phenomenon, a self-conscious renaissance that was distinguishable from modern Afro-Cuban work. In this body of art works are precise, detailed representations of the ideas of the *orisha*. For example, Adefunmi's *oshe*, carved in Harlem in 1965–68, follows the canon in its essentials—the twin thunderstones carried on the head as a mystic burden, the bulging eyes of *àshe*, the frozen mouth—but the figure gestures asymmetrically, with a miniature *oshe* in the left hand and a thunder rattle in the right (Plate 55). The figure is not frozen in a pose of giving but in a stance of combativeness.

This figural wariness is appropriate to the condition of blacks in the crisis decade of the 1960's. Awolowo, another prominent member of the Harlem Yoruba Temple, shaped in c. 1968 a remarkable plaster image of Shàngó, the thunder king (Plate 56) wearing a kind of *oshe*-coronet and holding before his body a royal Yoruba fly whisk and a miniature *oshe*. His face is traditionally impassive even as he stares. The sweep and velocity of the lines tracing the folds of the royal garment are unprecedented in the classical statuary, and represent the application of a rich inventive mind to the problems of artistic identity.

Shàngó's complex artistic embodiments—warrior and lover, "water by the side of fire at the center of the sky," "I have an assassin as a lover"—extend back to antiquity. As early as 1659 Shàngó's



PLATE 55



PLATE 56



PLATE 57



PLATE 58

upsurge into the world had been stylized by particularities of sculpture—the fertilizing thrust of the thunderstone into the earth indicated by an image carved in wood, pointing to his penis with one hand while indicating the source of that energy by pointing to the sky with the other hand (Plate 57). Eva Meyerowitz examined an old brass armlet decorated with Shàngó emblems in Dahomey (now Benin), where the traditional owners told her that the object had originally come from Oyo-Ile. On this probably ancient piece, possibly from the city of Shàngó, the sky-and-penis gesture of the thunder god reappears:

One figure presses both his hands against his cheeks, showing his tongue which is of enormous size, while the other carries an object in his one hand which suggests a meteorite or thunderbolt, while his other hand points to his sexual organs.¹⁵⁷

This strong phrasing came to Cuba:

There is no more vehement nor energetic spirit [than Shàngó]. When a devotee is mounted by the spirit of Shàngó, he charges three times, head leading, spinning like a ram, towards the drums. Then he opens his eyes to abnormal width and sticks out his tongue, to symbolize a fiery belch of flames, and raises his thunder-axe on high and clamps his other hand upon his scrotum.¹⁵⁸

The ancient dual gesture is so persistent that not only does Alakoro perform a modified version, pointing to the sky and to the earth twice, before the gates of the Oyo palace, but it is emblazoned in relief upon a thunder pedestal (*odo shàngó*) found in Bahia, dating, probably, from the second half of the last century (Plate 58). Here the figure of a priestess makes the dual gesture, rattle to sky, hand to waist.¹⁵⁹

The coming of the icons of the Yoruba to the black New World accompanied an affirmation of philosophical continuities. Selected fragments of the liturgies remained alive in songs about the wonder-working blade atop the head of Eshu-Odara, the irons of Ogun flashing moral vengeance in hearth and home, and the murmur of the chiming bracelets of Oshun beneath the undulating surface of the river. These verses lived in chants, and in icons of the goddesses and gods on New World domestic altars.

There is, in all of this, the vision of the Yoruba Atlantic world, a metaphoric capture of the moral potentiality inherent in certain powers of the natural world—thunder, oceans, herbs, and stones—and a demonstration that creative persons have shaped certain images, pillars of lateritic clay, implements of iron, metal fans, brooms decorated with leather and cowrie-shell embroidery, so that they illumine the world with intuitions of the power to make right things come to pass.

Time and again, in Yoruba Atlantic art and dance, in the image of the servitor shaped in wood or directly embodied in ritual participation, the ancient praise-poems and divinatory insights were materialized, and made visible. One final example:

A magnificent beaded (probably nineteenth century) Nigerian Yoruba tunic for a thunder-god possession-priest (*ewu shàngó*) displays the lord of thunder with characteristic axe and rattle, surrounded by four birds of nocturnal power [Plate 59]. Here is

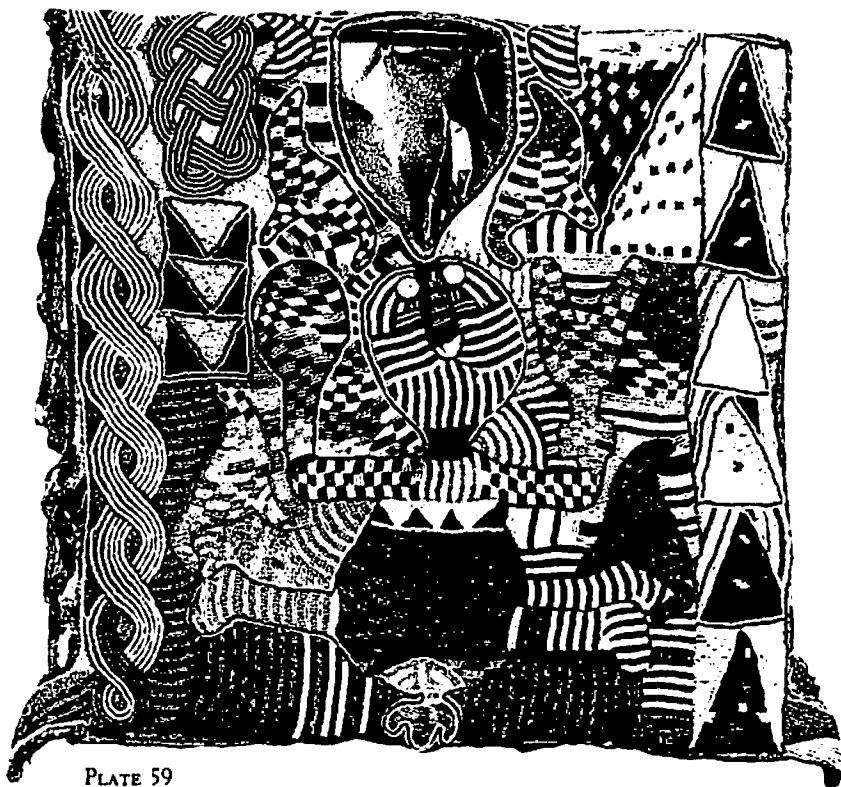


PLATE 59

Shàngó, beads of wealth blazing on his frame. Here is Shàngó, with triangularly represented elements of lightning, each with eyes to seek and find the rooves of the ungodly.

