

**YORÙBÁ TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS WOOD-CARVINGS
IN ÒYÓ, SÁBÈ AND IFÈ**

BY

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ABSTRACT

The Yorùbá people, who dispersed from Òyó-Yorùbá (Nigeria) to Sábẹ (Benin Republic) and Ifẹ (Togo) in the course of the Old-Òyó expansionist wars, and through migration from Ilé-Ifẹ, respectively, have continued the practice of Yorùbá traditional religion and its attendant practice of wood-carving. Existing studies on Yorùbá wood-carving have concentrated largely on the iconography and semiotics of Òyó-Yorùbá religious carvings with little attention paid to those of Sábẹ and Ifẹ, people who were originally from the same stock but have existed independently for a long time. This study, therefore, identified extant Yorùbá religious wooden paraphernalia in Sábẹ and Ifẹ, distinguished their iconographic features, interpreted their semiotic meanings and compared their iconography with that of their extant counterparts in Òyó. The study also examined areas of divergence in the artistic production of the people.

The study adopted ethnographic research design. A total of 33 in-depth interviews were conducted (15 in Òyó, 10 in Sábẹ and eight in Ifẹ) with master wood-carvers, priests and adherents of some Yorùbá traditional religion who use wooden paraphernalia in their worship. Direct observation was used to collect data on iconographic features of wooden religious paraphernalia such as *opón-Ifá* (divination board), *agere-Ifá* (palm-nut bowl), *ìróké-Ifá* (divination board-tapper), *osé-Şàngó* (Şàngó's wand), *ère-ìbejì* (twin figurines), and *egúngún* and *gèlèdé* masks. The interviews were content-analysed, while the paraphernalia were subjected to iconographic, semiotic and comparative analyses.

Opón-Ifá, *agere-Ifá*, *ìróké-Ifá*, *osé-Şàngó* and *ère-ìbejì* are still in existence in Sábẹ and Ifẹ. *Gèlèdé* masks are common in Sábẹ, and no masking tradition was found in Ifẹ. The *ìróké-Ifá*, *agere-Ifá* and *osé-Şàngó* found in Sábẹ and Ifẹ shared similar iconographic features with those of Òyó. They were characterised by the top, middle and base sections. Their middle sections bore a variety of

images, while the top and base sections were fixed. In all the three communities, the face of Èsù, usually represented on *opón-Ifá*, was the only constant feature on divination trays. Other depictions on the tray varied from zoomorphic and anthropomorphic to abstract motifs. The *gèlèdé* masks of Sábẹ and Òyó both had two sections: the lower section had the image of a human head and the superstructures bore a myriad of images. The kneeling nude female figure, commonly depicted in *iróké-Ifá*, *agere-Ifá*, *osé-Şàngó* and Èsù figures, symbolised the pain and travails of the woman during childbirth, an important moment associated with destiny. The face of Èsù on *opón-Ifá* was indicative of the mythical relationship between Èsù and *Ifá*, while the representations on *gèlèdé* masks demonstrated the extraordinary powers believed to be possessed by women. Points of divergence included the painting of *opón-Ifá* and *gèlèdé* masks in Sábẹ, and the unique embellishment of masks with metal plates in Sábẹ and Ifẹ.

The Yorùbá religious paraphernalia in Òyó, Sábẹ and Ifẹ communities shared iconographic features and had similar semiotic connotations. They have long been represented with fixed graphical symbols and have thus attained the status of icons.

Key words: Yorùbá wood-carving, Iconography, Semiotic meanings, Paraphernalia, Icon

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If by chance I failed to mention any person who has contributed in one way or the other to the success of this research work, I ask that they should please pardon me. It is inadvertent.

CERTIFICATION

I certify that this work was carried out by AKANDE, Abiodun
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DEDICATION

To the memory of my father

MOSES OLAIWOLA AKANDE

Ọmọ oníjẹ́sún ọba níbòkun

Ọmọ aláràa gbàyídá,

Ọmọ ayọ sí nú egbé dara dara

Ọmọ afínjú wọjà kí ọ̀bùn pa rùsẹ̀ rùsẹ̀

Ọ̀bùn rùsẹ̀ rùsẹ̀ ni yio rẹ̀rù afínjú wolé

Sùn re o

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Yorùbá people constitute one of the major ethnic groups in West Africa.¹ The population of the Yorùbá in West Africa is estimated at about 30 million.² They are predominantly found in Nigeria, constituting about 21 percent of her total population.³ The Yorùbá are located in the south-western part of Nigeria between latitudes 6⁰ and 9⁰ North, and longitudes 2⁰ 30' and 6⁰ 30' East.⁴

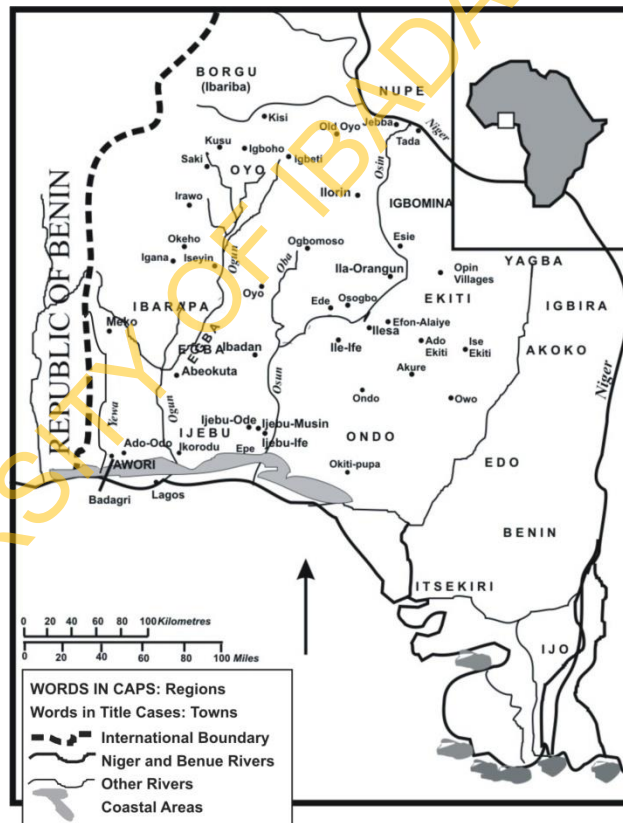


Figure 1: Map showing major Yorùbá cities and towns in Nigeria
Source: Akande Abiodun and Mba Ifeanyichukwu

Yorùbá communities also exist in Sábẹ in Benin Republic, and Ifẹ in the Atakpame region of Togo.⁵ Yorùbá communities also exist in diaspora. During the transatlantic slave trade of the 15th to 18th centuries the Yorùbá were forcibly removed and relocated to Cuba, Puerto Rico, Brazil, Haiti and Trinidad where they have now formed different groups.⁶ According to Aina,⁷ the entire population of the Yorùbá around the world, including those in diaspora, can be put at about 40 million. They are well-known for their prolific arts and crafts in carved wood and other media many of which are used in the service of their pantheon.⁸

According to Atanda, the Yorùbá originated from West Africa where their language, belonging to the Niger-Congo language group, developed.⁹ They are one of the main ethnic groups in modern Nigeria.¹⁰ They occupy Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo states. They also constitute a sizeable portion of Kwara and Kogí states. Their major cities include Ibadan, Eko (Lagos), Ogbomoso, Abeokuta, Ekiti, Akure, Ilorin, Ondo, Ijebu-Ode, Ijebu-Igbo, Osogbo, Oyo, Ile-Ife, Fiditi and others (see fig. 1).¹¹ Asiwaju¹² listed some areas where the Yorùbá population is concentrated in Benin Republic as Sábẹ, Oho, Ifonyin, Quidah, Ajase and Anago, and in Togo they can be found around the Atakpame region as the Ana and Fẹ (Ifẹ) sub-groups (see fig. 2 and 3).

Oral traditions point at Ilé-Ifẹ as the earliest possible place of origin of the Yorùbá. The ancestry of all Yorùbá, wherever they exist, has been traced to Ilé-Ifẹ. Ilé-Ifẹ is believed to be the religious capital of the Yorùbá and the Oni

of Ifè (king of Ifè) is the spiritual leader of all the Yorùbá, while Alaafin of Òyó

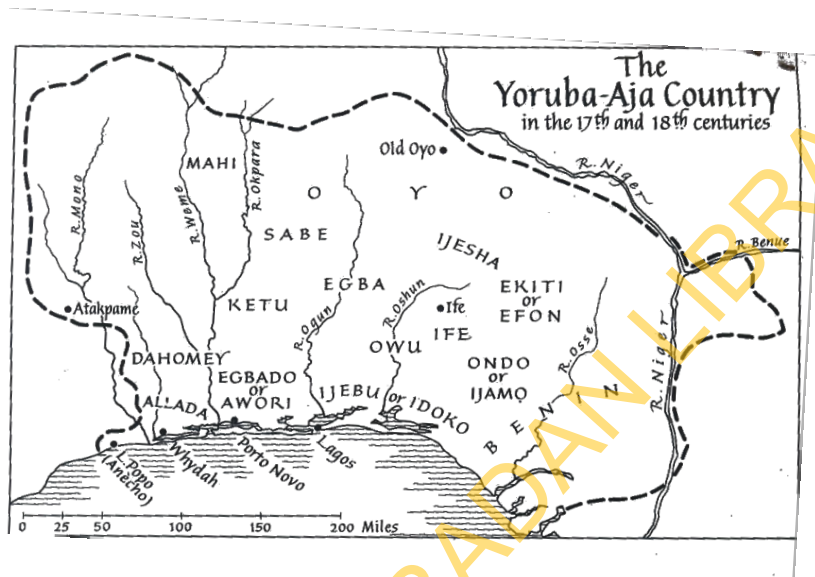


Figure 2: Map showing the coverage of Old Òyó empire in the 18th century¹³

(King of Òyó) claims political leadership. In line with this belief, Ilé-Ifè is thus the religious headquarters, while Òyó is generally regarded as the political headquarters.

Atanda¹⁴ categorised the works of historians on the origin of the Yorùbá into two groups. The first group include those that claim that the Yorùbá migrated from elsewhere to their present location. He referred to them as ‘diffusionists.’ The second group are historians who believed that Yorùbá life started in Ilé-Ifè and that the race originated from within the suburbs of their present location. Atanda called this group ‘anti-diffusionists.’

The diffusionist historians on Yorùbá history grew in number but were divided in their opinion of the origin of the Yorùbá. Johnson,¹⁵ their trail blazer,

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wrote that the origin of the Yorùbá could be traced to Mecca. He narrated a myth where Lamurudu was the great ancestor of the Yorùbá and a king of Mecca. Lamurudu was accused of idolatry and was killed. His children were sent out of Mecca and Oduduwa his son led the other children of Lamurudu out of Mecca to found Ilé-Ifè. Oranyan was said to have later tried to travel back to Mecca to avenge the murder of his grandfather, but encountered problems on the way. He then approached a Borgu king, who gave him a charmed snake that led him to found Òyó-Ile. Other diffusionist theorists of Yorùbá origin have suggested variants of this history. Frobenius¹⁶ in his own account suggested that the ancestors of the Yorùbá were Etruscans. Talbot¹⁷ and Lucas¹⁸ pointed to the direction of Egypt while Biobaku¹⁹ conjectured that they came from ancient Meroe in Eastern Sudan. Stride and Ifeka did not specify a place but noted that Oranyan featured prominently in Yorùbá myths of origin²⁰ and both in the legends of Benin and Òyó. He therefore surmised that Oranyan was probably an itinerant warrior,²¹ roving from place to place. Aderibigbe²² and Law,²³ of the anti-diffusionist group, posited that the Yorùbá have always been in their present location. Indeed, Adetugbo,²⁴ using the linguistic classification of Yorùbá language, pointed west Africa as the place of origin of the Yoruba people, because their language belong to the Niger-Congo language family spoken in the area of West Africa.

Many of the myths of Yorùbá origin pointed at Ilé-Ifè as the original homeland of the Yorùbá, yet, submissions of scholars, based on dates obtained from archaeological materials in Old Òyó gave a date of 8th century AD²⁵ and 12th-14th century for Ilé-Ifè.²⁶ Finding the origin of the Yorùbá has become a

puzzle. It is difficult to totally agree with any submission; the debate therefore is unending.

The Yorùbá were mainly dispersed from Nigeria to Sábẹ and other areas of Benin Republic (to the west) in the course of the expansionist wars of Old Òyọ. Morton-Williams,²⁷ Akinjogbin,²⁸ Akinjogbin,²⁹ and Law³⁰ wrote on the 16th to 18th century expansionist wars of the Yorùbá towards Benin Republic. Morton-Williams³¹ recorded that Yorùbá armies from Old Òyọ attacked and subdued Dahomey (Benin Republic) around 1730. Morton-Williams³², who was interested in the reason for the expansion and traced the interaction between Òyọ and Dahomey, submitted that Old Òyọ conquered Dahomey in order to gain access to the coast, thereby expanding her economy. In an attempt to make good his submission, Morton-Williams noted that as far back as the 17th century, Old Òyọ had become engaged in the Atlantic slave-trade and later conquered Dahomey in 1730 to gain access to the coast in order to carry out her slave trade business. The Dahomenian port of Port Novo then became a major trade outlet for the Yorùbá. Going by these accounts, large Yorùbá presence in Benin Republic has existed as far back as 1730.

In Togo, the Yorùbá are found around the Atakpame region, as the Ana and Fẹ (Ifẹ) sub-groups.³³ Togo occupies a narrow strip of land, stretching inland from the Gulf of Guinea in West Africa. Togolese Yorùbá people claim to have migrated from Ilé-Ifẹ in Nigeria to their present settlements.³⁴ Ajayi and Akintoye³⁵ narrated, an unsubstantiated oral tradition, that the dispersal of the Yorùbá from Ilé-Ifẹ to Togo and other parts of West Africa. According to them, when Oduduwa became old and blind, he called his children together and ordered them to go and found kingdoms of their own, giving each one a royal

symbol. The children then travelled out from Ilé-Ifè to found kingdoms in other parts of West African. It is believed that all West African Yorùbá kingdoms resulted from this dispersal.

Gayibor³⁶ wrote that after the migration from Ilé-Ifè, the Ifè or Ana people initially occupied Ajatado in Benin Republic, but because of the raiding army of the Abomey, they moved to Djovakou (in Benin Republic), and later to Atakpame (in Togo). Odji³⁷ also attempted to trace the history of the Ifè people in Atakpame. He wrote on how the Ifè people in Atakpame migrated from Ilé-Ifè between the 12th and 14th century AD. He indicated that the migration happened in two phases. The first was from Ilé-Ifè through Oke-Oyan (in Nigeria but now unknown) to Tchabe or Sábe (Benin Republic) where they sojourned for a long time in Ifita (a region of Savalou) (see Figure 3).

The second phase of the migration was from the Savalou region in Benin Republic to Togo. Odji gave a date of between 17th and 19th centuries for this migration³⁸ and blamed it on incessant raids by Fon warriors who made life uncomfortable for the Yorùbá people in the region of Savalou. The menace of this army was particularly targeted at strong young men who the armies got hold of and sold into slavery.

Today, all over the world, the Yorùbá are known for their diverse arts and crafts. They are associated with the best examples of traditional sculptures, busts and figures in brass, bronze, wood, terracotta, stone and even pure copper. They also produce textile, pottery, leather-work and calabash-carving. The practice of arts and crafts by the Yorùbá is not a recent development. This has been proven by exhaustive archaeological excavations that have been carried

out in Yorùbá-land. Agbaje-Williams has unearthed some potsherd from Old Òyó, dating back to the 8th century AD.³⁹ In Ilé-Ifè, around the middle of the 20th century a large number of antiquities dating between 12th and 14th centuries⁴⁰ were discovered. This excavation yielded important terra-cotta heads, bronze heads, brass heads and stone figures.⁴¹ More recently, Bascom⁴² visited Ilé-Ifè between 1937 and 1938 and reported that he saw paintings of animals and geometric designs on walls; he also saw calabash-carvings metal-casting (in *cire perdue* technique) and wood-carving in the process of production. The ingenuity and popularity of the artistic traditions of Ilé-Ifè do not need to be over-flogged; the works of art unearthed in Ilé-Ifè are on display in many museums all over the world.

Clapperton,⁴³ Clarke,⁴⁴ Kalilu⁴⁵ and Aremu⁴⁶ all confirmed the rich art traditions of the Yorùbá in Old Òyó. Clapperton, who visited Old Òyó before its sack and abandonment, observed that houses had ornamented doors and posts.⁴⁷ Clapperton also saw carved figures in courtyards that were part of the architecture.⁴⁸

Clarke, another visitor to Old Òyó, commented on the prolific art tradition of the Yorùbá.⁴⁹ Between 1956 and 1957, Frank Willett visited Old Òyó and reported that the sophistication of materials and decorative elements of pots found in Old Òyó supersede those of modern times.⁵⁰ Between 1973 and 1975 the Department of Archaeology, University of Ibadan, carried out excavations in an Old Òyó site and the result yielded verandah posts and pots.⁵¹ In addition to all these, recent studies on Yorùbá art by Kalilu⁵² and Filani⁵³ are testimonials to the prolific Yorùbá art traditions. Kalilu studied the traditional Yorùbá arts and crafts that were dispersed from Old Òyó to other Yorùbá

communities in West Africa. He documented the arts and crafts that originated in Old Òyó and identified the ones that were still in practise among the Yorùbá communities along the West African regions. Filani documented six Nigerian artists who have adapted Yorùbá forms and motifs to their works. He further spelt out the semiotic meanings of many Yorùbá forms and motifs.

The major arts and crafts practiced by the Yorùbá today include: blacksmithing, basketry, mat-weaving, calabash-carving, shrine-painting, cloth-weaving, stone-carving, pot-making, cloth-dyeing, embroidery, leather-works, body decorations and wood-carving. Of all the listed, wood-carving is the most practiced in most Yorùbá communities around the world, especially in Òyó, Sábẹ and Ifẹ.

There is therefore need for the study that will focus on the carving tradition of the Yoruba in Òyó, Sábẹ and Ifẹ. As earlier indicated these communities are historically related by origin and share in common the art of wood-carving. The three communities under this study have over the years practiced wood-carving and have built a corpus of wood-carvings that have formed a repertoire that can be interrogated and compared. Scholars such as Johnson,⁵⁴ Akinjogbin,⁵⁵ Babayemi⁵⁶ and Atanda⁵⁷ have documented the historical origin of the Yorùbá in Òyó, Sábẹ and Ifẹ, but have not worked on the tangible art traditions of the people. Despite the fact that the three communities share a common ancestry, language, live in neighbouring countries, and have all continued the practice of wood-carving, it is perplexing to observe that complete studies of their wood-carving art are hard to find.

Wood-carving is practiced all over Africa, but this is especially so among the Yorùbá in Òyó, Sábẹ and Ifẹ communities. In these communities, the carving tradition has gained prominence in their religion. In Sábẹ and Òyó, for

example, very elaborate types of *gèlèdè* and *ẹpa* masks are used in *egúngún* ancestral cult worship (Plate 6). A number of typical Yorùbá wooden figures also exist in Ifẹ (See Plates 3, 4, and 5).

A number of factors have enhanced the spread of Yorùbá wood-carvings. Notable among these factors, as hinted earlier, is that wood-carving is used in the service of Yorùbá deities. Yorùbá people in diaspora, still adhering to traditional Yorùbá religious beliefs, require the use of relevant wood-carvings for the purpose of religious worship. This has therefore encouraged the production of carved wood objects. In many communities to which the Yorùbá dispersed, many continued the practise of their religion and hold on to their belief systems. Adepegba⁵⁸ noted that among the Yorùbá, wood-carving is used in the service of the pantheon of numerous Yorùbá gods and cults such as Ògún, Şàngó, Ifá, *egúngún*, *ògbóni*, *ìbejì*, *orò* and so on. Carroll,⁵⁹ Thompson⁶⁰ and Adesanya⁶¹ mentioned that the common items produced in wood include: Èsù figure and its wooden icons, Şàngó wooden objects, Ifá wooden objects, *ìbejì* wooden figures, *Ògbóni* and *Orò* cult wooden objects. Adesanya mentioned Yorùbá masking traditions, such as *egúngún* (among the Òyó), *ẹpa* (among Ekiti and Igbomina) and *gèlèdè* (among the Egba, Egbado and Ketu) which employ the services of wood-carvers in the production of masks and other wooden objects in their worship.

Another factor that helped to broadcast Yorùbá wood-carving was the transatlantic slave trade that saw many Yorùbá sold into slavery all over the Americas. The slaves continued with the worship of their religion in the different worlds where they served as slaves. Lovejoy⁶² noted that the scale of migration was concentrated in the period between 1780 and 1850, which made

the movement of the Yorùbá into the diaspora one of the largest migrations across the Atlantic up to that time, rivalling all other African, and indeed European, 'ethnic' scale of resettlements. In West African, the expansionist wars of the Old Òyó empire and the migratory nature of the Yorùbá people saw the dispersal of the Yorùbá with their culture and religion to Sábẹ in Benin Republic and Ifẹ in Togo. It is germane to note that Yorùbá in diaspora have continued to hold tenaciously to their arts and belief systems. Indeed, Thompson⁶³ acknowledged the persistence of Yorùbá culture through change and adversity. Lawal⁶⁴ equally wrote that the Yorùbá have the habit of holding on to their culture wherever they found themselves. He further added that this habit has continued to influence the visual and performance arts of the diaspora.⁶⁵

Although wood-carving is an ancient art practice among the Yorùbá, its written historical record is relatively recent when compared with Yorùbá arts in metal. This is because the material with which it is produced is easily perishable; while metals and terra-cottas can survive for centuries, wood as a medium cannot. The humid conditions of Africa and her termite-infested soil are unfriendly to wood. Carroll⁶⁶ said that it is unlikely that any Yorùbá wood-carving can be more than a hundred years old. Pogoson⁶⁷ also added that extant African wood objects are less than two hundred years old.