There is a telling opposition to be noted here—the clash between the hard-edged, sharply pointed thunderstones and the smooth curves of richly elaborated interlace which almost certainly stands for serpents intertwined, ancient Yoruba image of coolness, peace, and power. These interwoven forces come down like lightning, like the zig-zags glittering on the moving body of the Gaboon viper, harbinger of God's *àshe*, like the earthworm, another founding form of God's *àshe*, ventilating earth, opening up the soil as with myriad lightning strikes.

Fire (thunderstones, flashing with pinpoint metallic eyes) and water (domain of becalmed serpents, superbly coiled about themselves) meet at the center of the sky. There Shàngó, axe and rattle handsomely attendant, faces the present and the future on behalf



PLATE 60

of his numerous followers. On the back of the tunic [Plate 60], facing the past, he whirls as an ancestor-inquisitor (*egúngún*), lappets flaring in the wind, a virtual dervish in striped strips of narrow-loom 'country cloth.' There he spins, a righteous whirlwind, a storm on the edge of the knife dividing this world from the next.

This spectacularly allusive tradition, the Yoruba beaded royal tunic, was renewed in Cuba in new form. It reached a peak of decorative quintessence in the making, perhaps in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, of a sumptuously beaded garment (*bandel*), for the mother-drum of a set of three Cuban-Yoruba *batá* drums [Plate 61]. Striking changes are apparent. Instead of Shàngó in a field of fiery and aquatic forces, there is a vivid creole fusion of distinct goddesses and gods. Olokun, god of the sea [Plate 62], appears at the summit of the composition, eyes fashioned out of flashing mirror shards. The ax of the thunder-

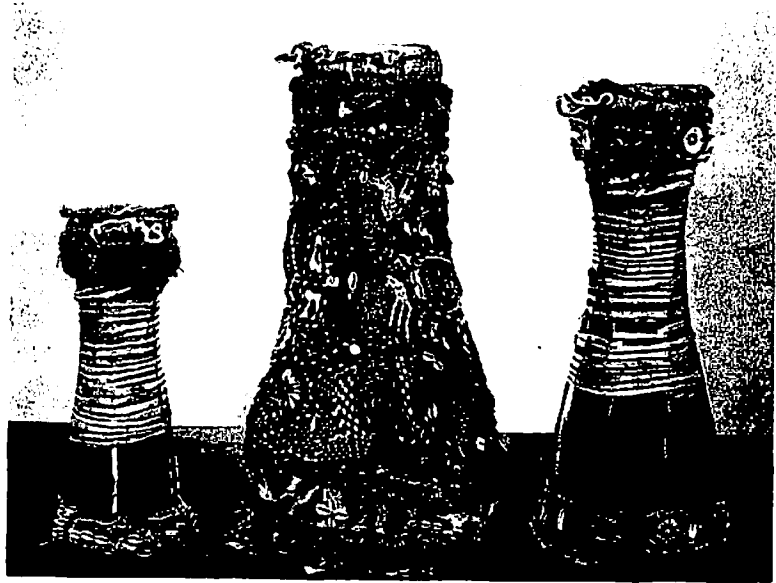


PLATE 61

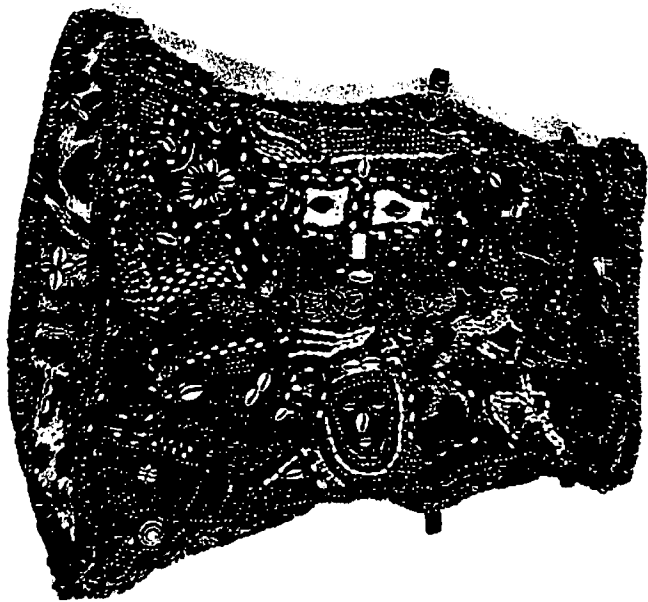


PLATE 62

god reappears at left, here centered with a shell-studded jewel of copper color, symbolizing Oshun and her world of wealth. The ancient eyes of Eshu-Elegbara, cowrie shells, stare forward from an implicit cross-roads at the bottom of the tunic. Left, there appears a bird of Yemayá, intuiting her powers; right, another thunder ax; and handsome segments of leopard pelt allude to *orisha* of the forest. And there is a segment of green and yellow beads for the deity of divination. The attributes of the deities of the Yoruba, one against the other, protect in unison the body of a drum. The drum itself brings back the rhythmized voices of the ancestors of the Yoruba in Cuba. Like a Trajanic frieze, unfolding history, this beaded drum tunic brings back sacred forces from the Old World to the New.¹⁶⁰

In conclusion, the grand message of Yoruba Atlantic art, wherever it is found, but especially in Nigeria, Togo, and Benin, the United States, Cuba, and Brazil, handsomely counterpointed, in music, by the rising worldwide popularity of Sunny Adé and other players of Yoruba juju music, and especially evident in the Yoruba Renaissance art and architecture (Plates 63, 64, 65) of Oyotunji, South Carolina,¹⁶¹ in the 1970's is this: sheer artlessness may bring a culture down but a civilization like that of the Yoruba, and the Yoruba-Americans, pulsing with ceaseless creativity richly stabilized by precision and control, will safeguard the passage of its people through the storms of time.