From the discussions above, it is evident that enriching studies have been carried out on the arts of the Yorùbá occupying different places in West Africa. However, not enough work has been done on the practice and development of the art of wood-carving in Sábẹ and Ifẹ, where the art tradition has been 'immediately' transferred. Yet, Yai⁶⁸ pointed out that no study of Yorùbá

culture is complete without an examination of their fate in the new world, where they are exposed and tested amidst existing cultures. He submitted that it is in the difficult conditions of exile that a tradition can best prove its ability to innovate. Today, Yorùbá artistic traditions have been transferred not only to other West African regions, but also to the shores of the Atlantic. As earlier stated, mythology and historical records established that the Yorùbá, all over the world, are connected, with the Yorùbá locale in Nigeria being their place of origin. In many communities where they live, the Yorùbá still practise their original traditional religion. The Yorùbá religion is perhaps the largest patron of these wood objects because they are needed for worship. This located the worshippers of traditional Yorùbá religion and, subsequently, their carvings in Òyó, Sábẹ and Ifẹ. Added to this, this study examined the production and forms of Yorùbá wood-carvings in the three communities. In essence, their developments were recorded, intermingling with other cultures, adaptations and their resilience in the new worlds where they have been transferred.

Statement of the problem

The nature of wood does not permit its products to last for more than 200 years.⁶⁹ This evidences the fact that many wood-carvings (and carvers) have been lost to history. Davidson⁷⁰ also pointed out that without the presence of an invoked spirit, a piece of sculpture had little value. He wrote that if a wood-carving began to rot or crack heavily, it would be considered unsuitable to house a spirit, and another figure would be made to replace it. The first piece, no matter how beautiful, would be declared worthless. This means that in the past a lot of wood-carvings that were done with great skill must have been discarded and allowed to rot. It is therefore of utmost urgency to put on record

the wood-carving traditions of the West African region. If Davidson's statement is anything to go by, it is important that wood-carving records be updated from time to time.

Researchers of Yorùbá wood-carving such as Adesanya⁷¹, Aremu⁷² and Adepegba⁷³ observed that there is a dearth of information in the area of Yorùbá wood-carving. These scholars advised that there is need for rigorous work to be done on Yorùbá wood-carving. Aremu⁷⁴ and Abimbola⁷⁵ particularly pointed out that available information and history on wood-carving and carvers are mostly in oral form. Added to the problems is that many scholars⁷⁶ of Yorùbá wood-carving have concentrated on master wood-carvers from Ekiti and Igbomina such as Obembe, Areogun, Bamgboye, Olowe and Lamidi Fakeye to the detriment of works from other parts of Yorùbáland and beyond. Although Bascom⁷⁷ wrote extensively on Duga of Meko, Carroll⁷⁸ touched on Otooro of Ketu, while Chappel⁷⁹ discussed some works of Akinjobi of Oke-Odan, little attention has been paid to the subject from a contemporary perspective. Yorùbá wood-carvers of Sábẹ and Ifẹ have not been sufficiently documented. This is the gap which this research bridged; it studied wood-carvers and wood-carving traditions in three Yorùbá communities cutting across Nigeria, Benin Republic and Togo.

Another modern-day problem facing the art and practice of wood-carving is that the Yorùbá traditional religion, which was the major patron of wood-carving appears to have been overshadowed by Christianity and Islam. These new religions (especially Islam) abhor the use of images in worship. Although Christian sect like the Catholic church (and Anglican) make use of images in their worship, these images are not all wooden and may not even be

African. Modern architecture has also minimally patronised carved wooden figures such as verandah posts and doors. The economic survival of traditional carvers is therefore in jeopardy. For these reasons, wood-carvers have therefore had to look elsewhere for the patronage of their works.

Objectives of the study

This research work is on wood-carving traditions among the Òyó, Sábẹ and Ifẹ Yorùbá communities. The present work is therefore aimed at studying the wood-carving traditions, carvers, styles and forms and their cultural associations in Òyó, Sábẹ and Ifẹ (three important Yorùbá communities located in different countries in West African).

The specific objectives of this study include the following:

1. To examine the level of the continuity of Yoruba wood-carving traditions (iconographic) in Òyó, Sábẹ and Ifẹ.
2. To investigate the traditions of renowned wood-carvers in the selected communities.
3. To study the degree of change and adaptation (iconography) of Yoruba wood-carving traditions in the study areas
4. To identify the Yorùbá religions and cults like Ifá worship and divination, Şàngó worship, Ògún worship, *egúngún* cult, *orò* cult, etc., and their wood paraphernalia in Òyó, and their equivalents in Sábẹ and Ifẹ, and to identify the carved wooden objects used in their worship.

5. To identify and study the major patrons of wood-carving in Òyó, Sábẹ and Ifẹ.

Towards showcasing the wood-carving traditions in the selected study areas the following research questions were designed.

1. Do the Yoruba in Sabe and Ife still retain the wood-carving traditions (iconography) they took with them from Nigeria?
2. Who are the acclaimed master-carvers in Òyó, Sábẹ and Ifẹ?
3. What are the identifiable similarities and variations (iconographic) in the wood-carvings of Òyó, Sábẹ and Ifẹ?
4. Do the Sábẹ and Ifẹ Yorùbá people still retain strong Yorùbá cults and religious traditions like *egúngún*, *orò*, *ògbóni*, Ifá divination, etc., where carved wood objects are put to 'other-than-mundane' use?
5. Who are the major patrons of wood-carvings in Òyó, Sábẹ and Ifẹ?

Scope of the study

The study covers the wood-carving traditions of the Yorùbá people in Òyó, Sábẹ and Ifẹ. Òyó here refers to Yorùbá towns in Nigeria, especially those which claim descent from Old Òyó. The people of such towns are referred to as Òyó-Yorùbá; they include, Òyó, Ede, Osogbo, Opin-Ekiti, Ekiti, Ibadan and many others.

Sábẹ is a town in Benin Republic. The town is noted for its large population of Yorùbá people. Scholars agree that the ancestry of the Yorùbá people in Sábẹ and its neighbouring towns can be traced to Old Òyó in Nigeria. The Yorùbá in Sábẹ have made their impact felt in the entire region with their strict adherence and constant exhibition of strong Yorùbá cultural traits, like *gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀*, *egúngún*, Ifá divination worship and, more than all other things, they still retain and speak the Yorùbá language.

Ifẹ is located in the region of Atakpame in Togo. They are sometimes called Ana. They are a stock of the Yorùbá people who migrated from Ilé-Ifẹ between the 12th and 16th centuries.⁸⁰ The Ifẹ people have continued with their original traditions of Ifá and Òrìṣà worship. Annually, the Ifẹ people celebrate *Odún Itshu* (new yam festival), where they display their deities and put up a number of Yorùbá cultural performances.

The Yorùbá people in the three communities share a common ancestry and language. The three Yorùbá communities have been selected based on their continued strong wood-carving traditions that have not been given due attention by scholars. There is a number of enriching studies on Òyó-Yorùbá wood-carvings, but those of Sábẹ and Ifẹ have not received enough attention. The people of the selected areas drifted away a long time ago and now belong to

different political entities, governments and, indeed, colonial heritage, yet they have filial connections, and still share the same language and cultural traits. It is therefore desirable to compare the culture of the selected communities in order to establish the attendants of changes and adaptations in the course of time and space.

Significance of the study

Renowned and documented Yorùbá master wood-carvers have been limited to certain parts of Yorùbá-land. But the documentation is inadequate as it represents a small proportion of the entire population of Yorùbá wood-carving traditions and wood-carvers in the West African region. This study has therefore expanded the record of master carvers from Yorùbá communities by adding more carvers from Òyó, Sábẹ and Ifẹ (three major Yorùbá communities in different countries in West African).

It has been established that the wood-carving tradition has, within the selected communities, travelled though time and space. In the course of its dispersal, the tradition has interacted with other cultures and has emerged as the ‘superior.’⁸¹ It is reasonable to say that the tradition must have acquired and dropped some of its original features. This highlight the new identities of the tradition and this can be a reliable source of information from which scholars, who may wish to study Yorùbá arts and crafts in the diaspora, may draw. Furthermore, the result of this research corroborates the position of Yai,⁸² that the resilience of any culture can be best tested in a foreign land. He also noted that “no study of certain aspects of Yorùbá is complete without an examination of their fate in the new world diaspora.”

This research has put on record the new patrons of Yorùbá wood-carvings in the selected communities. The Yorùbá traditional religion that was the major patron of wood-carving have been overshadowed by Christianity and Islam. This research reveals the new patrons of wood-carving. This research also give answers to frequently asked questions on wood-carving, such as what characterizes contemporary wood-carving in terms of philosophy and patronage? What is the level of deviation from the original wood-carving principles? What are the agents of change?

As earlier stated the expansionist wars of Old Òyó have been documented by various scholars, likewise the migration of the Ifẹ people to the region of Atakpame. This research also intends to trace the history of the Yorùbá and their dispersal to Òyó, Sábẹ and Ifẹ, using art as a medium. To put it succinctly, this research use art to corroborate historical accounts. This study therefore is intended to bridge the gap of inadequate information on modern-day practice of Yorùbá wood-carving and carvers, and to expand the frontiers of Yorùbá wood-carving traditions.

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CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study investigates the art of wood-carving in the three historically-important Yorùbá communities of Òyó, Sábẹ and Ifẹ whose locations now cut across different political and geographical boundaries. This review will dwell mainly on the examination of literature on Yorùbá wood-carvings. Nevertheless, it is relevant to take a look at the history of the Yorùbá to establish the connections between these towns. The three communities have long been historically-connected. The expansionist wars of Old Òyó (in the 18th century)¹ into Benin Republic and the migration of the Ifẹ Yorùbá people to the region of Atakpame in Togo will serve as background literature. This work will review literature under the following headings:

Traditional origin of Yorùbá people

Migrations of Yorùbá people: diaspora connections with emphasis on Òyó, Sábẹ and Ifẹ

Wood-carving traditions in Yorùbáland

Traditional origin of Yorùbá people

The origin of the Yorùbá has always been perplexing and a subject of debate among scholars. Despite the complexity of the discussion, it is generally agreed that the establishment of Ifẹ precede Òyó, even though there is hardly any

evidence to substantiate this position. Ilé-Ifè is believed to be the original homeland of the Yorùbá. There are widely held mythological stories about the origin of the Yorùbá in Ilé-Ifè. One such tradition (narrated by Bolaji Idowu) posits that Orisanla (the great divinity), also known as Obatala, who is regarded in Yorùbá culture as the arch-divinity, was sent by Olodumare (Supreme Deity)² to create solid land out of the primordial water which was the situation of the earth then. He was also charged with the responsibility of populating the earth. Orisanla afterwards descended from heaven to earth with a chain. While coming to earth, he brought with him a small snail shell full of earth, some palm kernels, a five-toed hen and a pigeon. He was to empty the content of the snail shell on the primordial water after placing some pieces of iron on it. He was then to place the chicken on the spilled earth, to spread the sand over the water. According to this myth, when Orisanla landed on earth, he landed in Ilé-Ifè,³ from where he started his assignment. It is in line with this myth that the Yorùbá believe that the creation of the entire world started from Ilé-Ifè. Ilé-Ifè, in Yorùbá language, literally translates to “the place from where the earth spreads out.” It should be noted that a number of variants of this myth exist even though they all basically raise the same point about the origin of Yorùbá in Ilé-Ifè.

The earliest written historical record on the Yorùbá was that of Samuel Johnson.⁴ In the first chapter of his famous work, he drew heavily from oral tradition to trace the history of the origin of all Yorùbá. In doing this, he leaned heavily towards a foreign origin of the Yorùbá. According to him, Oduduwa, the progenitor and legendary leader of the Yorùbá, was a crown prince of Mecca. His father, Lamurudu, was a king of Mecca. According to this myth,⁵

Oduduwa fled from Mecca after he was accused of paganism. He travelled 90 days from Mecca to Ilé-Ifè in Nigeria. There he founded the first Yorùbá kingdom. These two stories and many other variants agree that Ilé-Ifè was the first Yorùbá settlement. By implication, therefore, it was from Ilé-Ifè that the Yorùbá expanded and from here they went to found other Yorùbá towns and villages. Johnson's record is one of the earliest written records of the history of the Yorùbá and has served as a springboard on which many writers of Yorùbá history based their history of Yorùbá origin. Like the early history of most nations the commonly received accounts are for the most part purely legendary.

Babayemi⁶ stated that the Oduduwa and Oranyan myths are of two variants: those based on creation and those based on migration. The creation variant credits either Oduduwa or Oranyan with creating land and that Ifè is the cradle of the Yorùbá. The migration variant presents Oduduwa as the leader of the Yorùbá. Oduduwa founded Ilé-Ifè and from here the Yorùbá diffused to other parts of the world. Babayemi suggested that *òpá* Oranyan (Oranyan's staff), which is said to be Oranyan's walking stick while he was alive, is found in Ilé-Ifè is a material evidence to buttress the claim that Ilé-Ifè is the original homeland of the Yorùbá. The staff is believed to be located on the spot where Oranyan was buried.⁷ But since the myth does not mention that Oranyan went back to Ilé-Ifè after founding Òyó, Babayemi⁸ contemplated that Oranyan probably died elsewhere, while returning from one of his war expeditions, and that it was his corpse that was carried to Ilé-Ifè. Babayemi's position may be difficult to accept, especially because the physical size of the *òpá* Oranyan (a large tall piece of stone) will be difficult, if not impossible to move over such a long distance from Old Òyó to Ilé-Ifè. In another tradition, Oranyan is said to

have disappeared into the ground.⁹ One tradition¹⁰ however claims that his successors in Òyó were only able to cut his fingernails and toenails, which they buried at Bara (burial site at Old Òyó) where he is worshipped as the first ancestor of the Òyó people. Observable and central to this study is that all the versions and variants of the Oranyan story agree that Ile-Ifè was the first Yorùbá settlement.

Babayemi, elsewhere,¹¹ traced the adventure of Oranyan from Ilé-Ifè to Benin. He opined that Oranyan might have been a warrior who fought his way to Benin from Ilé-Ifè. Babayemi concluded that Oranyan was likely a cultural hero not only in Yorùbáland but also in Benin, Borgu and Nupe, since he features in the legends of all these people. This submission supports the position of Stride and Ifeka that Oduduwa had seven close descendants,¹² though some traditions call them grandsons. These seven relations of Oduduwa moved out to found the ruling families of seven new Yorùbá states. The seven states were Owu, Sábẹ, Popo, Benin, Ila, Kétu and Òyó. This myth in particular and other Oduduwa and Oranyan myths link all the Yorùbá groups to a common origin.

Aderibigbe's¹³ position about the origin of the Yorùbá is radical. He opined that the idea of the Yorùbá migrating from Egypt or elsewhere is unacceptable. He considered Ilé-Ifè as the earliest stage in the development of Yorùbá culture. The implication of this view is that the Yorùbá have always been and have remained in Ilé-Ifè, from where they diffused to other places in West Africa and the rest of the world.

Gayibor¹⁴ and Olomola¹⁵ stated that the Yorùbá people got to Ilé-Ifè sometime around the 8th and 9th centuries. At that time, Oduduwa, the leader of

the group, met Obatala who was the king of the ancient dynasty in Ilé-Ifè. Obatala was said to have been deposed by Oduduwa who then took the throne. This position corroborated the migration of the Yorùbá from elsewhere to Ilé-Ifè.

The following discussions centre on the founding of Òyó-Ilé. Apart from oral traditions, there are written records by scholars on the history of the Òyó-Yorùbá. The earliest written records of the history of Òyó were actually travelogues of explorers and reports of colonial officials. One such report is that of Clapperton,¹⁶ a foreign explorer to Nigeria. In his report, Clapperton saw Old Òyó as a Yorùbá city of historical and cultural importance. He described the people as a people fond of ornamenting their wooden doors and posts. Clapperton's report is considered important because he is the only writer who categorically stated that he saw Old Òyó when it was still populated. It is therefore an eye-witness account. Clapperton's intention however was not to record the history of Old Òyó or the Yorùbá; he was merely admiring the beautiful art tradition he saw. Another visitor to Old Òyó was J. D. Clarke.¹⁷ Soper¹⁸ pointed out that of all the visitors to Old Òyó, none gave a detailed description of the arts and crafts of the town as much as Clarke did.

Johnson's¹⁹ record of the history of origin of Old Òyó is the first written record. The record is based on the myth of Oranyan, Oduduwa and Lamurudu. Oranyan, the son of Oduduwa, was said to have decided to go back to Mecca to avenge the defeat of his grandfather, Lamurudu. On his way back to Mecca, he had to cross River Niger, which he found difficult to do because of its size. Too ashamed to go back to Ilé-Ifè, Oranyan approached the king of Borgu for

assistance. The Borgu king provided Oranyan with a charmed snake which led him to found the first Òyó (Old Òyó). A variant of this tradition has it that Lamurudu the king of Mecca, was the father of Oduduwa, the acclaimed progenitor of the Yorùbá. However due to the pagan act of his family, he was killed. The children of Lamurudu were then sent out of Mecca; led by Oduduwa, they travelled out to found Ilé-Ifè.²⁰

Law²¹ suspected that all these myths were political brainwashing to provide a reason giving the Yorùbá people a sense of unity through a common origin and subsequently subjecting them to the rulership of the Alaafin. He referred to this as a gimmick and called it “the heritage of Oduduwa.”²²

According to Gayibor,²³ the dispersal of the sons of Oduduwa took place in the 9th century. He claimed that this led to the founding of Òyó, and later in the 12th century the founding of Ketou. When Oduduwa took over from Obatala, the last king of the ancient dynasty in Ilé-Ifè, there was a power struggle between Obatala and Oduduwa on the issue of succession to the throne. Oduduwa sensed insecurity and danger and decided to send his children into exile to found kingdoms of their own. The children went out of Ilé-Ifè and found Benin, Owu, Ode-Ondo, Ilesa, Sábẹ and Òyó-Ilé.

Atanda²⁴ noted that the origin of peoples in any society has always brought about arguments and disagreements. Members of every community seem to be concerned with the question of the origin of their community. To this question, he submitted, there are satisfying answers which are usually provided by ideological historians and satisfactory answers mostly provided by objective historians. Majority of historians of Yorùbá history, according to

Atanda's criteria, base their arguments on events that cannot be scientifically verified. Indeed, he pointed out that most of the diffusionist scholars, who claimed outside origin for the Yorùbá, based their assumptions on Muhammad Bello (1739-1837); the Sultan of Sokoto's history book, *Infaq al maisur*, written in Arabic between 1806 and 1809. Bello, in his sentiments for religion, traced the origin of his own ethnic group to the Jews and Arabs.

Atanda,²⁵ elsewhere, using the Kwa language classification to which Yorùbá belong to trace the origin of the Yorùbá, concluded that the Yorùbá originated from West Africa area, where their language group developed. He wrote that their language is part of a continuum of the Kwa family of languages which developed in that area. Atanda wrote that the writings of the diffusionist historians as fallacies.

The diffusionist scholars of the origin of the Yorùbá history are divided, but their submissions all seem to be based on Johnson's account. Frobenius,²⁶ in his own account, suggested that the ancestors of the Yorùbá were Etruscans. Talbot²⁷ and Lucas²⁸ also pointed to the direction of Egypt while Biobaku²⁹ conjectured that they came from ancient Meroe in Eastern Sudan. Stride and Ifeka did not specify a place but noted that Oranyan featured severally in Yorùbá myths of origin³⁰ and also in the legends of Benin; he therefore surmised that Oranyan was probably an itinerant warrior,³¹ roving from place to place. The anti-diffusionists posited that the Yorùbá originated from the Niger-Benue confluence and some claimed that they have always been in their present locations. Whether from the diffusionists' or the anti-diffusionists' angle, it can be fairly established that the Yorùbá of West Africa all originated from Nigeria.

The complex nature of the origin of the Yorùbá has made it difficult to totally agree with any submission, the debate calls for further research.

Migrations of Yorùbá people: diaspora connections with emphasis on Ọ̀yọ́, Sábẹ̀, Ifẹ̀

Germane to this study is a review of the literature on the expansion of Old-Ọ̀yọ́ to Benin Republic and the migration of some Ifẹ̀-Yorùbá to Benin Republic and eventually to Togo. Historians have contributed immensely to this area of study. Johnson³² mentioned that as far back as the time of Alaafin Agboluaje (1754-?),³³ the Old Ọ̀yọ́ empire had extended its boundaries to Niger river in the north and a portion of Nupe and Borgu in the east. To the south, Ọ̀yọ́ had extended its borders to the coastal regions and Dahomey. Parrinder³⁴ also recorded that the Yorùbá spread to the west of Nigeria, cutting across Benin Republic and reaching into the east of Togo. Bertho³⁵ corroborated this history when he wrote that by 1730, Ọ̀yọ́ had conquered Dahomey and Yorùbá people had started migrating across the countries of West Africa (as far as Togo). He equally pointed out that these movements came as a result of wars and migrations. Lloyd, in his own account, wrote that Dahomey was conquered by Old Ọ̀yọ́ around 1726.³⁶

Akinjogbin's³⁷ account is similar to that of Johnson; he wrote that by the middle of the 18th century, Ọ̀yọ́ expanded its territory to Dahomey. At that time, Agaja was the ruler of Dahomey. Morton-Williams³⁸, who was interested in the reason for the expansion, traced the interaction between Ọ̀yọ́ and Dahomey. In his own view, he said that Old Ọ̀yọ́ conquered Dahomey in order to gain access to the coast and thereby expand her economy. Morton-Williams, in an attempt

to make good his submission, recorded that as far back as the 17th century, Old Òyó had become engaged in the Atlantic slave trade and it later conquered Dahomey in 1730; from there Òyó passed to the coast to carry out her slave trade business. Port Novo became a major trade outlet for the Yorùbá.

At a point in the 17th and 18th centuries, the power of Òyó was said to be quite enormous. Òyó was described by Ajayi and Smith³⁹ as the most populous Yorùbá town and because of the clear political ascendance throughout Òyó, the Alaafin became the most powerful Yorùbá ruler. Alaafin Orompoto was said to have introduced an intensive use of horses for warfare in Òyó. After introducing the cavalry, Òyó could match the menace of Borgu and Nupe. The Nupe had sometime in the 16th century forced Òyó to relocate to Igboho.⁴⁰ In due course, the strong army of Òyó conquered Sábe and Kétu (major towns of Dahomey).

Òyó spread westwards, rather than southwards probably because of the inability of the horses of Òyó to penetrate the thick forest. Horses perform best in the savannah. It was therefore difficult for Òyó to march against the Yorùbá cities that lay southwards, because of the thick and dense forest of the south. Coupled with this, some of the southern regions like Ekiti and Ondo areas were hilly and mountainous. Further reasons for the failure of Òyó to march southwards were blamed on the presence of tsetse flies in the southern regions. Tsetse flies were harmful to the horses of the Òyó cavalry. Òyó had to therefore spread westwards to the cities in the savannah.

Elsewhere, Akinjogbin⁴¹ wrote that Òyó attacked and conquered Aja which was under Dahomey. The subjugation, he wrote, was carried out in two phases. The first was between 1724 and 1730, when Òyó undertook four

successful expeditions against Dahomey. The second phase was in 1730 when a comprehensive political settlement was reached. Under the agreement of the settlement, Dahomey was mandated to pay tributes to Òyó⁴². Akinjogbin,⁴³ in fact, argued that the Yorùbá in Nigeria and those in Benin Republic and Togo should have been lumped together as one country. He condemned the arbitrary partitioning of Nigeria, Benin Republic and Togo. In his own view, the Yorùbá in Òyó, Sábẹ and Ifẹ should have been given one geo-political boundary because the interaction between the people has been long and total. To consolidate his position, Akinjogbin⁴⁴ pointed to and employed oral traditions in tracing the history of Yorùbá origin among the Alladah, Quidah, Abomey (all in Benin Republic) and in Eweland in modern Togo. He gathered that a certain fraction of the Yorùbá people moved from Ilé-Ifẹ in Nigeria to Togo. The leaders of the groups were all princes from Ilé-Ifẹ. Initially resident in Ilé-Ifẹ and in order to avoid friction, they decided to found different kingdoms. He gathered that the dispersal appeared to have been orderly and that they probably agreed on how to maintain future contact. This, in his view, is one of the reasons that led to the spread of the Yorùbá along the West African coast.

Morton-Williams,⁴⁵ Akinjogbin,⁴⁶ Akinjogbin,⁴⁷ and Law⁴⁸ wrote about the 16th to 18th century expansionist wars of the Yorùbá. Morton-Williams⁴⁹ recorded that the Yorùbá armies from Òyó-Ile attacked and subdued Dahomey (Benin Republic) around 1730. Akinjogbin,⁵⁰ noting the enormous influence of Òyó over Dahomey, recounted that Yorùbá people from Old Òyó were moved to infiltrate and reside in Dahomey. The implication of Lloyd's historical date is that the Yorùbá have settled in Benin Republic for about three centuries. The Yorùbá, being the captors, dominated the culture of the autochthons and

established a strong community. Indeed, Akinjogbin wrote that a particular king of Ọ̀yọ́ (Alaafin) actually moved Ọ̀yọ́-Yorùbá people to live and mingle with the people of Dahomey. The Ọ̀yọ́-Yorùbá would have taken with them their tangible and non-tangible cultural materials to Benin Republic. From these historical submissions, and present-day existence of Yorùbá people and, especially their language in some parts of Benin Republic, it is plausible to conclude that Old Ọ̀yọ́ in the past had influence and cultural domination over Benin Republic; the Yorùbá were the captors and the people of Benin Republic were the captives. Important to this study is the fact that the Yorùbá in Benin Republic got to their present location (from the Yorùbá located in Nigeria) through the expansionist wars of Old Ọ̀yọ́. Therefore, they are from the same stock as the Yorùbá in Nigeria and, by implication, are also from Ilé-Ifẹ̀.

Togo occupies a narrow strip of land, stretching inland from the gulf of Guinea in West Africa. The Yorùbá people in Togo claim to have migrated from Ilé-Ifẹ̀ in Nigeria to their present settlements. According to an oral tradition in Allada, Quidah and Abomey (all in Benin Republic) and in Eweland (Togo), the ancestors of the Yorùbá people in Togo migrated from Nigeria.⁵¹ This tradition claims that the first place where the Yorùbá settled was called Nuatja (called Watchi in modern Togo). From this point the group was said to have divided into several other groups and they went in different directions.

Asiwaju⁵² mentioned that in Benin Republic, Yorùbá settlements can be found around Sábe, Kétu, Oho, Ifonyin and Anago. In Togo, they can be found around the Atakpame region (as the Ana and Fè (Ifẹ̀) sub-groups of the

Yorùbá).⁵³ More than any other means, the Yorùbá got to Benin and Togo through the expansionist wars of Old Òyó and by migration.

Ajayi and Akintoye⁵⁴ recounted a tradition narrating the dispersal of the Yorùbá from Ilé-Ifè. Oduduwa was said to be old and stricken with blindness. He called his children together and ordered them to go and found kingdoms of their own, giving each one a royal symbol. In addition, an *odu* of Ifá (Ifá oral literature)⁵⁵ also gives an elaborate explanation on the dispersal. According to the Ifá source, Ilé-Ifè was hit by a drought which lasted for a long time, causing famine and decimation. No one could proffer a solution to this problem. The best diviners were consulted but they could not come up with a solution. Finally, one Agirilogbon, a diviner (*babaláwo*) of Oke-Itase in Ilé-Ifè, said that the people of the town should move out of Ilé-Ifè to found other communities. It is probably in accepting this that Oduduwa asked his sons to lead the various groups. This tradition confirms that the migration was orderly for the leaders are remembered as having met at a place called Ita-Ijeroun (the place of consultation). There they agreed which way each would go and how they were to maintain future contact. The princes went in different directions and later met at a place called Ita-marun in Ipetumodu (the point where five foot-paths meet). Those who went eastwards were said to have finally settled in Ado, Owo and Benin.

Gayibor⁵⁶ wrote that after the migration from Ilé-Ifè, the Ifè people initially occupied Ajatado in Benin Republic, but because of the raiding of the army of Abomey, they moved to Djovakou (in Benin Republic), and later to Atakpame (in Togo (see map in figure 4)) He also noted that the Ifè-Yorùbá

people occupied Tchetti (in Benin Republic) with the permission of the Voudou villagers in Gnagna (in Benin Republic) under the leadership of Chief Idayi. Later on, Pedoke, a chief of another Voudou village, also accommodated them in the Savalou regions (in Benin Republic). At that time the Ifè people were led by one Atalewa.

Odji⁵⁷ attempted to trace the history of the Ifè people in Atakpame. He gathered that the Ifè people in Atakpame migrated from Ilé-Ifè in Nigeria between the 12th and 14th century AD. He indicated that the migration happened in two phases. The first was from Ilé-Ifè (Nigeria) through Oke-Oyan (Nigeria) to Tchabe or Sábe (Benin Republic) where they sojourned for a long time in Ifita (a region of Savalou). A sub-group of this stock moved on to Tchetti (in Benin Republic). Another sub-group went to Djama Ekpo and yet another to Ilodji (both in Benin Republic). According to Odji, this migration can be referred to as the exodus of the children of Odùduwà from Ilé-Ifè to Tchabe (Sábe), Ketou (Kétu) and Tado (Ajatado).

The second phase of the migration was from the Savalou region, in Benin Republic, to Togo. Odji gave a date of between 17th and 19th centuries to this migration.⁵⁸ The incessant raids by Fon warriors made life uncomfortable for the Yorùbá people in the region of Savalou. The menace of this army was particularly targeted at strong young men who the armies got hold of and sold into slavery. It should be noted that the menace of the Fon army on the Yorùbá people in the Savalou was earlier mentioned in the reports of Plehn,⁵⁹ Dusser⁶⁰ and Vuillet⁶¹ to the governments of Benin Republic and Togo. In their reports they mentioned that the Yorùbá in Atakpame were from Tchetti, Djama and

Dahomey (all in Benin Republic). They also indicated that the Yorùbá fled from Benin Republic to escape the constant enslavement of their children by the Fon army. These writers' reports indicate that all through the reign of Adadozan (1797-1888) and Guezo (1888-1858) in Abomey, there were constant raids for able-bodied Yorùbá men who were sold as slaves.

Gbadewa⁶² identified three groups of Yorùbá in Benin Republic, these were the Hudu, Djama and Tchetti. The Hudu group, he said, stayed in Adima, the hilly parts of Gblito. The founder of this group was said to be one Atiliwa.⁶³ The Djama group also came from Ifè and settled in Djahokou (same as Djawokou) around the Savalou region of Dahomey. Because of the constant raid of the Abomey army, Atakpah, the leader of the group, with the consent of Akposso (their landlord), left Djahokou with his people to found another settlement called Djama. The third group, the Tchetti group, were originally from the Djama stock. They left Djama to settle in Tchetti-Ekpo, under the leadership of Ndaye. They later left Tchetti-Ekpo to found Gnagna. Much later, this group, under the leadership of Abomey Madogougou Adandozan who reigned between 1803–1818,⁶⁴ alongside the Djama group and leaders, finally relocated to the Atakpame region. In another work of his, Gayibor⁶⁵ corroborated the story of Gbadewa. He traced the history of the Ifè-Yorùbá people from Ilé-Ifè in Nigeria to Benin Republic before they finally settled down in Atakpame.

Fiona⁶⁶ recorded that the Ewe and some Yorùbá groups in Nigeria are thought to have moved into southern Togo from Nigeria sometime between the 1300s and 1600s. Additionally, he noted that the Togolese have long been

skilled wood-carvers. Many rain forest trees produced beautiful, richly-coloured woods, which artisans have used to create fine statues, masks and other objects over the centuries. He further observed that Ifá divination as an original and traditional Yorùbá cult is present in Togo.

In a study carried out by Fabunmi,⁶⁷ he mentioned that approximately 90,000 people in Atakpame, another Togolese town, speak a dialect of Yorùbá. Fabunmi recorded that majority of these Ifẹ settlers in Atakpame migrated from a place called Ije-Oku in Benin Republic into Togo and subsequently relocated to Atakpame. This is suggestive of waves of migratory patterns into the Atakpame region. They were probably moving and staying for short periods in places where they found comfort until they finally got to Atakpame. The people who speak Yorùbá in Atakpame actually speak the Ifẹ dialect and reside in Aposo, Kabrelosso and Ketokoli. According to Igue and Yai⁶⁸ the Yorùbá people can also be found distributed among villages of Seti-Epo, Ija-Oku, Idume, Okanlawon and Olola all along the western boundary of Benin Republic. Going by the records of Fabunmi, Igue and Yai, the Ifẹ people of Togo did not migrate directly to Atakpame region (earlier suggested). They settled at different points along the way before getting to their present locations in Benin Republic and Togo.

Looking at the circumstances surrounding the establishment of Yorùbá towns in Nigeria, Atanda⁶⁹ is of the opinion that the Yorùbá in Nigeria, Benin Republic and Togo should be considered as one. Atanda submitted that the balkanisation of the Yorùbá in the three regions was done in error, due to the ignorance of the foreign colonial masters about the history of the people. A

comparison of Yorùbá arts in Nigeria, Benin Republic and Togo such as this study sets out to do should corroborate or debunk the position of historians and yield immense benefits for future researchers who wish to study Yorùbá arts across geographical boundaries.

In the face of emerging archaeological dates on the earliest Yorùbá settlement, it will be hasty to draw a close to the debate. Artifacts from the mythically acclaimed Yorùbá origin, Ilé-Ifẹ̀, are put between the 12th and 14th centuries AD.,⁷⁰ while the ones from Old Òyó is about 8th century AD.⁷¹ Yet another date from Iwo-Eleru is 1100 BC.⁷² More recently, Oyelaran claimed to have gotten a date of 3 BC⁷³ from Iffe-Ijumu, an ‘Okun-Yorùbá’ community located between the Niger and Benue River, in Kogi State. However, despite the divergent positions of scholars on the actual place of origin of the Yorùbá, they are all in accord that the Yorùbá have a common origin, whether they migrated from elsewhere or were autochthons in their present locations in Nigeria. Also conclusive is that the origin of all Yorùbá people wherever they exist can be traced to Nigeria. By implication the Yorùbá communities in Benin Republic and Togo emerged from the ones in Nigeria. This is a justification for the possibility of a comparative study of the culture of the three communities, which can be done under the ambit of wood-carving tradition that they all have in common. Equally justifying the reason for this study is Lawal⁷⁴ and Kalilu’s⁷⁵ position that the Yorùbá have carried their culture to their several places of abode in the world, especially in the West African regions.

The Yorùbá are said to be among the largest number of African peoples enslaved and taken to Cuba,⁷⁶ Puerto Rico,⁷⁷ Brazil, Haiti, Trinidad and the rest

of the new world. They have since formed different communities and now refer to themselves with nomenclatures which include: *Nago* (in Bahia, Brazil), *Mina* (in Rio de Janeiro),⁷⁸ *Lucumi* (in Cuba, Puerto Rico),^{79,80} *Ọ̀yó̀túnjì* (in United States of America), *Candomble/Umbanda/Bauque* (in Brazil), and *Anago/Káàrọ̀ọ̀ Oòjùre* (in Nigeria).⁸¹ It is startling to note that about one-third of all slaves were taken from the areas that today are Benin Republic and Nigeria.⁸²

It is also germane to point out that many Yorùbá communities have existed as independent political units for centuries; some colonized by the French and others by the English. Although, wood-carving is done all over Africa, it is more common among Yorùbá groups and therefore considered to be the best example of art that can be used for comparison of material cultural traits among these communities. Kalilu⁸³ who studied the transmission of Yorùbá arts and crafts from Old Ọ̀yó̀ empire to other regions of West Africa pointed out that wood-carving is common and still thrives among many Yorùbá groups in the West African sub-region.

Wood-carving traditions in Yorùbáland

All the early attempts at writing about African art were done by anthropologists and ethnographers who emphasized the cultural significance of the art objects to the detriment of their history. They however made useful contributions to the study of functions and stylistic classification. These authors revealed the very rich artistic traditions of the Yorùbá. Their studies cover the arts of Ilé-Ifẹ̀, Owo, Benin and Esie.

From the 1940s to the 1960s, some of the authors who wrote on African art include Meyerowitz,⁸⁴ Cordwell,⁸⁵ Franz Boaz,⁸⁶ Henry Drewal,⁸⁷ Ulli Beier,⁸⁸ William Fagg and Magaret Plass,⁸⁹ Kevin Carroll⁹⁰ and Phillip Allison⁹¹. At the time they wrote, many of the writers were still in doubt about how to approach the formal appreciation of non-European works of art and how to understand and connect with the history of African peoples; they therefore emphasized the cultural significance.

Writers on African art in the 1970s and 1980s include Willett Frank,⁹² Roy Sieber,⁹³ William Fagg,⁹⁴ William Bascom,⁹⁵ Warren d'Azevedo,⁹⁶ Faris Thomson,⁹⁷ Ekpo Eyo,⁹⁸ Thurstan Shaw,⁹⁹ Robert Brain,¹⁰⁰ Ekpo Eyo, Frank Willett,¹⁰¹ Henry Drewal¹⁰² and H. Herold.¹⁰³ These authors carried out elaborate fieldwork based on studies of Nigerian art, drawing heavily from Yorùbá archaeology, history, and traditions of origins, styles and functions. These authors are specialists in art history and other disciplines. Other studies on Nigerian art in the 1980s and 1990s were done by William Fagg, John Pemberton III and Bryce Holcombe¹⁰⁴, Henry Drewal, John Pemberton III and Roland Abiodun¹⁰⁵ and Roland Abiodun¹⁰⁶ (elsewhere) and Adepegba¹⁰⁷.

Scholars whose studies were specifically on Yorùbá wood-carving and carvers include Clarke¹⁰⁸ and Leuzinger.¹⁰⁹ Leuzinger not only studied the principles of Yorùbá carving in general he also studied individual carvers from different Yorùbá communities; while Clarke recorded the biography and works of Bangboye of Ilofa. Another author, Bascom,¹¹⁰ studied Duga of Meko's works and biographies of specific carvers in Yorùbáland. At that time, they had

started to realize the importance of understanding the works from within their producer-culture perspectives.

Carroll¹¹¹ appears to be one of the first few writers that attempted a stylistic examination of Yorùbá works of art. Carroll put to record the biography and works of dexterous Ekiti and Kétu Yorùbá carvers. Some of the carvers he showcased are: Dada Areogun (1880-1954) of Osi-Ilorin, Bandele (b. 1910) the son of Areogun, Ootooro of Kétu (b. 1905) and Lamidi Fakeye (1925-2010) of Ila-Orangun. In his general discussion on Yorùbá carvings, he identified the objects carved by the carvers. The objects mentioned are masks, *Osé Sàngó* (Sàngó's double-headed axe), *Odó Sàngó* (Sàngó's mortar, in which various paraphernalia of Sàngó worship are kept), *Ọpón Ifá* (Ifá divination tray), *Agere Ifá* (Ifá wooden box), *Ìrókẹ Ifá* (Ifá tapper, for tapping *Ọpón Ifá*), and *Ikin Ifá* (divination palm-nuts, placed beside the tray), Èsù figure, Ògbóni drums, *Ère ibejì* (twin figures), etc. Other objects mentioned include: veranda posts, doors, *ayò* (a board game), combs and mirror frames. He observed that the carvers did not attempt to portray expressions like fear, anger or joy. The carvings illustrate Yorùbá life, dresses, tools, ornaments and sketches of village life, but they do not tell stories or relate historical events. Scenery or background does not exist, though there may be "stage-props" such as a chair to sit on or a tree to climb. Although the work of Carroll is limited to particular carvers in Yorùbáland, it presents a vivid account of the activities of carvers around the Ekiti region in the late 60s and early 70s. The study identified and attempted to collate general principles for Yorùbá wood-carving. Just like many studies of the 60s, it was focused on individual Yorùbá carvers with frugal attempt on their styles. The work is limited in scope and cannot be used to

represent all Yorùbá wood-carvings. Also, it did not discuss the survival of the art in other communities to which the carving tradition has been transmitted.

Carroll's subsequent submission in a study six years later is a point to note for researchers of Yorùbá history. Carroll¹¹² looked into the themes and decorative patterns on Yorùbá wood-carving as a source of information for Yorùbá history. He observed that for over three centuries, there seemed to have been no major changes in Yorùbá art style or subject-matters. He therefore called the attention of scholars and historians to the possibility of building up a detailed picture and history of the dresses, weapons, tools, utensils, etc., of the Yorùbá people in the last few centuries using the examples on Yorùbá wood sculpture. In this study, Carroll's contribution was to test the reliability of art as a source of history of a people.

After several years of field work on African art, Walker¹¹³ found that Yorùbá artists are not as anonymous as she probably had initially thought. Her work is therefore a challenge to the erroneous assumption of early western anthropologists and art historians in African art studies who assumed that traditional African artists were anonymous and were not important as the works they produced. On the contrary, Walker found out that African artists are popular and well-known within the community where they lived and worked. She also observed that their works can be identified by members of their communities and connoisseurs of art in their areas. She particularly picked and discussed the carving style of Olowe of Ise. Olowe of Ise was a carver from Ekiti region who is acknowledged by scholars as probably the most innovative traditional Yorùbá wood-carver of the twentieth century. Walker gathered

information on Olowe of Ise from photographs of his works, available written sources and *oríkì* (praise-poems). In a later but more comprehensive publication, still on Olowe of Ise, Walker¹¹⁴ reemphasized the acknowledgements of African artists within their areas of abode. She strongly attempted to debunk the idea that Yorùbá artists were unknown in their home territories. The artists were usually remembered and often honoured by the custodians of their carvings. She also found out that the artists were not only known but their works were often evaluated in aesthetic terms, usually described in words reflecting the skill of the maker. Her work brought a new dimension to the study of African art, which had for long taken for granted the identity of the artists, and had concentrate, on the aesthetic and cultural significance of the works of art. Walker's work is undoubtedly radical. The scope of her work is however restricted to a particular carver of Ise-Ekiti. Added to this is the fact that Yorùbá art has extended to other regions and its study requires research instruments and theories capable of coping with eclectic subjects.

Pemberton's work¹¹⁵ introduced a deep source of information to historians in Yorùbá studies. It recorded the praise-poems of famous carvers of Opin-Ekiti. In Yorùbá studies, the importance of oral history cannot be overemphasized. The data that resulted from the study can serve as a secondary source of raw oral historical data for future researchers. Within the lines of the praise-poems, carving characteristics and the prowess of great carvers of Opin are appraised. It has been proven that such studies are capable of placing events or persons within an historical epoch. Historical dates can also be extrapolated from the praise-poems. For example, through one of such records by

Abimbola,¹¹⁶ it was learnt that Arè Lagbayi was a court artist during the reign of Alaafin Abiodun in Old Òyó. Alaafin Abiodun was said to have reigned between 1775 and 1805. It was made possible by such efforts to resolve the date of Lagbayi's existence and even his original home. Ordinarily, there is no single carved wood that can be attributed to Lagbayi; his life and work can only be found in praise-poems and oral history (*ìtàn*). Another carver in history whose name has not been associated with any work of art is Bangbose of Osi-Ilorin; the carver who was said to have trained the celebrated Areogun of Osi-Ilorin. Bangbose is however mentioned severally in praise-poems as a carver with great dexterity. Without such oral records by these authors, information about some great Yorùbá artists would have been lost in the course of time.

When Picton¹¹⁷ used the word 'hand'¹¹⁸ to refer to the style of Areogun of Osi-Ilorin in his article, one understands that the author may have been adopting the local language of the culture which he wrote about to express 'style'. The literary meaning of the 'style' of an artist in Yorùbá language is *owó oníṣòṅà* (hand/style of an artist). However, *owó* literally translates to 'hand.' In this work, Picton attempted to place Areogun's work, style and resume within the historical and art-historical context of Opin, the group of villages to which Osi-Ilorin belongs. Picton was faced with the enormous task of placing Opin carvers within chronological parameters. He tried to solve the problem in two ways: first, he found that for the Opin people, there were three major wars in the nineteenth century which seemed to provide reference points within received memories of the past. The first was *ogun* Ali (Ali's war) which took place around the 1850s, a time when Opin was brought under the control of Ilorin by Ali Balogun Gambari. This event, Picton observed, served to erase

any memory of prior events, other than the mythological accounts of people coming out of the ground or of the first Olopin (king of Opín) coming from Ọ̀yọ́-Ilé. The second was *ogun Kírìjì* (Kírìjì war) which took place during the period of the Ekiti *parapò* war of 1879-1886. Picton wrote that this war was frequently remembered and referred to because an Opín contingent participated in the war. The third is *ogun Erinmòpé* (Erinmòpé war) of 1896. For example, one of the carvers Picton interviewed, John Dada, recalled being told that his grandfather, Rotimi Baba Oloja (a celebrated carver from Isare) was still alive at the time of the Erinmope war but died before *ogun Jamaní* (German war) of 1914-1918 (world war one). This suggests a date within the early years of this century, perhaps between 1900 and 1910.