PLATE 63

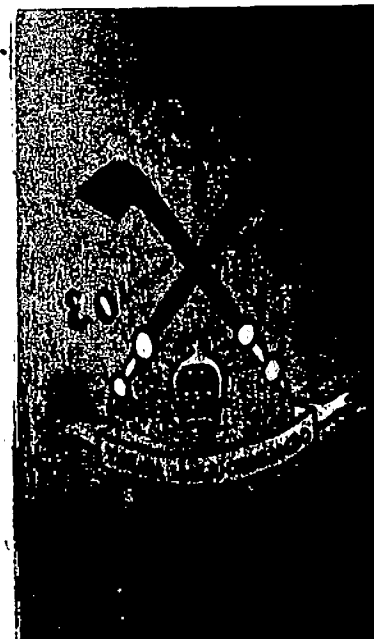




PLATE 64

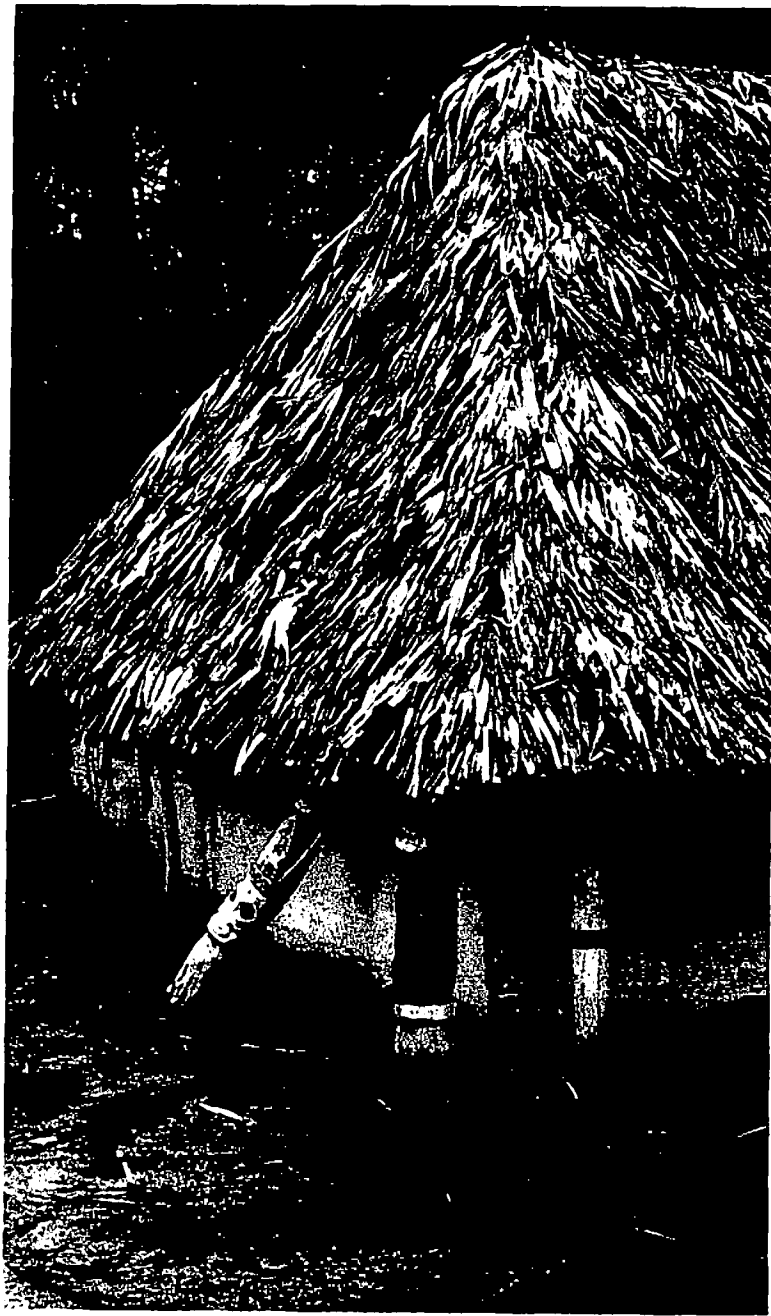


PLATE 65

One

1. Rev. R. H. Stone, *In Afric's Forest and Jungle: Or Six Years Among the Yorubans* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1899), pp. 20–21, 23.
2. See summary comments on Yoruba art and culture in R. F. Thompson, *African Art in Motion* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974). For Yoruba urbanism, see G. J. Afolabi Ojo, *Yoruba Culture: A Geographical Analysis* (London: University of London Press, 1966), pp. 104–30. A classic article is William Bascom, "Some Aspects of Yoruba Urbanism," *American Anthropologist* LXIV, 4 (August 1962), 699–709.
3. Oladipo Yemitan, *Ijala: Are Ode* (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 67. Translation from the Yoruba is mine.
4. Miss Tucker, *Abbeokuta; Or, Sunrise Within the Tropics* (London: James Nisbet & Co, 1853), p. 165.
5. T. J. Bowen, *Grammar and Dictionary of the Yoruba Language* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge, 1858). See entries *amewa* and *mewa*, and also R. F. Thompson, "Yoruba Artistic Criticism," in Warren d'Azevedo (ed.), *The Traditional Artist in African Societies* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1973), pp. 26, 60, note 10.
6. Babatunde Lawal, "Some Aspects of Yoruba Aesthetics," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. III (1974), p. 239.
7. Araba Ekó, conversations with the author, Lagos, Nigeria, 1972–73. The Araba, one of the leading priests of divination in Yorubaland, has