The second angle from which Picton attempted solving the problem was the use of existing local age-grades to which every adult member of Opín villages belonged. As the artist grew older, he moved from one age-grade to the next. The age-grades were calibrated; a person must reach a certain age before moving to the next. If he got to the last level, then Picton would know that the artist was of age before he died. If not, the author then used the grade-level he got to before he died to calculate his age. This appears to be a good method for art historians trying to calculate an artist's age; to cross-check their local wars and age-grades and then cross-check relative chronological events and place them within an absolute dating system. The use of this system has obvious limitations, and there are variations in the calculation of the time intervals between the age-grades from place to place; however, the system gives the possibility of guessing an artist's age in absolute as well as relative and social terms.

Although Picton was able to identify the genealogies of the carvers and attempted to locate them within time frames, he was faced with the problem of ratifying works attributed to particular carvers. This was due to lack of a corpus of works that can be used to cross-check the hand (style) of such carver. He argued that even when such corpuses were available, the 'hand' of the carver could not be consistent throughout his life-time. The initial stage or the close of his career may be different from his peak period.

In all, Picton was able to trace the histories of wood-carver lineages back to 1850 when the Opin area became part of the Ilorin Emirate, a traumatic event that overshadowed prior historical events. Picton's work deserves to be applauded because it has helped to simplify the lumping together of carvers from Ekiti. Picton's study presented a graphic illustration of who trained who among Ekiti carvers. It also revealed that almost all the famous Yorùbá carvers have one link or the other with Opin-Ekiti. The present research also seeks for stylistic continuities of Yorùbá wood-carving; only this time, it extends beyond political and geographical boundaries to other Yorùbá communities.

Another enriching study on wood-carving is that of Chappel. He documented the works of one Akinjobi of Oke-Odan. The works of this artist were first collected in 1951 by K. C. Murray, then surveyor of the Nigerian Antiquities Service.¹¹⁹ Akinjobi's full names were Akinjobi Ikujeniya Alibiosu Mafarasin Akinjobi (warriors joined in bearing him). Akinjobi was born in Ade-Odo. His father was Ikujeniya Akinyemi Oloibo. His paternal grandfather was Fabiyi Ojikutu who was born in Imasai, near Ìlaro. Chappel¹²⁰ attempted a division of Akinjobi's work into two stylistic groups. In the first group, facial

features exhibited in his carvings were all represented in similar fashion. This same group of work was said to convey the still and calm composure that distinguishes Yorùbá figurative sculpture. The figures in the other group are livelier in expressions. Although only eleven of Akinjobi's sculptures were available for this study, the works are remarkable, and evidenced him as a unique sculptor of his time. His style is quite different from that of other Yorùbá sculptors. Chappel's study of Akinjobi might probably not have been documented, if not for his meticulous eyes. However, the study was limited in scope even though it highlighted salient information about the carver's biography.

In a recent research on Yorùbá wood-carving, Adesanya¹²¹ regretted that the chance of compiling a traditional artist's biography is rapidly dwindling in Yorùbá-land because many of the master carvers are dying without the documentation of their lives and works. Although her focus was on the Fakeye family and their influence on Yorùbá carving tradition as a whole, she attempted to record the biography of the Fakeye family and their influence on the Yorùbá carving traditions as a whole. The research, like that of Carroll mentioned earlier, also itemised and explained the functions of some Yorùbá carved objects like Èsù and his wooden icons, Şàngó wooden objects, Ifá wooden objects, *ibejì* wooden figurines, etc. By her effort, Adesanya's work writes the famous Fakeye family into Yorùbá wood-carving traditions, especially in the Ekiti area.

Slogar's work¹²² on carved *ògbóni* figures from Abeokuta did not, in terms of quality, present the best examples of Yorùbá wood-carving tradition

but recorded a rare genre and oeuvre of carved wood-objects. From the onset of the article, the author called the attention of readers to the fact that the Ògbóni society is not often associated with the use of figurative wood-sculpture; they favour cast brass images called *ẹdan* and *Onile*. He pointed out that little has been documented on the wood-carving of the Ògbóni society. Slogar observed that based on their styles, all the carvings he got were likely to be products of one 'hand' or workshop. He linked these works with the Adigbologe family workshop in Itoko township of Abeokuta, a workshop that was founded by a man named Ojerinde who died just before the beginning of World War I¹²³. Ojerinde's son, Oniyide (ca. 1875-1949), and grandsons Makinde (d. 1950) and Ayoola (d. 1980) carved alongside him in the same workshop.

An examination by the author of Ògbóni wood-sculptures revealed that they all share striking features such as 'missionary hats' on their heads. This feature is indicative of the possibility that they were carved after contact with Western religion. Slogar also linked the hat worn on the carvings to the 'Adubi Rising' (religious protest around Abeokuta in 1918 when many of the Ògbóni houses were destroyed). Later, new Ògbóni houses were built and new images were commissioned. At that time (1918), Ojerinde had died, leaving, presumably, his son, Oniyide to carry out most of the commissions. Oniyide was said to have, within a relatively short time, done the carvings during this time of reconstructive efforts. This, in Slogar's view accounts for the striking similarities found in these works. Slogar revealed a rare corpus of works and attempted to root their production to the Adigbologe carving workshop. It is undoubtedly a ground-breaking study.

Adepegba¹²⁴ highlighted the general characteristic features of Yorùbá wood-carving and looked at its economic possibilities. He noted that wood-carving received patronage from diverse Yorùbá religious associations and cults. Carving was in regular use for the service of the pantheon of over four hundred Yorùbá gods. The various patrons of Yorùbá wood-carving that Adepegba listed are no longer viable enough to sustain the culture. Apart from the fact that Adepegba's work is limited to Yorùbá wood-carving in Nigeria, it has not also identified the new patrons of wood-carving in modern times.

Generally, these scholars have concentrated on Yorùbá carvers from Òyó, Ekiti, Igbomina, Egbado and Kètu sub-regions (see figure 4), all of which claim descent from Ilé-Ifè and by extension, Òyó. It is also important to mention that carving from these communities have been identified with regional sub-styles. For example, carvings by Ekiti and Igbomina carvers are usually robust, sumptuous and with clean finishing knife strokes. On the other hand, Egbado and Ketu carvings are usually not as large and they lack very clean finishing strokes. The names and reputations of Old Òyó carvers are heard of in oral histories.

RELIGION AND BELIEFS OF THE YORÙBÁ

Wood-carving art and the Yorùbá religion have a close affinity. A study therefore of the Yorùbá religion and belief systems will help in understanding their way of life and the reasons for the production and styles found in their wood-carvings.

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Tillich¹²⁵, the German-American philosopher and theologian, once defined religion as man's ultimate concern, a concern that transcends all other concerns. Tillich's definition appears to encapsulate the way and manner in which the Yorùbá perceive religion. To the Yorùbá, religion permeates all facets of life. It is expressed in several ways.¹²⁶ Religion is reflected in their songs, sayings and arts. Religion finds vehicles in myths, folktales, proverbs and sayings, and it is the basis of their philosophy.¹²⁷ According to Idowu¹²⁸ Yorùbá religion is structured after certain principles, and these are: belief in God, belief in divinities, belief in spirits, belief in ancestors and the practice of magic and medicine.

Belief in God

Mbiti¹²⁹ observed that belief in God is fundamental to many communities in Africa. This belief points at the existence of a supreme, primordial being, the lord of the universe. The Yorùbá believe God to be the creator of the universe and that he can only be accessed through a pantheon of divinities. This points at a monotheistic belief in one God (Supreme Deity) called Olodumare who can only be accessed by supplications and sacrifices through several divinities.¹³⁰ Yorùbá artists do not in any way attempt to represent Olodumare in any form.

Belief in divinities

The belief that the Supreme Being can only be reached through divinities is another feature of Yorùbá religion. The Yorùbá pantheon, according to Abimbola,¹³¹ numbers about four hundred and one deities. Although deeply imbued with polytheism, the Yorùbá have not lost the idea of supreme God.

Many of the divinities and their insignia are represented in wood by Yorùbá wood-carvers. Some commonly carved divinities and objects of worship include; *Osé Şàngó*, *Odó Şàngó*, *Ọpón Ifá*, *Agere Ifá*, *Ìrókẹ Ifá*, Èsù figure, Ògbóni drums, *Ère ibejì* etc.

Belief in spirits

This is a belief, recognition and acceptance of the fact that spirits exist who may use material objects as temporary residences and manifest their presence and actions through natural objects and phenomena. Spirits in the Yorùbá belief are ubiquitous; there is no area of earth, no object or creature, which cannot be inhabited by a spirit. Although spirits are believed to have no particular form, the objects in which they reside can be carved.

Belief in ancestors

The Yorùbá believe that communion and communication are possible between those who are alive on earth and the deceased. They also believe that the latter have the power to influence, help or molest the former. An ancestor is a departed member of a family or tribe. It is believed that death is not the end of family life; membership of family and community extends to the life beyond. *Egúngún* is a form of manifestation of the ancestors. *Egúngún* masquerades use carved masks and carved objects can be found in their regalia.

Practice of magic and medicine

Magic by definition is an attempt on the part of man to tap and control the supernatural resources of the universe for his own benefit. Magic serves man's

blissful egocentricity. In Idowu's definition, magic includes those supernatural devices employed to gain one's end without the help of spirits or gods. Magic is used for the protection of the individual from his enemies, from dangers and to give the individual power to injure his enemies. Medicine on the other hand has been defined as ritual practice or sacred object believed to control supernatural powers to work as a preventive or curative remedy for physical and spiritual illnesses.¹³² From this definition, medicine can be seen as the art of restoring and preserving health. Carved images are employed in magic. There are charms and amulets that require the use of wooden images. *Gbékúde* (charm for fending off death), for example, employs wooden images tied to the neck of children or waists of adults. There are healing processes that also employ carved images and icons.

THE CONCEPT OF *ORÍ* (HEAD) IN YORÙBÁLAND

The most prominent feature of carved Yorùbá wood figures is the head (*orí*). In discussing wood sculpture of the Yorùbá, their belief in *orí* as an object of worship cannot but be mentioned. Discussions of the concept of *orí* will go a long way in helping in the understanding the reason behind the extra-large proportion of the head when compared with other parts of the body in Yorùbá wood-carvings.

Johnson¹³³ stated that *orí* is a universal household deity worshipped by both male and female in Yorùbáland. The deity is represented with 41 cowries stuck together in the shape of a crown. This image is kept in a large wooden box with a lid. The container is called *ilé-orí* (the house of *orí*). The size of the container is said to be as large as the owner can afford. Some, according to

Johnson, may contain up to six head images.

While trying to draw distinctions between *ara* (body), *ẹmí* (soul) and *orí* (head), Eades¹³⁴ pointed out that *orí* is more complex than *ara*, because it is the seat of the intellect. It is also related to a person's destiny, an element that determines the success or failure of a person in this world. Every man is expected to worship his *orí* along with those of his children until they are adults.

Lawal¹³⁵ further expatiated on why the head (*orí*) is the most prominent part of Yorùbá sculptures. The reason, he stated, is because the Yorùbá regard the head as the symbol of the *àṣe* (divine powers) of the Supreme Being (Olodumare). *Orí* constitutes a person's life-source and controls his personality and destiny. Three different modes of representing the head are identified in Yorùbá sculpture: the naturalistic, which refers to the external or physical head (*orí òde*); the stylized, which hints at the inner or spiritual head (*orí inú*); and the abstracted which symbolizes the primeval material (*òkè ipòrí*) used in making the inner head. Lawal¹³⁶ concluded that the prominence given to the head in Yorùbá sculpture is thus a reflection of the combination of its socio-biological and cultural importance as the coordinating centre of human existential struggles.

Idowu¹³⁷ recorded that kola-nuts, fish, fowl or an animal may be offered as sacrifice to *orí*. A fish or kolanut is stuck on the forehead while the blood of a fowl or animal is smeared on it. A person can make sacrifices not only to his personal *orí* but also to the *orí* of his parents.

Idowu¹³⁸, in another study, pointed out that *orí* refers to the physical head and that the physical head is a symbol of *orí-inú* (the internal head or the inner person). *Orí* is believed to rule, control and guide the life and activities of a person. *Orí* also determines a person's destiny (*àyànmó*). The Yorubá considers *orí* an object of worship because *orí* is believed to be the very essence of one's personality and must constantly be appeased and kept in good condition.

A particular Ifá divination verse (*odù* of Ifá), *òsé-tùrà*, exemplifies the importance of the worship of *orí*. The divination verse tells the story of a particular king, Olooyo, who continued in the worship of black magic instead of his *orí*; the divination verse continues thus:

Òsé-tura adifá fún Olooyo

Olooyo tí o fí orí ara rẹ sílẹ̀

Tí ó nbọ̀ ìdì àdó

Şùgbón orí níí gbéni

Àdó kùí gbé ní

Njẹ orí là bá má bo

Tí a kò bá fí òrìşà sílẹ̀

Orí ló ní ọjọ̀ gbogbo

Ògùn ló ní ọjọ̀ ipónjú

Meaning:

Òsé- tùrà was the divination performed for Olooyo

Olooyo abandoned the worship of his head

He subscribed to magic

Forgetting that it is the head that helps men

We ought to worship the head

And let alone the divinities

The head helps constantly on a daily basis

But magic is for the day of trouble

SOME REPUTABLE YORÙBÁ MASTER CARVERS

The following are some famous Yorùbá wood-carvers with the locations of their emergence and probable birth and death dates:

Ọyọ-Ilé carver

Arè Lagbayi of Ojowon (between 18th and 19th century)

Ekiti carvers

Olowe of Ise (1873–1938)¹³⁹

Areogun of Osi (1880–1954)¹⁴⁰

Bangboye of Ilofa/Odo Owa (1883–1978)¹⁴¹

Bandele (Son of Areogun) (b. 1910)¹⁴²

Egbado carvers

Adigbolope of Abeokuta

Duga of Meko (b. 1880–1960)¹⁴³

Akinjobi of Oke-Odan (late 19th century–1957)¹⁴⁴

Kétu carver

Ootoro of Kétu (b. 1905)

Igbomina carver

Lamidi Fakeye (1925–2009) Although, he hailed from Ila-Orangun, a major Igbomina town, Lamidi Fakeye can be classified as an Ekiti carver, by virtue of his training and exposure.

However, from a general examination, it is observed that the towns and cities from where these carvers emerge, fall within the rain-forest region of West Africa (see Figure 5)

Arè Lagbayi

Abimbola¹⁴⁵ submitted that we may never be able to find a single wooden object that can be referred to as an authentic carving of Lagbayi. Yet, his works

and personality continue to be celebrated all over Yorùbáland through praise-poems and several other genre of oral traditions. Adesanya¹⁴⁶ mentioned and discussed a number of Yorùbá master wood-carvers. Although she dwelt on Olowe of Ise, she however regretted that the works of some Yorùbá carvers are not available; their carving dexterity *arè* only attested to by oral traditions. An example of such carver is Are Lagbayi, the itinerant carver who is believed to have come from Ojowon (a satellite town of Old Òyó), and whose name has been mentioned severally in Ifá verses, praise-poems and other genre of Yorùbá oral history.

Arè Lagbayi as a name featured variously in many Yorùbá praise-poems, especially in the praise-poems of Yorùbá wood-carver lineages. Lagbayi has been variously referred to as Abogunde, Ajibogunde, Oloje, Olojowon and Agbó, a shortened version of *Agbó-mó-tù Oje* (descendant of Oje, who lived to a ripe old age and still remained agile). Some lines of Lagbayi's praise-poem recorded by Aremu¹⁴⁷ runs thus:

“Arè Lagbayi ọmọ Agbomati Oje

Ọmọ agbótán f’arúgbó ẹbí olómoge

Ọmọ igi mẹta lẹsẹ lati ilé wá

Tani npè mí ní Olojee Adamadeye

Èyí tó ti Tápà wá s’Òjé rọ”

Meaning:

“Arè Lagbayi, the offspring of Agbomati Oje

The offspring of one who grows old and still looks like a lad

The offspring of one who is firmly rooted in three trees (lineages)

Who calls me Olojee Adamadeyo

The one who came from Nupe land to unite the people of Oje.”

According to Yai,¹⁴⁸ Lagbayi the legendary Yorùbá carver was an *arè*. An *arè* is an itinerant artist, because he or she may reside, marry, bear children and work in a community for years or decades before moving on to another community. By implication, an *arè* could be an embodiment of history. In recent times, *arè* has been put to mundane use, almost equating it to a “chieftaincy title.” Abiodun,¹⁴⁹ when eulogising Ulli Beier in an article, described an *arè* as an artist who is “constantly on the move.” He wrote that “they are permanent strangers, always discovering and exploring new territories, transforming themselves, ever in pursuit of their *orí*, their inner spiritual head, their personal destiny.”

Some characteristic features of Lagbayi’s carving are captured in a praise-poem recorded by Abimbola. The part that describes the features of Lagbayi runs thus:

“*Bí wọn o gbènà ọsokun, Ọjẹẹ lé*

Wọn á gbẹ ti wọn lẹbọrọ igi, lẹbọrọ igi

Bàbá mi gbẹ tiẹ

Ó rí bọ̀lọ̀jọ̀ bọ̀lọ̀jọ̀

Arẹ̀ pagi dà sozi dèniyàn

Ó sá kẹkẹ gi wẹrẹ wẹrẹ

Bàbá mi bàbàjáa gi pòdòdò pàtà lọwọ̀n.

Arẹ̀ Lagbayi o gbẹ̀nà gbáwòrán láyé Abiodun”

Meaning:

“When people carved wood in a distant land, the city of Oje-Ile, our ancestral home,

They carved shapeless wooden objects

But whenever my father carved his own,

It looked sumptuous and elegant.

The itinerant carver who changed wood to a human being.

He inscribed delicate *kẹkẹ* facial marks on wood

My father, inscribed broad *àbàjá* facial marks on wood in the city of Ọ̀wọ̀n (probably a shortened form of Ojowon).

Lagbayi, the itinerant artists who carved wooden objects that appear like real people during the reign of Alaafin Abiodun.”

It is deducible from lines 6 and 7 of the praise-poem that Lagbayi's carvings bear *kẹkẹ* and *àbàjá* facial marks and that they are beautiful and naturalistic. The description in line 4 is that Lagbayi's works look *bòlòjò* *bòlòjò*, an onomatopoeic description for large, tall and opulent. The last line of the poem compare his works with *àwòrán* (to look and imitate, to copy, probably from life, to resemble), may simply mean that they are naturalistic. He probably attempted portraits of some Alaafin. It is however regrettable that no single extant work has been attributed to Arẹ Lagbayi. All that can be discussed about him are mere allusions based on his praise-poems and oral histories.

Olowe of Ise (1873 – 1938)¹⁵⁰

Many details regarding Olowe's life is unknown. Who trained him and where he learnt his carving are still not known. According to Walker,¹⁵¹ Philip A. Allison was probably the only European that met Olowe. Philip Allison, who died in 1990, worked for the British colonial forestry department in Nigeria from 1931 until his retirement in 1959. Allison then stayed on and worked for the National Museum as an ethnographer. In this capacity, he collected a few works of Olowe and took them to the National Museum in Lagos.¹⁵² Allison is said to have met Olowe in 1937 at the palace of Arinjale of Ise.¹⁵³ He died a year or two afterwards. According to Walker, Olowe's mother was captured during a war and taken from Ise to Efon-Alaiye. There she gave birth to Olowe and a daughter. Walker placed his birth between 1873 and 1877. When the war was over, they moved back to Ise-Ekiti. Olowe served the Arinjale as a court messenger, *ẹlẹmòsò* (also *ẹmẹsẹ*). In Adesanya's record, Olowe was told by his mother that Atoriye-Nla of Ise-Ekiti was his father. As time went on Olowe

enthusiastically returned to Ise-Ekiti to meet his father but was repulsed by his kinsmen. It was during this frustrating period that Oba Aweloye, the traditional ruler of Ise, invited him to stay in his palace. It was here that he started his career as a carver. He became so competent in carving that the king made him his court artist. For this reason he was sometimes called *omódé owà* meaning “the king’s courtier.”

In a study carried out by Adesanya,¹⁵⁴ she traced the origin of Olowe to Efon-Alaiye. Based on oral traditions gathered from his kinsmen who were still alive between 1996 and 1998, she suggested that Efon-Alaiye was more likely to be the original homeland of Olowe, but that Olowe’s works gained popularity in Ise. She also observed that Olowe’s works bear striking similarities with the works of popular carvers from Efon such as Adesina Agbonbiofe, Ologunde and Obembe (c. 1869-1939). From these observations, Adesanya concluded that Olowe is associated with Ise because his works flourished in Ise-Ekiti and that this is the reason why his name is associated with Ise; Olowe of Ise.

Olowe was described in a Yorùbá praise-poetry as a great ‘hand’ with the wood of the iroko tree, carving “as though it were soft as a calabash.” After successfully completing commissions for the local king, Olowe worked for other regional leaders. In 1924 two doors he made for the palace at Ikere, a Yorùbá town in the southern Ekiti area of south western Nigeria, were acquired by the British Museum. His works are extraordinary for their crisply-articulated figures and deeply-patterned and textured surfaces.

The subject of Olowe’s carvings are the same as that of other Yorùbá carvers: he produced figures, masks, verandah posts, doors, containers, drums,

dolls and game boards. However, his works have certain peculiarities. His relief carvings are radically different from the usual Yorùbá carved reliefs. Usually doors are composed of two panels of the same size, but in Olowe's doors, his panels are usually uneven in size. The figures on the relief are very high and of uneven relief and on their upper parts, the head, neck and some parts of the shoulder are rendered totally in the round, raised over and above the panel, therefore casting shadow on the background. Figures on one register sometimes extend beyond the frame of their registers. On the other hand, in his works in-the-round, the necks are unusually long and with a flat protruding hair-style. On the cheeks of his figures are usually three upright facial marks (called *pélé* among the Òyó-Yorùbá).

According to Pemberton III¹⁵⁵ the carving depicting a king and his consort in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago is a master-piece in the history of West African art. It is one of the three verandah posts carved by Olowe of Ise for the Ikere palace. The sculptures were created for an inner courtyard where the Ogoga, king of Ikere, received visitors.

Areogun of Osi-Ilorin (1880 – 1954)¹⁵⁶

In order to fully understand the history of Areogun of Osi, it is important to note that the town of Osi is a member of a group of twelve villages called Opin. Other villages in Opin include: Isare, Ikerin, Oja Idera, Aare, Ajuba, Oke-Opin, Owa-Otun, Isolo, Epe, Araromi and Oke-Opin Tuntun. According to Carroll¹⁵⁷ Areogun was born in 1880 in Osi, a village located north of Ilorin. Osi is one of the twelve villages of Opin-Yorùbá.¹⁵⁸ His birth name was Dada. Areogun was a praise-name given to him because of his dexterity. The complete name is

Arowoogunbuna meaning “one who gets money with tools of Ogun” (made from iron). In Yorùbá-land Ogun is the god of iron. Ogun is worshipped by all those who use iron tools, such as blacksmiths, warriors, hunters, carvers and, these days, lorry and taxi drivers are included. However, Picton¹⁵⁹ pointed out that the name *a r’ówó Ògún yán nán* means “one who sees money from iron and spends,” (which is shortened to *arowogunbuna*). Furthermore, Areogun or Arewogun, and the standard Yorùbá Arowogun, is probably a general praise-name for accomplished wood-carvers in Opín. He noted that the same name is used for Rotimi Baba Oloja of Isare, another great wood-carver from Isare (another of the Opín villages).

Ifasan, the carver whom Areogun served under after leaving Bangbose his master, was born and trained by Roti (sometimes written as Rotimi) Baba Oloja of Isare (mentioned above). An interesting unconfirmed biographical detail about Areogun, written by Picton, records that Areogun’s mother was a daughter of Roti Baba Oloja of Isare.¹⁶⁰ The implication is that Areogun at one time served under Ifasan, his uncle (the brother of his mother).

In Carroll’s record, Areogun spent sixteen years as apprentice and assistant to Bangbose of Osi, his master. He later went to work with one Ifasan, a carver of Isare, before he started as an independent carver. Areogun grew up under the influence of great Yorùbá wood-carvers like Roti, the ‘Baba Oloja’ of Isare (his maternal grandfather, if Picton’s information recounted above is correct) and Roti, the Alari of Ikerin (another Opín village).

According to Picton,¹⁶¹ the contemporaries of Areogun include: Ayeji, Osamuko (who trained Bandele, the son of Areogun), another Roti (different

from Rotimi Babaoloja of Isare), Ogungbe and Aworogun. All these carvers died before 1964.

Areogun was fond of repeating his favourite themes such as a horse rider with a gun or a spear, a woman feeding her baby, a woman carrying a calabash of yams, and a woman in trouble with two men. Sometimes he would paint his carvings before handing them over to their owners.

Bangboye of Ilofa or Odo Owa (1893 – 1978)¹⁶²

According to Pemberton¹⁶³ Bangboye came from Odo-Owa. However, Odo-Owa and Ilofa are two villages located near each other in Ekiti region.

Clarke¹⁶⁴ who saw Bangboye at work described him as almost mathematically accurate in his carvings. Clarke stated that precise cuts on wood here and there, even at different times, “resulted almost always in very similar results.” He was tagged the “master of clean finish.” Of all Yorùbá carvers he was said to make the most use of decorative patterns and intricate designs. The garments of his figures, edges of panels and rims of divination trays are embellished with intricate decorative designs. The wrists and necks of female figures are also adorned with beads and bracelets.

Bangboye is known for his complex compositions. He is believed to be a prime designer of *epa* masks, an elaborate headgear worn during masquerade festivals to celebrate important contributors of public good. Such was Bangboye’s skill that in the 1930s, British officials gave him a teaching post in a government school. Pemberton¹⁶⁵ noted that as a carver, his works reveal a discipline of mind and hand (*ifarabalẹ*). Pemberton also gathered a praise-poem

that describes the prowess of Bangboye. It is described as a fitting tribute to his genius as a carver. It runs thus:

Ọmọ Ọṣọ̀nà ẹ̀rìbìtì

Gbẹ̀gi mú ọ̀nà

Ó sọ ‘gi lórúkọ’

Meaning:

“One who created robust carvings

He carved wood for decoration

And gave his carvings names”

Bandele (b. 1910)¹⁶⁶

Bandele is the son of Areogun of Osi-Ilorin. He was trained by Osamuko, a former apprentice to his father. The Yorùbá believe that it is better for a child to learn from an outsider as he or she can be over-pampered by the kindness of his or her parent. Therefore, boys and girls are often sent as apprentices to friends and relatives to learn a trades or skills.

Before he met Father Carroll, Bandele was forced to supplement his income by sawing planks and carving trays from left-overs of sawn wood. Carroll wrote that Bandele had been travelling about, carving such things as drums, pillars and doors for Ogboni houses before he came to the workshop organised by the Catholic Mission in Oye-Ekiti in 1947. Bandele, like his

master, Osamuko, was ambi-dexterous. He came to limelight through the art workshop organised in 1947 by the Catholic Mission in Oye-Ekiti. Lamidi Fakeye was apprenticed to him at one time.

Carroll wrote that Bandele had been using drawing instruments like set-square, rulers, etc., even before he attended the Oye-Ekiti workshop. His ability to use both hands helped him save considerable time during carvings. He did not have to change positions when carving. Carroll also recorded that Bandele sometimes worked by drawing with charcoal on logs to be carved; although he was said not to adhere strictly to his markings. He is described by Carroll as “a careful carver who never cuts away by accident any piece of wood he may need later.”

Some of his apprentices were Fayo of Ora, Dan Alagba of Oro and Lamidi Fakeye of Ila-Orangun. The carving prowess of Bandele is attested to in a praise-poem gathered by Pemberton.¹⁶⁷ It runs thus:

“Àjẹ Isola

Oni şàngó akeke

Tó nfági yapara nínú oko

Òwòròwó apógi nífun dàsígbò

Bí ò bágbẹ nínú, a gégi lù móko

B’ólóko bá bínú, a tún gé mû si

Agba àwìn ọlẹlẹ sígi lórún

Baba Olatunde”

Meaning:

“Isola who does the extra-ordinary (a “wizard” among carvers)

Whose axe is like the thunderbolt of Sango (the deity who manifests his power in thunder and lightning)

Who chops wood violently at the farm

Stripping away the bark, leaving piles of wood chips in the forest, as he lays bare the inner wood

If the heart of the wood is not yet dry, he leaves it laying it in the bush

Even if the owner of the farm becomes angry, he cuts down more trees

In the morning he purchases bean cakes on credit to be paid for later with his carvings

Father of Olatunde (One who brings prosperity).”

Adigbologe family of Abeokuta

Adigbologe refers to works of art produced by a number of artists sharing a common atelier, rather than the works of a particular artist. The workshop was started by a carver called Ojerinde. The workshop was located in Itoko

township of Abeokuta. It seems Ojerinde was born in the Egbado town of Aibo,¹⁶⁸ where he would have trained as a wood-carver under his father, Egunjobi¹⁶⁹. Ojerinde, nicknamed Adigbologe, died a few years before the outbreak of the first world war (1914-1918).¹⁷⁰ As the Òyó empire crumbled, the Egbado people, who were allied with Òyó, grew vulnerable. In the early 1850s when the army of Dahomey advanced on Aibo¹⁷¹ Oyerinde fled to Abeokuta. There he began a wood-carving tradition that is today associated with him and his descendants who took to wood-carving. These include his son Oniyide (c. 1875-1949) and grand-sons Makinde (d. 1950) and Ayoola or Ayo (d. 1980). After his death around 1914, his descendants continued to associate their works with his name. “Adigbologe” has evolved into a brand name that is now used in identifying carvings from their workshop.¹⁷² Some carvings done in the workshop are *ibejì* images, head-dresses for *egúngún* masquerades, and large-scale compositions with multiple figures. Characteristic features of carvings from this workshop are sharply-incised nostrils, wide mouths, large spherical heads, wide lenticular eyes and short legs.

Quite a number of *ògbóni* figures in Abeokuta come from the Adigbologe workshop. Indeed, Slogar¹⁷³ pointed out that the relationship between *Ògbóni* fraternity and the Adigbologe workshop is deep. Adigbologe was said to have established an *ògbóni* chapter in his compound in Abeokuta, which was still in existence until 1973.¹⁷⁴ During his life-time, Ojerinde held the highest *Ògbóni* title of ‘*Olúwo*.’

Duga of Meko (b. 1880) (fl. 1900(?) – 1960)¹⁷⁵

Duga was born in Meko, Abeokuta. He took to the profession of his father and grandfather who were also wood-carvers. Bascom,¹⁷⁶ who discussed this wood-carver extensively, could not pin-point Duga's masters. He only mentioned that he might have been trained by an unknown carver from Kétu. Bascom also recorded that the *gèlèdè* cult was responsible for the payment of his training. The cult paid for his training on the understanding that after its completion, he would carve free of charge for them. However, he was allowed to carve for other people and cults outside the *gèlèdè* for fees that would be determined by the *gèlèdè* cult.

Duga was fond of painting his carvings with imported and local paints. Some of his works include *gèlèdè* masks, Ifá divination trays, and Šàngó staffs. Duga died in 1960. It is reported that his apprentices failed to emulate his dexterity in the arts and that it is only the artistic memorials he left behind that continue to articulate his artistry.¹⁷⁷

Akinjobi of Oke-Odan

The works of Akinjobi of Oke-Odan were first collected in 1951 by K. C. Murray, then surveyor of the Nigerian Antiquities Service.¹⁷⁸ A few biographical details about Akinjobi were gathered by Chappel. His full name was Ikujeniya Alibiosu Mafarasin Akinjobi (warriors joined in bearing him). Akinjobi was born in Ade-Odo. His father was Ikujeniya Akinyemi Oloibo. His paternal grandfather was Fabiyi Ojikutu who was born in Imasai, near Ilaro. When he was a young boy, he came to Oke-Odan with his maternal grandfather

at the beginning of the 20th century. Although he was also into farming, wood-carving was his principal occupation. Chappel¹⁷⁹ distinguished two stylistic elements in his works. One was observed in his treatment of the head and facial features in relation to the limbs and torso. The heads are big and appear tilted up, making some of the figures appear as if they are looking up at the sky. The nostrils have sharp cuts and they look like two half circles. The lips are round and almost flesh-like. The torso is given a very simple or what can be called a somewhat flat treatment. Secondly, Chappel observed an unusual positioning of the hands which are held next to the thighs, with their palms open and in a frontal position. The hands are carved straight down from the shoulders, terminating in open semi-abstract and non-proportional palms.

Chappel gathered that Akinjobi was, for some time, the only practicing carver in Oke-Odan. This assertion was said to be corroborated by the-then Oba of Oke-Odan who said he succeeded in establishing himself as the leading craftsman in town. This led to his being given the chieftaincy title of the *Olóri ọ̀nà* (head of craftsmen). His workshop was said to be patronized by people from surrounding villages.

Ootooro of Ketu (b. 1905)

Ketu lies over two hundred miles to the west of Ekiti, much of the land extends to the Benin Republic. Carroll¹⁸⁰ observed that the wood-carving traditions in this area is purely Yorùbá in style. Carroll however noted that the works from this area lack the bulky and sumptuous qualities of Ekiti carvings. Ootooro a carver from Ketu, had attended the workshop directed by Father Kevin Carroll at Oye-Ekiti. Ootooro was particularly patronized by devotees of *òrìṣà* around

his locality. He was said to be passionate with his belief in *òrìṣà*. His first Christian theme was the story of Jesus and the woman of Samaria at the well. Adesanya¹⁸¹ observed that the features in Ootooro's works are similar to those of Duga of Meko (probably because Duga trained in Kétu), Masudi Latunji and Kobadoku of Igbesa (all are Kétu carvers). It has been observed that the works of the Kétu carvers do not have the massive sculptural quality of Ekiti carvers.¹⁸² Kétu carvers are noted for the production of miniature pieces which are usually painted with colours. While Ekiti works are massive and architectural and usually left in natural wood colours Kétu works are relatively small and painted. Carroll observed that while Ekiti figures wear traditional attires, Kétu works wear light and sometimes imported materials; much of which he said was influenced by the Egun tribe of the Benin Republic. Ootooro, like many other carvers in Kétu, carved a lot of masks and figurines for the *gèlèdè* cult.

Many of Ootooro's carvings from my own observation lack the finesse found in Ekiti works. Ootooro's works appear to be hurriedly done. He probably was only conscious of the religious function of the carving. In contrast, Ekiti carvers, Lamidi Fakeye and Bandele for example, seemed to be conscious of the aesthetic import and decorative function of their works. The painstaking finish they give their works are therefore obvious.

Lamidi Fakeye (1925? – 2009)

The classification of Fakeye as an Igbomina carver is highly debatable because although he hailed from Ila-Orangun (a major Igbomina town), he was strongly influenced by the Ekiti school of carvers. As a matter of fact, he was trained by

Bandele, the son of Areogun of Osi-Ilorin, a strong and reputable carver of the Ekiti school. Also, the father of Lamidi, Akobiogun Fakeye, was trained by Taiwo of Ore's compound, Ila-Orangun (c. 1855-1935).¹⁸³ Taiwo's father, Ajayi Arowoegbe, who was also a carver, came from Otun, an Ekiti town to Ila-Orangun around 1885. By virtue of his training, he had strong Ekiti influence.

In an interview by Pogoson and Shyllon¹⁸⁴ with Lamidi Fakeye shortly before his death, Fakeye claimed that the 1925 date that has over the years been said to be his date of birth was the handiwork of Father Carroll. Fakeye himself could not tell exactly when he was born, but claimed he would be about 80 years old. Born in Ila-Orangun, he started exhibiting traits of a good carver from the age of nine. Although born and trained by a wood-carver, Akobiogun Fakeye (c. 1870-1946),¹⁸⁵ he was not interested in wood-carving as he thought it would not give him enough income and would impoverish him. He therefore tried other professions like barbing, bicycle repairing and even sawing. Although, Adesanya¹⁸⁶ pointed out the professions learnt by Fakeye, the interview carried out by Pogoson and Shyllon¹⁸⁷ revealed Fakeye's high level frustration and fear of poverty if he took to wood-carving. He only decided to go into wood-carving after an illness took him to a diviner. The diviner, whom he claimed was the grandmother of Bisi Akande, one-time governor of Osun State in Nigeria, told him to go back to his father's profession (wood-carving), which he dreaded, if he wanted to make a good living.¹⁸⁸

Other factors that are worthy of consideration in Fakeye's decision to take to wood-carving include his meeting with a certain Mr. Ogunsusi who informed him about the Roman Catholic workshop at Oye-Ekiti and introduced

him to George Bandele, whom Lamidi accepted as his master. George Bandele introduced Lamidi to Father Carroll in 1949.¹⁸⁹ Fakeye's skill and fame grew during and after attending the workshop.

Without a doubt, Lamidi Fakeye's works are monumental and sumptuously decorated with patterns. His carved female figures wear very elaborate hairdos and have erect breasts. The eyes, noses and lips protrude out of the ball of the head. The ears are large. In some cases one sees the adoption of three upright facial marks commonly used by Efon carvers (Olowe of Ise in particular). Fakeye's relief works are decorated with profuse lineal patterns that sometimes seem to engulf the main figures.

It can be observed that most of these carvers are located, largely, within the rain forest region of West Africa (see figure 5). Adepegba¹⁹⁰ has also observed that it is within the rain forest region that wood, the primary material for carving, is available in abundance.

ITEMS COMMON WITH YORÙBÁ WOOD-CARVERS

Masks

The Yorùbá belief in ancestors has led to the creation of the physical appearance of spirits of the dead in the forms of *egúngún* (among the Ọ̀yọ́), *epa* (among Ekiti and Igbomina), *gèlèdè* (among the Egba, Egbado and Ketu). The masquerade is believed to represent the spirits of long-gone ancestors. When they appear (mostly during annual festivals), they are believed to bring blessings from the great beyond. Sometimes they perform judicial functions. When they settle disputes and quarrels, their decision is always final.

Carroll¹⁹¹ observed that *epa* masks in Ketu and Ekiti usually have two

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sections. The first is below and this forms the mask proper, while the second is the super-structure. Ekiti super structure masks are complex and may contain as many as twenty or more figures and they are carved from a single block of wood. Kétu super-structure masks on the other hand are simple and smaller.

Ifá Wooden Object

Opón Ifá (Ifá divination tray):

This is the wooden tray on which divination is done. On the other hand, if the diviner does not use the divination chain, he may decide to use loose sixteen palm-nuts for divination. In this case, *iyèròsùn* (divination powder) is poured on the tray to record the results of divination. After four casts of the palm-nuts, the final markings on the divination tray must reveal an *odù* (divination verse) of Ifá. The tray is usually round or rectangular in shape. The borders are decorated with anthropomorphic and zoomorphic designs. At the top central position, directly opposite the diviner is *ojú opón*. Usually, the head of Èsù is represented on the *ojú opón*. *Eṣẹ opón* is the central lower part directly opposite *ojú opón*. Half-way to the right hand side is *onà ọ̀gànràn* and opposite to this on the left hand side is *onà múnu*. Pogeson and Akande¹⁹² aver that except for the Èsù figure on the *ojú opón*, other images on the divination trays are made up as the carvers go along.

Agere Ifá:

This is the container in which the *èkùró* Ifá (divination palm-nuts) are kept before and after use. It is usually carved as a kneeling female figure carrying a container. Sometimes it is carved with several human and animal figures forming a support for the big bowl on top. It is usually carved with a lid.

Ìrókẹ̀ Ifá:

This is called the tapper. It is a long narrow carved wooden object, usually held by diviners and used in tapping the edge of the divination tray at intervals during a divination session. This action is said to invoke Ifá to be present at the divination exercise.¹⁹³ Sometimes the image of a kneeling figure, wearing a cap is represented with other images. It is carried around by *babaláwos* (diviners). *Ìrókẹ̀ Ifá* is a symbol of authority for *babaláwos*.

Ère Ìbejì

Ìbejì figures are carved only when one or both twin children are dead. The Yorùbá believe that if one of twin children dies, an *ère ìbejì* must be carved to replace the dead one. After the image is carved, the spirit of the dead twin is then invoked into the carving. It is believed that if this is not done, the roaming spirit of the dead twin will invite the living twin and he or she will also die.

These figurines are usually produced in twos, a male and a female. Both are rendered nude with pronounced genitals. The hairdo of the female is usually elaborate, the breasts protrude and sometimes beads are carved or tied around the waist and ankles. The male figure is carved with the genital large and erect.

Èsù figure

Constantly found represented by Yorùbá wood-carvers is the Èsù figure. Èsù is one of the principal divinities in the pantheon of Yorùbá gods. He is also very prominent in Yorùbá mythology. Awolalu¹⁹⁴ gathered that Èsù is the divinity

that taught Orunmila (the deity of Ifá) the art of divination. And he did so on the condition that he would have a share of every sacrifice prescribed by Orunmila to the people who come to consult Ifá. Èsù is sometimes referred to as the trickster god because he can incite men to offend each other, or even a deity to offend another deity. Awolalu¹⁹⁵ further said that Èsù is ambivalent as he is ambidextrous. Èsù is represented with a human figure with a kind of crest or head-dress protruding from the back of the head (*ògò Èsù*). Sometimes the figure is depicted holding a flute attached to its mouth.

Olúmèyè (one that knows honour)

This is the figure of a kneeling woman who is said to be a messenger of the spirits; she carries kola-nuts or bean-cakes in a bowl in the form of a cock. Sometimes, however, the kneeling woman may carry a decorated bowl not made in the image of a cock. Walker¹⁹⁶ observed and pointed out that this figure is commonly carved by Yorùbá sculptors and is often used in both social and religious contexts. In the home, it is used to hold kola-nuts for visitors. In shrines, it is used to offer kola-nuts to the deities.

Ògbóni wooden objects

According to Lawal,¹⁹⁷ the *Ògbóni* society, a Yorùbá cult, wielded considerable political, judicial and religious powers among the Yorùbá in pre-colonial times. It is called *Òṣùgbó* among the Egba and Ijebu Yorùbá. They function as the town council, civic court and an electoral college for selecting new kings and dethroning unpopular ones. The cult had the power to impose curfew, especially during periods when some gruesome judgment had to be meted to offenders.

Membership in this cult brought wealth and prestige, although it was restricted to a few. Lawal¹⁹⁸ noted that membership of this cult provided access to certain occult knowledge and powers of coping with the vicissitudes of life.

The society has a number of carved ritual objects used during worship. These include the *ògbóni* drum and *ẹdan ògbóni* and some other items. Although these objects are mostly produced with metals, some are in wood. Slogar,¹⁹⁹ in a study on the carved *ògbóni* figures from Abeokuta, observed that not many studies have been done on the wood-carvings of the *ògbóni*. He noted that the society is often associated with the use of cast brass images (*ẹdan* and *onile*). In the carvings studied by Slogar a common characteristic is that there is a big man, sometimes wearing a hat, surrounded by smaller men. On many of the carvings is a bird-like image on the hat of the central figure. Many of the figures wear three vertical facial marks. On some others, the three marks are horizontal.

House-posts and door panels

Ashiyangi,²⁰⁰ who studied the forms and functions of traditional Yorùbá house-posts and pillars, wrote that house-posts are commonly used to support the over-hanging roof space in typical Yorùbá courtyards. He also observed that the posts are usually squares, circles or horseshoe shapes with impluvia for collecting rainwater. Apart from the support which they give to the rafters, the posts are also exquisitely decorated.

Subjects portrayed in Yorùbá posts and door panels are taken from everyday life. Human beings, animals, birds, etc are depicted on the posts.

Ashiyambi also observed that children are hardly ever carved as independent figures on house-posts. They are either carved on the backs of their mothers or in the arms of their mothers. Usually, verandah posts are carved in tiers, one atop the other. The head of human beings are extra-ordinarily large when compared with the size of the body, as in other Yorùbá wood-carvings. In representing the horse rider, the rider is equal in size to the horse. At the upper and the lower ends of the posts is a lump of wood on which the rafter of the roof will rest. Carved posts and door panels are often exclusive reserves for the houses of the affluent in Yorùbá communities. These architectural arts are therefore marks of distinction in Yorùbáland.