- been enormously kind over the years in sharing his rich knowledge of the literature of divination in relation to the nature of the *orisha*.
8. Interview with Araba Ekó, 13 January 1972, Lagos.
 9. Informant: A. O. Williams Onáyemin, Ilesha, 5 August 1965.
 10. *Iroko shrines seen in the field*, Ketu, Republic of Benin, summer 1972. For a spectacular document of the Afro-Brazilian continuity of this custom, blended with the cognate Dahomean Loko cult, see Carybé, *Iconografia dos Deuses Africanos no Candomble da Bahia* (São Paulo: Raizes, 1980), p. 110.
 11. The definition of red "as the supreme presence of color" stems from Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind (La Pensée sauvage)*. (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1966), p. 65.
 12. Araba Ekó, Lagos, 13 January 1972.
 13. Informant: the late J. K. Adejumo, Ipokia, capital of the Anago Yoruba, 5 January 1968.
 14. Cf. Denrele Obasa, *Awon Akewi*, cited in A. Fajana, "Some Aspects of Yoruba Traditional Education," *Odu* (July 1966), p. 25.
 15. Babatunde Lawal, *op. cit.*, p. 241.
 16. "Giving with *both* hands," Henry Drewall (personal communication, 4 December 1979) points out, "signifies as well the union of social and spiritual worlds, for the left is used in greetings by *orisha* (i.e., possessed worshippers) to mortals. Thus it is a *sanctified* gesture of giving."
 17. Araba Ekó, 12 January 1972.
 18. *Ibid.*
 19. Babatunde Lawal, "The Significance of Yoruba Sculpture" (mimeographed paper read at the Conference on Yoruba Civilization, University of Ife, Ile-Ife, 26–31 July 1976), p. 9.
 20. The late J. K. Adejumo, Ipokia, 5 January 1968. In addition, in the communication cited in Note 13, Henry Drewall further glosses this testimony: "Opening his cap may also connote peaceful intentions; for, in contrast, the caps of hunters hold medicines for cursing. The gesture of removing one's cap to take out the medicine is an act of war, but 'opening' the cap shows friendship."
 21. Araba Ekó, interview, 17 January 1972.
 22. R. C. Abraham, *Dictionary of Modern Yoruba* (London: University of London Press, 1958), p. 658.
 23. Araba Ekó, 12 January 1972.
 24. E. A. Ajosafe Moore, *The Laws and Customs of the Yoruba People* (Abeokuta: Fola Bookshops, n.d.), p. 7.
 25. For details, see Robert S. Smith, *Kingdoms of the Yoruba* (London:

- Methuen, 1969), pp. 133–55. See also Rev. Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas* (Lagos: C.M.S. Bookshops, 1921).
26. S. A. Akintoye, *Revolution and Power Politics in Yorubaland 1840–1893* (New York: Humanities Press, 1971), p. 44.
 27. Juana Elbein dos Santos, *Os Nago E A Morte: Pádé, Àsèsè e o culto Ègun na Bahia* (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1976), p. 13.
 28. William Bascom, *Shango in the New World* (Austin: African and Afro-American Research Institute, 1972), p. 13.
 29. Focused on the African-influenced life of Port-au-Prince in Haiti, a thoughtful and important study of the punning process in linking attributes of the saints to those of the *vodun* (Dahomean spirits) and the Yoruba *orisha* is Michel Leiris's: "Note sur l'usage de chromolithographies par les vodouisants d'Haiti," in *Les Afro-Américains* (Dakar: Mémoires de l'Institut Français d'Afrique Noire, 1953), pp. 201–7.
 30. Bascom, *Shango in the New World*, pp. 16–17: such syncretisms are not consistent, varying from place to place, even from shrine to shrine. Bascom illustrates this point with an excellent table of Shàngó/Catholic saint correspondences across the western hemisphere (pp. 16–17).
 31. Dos Santos *op. cit.*, pp. 171–81.
 32. *Ibid.*, p. 179.
 33. See Carybé, *op. cit.*, p. 46, for a watercolor of an Eshu-Elegbara priest in Bahia wearing a headdress that is red on one side, black on the other.
 34. Hence the pitchforks of Satan, horns of the Devil, and other infernal images that cloud his true role as messenger of the deities and principle of individuality, particularly in the Yoruba-influenced religious life of Rio, where a kind of meta-literature has arisen in his name, incredibly creolized and inventive in its references, freely mixing Kongo, Yoruba-Dahomean, Roman Catholic, spiritualist, and other concepts, as illustrated, for example, by N. A. Molina, *Na Gira dos Exu* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Espiritualista, n.d.); Antonio de Alva, *O livro dos exus: Kimbas e Eguns* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Eco, 1967); and José Maria Bitten-court, *No reino dos exus* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Eco, 1970).
 35. From a conversation with the Araba Ekó, Lagos, 18 January 1972.
 36. Juana Elbein dos Santos and Deoscoredes M. dos Santos, *Eṣu Bara Laroye: A Comparative Study* (mimeographed), Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria (April 1971), p. 28: "Esu is the Lord of Power, Elegbara, its controller at the same time as its representation." See also their "Esu Bara, Principle of Individual Life in the Nago System," a paper delivered at the conference on *The Notion of the Person in Black Africa* (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Colloque Internationaux, No. 544, 1971).

37. Interview with Lydia Cabrera, Coral Gables, Florida, September 1981.
38. Lydia Cabrera, *El Monte: Igbo Fina Ewe Orisha, Vititinfinda* (Havana: Ediciones C.R., 1954), p. 80: "Propicio, modifica el peor de los destinos; hostil, ensombrece el más brillante."
39. Witnessed in Rio, spring 1968.
40. Cabrera, *op. cit.*, p. 95: "Eshu is an Elegba ready to do nothing but evil."
41. Dos Santos and Dos Santos, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
42. It may well be, as Henry Drewall suggests (personal communication, 4 December 1979), that "the iron blade/tuft/penis projecting from the top of the head of Esu/Elegba seems more Fon or more precisely Ewe than Yoruba. I documented a large cement sculpture of a seated Legba figure with iron bursting from his head at the entrance to a compound in an Ewe town north of Lome." It is fairly certain that Fon, Ewe, and other Yoruba-influenced groups living to the west of Yorubaland "came before" the Yoruba to Brazil, as Drewall adds, "not with them." The complex problem of the merging of Yoruba-influenced Legba imagery, from Ewe/Fon sources, with Yoruba impulses in Brazil and Cuba will be discussed in a future publication, *The Face of the Gods*. Here it suffices to note the probable reinforcement of Yoruba imagery by already existing Fon/Ewe customs in the Western Hemisphere.
43. Argeliers León, "Elebwa: una divinidad de la santería Cubana," *Abhandlungen und Berichte des Staatlichen Museums für Volkerkunde Dresden*, 21 (1962), pp. 57-61.
44. Letter written by Julius Oyetunde of Ibadan, dated 22 July 1919, and now in the archives of the Museum of Ethnic Art, UCLA, Los Angeles. The letter came with a shrine image carved in wood for Eshu-Elegba, attributed to Agesingbena of Ibadan (Museum of Ethnic Art: X67-600), now at UCLA. I thank George Ellis for a copy of this letter.
45. Dos Santos and Dos Santos, *Eṣu Bara Laroye*, p. 29.
46. Joan Wescott, "The Sculpture and Myths of Eshu-Elegba," *Africa* XXXII, 4 (October 1962), 338.
47. Dos Santos, *op. cit.*, pp. 135-37.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 162.
49. Cabrera, *El Monte*. The photographs at the back of this important volume are unnumbered; what would be the tenth and eleventh pages of the plates focus on art for Elegba in the late forties and early fifties in western Cuba.
50. *Arará* (Afro-Cuban for Dahomean/Ewe worship) is cognate with the Afro-Haitian term *Rada*. Both words stem from the name of an ancient town, Allada, in Dahomey. For a rewarding survey of Ewe art, see Dzagbe Cudjoe, *Tribus* (August 1969), pp. 49-60.
51. Attribution by Lydia Cabrera, conversation with the author, summer 1979.
52. I heartily thank Sidney Mintz, of the Anthropology Department, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, for bringing this fine piece to my attention, and for details about its collection.
53. For a broader interpretation of projections from the head throughout Yoruba art, see Margaret Drewall's "Projections from the Top in Yoruba Art," *African Arts* XI, 1 (Fall 1977), 43-49.
54. Lydia Cabrera, conversation, winter 1979.
55. Roger Bastide, *Imagens do Nordeste Místico* (Rio de Janeiro: Empresa Gráfica o Cruzeiro, 1945), p. 129.
56. *Ibid.*, pp. 129-30.
57. *Ibid.*, photograph between pp. 160-61, caption reads in Portuguese: "Exu-bara (Photo Recife Department of Police)."
58. See Mario Barata, "Arte negra," *Revista da Semana* (17 May 1941), pp. 16-17, 34, where he speaks of "macumba idols from Rio recently collected by the town police." "Collected" is a euphemism for police confiscation of objects including an interesting image for Eshu-Elegbara roughly similar to the piece under discussion. Both are now in the Police Museum of Rio. But the pre-1941 dating of the object under discussion is still no more than an informed guess, for other than this article no records of accession could be found during several visits to the Police Museum in March and August 1968. See also Mario Barata, "The Negro in the Plastic Arts of Brazil," in *The African Contribution To Brazil* (Rio de Janeiro: Edigraf, 1966), p. 38, note 21.
59. M. A. S. Barber, *Oshielle: or Village Life in the Yoruba Country* (London: James Nisbet, 1857). Illustration faces p. 187.
60. Susan M. Pearce, *Yoruba Archaeology and Art* (Exeter: Royal Albert Memorial Museum, 1970) catalog object no. 27 (RAMM no. 1385/1868).
61. Pierre Verger, *Notes sur le culture des orisa et vodun* (Dakar: IFAN, 1957), p. 134: *Ó fi eri ejo fun fere* (with the head of a snake he blows a whistle). Verger collected this praise-verse in Ketu, an ancient town over which, according to tradition, Eshu once ruled.
62. Informant: Araba Ekó, interviews, Lagos, July 1965.
63. Verger, *op. cit.*, pp. 136, 138.
64. For Bahia, Verger, *ibid.*, pp. 138-39; for Cuba, Lydia Cabrera, *Música de los cultos Africanos en Cuba*, Disco 4, Lado 2; for Miami, *Eru Ana: Afro-Cuban Folklore* (Onix LP: ORLPS-004, Cara A, "Eleguá").