Ẓàngó ritual objects

Ẓàngó is one of the principal deities of the Yorùbá. Ẓàngó is the deity responsible for lightning and thunder. According to a Yorùbá legend, Ẓàngó had once lived as a human and was the fourth Alaafin of Òyó. As a king, he had magic and charms that could make fire and smoke come out of his mouth when he spoke. Because of his great powers, he was later transformed, through the process of apotheosis,²⁰¹ to a god. A Ẓàngó priest is called *Mogbà*. Ẓàngó priests are sometimes represented in Yorùbá sculpture. When they are represented, they are depicted with plaited hair. According to Fakeye, Ẓàngó himself did not wear plaited hair. There is also the *Elegùn Ẓàngó*, the mouth-piece of Ẓàngó. During Ẓàngó worship sessions, the *Elegùn* usually gets possessed by the spirit of Ẓàngó. His actions and utterances are no longer that of a man but that of the spirit of Ẓàngó. Other insignias of Ẓàngó are a ram and *osé* (a two-sided axe); the latter being his ultimate symbol. The ram is

represented alongside because it is one of the sacrificial animals used in the worship of Šàngó.

Other Šàngó ritual objects carvers depict are: *odó* Šàngó (Šàngó's mortar) and *seřeře* (rattle). The former is not depicted in the shape of a regular Yorùbá mortar for pounding. Šàngó's mortar is actually the podium on which Šàngó stands or sits to make pronouncements. It also served as his box of charms. *Seřeře* is the rattle which the *Mogbà* shakes as he chants the praises of Šàngó. *Seřeře* is also carved by artists as an insignia of Šàngó. During his lifetime Šàngó's wives were Oya and Oba (both are rivers in Yorùbá land). These two women were also elevated to deities by the Yorùbá.

Warriors (Equestrian Figures)

There are two major types of people who are depicted on horses by carvers. First are the kings and second are warriors. When kings are depicted, they are surrounded by their wives and court followers. The image of the king, which always forms the central figure, is bigger than all other human figures in the composition and he wears a crown, sometimes with fringes, and is sumptuously decorated with patterns. Putting a rider on a horse shows that the rider is superior to the other figures on the ground.

In many cases where the carvers depict warriors on horses, the warriors are carved with spears, swords and sometimes *àdó* (small gourd used in storing charms). Warriors have special cloth, *ařo ògùn* (cloth of charms) which they wear when they go to wars. Equally, in the case of warriors, there are entourages. Some have trumpeters or drummers heralding the coming of an

important person; some slaves captured may be carrying loads to show the exploits of the warrior. The Yorùbá believe that a warrior must *kó ẹrú, kí o tún kó ẹrù* (take slaves as captives and bring home goods) to be considered a complete conqueror.

Dolls (*omólángidi*)

Omólángidi are carved dolls for children to play with. Traditionally in Yorùbáland, girls played with *omólángidi*, pretending to be mothers caring for their children. The dolls are carved from the head to the neck region, terminating in a large lump of wood. The large lump serves as a stand. The lump is usually decorated with patterns. They may be naturalistic or highly abstracted and stylized. An example is the doll carved by Olowe of Ìsẹ²⁰² (see plate 19). Walker²⁰³ has written that *omólángidi* are carved with little anatomical details and that their small flat bodies allow girls to carry them on their backs, tucked into their wrappers and held to their back with a piece of cloth (*òjá*).

It is observed that even when Yorùbá carvers attempt to produce religious carvings like masks for example; their social, political experiences are reflected in their illustrations. Their daily lives form themes for their carvings. Wood-carvings also reflect the social, political and cultural milieu of the Yorùbá people at each point in time. It is not uncommon to see bicycles, crosses, cars, hats and other foreign materials depicted in Yorùbá wood-carvings. From this stand-point, Yorùbá art may not be seen as basically a religious affair but as an equally illustrative art.

STAGES IN THE PROCESS OF WOOD-CARVING

Odekunle,²⁰⁴ a traditional carver in Òyó, said that carving actually starts from the moment the carver begins to conceptualize the idea of the carving in his mind. Within his mind, the carver reads shapes into the log of wood and considers what to chop off and what to retain.²⁰⁵ Basically there are four main stages in the production process of a wood-carving. The stages are: *oná lílé*, *àlétúnlé*, *dídán* and *fínfín*.²⁰⁶

Oná lílé or *oná bíbù* means ‘roughing out.’ It is the general cutting of the wood into masses. The wood is chopped out to map out the large forms of the intended theme. Each figure is marked out on the wood. A rough definition of the head, torso and lower limbs are done at this stage. This is usually done with an axe or adze.

The next stage, *àlétúnlé*, meaning ‘further redefinition of forms into recognisable bits.’ This is the breaking up of the masses into smaller forms. This is where the negative spaces are defined. Basic shapes are marked out and negative spaces are cut out and properly defined. It is at this point that the forms of ears, nose, lips, fingers, etc., are marked out. This stage is mostly done with a chisel and, where necessary, a adze.

The third stage is *dídán*, which literarily translate to “polish.” It involves smoothing with various grades of knives and chisels. At this stage, the large and rough marks of axe, adze and chisel are smoothed out. This will in turn create a plain background that will contrast details and make them visible.

The fourth stage is *fínfín*. *Fínfín* covers various types of knife work. It

involves the cutting of sharp details such as hair, eyelids and pattern works. It consists of adding various incised designs to the already finished figures. Ashiyanbi²⁰⁷ gathered that anthropomorphic, zoomorphic or a combination of the two are added at this stage of carving. He also pointed out that carvings can be polished at this stage. This is majorly done with a knife.

WOODS COMMONLY USED FOR CARVING

Carroll²⁰⁸ identified seven types of wood frequently used by the Ekiti carvers. They are: *Ìrókò*, *Aberínbérín* (or *Erinmodò*, *Ògbúgbún* or *Ògbó*), *Ìre*, *Àhun*, *Òmò*, *Ogono* and *Àyan* (or *Apá*).

Ìrókò (*Chlorophora excelsa*): This is described as a hard wood with strong resistance against rain and wind, and perfect for sculptural purposes. It is used for carving verandah posts, doors, mortars, bowls and Ifá trays.

Aberínbérín (*Riconidendron Africanum*): This is a light wood, though not susceptible to insect attacks. It is used for carving masks, bowls and *omólángidi* (children's doll). Over time, it needs to be polished frequently to prevent it from becoming powdery and to preserve it against insect attack.

Ìre (*Funtumia elastica*): This is described as a wild rubber tree. Tough and elastic in texture. It is commonly used for *ìbejì* figurines, house-posts and ornamental objects.

Àhun (*Alstonia congensis*): A white and light wood, easily attacked by insects and worms. It is used for perishables like *omólángidi* and domestic bowls.

Òmò (Cordia millenii): A not-too-hard wood, brown in colour and not susceptible to insect attacks. It has good qualities, polishes well and has a resonance quality. Because of its reverberation quality, it is used for drums. It is also used for house-posts.

Ogono (Khaya sp.): This wood is highly susceptible to insect attack, especially in the dry season when all the moisture in the wood is gone. It is used in carving mortars and Ifá trays and bowls.

Àyan (Afzelia Africana); It is a very hard wood and used for drums, doors and verandah posts.

Ashiyani²⁰⁹ in his own study merely listed the Yorùbá/English and scientific names of fourteen woods used in carving. He did not bother to explain the nature and uses of the woods. The woods he listed are:

Òmò (Coria millenni)

Àhun (Alstonia congensis)

Ìrókò (Chlorophora excelsea)

Ebony (Diospyros ebum)

Obeche (Triplachyton scleroxylon)

Mahogany (Entandrophragma cylindricum)

Afàrà (Terminalia superb)

Erinmadò (Ricinodendro heudelotti)

Àyan (Afzelia Africana)

Apá (Afzelia species)

Aràre (Triplachyton sclererodendra)

Ìre (Funtumia elastic)

Ironwood (*Ostrya virginiana*)

Òpépé (Sarcocephalus diederrichii)

Lamidi Fakeye, in an interview by Pogoson and Shyllon,²¹⁰ identified six types of wood commonly used by traditional carvers in Yorùbáland. He also mentioned the art objects that each of these can be used for. These are:

Ìrókò (Chlorophora excelsea): Fakeye described this as a very hard wood used for mortars, verandah posts, drums and door frames.

Òmò (Coria millenni): A wood which Fakeye described as strong and water-resistant. It is used mainly for the carving of drums. He mentioned that about six or seven types of drums can be carved out of it apart from *dùndún*.

Ìre (Funtumia elastic): Ire is said to be used for the carving of *èrè ibejì*, *aparú* (whip which hunters use for killing insects), *iyarun* (wooden combs for women), and *òmólángìdì* (children play-dolls).

Àhun (Alstonia congensis): This is described as a white wood. Its bark is said to be medicinal. It is used for carving *omolangidi*.

Erinmodò (Ricinodendro heudelotti): Said to be soft in carving, it is a strong wood that can weather all seasons. If its seasoning is done perfectly, it can resist a lot of harsh weather conditions.

Apá (Afzelia species). It is also called *ayan*. It is used for *dùndún* and *gángan* drums.

(Please note that the scientific names in Fakeye's identification were supplied by the researcher. The names are from a book written by Willacy).²¹¹

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Two major theories have been identified for the interrogation of this thesis. These are the theories of diffusion and iconography. The theory of diffusion deal in the main with wood-carving as a cultural trait and its history of diffusion, while iconography theory was used to probe into the iconographics (graphic qualities) cultural and symbolic meanings (semiotics) of the wood sculptures of Ọ̀yó, Sábẹ and Ifẹ.

Diffusion theory

The origin of the theory of cultural diffusion can be traced to Franz Boaz. Initially in its application, Boaz first conceptualized and applied the theory as ‘historical particularism,’²¹² but was later developed into diffusionism. Cultural diffusion was popularized by the famous Alfred L. Kroeber in his influential paper, ‘Stimulus Diffusion,’²¹³ published in 1940. Kroeber applied this theory in cultural anthropology and cultural geography to describe the spread of cultural ideas and items across geographical borders. He cited examples of cultural basics like arts, ideas, styles, religions, technologies, languages, etc. Kroeber explained that diffusion can occur in individuals, whether within a single culture or from one culture to another, provided there has been some form of interaction.

The theory of diffusion has been variously applied by scholars. Among the many scholars that applied the theory are Pierre-Verger²¹⁴, Mabogunje and Omer-Cooper²¹⁵ and Justin Kerr.²¹⁶ Pierre-Verger compared the Yorùbá culture in its original setting and in the diaspora. He observed that inspite of the time and distance separating the Yorùbá in Nigeria, Brazil and Cuba, they all

continue to worship their ancestral gods. He noted that the Yorùbá practice of Ifá divination is admirably preserved in the Americas where the *babaláwos* still know how to recount the stories related to the various *odù* (signs) of Ifá. Verger observed that in Brazil and Cuba, these *babaláwos* have retained the knowledge of these oral literature in Yorùbá language. In the course of ceremonies performed by the *babaláwos* in honour of their gods, they sing and praise them in the very same manner as those in the countries (Nigeria, Benin Republic and Togo) from where they originated. This continuity, Verger explained, does not only affect the recitations of Ifá verses but it is also found in their traditional songs (music), musical instruments (art), dances and their attitude towards their ancestors (religion).

Mabogunje and Omer-Cooper,²¹⁷ in their attempt to locate the original site of Owu, a Yorùbá town that was destroyed and disbanded by a series of wars, applied the theory of cultural diffusion. The disintegration of Owu was so total that finding the original location of Owu today is perplexing. The people of Owu therefore forcefully migrated to different parts of Yorùbáland to form diverse independent communities, chiefdoms and kingdoms. Many years after the Owu wars and their subsequent disintegration, most of the settlements founded by the people of Owu still trace their ancestry to the original Owu. Owu today can be found in three major settlements, Owu in Ijebuland, Owu in Egbaland and Owu in Òyó and Ibadan provinces. It is also observed that in most of the newly-found Owu settlements, the worship of *Alugbua*, a major Owu deity, is still widespread. They found that in all the Owu communities, the *Alugbua* deity is represented with inverted pots. The intension of Mabogunje and Omer-Cooper was historical, but along the line they revealed the

transmission of culture (thought and material) from one community to others. From the discussion above, one can draw a synergy between the entire Yorùbá history and the history of Owu. All the Yorùbá communities around the world trace a common ancestry to Ilé-Ifẹ̀. Also, the Yorùbá people around the world have similar gods represented in the composition of their pantheon.

Another scholar that has applied the theory of diffusion in his study is Justin Kerr.²¹⁸ Kerr studied textile motifs among the Maya Indians of South America. He observed that despite the many changes that occurred over the last millennium, the Maya Indians of today continue to weave and embroider some of the same design motifs that had been popular since the classical period. Moreover, the author found out that in all the communities that the Maya type of weaving has been exported; they retain the original motif from Maya. In conclusion, Kerr submitted that despite many changes that may occur over time and space, cultures maintain similar artistic traditions.

In the present study, there are three Yorùbá groups. The first is the Ọ̀yọ́-Yorùbá in Nigeria, while the other two are Sábe-Yorùbá in Benin Republic and Ifẹ̀-Yorùbá in Togo. The intension of this study is to prove that several ethnic traits (especially wood-carving) have been transferred from the Ọ̀yọ́-Yorùbá group to the other two groups. Specifically, wood-carving is the cultural trait that has been diffused from Ọ̀yọ́ to Sábe and Ifẹ̀. The study, therefore, set to document the effect of diffusion on culture. This study assumes that there is the possibility of culture getting watered down or acquiring new identities as it is transferred from one place to new areas. In other words, there can be additions and subtractions to the original culture as it is transferred to other social

settings. Sometimes, transferred cultural traits are also likely to be adapted to suit existing cultural milieu. The cultural diffusion theory recognizes that there can be cultural barriers that may serve as hindrance to the newly-introduced culture. Apart from the interest of this research, submissions like that of Yai will be put to the test. Yai²¹⁹ submitted that “It is in the difficult conditions of exile that a tradition can best prove its ability to innovate.”

The conditions under which the two Yorùbá groups in Sábẹ and Ifẹ migrated are different. The Yorùbá groups in Sábẹ migrated in what can be called expansion diffusion²²⁰ while the ones in Ifẹ (Togo) migrated in relocation diffusion. Principally, expansion diffusion cases can be described as an innovation, idea or cultural trait that developed in a source area and remains strong there while also spreading outward to other areas. On the other hand, relocation diffusion has to do with an idea or innovation migrating into new areas, leaving behind its origin or source of the cultural trait. The relocation diffusion can easily be linked to the manner in which the Ifẹ people migrated to Atakpame in Togo from Ilé-Ifẹ in Nigeria.

The expansion and relocation types of diffusion can further be linked with the ‘force’ and ‘direct’²²¹ theories of expansion. The carving culture spread from Nigeria to Benin through the several incursions launched by Ọyọ on Dahomey. The Yorùbá conquered the people of Sábẹ and they therefore became subjects of the Yorùbá. Consequently, the Yorùbá culture became dominant in Sábẹ. This spread was forceful and can therefore be tagged as ‘force spread’.²²² The Yorùbá people and culture got to Togo through migrant groups from Ilé-Ifẹ to Atakpame in Togo. The migration cannot be considered

totally forceful since the people willingly moved to the Savalou region of Benin Republic, but later because of the marauding soldiers of Abomey relocated to Togo. It makes sense to explain this expansion as ‘direct.’

Another thorny issue is that of which community will likely preserve more of the original Yorùbá carving characteristics. Will it be the culture to where the trait diffused, which out of desperation may want to preserve the memory of home? On the other hand, can it be the original stock that will retain the more original culture in an attempt to make good the strong traditional belief of the Yoruba people about cultural practices. The belief is wanting to do things in usual ways to achieve expected results. The belief is encapsulated in a Yorùbá adage that says *ká ṣé bí wọ̀n ti n ṣé, ko lè baà rí bí ó ti n rí* (let us do it in the usual way so as to achieve the usual result). On another hand it is possible for the people in place of origin of the culture to relax and be carefree to a level where influences on the tradition can creep in unnoticed. This may be borne out of the fact that they are not caught up in any desperate situation to preserve the tradition. Whichever is the case, this study hopes to unravel the contents of Yorùbá wood-carving traditions in the three different political and geographical locations.

Iconography theory

Another interrogative tool which this research employed is the Iconology theory. Iconology is the study of graphics and their symbolic meanings. The symbolism is independently referred to as semiotics. Semiotics is more meaningfully applied to languages than the plastic arts. The term ‘semiotics’ derives from the Greek word *semeiotikos* which means “observant of signs.”²²³

The Greek word *semeion* from *semeiotikos* means “a sign” or “a mark.”²²⁴ Semiotics is thus the study of signs and sign processes. When it was originally conceived, semiotic study was closely related to the field of linguistics. While semiotics is adapted from linguistics, iconography is an original tool for the plastic arts.

Iconography is used to interrogate and extract data on the forms, motifs, and the general graphic descriptions of traditional Yorubá religious paraphernalia. During the field work, direct observation, photographs and video recordings of the Yorùbá wood-sculptures were carried out. During analysis, the photographs and video recordings proved useful in refreshing and complementing the researcher’s observations. Consistent and common forms were collated and analysed for reasons of their usage and graphic quality. On the other hand symbolic meanings of common forms and motifs were also gathered and discussed.

Abiodun²²⁵ attempted a list of what it takes to fully understudy the Yorùbá arts. Among the criteria discussed by Abiodun is to *bá àwọn àgbà rìn* (walk with the elders). Further encapsulated in this criterion are other criteria, like *ifarabalè* (calmness); *ìmojú-mọra* (sensitivity); and *tító* (steadfastness). Other qualities like *ojú-inú* (insight) and *ojú-ọ̀nà* (design consciousness) can be developed through training. It can be argued that to absolutely fit into the requirements of Abiodun, as stated above, to totally understand the nature of art of a culture, the expert must be a part of that culture. A good grasp of the language, Yorùbá, and its impulsive interpretations therefore becomes imperative for a scholar of Yorùbá arts. This is in line with the Yorùbá

aphorism that says, *A kì mọ Ọsọ ju iya Ọsọ lẹ* (you cannot understand the character of Ọsọ more than his mother).

One of the common approaches to the analysis of the works of artists, especially in catalogues of exhibition, is to describe the pictures in words from a rigorous study of the images (formalism and Iconography). Pogoson and Akande's²²⁶ analysis of the works of Moyo Ogundipe in an exhibition catalogue followed this order. The writers found that a number of images (icons) were common in the works of the artist. The icons were identified and thorough analyses of the cultural meanings of the images were done with the aim of reading inherent meanings in the paintings. Some of the identified icons in the works of Ogundipe were horse rider, verandah posts, birds and offering bowls. Also found in Ogundipe's paintings are representation of mermaids, centaur and flowers. It was concluded that the images of Ogundipe were from his Yorùbá origin as well as his travel experiences to Europe.

Among the scholars that have used the iconography theory in their study include Filani.²²⁷ In his study, Filani collated a number of Yorùbá motifs that are found in the decorations on calabashes, wood-carving, tie-dye fabric, leather, etc. He attempted to locate these motifs in the works of six Yorùbá artists (three with formal training and three with informal training). He also studied how the artists have adapted these motifs into their paintings. In his essay, Filani gathered a number Yorùbá motifs and supplied their symbolic and cultural meanings.

It is however important to mention here that the present study cuts across a number of disciplines, therefore a multi-disciplinary approach was adopted to

interrogate the problems as they emerge. Indeed, a number of scholars have referred to this approach with different nomenclatures. Drewal²²⁸ called it 'eclecticism,' Oguibe²²⁹ called it the 'masquerade theory,' while Egonwa²³⁰ referred to it as 'holistic approach.' The theories chosen (diffusion and semiotics) for the study are a matter of necessity; the theories are chosen to interrogate specific aspects of the study. The study is not rigidly tied to particular theories.

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CHAPTER FOUR

WOOD-CARVING TRADITIONS IN ÒYÓ, SÁBÈ AND IFÈ

This chapter analyses the data gathered on the wood-carving traditions of Òyó, Sábè and Ifè. These wood-carving traditions are limited to objects associated with the worship and belief in Ifá, Şàngó, Èsù, *Egúngún*, *Obalúayé*, and *ibejì*. The analyses are in three sections; first, data from Òyó will be analysed, followed by those of Sábè and Ifè, respectively. Among the Yorùbá in these communities, the following issues will be discussed:

- a. identification of the carvings associated with each deity or religious practice
- b. the history and beliefs of the people about the deity or religious practice
- c. identification of the typical features of particular carvings associated with each deity or religious practice
- d. matching established iconic models with their extant archetypes

YORÙBÁ WOOD-CARVING TRADITIONS IN ÒYÓ

From Òyó-Yorubá, data were gathered from three main towns, namely: Òyó (Ago d'Òyó or Òyó Atiba), Ibadan and Fiditi. Of the three, Òyó is the core where most of the data were gathered. The choice of Òyó as the core town is due to the fact that Òyó is believed, and has been historically proven, to be a resettlement of Old Òyó (variously called Òyó-Egboro, Òyó-Oro, Òyó-Ajaka, Katunga and Òyó-Ile¹), an ancient Yorùbá antecedent town. Much more, historians have written about the relocation of Old Òyó to Òyó. In their records,

many cultural items and traditions were said to have been carefully preserved and brought down to the present Òyó.² This indicates that many of the arts and crafts of Òyó are continuities of the ones practiced in Old Òyó. Another reason for the selection of Òyó is its strong art tradition. As already discussed in the early chapters of this work, authors like Clapperton,³ Clarke,⁴ Willet,⁵ Kalilu⁶ and Aremu⁷ have attested to the rich art traditions of Old Òyó. Clapperton, who visited Old Òyó before its sack and abandonment, observed that houses had ornamented doors and posts.⁸ He also saw carved house-posts in courtyards that were part of the architecture.⁹ Frank Willett carried out archaeological excavations in Old Òyó after its abandonment, and reported that the sophistication of materials and decorative elements of pots found in Old Òyó supersede those of modern times.¹⁰ It is from these great art traditions of Old Òyó that the art traditions of the present Òyó are derived. Further link to the continuity of the art traditions of Old Òyó in Òyó can be found in the praise-poems of many wood-carver lineages in Òyó. For instance, the poems point at Are Lagbayi, a celebrated and itinerant wood-carver of Old Òyó, as their progenitor.¹¹

Carvings associated with Ifá

The history of Ifá, sometimes called Orunmila, has been largely mythological and has therefore been shrouded in mystery. The myths are in oral forms and have been subjected to diverse variations from one locality to another. Owing to the various versions of the myths, it has been difficult, if not impossible, to identify and interrogate the original myth for the purpose of finding the origin of Ifá. Consequently, ascertaining the history of the origin of Ifá has been unending. Nevertheless, this work will highlight the submissions of some

scholars on the origin of Ifá. Johnson,¹² suggested that Shetilu was the originator of Ifá divination, and that he had been in Ilé-Ifẹ before the Yorùbá people arrived from Mecca. In one account, Johnson wrote that Shetilu was originally from Nupe-land, and in another, he claimed that Ifá worship was introduced by a king of Ọyọ, Alaafin Onigbogi, who was dethroned for this unpopular act.

Clarke¹³ traced the source of Ifá divination powers and origin to the phallic god, Elegba (Èsù), because of the promise of Ifá to give Èsù the first portion of every offering to God by those who consult Ifá. Clarke stated that Orisanla (sometimes called Obatala) and Orunmila (also known as Ifá) were critically involved in the creation of the world. At this same primordial time, Abimbola stated that Orunmila was known to possess divination skills. This is an indication that Ifá worship had existed before the creation of man.

Idowu¹⁴ records that at the time of creation, Olodumare assigned duties to the divinities. Èsù was the universal policeman and the keeper of *àṣẹ* (divine power) with which Olodumare created the universe and use in maintaining its physical laws. Ifá was put in charge of divination because of his great wisdom which he acquired as a result of his presence when Olodumare was creating the universe. Ifá therefore knows all the hidden secrets of the universe. This is why he earned his praise-name *Akéřefinúṣogbọn* (the small one whose mind is full of wisdom).

According to Abimbola,¹⁵ the Yorùbá believe that Ifá was one of the four hundred and one divinities (*òrìṣà*) sent by God (Olodumare) to earth (*ayé*). At the beginning of creation the divinities descended from heaven (*òrun*) into what would later become the city of Ilé-Ifẹ.¹⁶ Ifá was said to be the youngest and the wisest of them; he was therefore nicknamed *Akéřefinúṣogbọn* (the small one

whose mind is full of wisdom), and because of his wisdom he was put in charge of divination.

It can be observed from these traditions that the Yorùbá accept that Ifá divination has existed from time immemorial. Myths of origin show that no recent event or occurrence can be associated with the origin of Ifá divination. However, from the several myths of origin narrated by scholars, one may say that the Yorùbá have long been involved in Ifá divination, so much that its time of origin has been forgotten. Another possibility is that the claim that the origin of Ifá is not known might be a gimmick to mystify people about the cult and to make it not only dreaded but acceptable to all. The concern of this research is the wooden objects employed in the worship and consultation of Ifá; some of which are: *Ọpọ̀n Ifá*, *Ìrọ̀ké Ifá*, *Agere Ifá*, *Èsù* figure and others. We shall therefore proceed to discuss them.

Ọpọ̀n Ifá (divination board)

Ọpọ̀n Ifá is one of the chief paraphernalia of Ifá worship and divination. These divination boards, as they are usually called, may be carved in round, spherical or rectangular shapes, but the round ones are more common. The edges of the boards are usually decorated. The decorations on Ifá divination boards have caught the attention of scholars. Drewal and Drewal¹⁷ pointed out that the decorations on Ifá divination boards do not have a single narrative link binding the diverse depictions; rather, they convey myriad autonomous forces operating in the Yorùbá cosmos and those affecting the diviner and his clients. This implies that decorations carved around the boards are independent of one another and that they can be the illustrations of any of the many items, human or animal forms that can be linked with the diviner and his clients. Drewal,

Pemberton and Abiodun¹⁸ have divided the compositional picture plane on the fringes of Ifá boards into nine sections. Eight sections are on the border of the board while the centre of the board forms the ninth section. The most important of all these sections is the one opposite the diviner. It is called *ojú ọpón* (the face of the board); this is where the Èsù face/head is usually portrayed. The section nearest the diviner is called *ẹsẹ ọpón* (the foot of the board). Halfway up the right-hand side is *ọnà ọgánrán* (the right path) and opposite on the left-hand side is *ọnà múnu* (the direct path). Between these sections are four spaces that make up the eight sections of the border. Witte,¹⁹ Pogoson and Akande²⁰ observed that many of the representations on the borders of Yorùbá Ifá divination boards are of human and animal activities that are in one way or the other mythologically connected with Ifá. Stories of animals feature prominently in Ifá poems (*odù Ifá*). Pogoson and Akande²¹ further concluded that a large number of the images are extemporizations by the carvers and that only the Èsù head is constant.

The following boards (plates 20 and 21) that will be discussed belong to Taiwo Abimbola²² of Ile-Tuntun, Ọyọ. Plate 20 was carved for him about twenty years ago by a wood-carver from Iseyin (a Yorùbá town of about 40 kms from Ọyọ), and since then he has been using it for divination at home and abroad. The carvings on the board are those of animals and human beings. At the topmost position, *ojú ọpón*, (directly opposite the diviner) is the Èsù figure. This is the usual position of the Èsù head on Ifá divination boards. Although, Pogoson and Akande²³ have pointed out that the Èsù head is the most constant feature in all Yorùbá *ọpón* Ifá, it should be noted that its rendition varies. The Èsù head on this particular board is confined within the marked borders of the board. Comparatively, the size of the head is not dominant when compared with

other elements on the board. On some boards, the Èsù head is dominant and forms the focal point.

The *ojú ọpón* and *ọnà ọgánrán* (extreme right-hand side) of the board (plate 20) have depictions of a tortoise and a chameleon, while the opposite side between *ojú ọpón* and *ọnà múnu* (extreme left-hand side) has representations of a woman who appears to be dancing, and another woman who is standing upright with her palms clasped in front of her. Next to the represented standing woman is a carved lizard. The space between the *ọnà múnu* and *ẹsẹ ọpón* (the foot of the board, directly opposite the *ojú ọpón*) is the depiction of two human figures; the one at the top carries a pot on his head while the next male figure appears to be masked and probably dancing. On the opposite side of the male figure is the space between *ọnà ọgánrán* and *ẹsẹ ọpón*; it has the representation of a female figure with a baby on her back and a bird with long legs and beak. The carvings at the *ẹsẹ ọpón* looks like a large feather. According to the owner of the board, all the animals depicted are sacrificial animals of Ifá. He also pointed out that the images on this board are prototypes of the ones found on other boards used by diviners in Yorùbá land.

Plate 21 is Taiwo Abimbola's other board. On this board, the Èsù head is represented and positioned in its usual place at the *ojú ọpón*. It occupies a very large proportion of the entire *ojú ọpón* and even expands into the spaces of *ọnà múnu* and *ọnà ọgánrán*. Its entire head appears like a semi-circle with its other half cut off at the rim of the board; with its rounded side extending to the centre of the board. The Èsù head is undoubtedly the focus on this board. The cheek and fore-head has *pélé* face markings (three short vertical lines). The head, in this particular case, extends beyond the marked borders of the divination board, slightly protruding into the *àárín ọpón* (centre of the board). Pogoson and

Akande have pointed this out as one of the identification characteristics of divination boards from Isale-Ọ̀yọ́, even though they noted that Ọ̀yọ́ boards may combine features of the Èsù head not extending beyond the borders of the boards as well as extending to the centre. Witte who studied the divinations boards from Osogbo and Ijebu regions observed that while Osogbo boards have the Èsù head confined within the border, Ijebu boards have it protruding to the centre of the board.

On the same board (plate 21), the *ọ̀nà ọ̀gánrán* bears the depiction of an *ọ̀pẹ̀lẹ̀*²⁴ (divination chain). The *ọ̀pẹ̀lẹ̀* may be used in place of *ikin Ifá* (sixteen palm-nuts). On the opposite side (*ọ̀nà múnu*) is a stylized snake and at the *ẹ̀sẹ ọ̀pọ̀n* is an inverted half-circle with criss-cross hatching incisions. All the spaces between the major designs are embellished with ‘zig-zag’ or what may be ‘interlocking’ patterns. The motifs and design of this board conform perfectly with iconic Yorùbá divination board.

Plate 22 is the divination board of Bartholomew Obaniyi Fakorede of Ile-Alagba compound, Fiditi. According to Fakorede, this board was passed down to him from his great grand-father. He said he has jealously kept this board from thieves who might want to steal and sell it to European collectors. Fakorede’s estimation is that this board may be over a hundred years old. He continues to use this board for divination. The decorative patterns on the edges of the board are not deeply cut but the centre of the board is deep and the edges therefore appear high. The representation of the Èsù head at the top of the board is in high relief. The cheeks are high and have *pélé* facial marks on them. The head is not totally confined within the borders of the board; it projects slightly into the centre. The *ọ̀nà ọ̀gánrán*, *ọ̀nà múnu* and *ẹ̀sẹ ọ̀pọ̀n* have checkered patterns, and the other spaces to the left and right on the upper parts have

interlocking triangles. The unique feature in this board is in its rich rotund depiction of the head of Èsù.

Generally, the divination boards that have been discussed have a variety of imageries on their fringes; the images vary from zoomorphic and anthropomorphic figures to various geometric shapes. As in all *opón* Ifá, the head of Èsù is the only constant feature at the top central position of the board. The images on the boards all fall within the repertoire of Yorubá *opón* Ifá icon.

***Ìróké* Ifá (divination board tapper)**

In Youbaland, when *babaláwos* (Ifá diviners) go out to attend important ceremonies, they usually take with them their *ìróké* Ifá. *Ìróké* Ifá is the symbol of identification and authority of a *babaláwo*. However, a more common use of *ìróké* can be observed during a divination session. At the initial stage of divination, the *babaláwo* usually invokes the presence of Ifá, spirits of reputable *babaláwos* who have passed on, and other relevant forces to witness and participate in the divination. During this invocation and in the course of divination, the *babaláwo* continues to tap the edge of his divination board with the *ìróké* at intervals. This action, repeated from time to time, is said to continually hold the presence and attention of supernatural forces that had been invited at the outset of the divination. Clarke²⁵ mentioned that the tapping of the divination board with *ìróké* is to invite Èsù, the ancestors and all the forces whose presence may be required to be in attendance at the divining session. From the above submissions, it is obvious that *ìróké* is not only an insignia of identification but also a sceptre of power.

Abiodun²⁶ observes that the *ìróké* usually consists of three sections, the topmost or pointed-end section, the middle section, and the third or bottom

section (in order of importance). Elsewhere, Abiodun²⁷ attempting an interpretation of Ifá art objects based on oral traditions suggested that the topmost part of the *iróké* symbolizes the inner spiritual *orí*, while the middle section, which is usually a depiction of a nude, kneeling female figure, holding her breasts, symbolizes the position of a woman during child-birth. The Yorùbá belief is that it is at this point that a child chooses its destiny. He explained that to the Yorùbá, the choice of one's destiny is of utmost importance and that a woman is significant because of her role in child-birth. The woman, usually represented in a kneeling position, is a symbol of *ìkúnlẹ̀ abiamọ̀* ("the kneeling pain of child-birth"), and is often regarded as the greatest act of reverence that can be shown to any being, especially to appease the gods and solicit their support.

Deducible from Abiodun's submission is that the features that essentially qualify a carved object as a typical *iróké* are that it must have three main sections; the first is the cap which is at the top, usually depicted with a curve cone; the second is the picture section which may have illustrations; and, lastly, the handle. The inside of the handle may be hollow in order that bells may be attached therein. An *iróké* must be portable and easy to be carried about; it must also be strong enough to tap divination boards without breaking. Plates 23, 24 and 25 are *iróké* Ifá belonging to Taiwo Abimbola, of Ile-Tuntun, Òyọ̀. Abimbola had just received these *irokes* from his carver and they were yet to be 'bathed.' 'Bathing,' according to Fasakin,²⁸ must first take place before any Ifá paraphernalia can be put to use. The 'bathing' process involves the washing of the board with alcoholic drinks to which concoctions from certain leaves are added and the invocation of the spirit of Ifá into the object.

Plate 23 is a typical *iróké* Ifá with the three sections. The top section is the conical cap used for tapping the divination board. Next to this is the middle section which usually bears a representation of, mostly, human beings. In this particular *iróké*, in the middle section is the depiction of two human heads (likely to be females), backing each other. The features of the heads are sharp and angular and typical of Yorùbá wood-carving. The coiffure are elaborate and elongated and terminate in a cone at the top. This cone serves as the bridge between the middle section and the conical cap of the *iróké*. The hair-style on the heads is similar to the traditional Yorùbá *ṣùkù* hair-style. The lowest part of the *iróké* serves as both a handle and a rattle. The surface of the handle is embellished with criss-cross lines which form interlocking patterns. This is probably to serve as a grip for the holder. This handle is hollow and on the inside, metal bells are attached (plate 23c). When the *babaláwo* taps the board with the *iróké*, the metals jingle. Also, when the *babaláwo* says prayers, he rattles the *iróké* and it jingles to attract *àṣẹ* (spiritual powers and forces that make prayers come to pass).²⁹ When the metal bells jingle, the hollow and resonance quality of the wood amplifies the sound.

This *iróké* Ifá (plate 24) depicts a male horse-rider in the middle section. The horse-rider has decorated hairstyle. The hair terminates in the conical part at the top. Equestrian figures are not unusual imagery in Yorùbá wood-carving. Indeed, it is common to many African arts. Thomson³⁰ demonstrated that the image of the mounted figure is widely found in West Africa as an expression of conquest. Among the Yorùbá carved wooden figures of horsemen honouring warriors are kept in the homes of veterans of military exploits. Morton-Williams³¹ equally pointed out that the ‘motif’ of the mounted warrior, usually in wood but rarely in ivory, is usually placed in several settings by the Yorùbá.

It can sometimes be found in temples or shrines of gods (*òrìṣà*) or in the palaces of kings. He notes that this usage can also be found in the superstructure of some *epa* masks.

Chief Fatokun Morakinyo, the Are Isese Yorùbá of Ile Arowopale, Isale-Òyó is the owner of the *ìróké* in Plate 25. The middle section bears the depiction of standing male and female figures, with their backs to each other. The female is identified by her breasts, and the coiffure on her head. Resting on the head of the two figures is the abstracted form of a bird on which the top conical section is mounted.

The *ìróké* in plate 26 belongs to Babalawo Famoriyo Agboola of Ile Odo-Oje, Isale-Òyó. The unique feature of this *ìróké* is not only in its unusually short length, it also does not have a middle section. The carve has creatively used the top section to carver out a male face, thus making-up for the lost middle section, yet serving as both the middle and the upper sections. The features of the face on the *ìróké* are simple and are sunk, rather than in relief. The bottom section is hollow and has a bell attached to the inside.

Plate 27 is an *ìróké* Ifá belonging to Famoriyo Agboola. This particular one is embellished with beads, traditionally called *òtútù ọpón*. Ojebode Bamidele of Oroki area of Isale-Òyó also has this type (Plate 28). According to Fasakin³² this type of *ìróké* is usually held by *babaláwos* when going out on important occasions. They are not often used during divination. This *ìróké* is rather heavy to be used to tap divination board. The *ìróké* with *òtútù ọpón* is made out of carved sticks, gum and beads. There are no visual representations on all the ones found in the course of this research.

Agere Ifá (Ifá bowl)

According to Roache³³ a large number of imagery can be portrayed in an *agere* Ifá. They range in style from very simple ones with a single simple column supporting a large dish at the top to ones with a lot of complex mythical images. He cites the example of an *agere* Ifá that portrays what might be a myth. In the *agere* he described, two hunters or warriors attacking a wild animal which has a huge coiled snake in its mouth.

In the narrative of a myth gathered by Drewal and Drewal,³⁴ *Agere* was at one time the wife of Orunmila. She was said to so much love Orunmila that on an occasion she reportedly hid him inside her stomach to protect him. She was also said to have been highly industrious and that her husband enjoyed working with her. The interpretation of this myth is that the *ikin* Ifá, used for divination by diviners represent Orunmila while *agere* Ifá used by diviners to hold *ikin* Ifá during divination sessions stands for *Agere* the wife of Orunmila. The love of *Agere* for Orunmila in the myth is symbolized by placing of the *ikin* Ifá in the *agere*. Also, *Agere* is said to be a hard-working woman; this is demonstrated in the use of *agere* as a container for preparing concoction, medicine, etc.

From the foregoing, a large number of representations can be found for the use of *agere* Ifá. More important of its characteristics are that it must have three main sections, the top is usually in the shape of a dish where the *ikin* Ifá is kept; the middle section is where a variety of images may be depicted; and the third section is a flat base on which the entire structure rests. It is very important that the top must be hollow enough to contain the sixteen palm-nuts of Ifá divination, to prevent them from falling out. The middle section may bear any

form of depiction, and the base must serve to hold the whole carving and its contents without tilting.

The *agere* Ifá in plate 29 has three figures at its central section. The figures are seen from three sides as shown in plates 29a, 29b and 29c. They are figures of a flutist, a drummer, and a nude kneeling female figure. According to Fagbemisola, a master *babaláwo* and the son of Chief Fatokun Morakinyo, the owner of the *agere*, the flutist represents Èsù whose relationship with Ifá has been extensively discussed earlier. Fagbemisola described the other two figures as inventions of the carver. However, Abiodun³⁵ has pointed out that kneeling figures symbolize *ìkúnlẹ̀ abiamọ̀* (pain at child-birth), which has a link with the choice of man's destiny. And because Ifá is said to have the fore-knowledge of every man's destiny, the kneeling figure can be said to symbolize the primordial wisdom of Ifá. The third figure is a drummer. Drummers are usually depicted in many Yorùbá wood-carvings; they symbolize festivity.

Another *agere* Ifá belonging to Chief Fatokun Morakinyo is the one in plate 30. There are two figures in the middle section of this *agere*. One is male while the other is female and the figures have their backs to each other. The top section (the bowl of the *agere*) is placed directly on the head of the figures. The bowl is decorated with criss-cross lines and painted white; the cloth on the figures is also painted white, their coiffure is painted black, while their bodies are dark brown.

Plate 31 is the *agere* Ifá of Famoriyo Agboola of Isale-Òyó. The middle section bears the image of a kneeling female figure holding the bowl of the *agere* on her head. The figure has beads around her neck and wrists. Her breasts are protruding as usually found in the representation of women in Yorùbá

wood-sculpture. The bowl on her head is embellished with a linear patterns. This bowl is a classical example of a Yorùbá *agere* Ifá.

The variety of figures and forms depicted in the *agere* Ifá found in Òyó-Yorùbá confirm Roache's³⁶ submission that *agere* Ifá iconography has a large number of varieties. Indeed, the carving in the centre position may vary from anthropomorphic forms to zoomorphic forms and even linear and geometric shapes.

***Opón ikofa si* (divination palm-nuts storage bowl)**

When divination is not in session, the *ikin* Ifá (divination palm-nuts) are stored away in the *opón ikofa si* (plates 32, 87 and 88). This bowl is usually carved with a number of compartments in which divination nuts and *ibò* (instruments for casting lots) are kept. *ikin* Ifá (also called *èkùrò* Ifá) consists of sixteen palm-nuts obtained from the Ifá palm-tree (*òpẹ* Ifá). Each fruit of this palm-tree has four eyelets on its thick bottom. *Ìbò*, also called *ìránşẹ* Ifá (Ifá's messenger), are bones and pairs of cowry-shells tied together. At the outset of a divination session, the diviner gives the client a bone and a cowrie to hold secretly in each hand of his choice. After the divination, the diviner then asks the client to drop any of the items in his hand. If what he drops is the cowrie, it means that a solution has been found, but if it is the bone, then divination has to continue until an appropriate solution is found.

Famoriyo Agboola is the owner of the *opón ikófásí* in Plate 32. Famoriyo is the *mógàjí* of Ile Odo-Oje, Isale-Òyó. The bowl is comprised of two sections; the main bowl and the lid. In this case, the lid is bigger than the main bowl. At the top of the lid is the image of a rabbit. On the side, directly opposite the rabbit are the images of a man and a woman. The man has a fly-whisk in his

right hand and holds the woman with his left. The woman is dressed in *ìró* and *bùbá*. She has a *ṣùkú* hair-do. The figures both face the observer in a frontal position. On the other side of the lid is a mud fish. According to Famoriyo, the bowl is a family property and has been so from time immemorial. He also said that it is usually kept with the *mógàjí* (family head), usually a *babaláwo*, of the family compound. The bowl is still being used for the safe-keeping of Famoriyo's divination palm-nuts and *ìbò*.

Èsù and its iconology

Who Èsù actually is has been expressed differently by various scholars such as Pemberton, Carroll and Parson among others. Pemberton³⁷ noted that in Yorùbá-land Èsù shrines are found in significant sites such as family compounds, cross-roads and at the entrances of palaces and market places. Èsù is a figure of utmost importance in the domestic and religious life of the Yorùbá. According to Pemberton, this figure may not be easily understood. Some believe that Èsù is a messenger of Olodumare. He is believed to set the affairs of earth in order; he guards and helps the children of men; he is also the messenger between the pantheon of *òrìṣàs* and Olodumare. Some believe that Èsù is the messenger of Ifá and some of the other *òrìṣàs*. It is believed that he is so swift that he can be a messenger for many. Èsù earned his trickster title from the many stories that narrate his nefarious activities. In a particular verse of the Ifá, it is told how Èsù deceived the messenger of Olodumare, who had been sent to take Orunmila back to heaven, by substituting a goat's head in a sack and telling the messenger that Orunmila had been killed by thieves and all that was left was his head. In another Ifá verse collected by Bascom,³⁸ Èsù tricks Earth into nakedness and then into marriage. Èsù has the power to deceive men, kings

and gods, and even witches and wizards. The tricky behaviour associated with Èsù has been pointed out as more than mere deceit; it is an expression of power through witty means.³⁹ Some others associate Èsù with diabolic mayhem. The association of Èsù with diabolic and malicious activities is certainly widespread in Yorùbá-land. Idowu⁴⁰ cited Yorùbá sayings attributing to Èsù the origins of misbehaviour. The wicked are called *omọ Èsù* (child of Èsù), and neighbors will say of one who does harm to himself or to others as *işẹ Èsù ni* (It is Èsù who stirred him).