65. Valdelice Carneiro Girão, "A Coleção Arthur Ramos," *Revista Ciências Sociais* II, 1 (1971), 105:" (1.60.122) *Exu*, 33 cm. high, wooden statuette, restored . . . [from the] Candomblé da Bahia."
66. As well as in Hispanic New York City. I am indebted to Eshumiwa, a New York priest of Eshu-Elegbara, for the privilege of studying a hook for Eshu, painted red and black, Eshu's colors, made in Harlem in 1965.
67. Cabrera, *El Monte*, ninth page of unnumbered photographs.
68. Wande Abimbola, *Ifá Divination Poetry* (New York: Nok Publishers Ltd, 1977), p. v.
69. Cf. William Bascom, *Ifá Divination: Communication Between Gods and Men in West Africa* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1969), p. 11.
70. Abraham, *op. cit.*, p. 274, *Ifá: aigbofa la n woke: Ifá kon kò si ni para* ("owing to being unskilled in divination, we are looking up at the thatch, but it is not a likely place to find him!").
71. Wande Abimbola, *Ifá Divination Poetry*, pp. 2-4. For another myth of Ifá, see Fela Sowande, *Ifá* (Yaba: Forward Press, n.d., c. 1964). See both Abimbola and Bascom, *op. cit.*, for excellent descriptions of the divination process and its instruments.
72. Fela Sowande, *Ifá Odu Mimo* (Lagos: Ancient Religious Societies of African Descendants Association, 1965), p. 28.
73. *Ibid.*
74. For a discussion of visual art pertaining to Ifá and its Dahomean equivalent, Fa, see Bernard Maupoil, *La Geomancie a l'ancienne Cote des Esclaves* (Paris: Institut d'Ethnologie, 1961), reprint of the 1922 edition. There is an excellent survey of Ifá art in relation to the oral literature of Yoruba divination by Rowland Abiodun, "Ifá Art Objects: An Interpretation Based on Oral Tradition," in Wande Abimbola (ed.), *Yoruba Oral Tradition: Poetry in Music, Dance, and Drama* (Ife: Department of African Languages and Literatures, University of Ife, 1975), pp. 421-69.
75. Abimbola, *Ifá Divination Poetry*, pp. 150-51. I have slightly retranslated the Ifá verse herein cited.
76. William Bascom, "Two Forms of Afro-Cuban Divination," in Sol Tax (ed.), *Acculturation in the Americas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), pp. 169-79.
77. Cf. Fernando Ortiz, *Los Instrumentos de la música Afro-cubana*, Vol. I (Havana: Ministerio de Educación, 1952), p. 193, Fig. 9 (illustration of an Afro-Cuban *irofa* and *opon ifá*). Bascom, "Two Forms," reports (p. 172) that "in Cuba few diviners know the use of the sixteen nuts,

- most of them relying on the divining chain. Similarly among the Yoruba the chain is more frequently employed."
78. Abiodun, *op. cit.*, makes the important observation (p. 12) that "Ifá acknowledges the power of Èṣù symbolically, placates him and solicits his cooperation through the carved face(s) of Èṣu in the border decoration of *opon*." Drewall has examined an *atefa* in the Deoscoredes dos Santos collection in Bahia which belonged to a servitor of the Yoruba gods who divined. This tray even had a circular indentation on the bottom which in Nigeria, according to my informants, means that the *opon* is a secret drum with two membranes, one on each side. Peter Morton-Williams (with J. R. O. Ojo), *Museum of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ife: A Short Illustrated Guide* (Ife: University of Ife Press, 1969), says, on p. 8: "The back of the tray is hollowed so that it sounds when tapped by the diviner with his ivory rattle to invoke Orumnila." Drewall (personal communication, 1979) says it has to do with a covert function of cursing. All three versions dovetail within, and support, the notion of the *opon* as a most important instrument of communication with the gods.
 79. See Morton-Williams and Ojo, *op. cit.* For a brief discussion of form and meaning in the study of *agere ifá*, see Abiodun, *op. cit.*, pp. 447-50.
 80. Roger Bastide, *Le Candomblé de Bahia* (Paris: Mouton, 1958), p. 51, note 77. In Brazil the *agere* was redesignated "box for Yemanya," goddess of the sea, possibly by analogy with its discovery by the sea.
 81. It is important to note that while the use of the *opele* in Cuba and Cuban-influenced North America remains strong, our early visual source published in (Fernando Ortiz, *Hamba Afro-Cubana: Los Negros Brujos* (Madrid: Editorial America, 1906), p. 178, illustrated (Plate 20b) in this book, is actually a drawing, taken from another drawing, published in a late-nineteenth-century Havana newspaper. In translation, "divining-chain" became confused with "necklace," and what we have are enough seeds on a chain to make *two opele* (cf. Plate 20a) with one left over! Nevertheless, the spacing of chain to seed is identical with the Nigerian antecedent, and the same reference gives us an early document of the use of green and yellow beads for Ifá in the western hemisphere (p. 177).
 82. Cabrera, *El Monte*, p. 15. The citation is a composite of two sentences in which I translate *derecho*, lit., "right," as protocol.
 83. See R. F. Thompson, "Icons of the Mind: Yoruba Herbalism Arts in Atlantic Perspective," *African Arts* VIII, 3: 52-59, 89-90.
 84. *Ibid.*
 85. Cabrera, *El Monte*, pp. 70-71.

86. For details, see my "Icons of the Mind," noted above.
87. Cabrera, *El Monte*, p. 101.
88. Araba Ekó, interview, 12 January 1972.
89. Quoted in my *Black Gods and Kings* (Los Angeles: Museum of Ethnic Arts, 1971, p. 11/3).
90. Informant: Julito Collazo, interviews, Hamden, Connecticut, winter 1970. The melody of an ancient Osanyin song appears in Cuba (*Cult Music of Cuba*, Ethnic Folkways LP FE 4410) and also in Brazil (*Folk Music of Brazil*, Library of Congress LP AFS L13). Harold Courlander, in the notes to the LP of Cuban black ritual music, was apparently the first to notice the implications of antiquity in the geographic distribution of this song. A full version, mentioning the immovable stone under water, was recorded in the 1950's by Lydia Cabrera, *Música de los Cultos Africanos en Cuba*, Record 3, Side 1 (c. 1958).
91. Teodoro Díaz Fabelo, *Olorun* (Havana: Ediciones del Departamento de Folklore del Teatro Nacional de Cuba, 1960) p. 67. The original text interweaves Lucumi (Cuban creolized Yoruba) and Castilian phrases which I elide together.
92. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
93. Geraldine Torres Guerra, "Un elemento ritual: El Osun," *Etnología y Folklore*, Vol. III (1967), pp. 65-81.
94. Cabrera, *El Monte*, ninth unnumbered page of photographs, "Altar of a priest, for the Niño de Atocha, Elegba."
95. I am grateful to Owoeye of Efon-Alaiye for an introduction to a corpus of works of art in iron by members of the atelier of Odeleogun and his son, Ajanakú, in the winter of 1964.
96. See, for example, Bastide, *op. cit.*, pp. 72 ("tree of life"), 111 (a bird at summit, surrounded by small branches), which Ramos took to be "Eshu of the seven roads." Cf. Deoscoredes dos Santos, *West African Sacred Art and Rituals in Brazil* (Ibadan: Institute of African Studies, 1967), p. 80: "A central bar with six smaller bars and an iron bird on top symbolizes a tree with seven branches and the bird at the top."
97. From oral evidence collected at Igogo-Ekiti, summer 1965, Nigeria.
98. For an earlier version of this paragraph, see Lewis M. Dabney, *The Indians of Yoknapatawpha* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974), p. 146. Finally, no reference to Osanyin is complete with mention of Pierre Verger's important booklet, *Awon Ewé Osanyin: Yoruba Medicinal Leaves* (Ife: Institute of African Studies, University of Ife, 1967).
99. *Black Gods and Kings* p. 7/1. Robert Smith, *Journal of African History* VIII, 1 (1967), 93, makes an observation that is relevant here: "Among the Yoruba the sword was regarded essentially as a cutting weapon." Finally, for a superb study, see Sandra T. Barnes, *Ogún: An Old God for a New Age* (Philadelphia: ISHI, 1980).
100. Told me by the Chief of Ipole, near Ilesha, winter 1963.
101. A composite of praise-verses (*awon oriki*) published by Verger, *op. cit.*, pp. 178-79, verses 1, 3, 9; 8, 9 (in the last verse I expand the idiophonic *rororo*, the sound that fire makes, into: "leaves the forest screaming . . .", pp. 175-77, 180-81, 183-85, 188).
102. Informant: Onayemi of Ilesha, July 1965.
103. *Ibid.*
104. *Ibid.*
105. Verger, *Notes sur le culture*, p. 182: "Seven Ogun in the house of Ire."
106. Quoted in Ortiz, *op. cit.*, p. 65. The object was in this text misattributed to the cult of Orisha Oko.
107. There may be a trace of Kongo influence here, blended in with Yoruba practice, for some Afro-Cuban informants have told me that one works with an *nfumbi* (creole Ki-Kongo for "dead man") locked in the Ogún cauldron. The cauldron itself resembles a famous pot on a tripod of three stones in which the founder of Kongo primordially "cooked up" the first medicines of the land. Cf. the morphology of the famous Afro-Cuban Kongo charm "Graveyard-Midnight" (Plate 66), *supra*.
108. Informant: Larry Harlow, New York City, fall 1979. Moreover, a few Afro-Cuban *botánicas* (herbal stores) in New England sometimes sell protective chains of Ogún to hang at the bottom of front doors, on the inside, for protection.
109. Verger, *Notes sur le culture*, p. 206.
110. *Ibid.*, pp. 208-9.
111. The cited verses are a composite, from praise literature for Oshoosi and closely related hunter-deities, in Verger, "Notes." The page numbers, and, in parentheses, the numbers of the verses follow: 221 (4, 5), 225 (65), 215 (village of Save, 1), 216 (4); 222 (13).
112. M. A. S. Barber, *op. cit.*, 1857.
113. R. S. Smith, "Yoruba Warfare and Weapons," in S. O. Biobaku (ed.), *Sources of Yoruba History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), pp. 232-33.
114. Dos Santos, "West African Sacred Art," Plates 80 and 81.

115. Cf. Babatunde Lawal, *op. cit.*, p. 246: "The person who wears an all-red garment is likely to be mistaken for a priest."
116. Abraham, *op. cit.*, p. 623.
117. Informant: Adisa Fagbemi, *Imasai*, northern Egbado, winter 1963–64.
118. Verger, *Notes sur le culture* p. 244. So closely does Obaluaiye relate to his Dahomean derivative, Sakpata, that I follow Verger in combining songs for both deities to illustrate the nature of the redoubtable earth deities. This particular selection is excerpted from *nukoromahan*, bright, satiric songs of moral allusion that "invite people to mend their ways or else incur the wrath of Sakpata."
119. *Ibid.*, p. 244.
120. *Ibid.*, pp. 256 (2); 257 (4); 259 (acclamations); 260 (4), an ancient image of nobility and regal poise in Yoruba poetry; 264 (10); 264 (5,6); 265 (7).
121. Dos Santos, "West African Sacred Art," p. 67, Plate 57.
122. Source: Araba Ekó, 18 January 1972.
123. Juana Elbein Dos Santos, in conversation with the author, January 1980, Bahia.
124. There is a good description of this shrine, which I myself visited on 16 May 1963, in Geoffrey Parrinder, *West African Religion* (London: Epworth Press, 1961) pp. 28–29.
125. The priest of Nana at Dassa-Zoumé told me (16 May 1963) that the clay pillar within the crown and sheath of straw was called *ata bukuu* and added: "Bukúu lives in there and comes out during spirit possession." This spirit can force market prices to drop if the poor are suffering.
126. For notes on the Ejiwa cult in Lagos, see unpublished notes of Kenneth Murray, Nigerian Museum, Lagos. The myth of Ejiwa was explained to me by Ajanaku Araba Ekó (13 January 1972): "Elegba while fishing is known as Ejiwa." Obaluaiye gave Ejiwa (Eshu) the gown of raffia because the latter had once been kind to him.
127. Dos Santos, "West African Sacred Art," pp. 50–66.
128. Informant: Momuri Orilegbolodo, servitor of Bukúu, Ketu, 8 September 1972.
129. Dramatically pantomimed by Momuri Orilegbolodo in the process of her explanation of the staff's powers. She called it *ileesin gogo*.
130. And her concern with instilling a social conscience in her followers (cf. Dassa-Zoumé legends about Nana forcing market prices to fall to favor the poor) matches that of her fiery son.
131. Informant: Babalawo Alawode Ifayemi, apparently recorded in Ketu country. Dos Santos, "West African Sacred Art," pp. 58–65. I have retranslated portions of the original Yoruba version of the myth.
132. Interview, Araba Ekó, 8 December 1975.
133. *Ibid.*
134. Yemitan, *op. cit.*, pp. 4–6.
135. For example, the altar to Yewa, an important riverain goddess, at Ipokia, capital of the Anago Yoruba, is circular, made of clay, and dyed a splendid indigo blue.
136. Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 243: "Burying the king in the bed of the river was regarded as an expiation made for his murder." The inner power of the riverain goddesses is likewise measured by the immense shield of flowing water that separates them from the world of the living.
137. Judith Hoch-Smith, "Radical Yoruba Female Sexuality," in Judith Hoch-Smith and Anita Spring (eds.), *Women in Ritual and Symbolic Roles* (New York: Plenum Press, 1978), p. 265. As to the negative dimensions in the mystic use of fans, cf. Araba Ekó (17 January 1972): "There are fans, which the 'mothers' use, concealing poison; while fanning a 'mother' can use it as a means of throwing death or injury or madness upon a person."
138. From a myth described to me by a migrant from the ancient city of Owó in southern Ijebu country, winter 1963–64.
139. Source: Henry Drewall, who has conducted excellent researches among Ketu, Egbado, and, recently, Ijebu Yoruba.
140. Verger, *Notes sur le culture*, p. 297.
141. Or, cf. Fernando Ortiz, *Los instrumentos de la música Afrocubana*, Vol. II (Havana: Ministerio de Educación, 1952), pp. 299–301: "There are serious cases when one must 'cool' a saint, or rather his stone, with five or seven fans in action all at once, according to what Ifá (the oracle) indicates."
142. Verger, *Notes sur le culture*, p. 298, Abeokuta prayer 2.
143. *Ibid.*, p. 426, Ilesha verse 9.
144. José Ribeiro de Souza, *400 Pontos Riscados e Cantados na Umbanda e Candomblé* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Eco, 1966), pp. 40–41.
145. Informants have also mentioned that a starfish image might be intended here, for which there is good authority in Bahia. Cf. Edison Carneiro, *Candomblés da Bahia* (Rio de Janeiro: Tecnoprint Grafica, 1967), p. 45: "A large starfish . . . in homage to Yemanya."
146. Dr. Lawrence Longo of Los Angeles has made a film of the Oshun festival at Oshogbo, which was kindly screened for me in the summer

- of 1970 by George Ellis, then of the Museum of Ethnic Arts, UCLA. The film documents the flower-hurling portion of the Oshun festival.
147. Verger, *Notes sur le culture*, p. 422 (2,5,8), 423 (10,12,14,15,17), 424 (23,24,29), 425 (1,6) 426 (3,9) 427 (3), 428 (16).
 148. *Ibid.*, pp. 429 (6, 10,12,13,14), 430 (16;4), 431 (8,9), 433 (5).
 149. Lydia Cabrera, *Yemayá y Ochún: Kariocha, Iyalorichas y Olorichas* (Madrid: C y R, 1974), pp. 271-72.
 150. I am extraordinarily grateful to the son of the late Oginnin for taking several days in July 1965 to explain in detail the meanings attached to this fan as his father had explained them.
 151. Cf. Abraham, *op. cit.*, p. 622.
 152. I am grateful to the Alaafin of Oyo for the privilege of witnessing the annual perambulations of Alakoro in January 1964.
 153. For an excellent summary of the lore of Shàngó, see Babatunde Lawal, *Yoruba Sango Sculpture in Historical Retrospect* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1970).
 154. Verger, *Notes sur le culture*, pp. 342 (21); 351 (121); 359 (13, 14,19;3); 361 (26,30); 362 (31); 362 (48); 363 (49,56); 366 (1); 374 (30); 378 (77,88); 380 (104,112); 381 (12); 390 (12); 392 (4), lit., "beads, rich, on king of Oyo"; 393 (11); 395 (4).
 155. Morton-Williams and Ojo, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
 156. Vivaldo da Costa Lima, *Una festa de Xango no Opo Afonja* (Salvador: IV Coloquio Internacional de Estudos Luso-Brasileiros, Universidade de Bahia, 1959) p. 19.
 157. Eva L. R. Meyerowitz, "A Bronze Armlet from Old Oyo, Nigeria," *Man* XLI, 15-37 (March-April 1941), 26.
 158. Fernando Ortiz, *Los Bailes y el Teatro de los Negros en el Folklore de Cuba* (Havana: Ediciones Cárdenas y Cia, 1951), p. 235.
 159. It is possible the modification of the gesture in this Brazilian instance was influenced by the strong presence of the Kongo left-hand-on-hip gesture (*telama lwimbanganga*) with right hand forward.
 160. From a MS. in progress by Robert Farris Thompson, *The Face of the Gods: Art and Altars of the Black Atlantic World*.
 161. See Carl M. Hunt, *Oyotunji Village: The Yoruba Movement in America* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1979), p. 63: "Villagers are skilled in leather crafts, pottery making and cloth dyeing . . . some of the men are also very good artists and skilled wood carvers."