Carroll⁴¹ noted that, generally, there are two types of Èsù carvings; some represent worshippers of Èsù while others depict Èsù himself. He further identifies the features of Èsù carvings; he observed that the figure usually has something in its mouth such as a pipe or a flute, and sometimes its thumb (see Plate 84). He described some other representations showing the figure with a kind of crest or head-dress protruding from the back of the head (Plate 85) and the entire composition having a base on which it rests which can serve as a pedestal that allows it to be placed at the entrances of shrines, market-places, etc. The carving of Èsù is usually painted in black, according to Carroll. He however warned that there can be variations in the representations of Èsù according to the perception of different religious cults about his character.

Pemberton⁴² observed that cowry shells are often attached to the Èsù figure and that the elaborate head-dress (Plate 86) of the figure extending downward at the back is clearly an attempt to portray its head in the phallic structure for which the character is known. Vogelzang⁴³ recorded the depiction of Èsù as a horse-rider (Plate 84) in an exhibition at the Gallery Luttik in Holland in 1984. The equestrian figure is common in African art. Pogoson and Akande⁴⁴ noted that this image has been in long use among Yorùbá artists. Its

portrayal is symbolic of the superiority, prestige, power and kingship attributes of the horse-rider (the mounted) over others (the unmounted). Morton-Williams⁴⁵ discussed the various applications to which horse-riders have been put. He surmised that it is a manner of depicting great warriors and achievers. In cases when Èsù is depicted as a horse-rider, it is symbolic of the reverence accorded to the divinity and its position within the Yorùbá pantheon.

Parson⁴⁶ research on Èsù iconology probed the significance of the phallic structure depicted as the head-dress of the Èsù figure. He suggested that such tall, solid and erect materials radiate a domineering power both in African and European perceptions. He, as a matter of fact, did not dismiss the possibility of the projection as a depiction of the penis. However, the question that comes to mind is the projection symbolizes a penis, does this suggest that Èsù is male? It should be noted that Èsù in Yorùbá culture is believed to be neither male nor female. Also important to mention that the extension at the back of Èsù head may not necessarily symbolize a phallic organ. It is equally plausible to suggest that the extension can be a stylistic representation of a type of cap worn by hunters and medicine-men in Yorùbá-land. The cap, a type of *gòbì*, usually extends backward and its lower part bulging and heavy, perhaps because charms are usually kept in it. However, if, by chance, the projection as observed by Parson is symbolic of the phallus, it can only be related with the issue of sex and gender, at best, symbolizing 'balance and integration,' particularly between the sexes.

Èsù figures in Plates 33 and 34 belong to Chief Fadairo Agbomabiwon of Fadairo compound, Isale-Òyó. Here, Èsù is represented as a kneeling, nude female figure but the facial features appear more masculine than feminine. The ratio of the head to the body is about $\frac{1}{3}$. The head is obviously big and has a

large rear side on which a small human face is carved. The large rear part of the head is a type of head-dress, it narrows into a projected cylindrical form. This type is usually referred to as *ògò Èsù*, meaning Èsù with rear projection. The head-dress extends downwards along the back of the figure and terminates just above the buttocks. The eyes are large and appear as if they are about to burst out of their sockets, and the eyelids are pronounced and sharply-defined, bordering the bulging eye-balls. A leather band is tied around the neck of the figure from which dangling strings of cowries extend downwards to cover the torso of the figure. The figure is painted black.

Plate 35 is the Èsù figure belonging to Famoriyo Agboola, Ile Odo-Oje, Isale-Òyó. This figure is a female figure. Of particular attention is the head-dress; it appears like a coiffure. The hair-style appears somewhat like the *şùkú* common among Yorùbá women. This Èsù is also stringed with cowrie-shells.

Today, the Èsù figure has assumed many forms. According to Odesola,⁴⁷ there can be many types of Èsù carvings; there are some with the figure of a kneeling or standing female figure, holding her breasts (Plates 85 and 86), some others depict a man holding a rattle and fly-whisk and having a face at the back of its head-dress, others are carved as an equestrian figure with a flute in its mouth (Plate 84) and yet some others can be in form of a standing male figure holding a flute (Plate 83).

Şàngó, its paraphernalia and iconology

Samuel Johnson⁴⁸ records that Şàngó, the thunder-god in Yorùbá-land, was the fourth ruler of Òyó-Ile. He was deified by his friends and well-wishers after his death. According to Johnson, Şàngó was said to have ruled over all Yorùbá-land, including Benin, Popo and Dahomey. He was hot-tempered and had

‘trickish’ tendencies. Şàngó is believed to have had the ability to emit fire and smoke from his mouth and nostrils. His chiefs saw him as a ruler with dangerous personality which constituted a threat to the safety of his citizens. They therefore decided to exile him.

A variant of this story narrated by Beier⁴⁹ presents Şàngó not only as a powerful warrior but also a great magician. He was said to know how to make thunder and lightning. One day when he was testing the potency of a charm, he inadvertently destroyed his whole palace, killing most of his wives and children. Faced with such a calamity, Şàngó could not face his people to relate his misfortune; he therefore committed suicide. As indicated earlier, he was deified afterwards. And whenever a house was destroyed by lightning it was attributed to Şàngó’s anger.

Thompson⁵⁰ recorded a tradition on how Şàngó came into the possession of the *osé* and *şẹẹrẹ* (rattle). He related that at a point in history, Şàngó was going to war and he consulted the god of divination, Ifá. Ifá gave him two men to serve as his bodyguards. One was Osé and the other Seere. Osé carried a staff with him to battle, while Seere carried a calabash which he would rattle in order to invoke supernatural powers to aid him in winning battles. These two instruments have since become associated with Şàngó as tools with which he vanquishes enemies.

A praise-poem of Şàngó gathered by Verger⁵¹ indicates that the *osé* must be sturdy and that the mortar of Şàngó must be strong and big. Thompson⁵² suggested that the *osé* Şàngó in traditional sculpture is a symbol of the comradeship between worshippers and deity. He narrated that the initiates of Şàngó must balance on their heads pierced vessels in which living flame burns. They dance with this fiery burden, properly balancing the vessel and never

allowing it to fall. The ability to rise to this challenge and swallow fire proves that they have become, in effect, *Ẓàngó* himself. In relating this ritual with the physical features of the *osé*, Thompson likened the axe-head to fire and the human figure usually forming the next tier as the devotee carrying the fire. Thomson published a number of *osé* with kneeling and nude female figures holding their protruding breasts with their hands, a posture that has been found to be typical of many Yorùbá wood-carvings (see plates 31, 34, 47 and 71).

Armstrong⁵³ mentioned that sometimes *osé* is simply carved with a handle surmounted by twin blades. He also notes that there are instances where the blades are further embedded with human faces at the centre or at the end of each blade. Describing the next section of the *osé*, Armstrong notes that this portion may portray a variety of forms, but mostly it bears the carving of a full human figure (which is sometimes a male but most times a kneeling female). There have been examples of *osé* without the illustration of full figures. Thompson⁵⁴ recorded one from Igbomina with a number of heads around the base of the axe before its handle. There are lots of variations from place to place in the carving of *osé*.

Osé Ẓàngó (Ẓàngó's wand)

Plate 36 is the *osé Ẓàngó* belonging to Sangodele Ibuowo of Asipa, the current *ẹlẹgùn Ẓàngó* of Ọyọ town. This *osé* has three sections; the topmost is the axe-head, and in the middle section is a kneeling female figure holding her breasts in her hands. The lowest section is the handle of the wand. The axe-head has a few stripes of chisel marks and is lightly decorated. The coiffure of the kneeling figure is plain; it extends up like a conical cap to join the axe-head. The eyeballs of the figure are large and bulging. The handle of the wand has no surface

decoration. The iconography of this wand conforms to the *Ẓàngó* wand archetype. Indeed, the kneeling figure depicted here is the most favoured as the central image for the *osé*. Sangodele brought out another *osé*, the one in Plate 37, and said the two were copies fashioned after two older ones that were eaten up by termites while the other one was stolen.

The *osé* in Plate 37 shares a similar iconography with the one in Plate 36 but the individual styles of the artists are evident. While the one in Plate 36 has sharp cuts, giving it a geometric appearance, the one in Plate 37 appears rotund and naturalistic; the face and the body appear organic. The figure in the middle section has intricate hairdo, and *pélé* facial marks. Its stomach appears as if the figure depicted is pregnant and it has a bulging navel.

Plate 38 is a *Ẓàngó* figure; it belongs to Taiwo Abimbola of Ile-Titun, *Òyó*. Abimbola said he uses this figure in the worship of *Ẓàngó*; libations are poured for it and kola-nuts are cast before it to appease and worship *Ẓàngó*. The figure is representative of the image of *Ẓàngó*, standing on an *odó* (pedestal). It is the figure of a man with elaborate coiffure. The figure holds an *osé* in its right hand and a *şereşere* (rattle) in its left. The pedestal on which it stands is decorated with relief carvings of a ram and an *osé*. This figure matches Thompson's⁵⁵ description of *Ẓàngó*, because it incorporates all the wooden items used in *Ẓàngó* worship. There is an *osé* and *odó* *Ẓàngó*. *Odó* *Ẓàngó* is the pedestal on which *Ẓàngó* usually sat or stood during his lifetime. In the worship of *Ẓàngó*, the mortar usually serves as the pedestal on which the *elẹgùn* (*Ẓàngó*'s priest) stands or sits. This *odó* is different from the traditional domestic one used for pounding yam. The shape of *odó* *Ẓàngó* may not necessarily be like the one for pounding yam, but sometimes it is represented like an inverted type of the one

for pounding yam. The *odó*, as it is usually referred to, is usually cylindrical and on its sides are, usually, relief decorations.

***Egúngún* masks and head-dresses**

The masking culture of the Yorùbá called *egúngún* comes from their belief in the existence of life after death. The Yorùbá believe that death is not the end of life and that death is a mere indication that the body (*ara*) has been separated from the soul (*ẹ̀mí*). The belief in the independent and corporate existence of the body and soul, and that the soul can potentially influence the affairs of the living, have necessitated the search for a means to appease the souls of the deceased. The masking tradition is therefore a means of propitiating and integrating the dead with the living. There are diverse view of the origin and reason for *egúngún* culture among scholars.

Bascom⁵⁶ narrated one of several oral traditions of the origin of *egúngún* culture among the Yorùbá. According to him, long ago, *Ikú* (death) and his followers constantly invaded Oja Ifẹ (Ifẹ market) in Ilé-Ifẹ, and each time they came they killed many people. The people sought the help of Oni Lafogido, king of Ifẹ, but the king could not help. Finally, one Amaiyegun promised to help the people. Amaiyegun made a colourful costume for himself that fully covered his body such that no part was exposed, thereby disguising him. When he wore the costume, he could no longer be recognized. And so when he stretched out his leg and the people sang *ẹ wo ẹ̀sẹ awo rébétérébété* (come and see the beautiful leg of a masquerade) and he, again stretched out his hand and they sang *ẹ wo ọwọ awo rébétérébété* (come and see the beautiful hand of a masquerade). On the next market day, Amaiyegun and his followers, dressed in similar costumes, attacked *Ikú*. The fact that *Ikú* and his messengers could no

longer recognize their attackers caused Amaiyegun to disarm them and drive them away. This account, according to Bascom, is man's attempt to overcome death.

Lawal⁵⁷ submitted that the *egúngún* culture of the Yorùbá is a way to harness the power of departed souls for the benefit of the living. For this reason, shrines are built for the departed where they are venerated. In such altars, sculptures are placed to house the souls of the dead. Lawal linked the Yorùbá belief in the independent existence of the soul to their other belief in surrogate twin figures. He stated that the spirit of dead twin can be invoked into the surrogate and is kept there in order that the spirit will not torment the living twin. He opined that the soul of the dead will imperceptibly inhabit the sculpture, receiving sacrifices and blessing the living. The *egúngún* mask is therefore a medium through which the souls of departed ancestors return to earth in physical forms to inquire about the welfare of their living descendants.

Lawal,⁵⁸ added that there is a great variety of *egúngún* masks and head-dresses; they are produced with various materials such as wood, bones, metals and even skulls. Kalilu⁵⁹ listed the materials used for *egúngún* masks as wood, leather, iron, lead and brass. He notes that the masks range from single-faced to multiple-faced. The types of masks he recorded include a few helmets and head-masks; but face-masks are completely absent. The masks use both anthropomorphic and zoomorphic subjects in naturalistic, abstract and stylized forms. Most of the anthropomorphic types are in the form of human heads depicted with face masks, while the zoomorphic figures are all in abstract forms.

Kalilu⁶⁰ however warned that the images on *egúngún* masks are less important and it may be misleading to associate them with the very essence of

egúngún cult. *Ère* (mask), he submitted, is just a reflection of the affluence of the owner of the masquerade. Furthermore, he added that the images on the masks are not symbolic; the carving (*ère*) is chosen or applied according to the owner's or the carver's fancies (emphasis mine). The use of images in these masks is born out of the Yorùbá regard for sculptured images.

Egúngún masking culture remains strong in many Yorùbá communities, but it is especially found to be elaborately celebrated in Fiditi town. Fiditi is about 14 kilometres from Òyó. Adedokun Ojepeju, the *alágbáà* (leader of *egúngún* devotees) of Fiditi, claimed that the annual *egúngún* festival in Fiditi is perhaps the most celebrated of all annual festivals in the town. According to him, during the festival, different types of *egúngún* masquerades from different compounds dance around the town. It is believed that their dance will ward off evil and bring good fortune for the coming season. Ojepeju pointed out that not all *egúngún* wear or carry wooden masks and carved figures. He said the issue of the use of wood carvings and masks is determined by the owners of the *egúngún*, but that some have been noted to carry elaborate masks year after year. He went further to say that some *egúngún* masquerades may bear a mask in one year and decide not to bear it in another.

Plates 39 and 40 are *egúngún* head-dresses from Akunuogan Ojediran and Agbele (Ile-Abefe), respectively of Fiditi. Plate 39 is a single head-dress. It is a carving of a head with a large nose and eyeballs. The head has a *suku* hairdo. It is likely the head of a female. Plate 40 is also a single head-dress. Its hairdo is similar to the ones found on female (*tètédé*) *gèlèdé* masks. The two masks have *àbàjá* face marks on their cheeks.

The head-dress in plate 41 belongs to Ajanbaku masquerade of Oguola compound, Fiditi. It is composed of several independent carvings. The figures

have individual pedestals and can by themselves stand independently as single figures. The figures are tied together; they comprise both male and female figures. Their sex organs make them easily distinguishable. The figures have their genitals pronounced and protruding. This work is a total contrast to *gèlèdè* and *epa* masks in which entire single composition of several figures are carved out of a single wood and yet are joined together. The owners of the mask in plate 41 said that the figures are meant to be together as one from the outset and that they had never existed as independent carvings. He also said that there were years when they included exotic plastic dolls in head-dresses. Novel as this may appear, Lawal⁶¹ and Kalilu⁶² have pointed out that *egúngún* head-dresses have a wide variety of images and compositions and that they may be anthropomorphic and zoomorphic models. The iconographic representations on all the head-dresses discussed here are therefore still within the archetype of Yorùbá *egúngún* head-dresses.

YORÙBÁ WOOD-CARVING TRADITIONS IN SÁBẸ-YORÙBÁ COMMUNITY

The origin of Sábẹ has been historically linked with the Yorùbá in Nigeria. Even today, the Sábẹ people still emphasize and uphold their Ilé-Ifẹ ancestry and there are strong cultural linkages of the Sábẹ kingship with Ilé-Ifẹ, traditional home of all Yorùbá. According to Oba Adetutu Akenmu⁶³ (the current king of Sábẹ), the people of Sábẹ trace their roots to Ilé-Ifẹ. Indeed, the Sábẹ king-list records its first king as a direct offspring of Oduduwa. This king-list is displayed at the lobby of the palace of Onisabẹ of Sábẹ. According to Oba Adetutu, the first king of Sábẹ was said to have reigned between the 12th and 13th centuries. Other Sábẹ kings are as follows:

Oba Monen 1769-1795

Oba Akikenju 1796-1825

Oba Otewa 1852-1860

Oba Alamu 1880-1887

Oba Akenmu 1888-1925 (See Plate 42)

Oba Adegboye 1926-1933

Oba Adeyemi 1934-1946

Oba Ademoyegun Asingbo Akikeenju IV 1947-1963 (See Plate 43)

Oba Adegeriolu Kolawole 1964-1968 (See Plate 44)

Oba Ayegbamife 1971-1973

Oba Adeleke Akinni Ifaa VI 1976-2005 (See Plate 45)

Oba Adetutu Akenmu 2005 till date

However, the lack of data on kings between the first Onisabẹ and later ones is blamed on lack of records. The earliest king in the memory of the people is Oba

Monen, while the addition of Oduduwa's son as the first is done in order to emphasize their connection with Ilé-Ifè. Such inexactitudes are not uncommon in many African societies because histories were invariably in oral form.

Sábe is one of the prominent Yorùbá communities in Benin Republic. Although the Sábe speak a distinctive Yorùbá dialect, it is one that can be easily understood by any Ọyọ Yorùbá person. In Sábe, as in Ọyọ, it is common sight to see shrines of Ọgún (god of iron) in front of family compounds. The shrines are usually marked with a number of metal scraps dumped beside a tree, wall or large stone, and many times sacrificial items are placed in them. Worshippers of Ọgún are mainly artisans whose instruments of work are made of iron; they include motor-vehicle drivers, hunters, farmers, motorcycle riders and several others. Adherents of Ọgún worship abound in Sábe. Other prominent Ọyọ-Yorùbá deities and cults found in Sábe include: Šàngó, Ifá, *ìbejì*, *gèlèdé* and *ògbóni*. In the following sections, this dissertation discusses the carved wooden items found among the Sábe-Yorùbá in comparison with those of Ọyọ. The discussion will pay attention to wood-carvings and other paraphernalia employed in the worship and observance of the rituals of shared deities.

Ọpón-Ifá

The Fadupes of Ijalumo Area of Sábe are the principal diviners for the king of Sábe. An *ọpón* Ifá of this family is shown in Plate 46. This divination board is round in shape; it has linear and geometric decorations around its edges, leaving a bare centre for divination. At the top central position is the Èsù face. This strict central positioning of Èsù's face on divination boards has been variously discussed by scholars.⁶⁴ On the board under discussion, the face of Èsù occupies a large portion of the upper part of the board. The face has large eyeballs, a flat

nose and two raised horizontal stubs as lips, representing the mouth. The face is confined within the border band; it does not extend to the middle of the board. The areas on the sides are embellished with criss-cross lines and triangular motifs. The *ẹ̀sẹ̀ ọ̀pọ̀n*⁶⁵ (directly opposite the *ọ̀jú ọ̀pọ̀n*) is plain. The *ọ̀nà mínu* (left-hand side) and *ọ̀nà ọ̀gánrán* (right-hand side) have similar decorations. They both have criss-cross and triangular decorations. This board is painted with blue, red, white and black enamel paints. The *àárín ọ̀pọ̀n* (centre of the board) is painted red while the Èsù face is light blue.

The Fadupe *ọ̀pọ̀n* Ifá, still in use, is a wooden board carved in low relief. The decorative pattern on the left is a mirror repeat of the ones on the right. The Èsù face which has been observed to be confined within the borders of the board is similar to those found in Osogbo (by Witte⁶⁶) and in Ọ̀yọ̀.⁶⁷ Indeed, the decorative motifs on this board bear similarities with that of the Ojebode family from Oroki, Isale-Ọ̀yọ̀, Nigeria.⁶⁸ This religious iconographic similarity therefore confirms the historical linkage between Ọ̀yọ̀ and Sábẹ̀. Unlike in Ọ̀yọ̀ and Osogbo, where *ọ̀pọ̀n* Ifá are unpainted, Fadupe, the owner of the board, said he painted this board himself and that the colours are not significant; he applied the colours randomly. His main reason for painting the board is simply to prevent it from termite attack.

Plate 47 is an *ìróké* ; it also belongs to the Fadupe family. In the central position is a kneeling female figure holding an object to her chest. This figure is considered to be a female because of its elaborate coiffure. However, protruding breasts, one of the main characteristic features for identifying female figures in Yorùbá wood-carving is absent. A small protuberance of wood that terminates in a cone-like structure is on the head of the figure, while at the base another

one serves as its handle. This object is also coated with various colours of enamel paint.

Another divination board from Sábẹ (Plate 48) is that of the Falaise Ojerinde family from Alapinni area of Sábẹ. This board is oval in shape and has the Èsù face at the usual top central position (*ojú ọpọn*); it has robust cheeks and facial marks. The marks are three short vertical lines. These are *pélé* marks common among the Ọyọ-Yorùbá. The eyeballs are moderate, the nose is flat and the mouth is represented with two thick, short, horizontal relief lines. It also has horizontal markings across the fore head. It is not clear whether these are facial marks or wrinkles. A line which runs around the border of the board, avoids the face of Èsù. The *àárín ọpọn* is slightly sunken and plain. There are patches and traces of peeled or faded colours on the board. This board was once painted, but the colours have peeled or faded off.

Baba Awo Arifájogun of Jabata, Sábẹ owns the divination board in Plate 49. The decorated borders of this board are narrow when compared with the earlier one discussed. The Èsù figure is also represented in its usual position. However, the forms of the head of Èsù in this board are sketchy rather than detailed. The head encroaches slightly into the centre of the board. Features of the head are not easily identifiable. The left and right borders, down to the bottom of the board, are embellished with geometric shapes and assorted lines. The paints on this board appear fresh. The colours used are yellow, red, black, blue, green, white and brown. The centre is slightly depressed. This board and other divination boards found in Sábẹ conform perfectly well with typical Yorùbá divination boards, especially in their placement of the Èsù head at the top central position and the application of geometric, zoomorphic and anthropomorphic images on the fringes of the boards.

Osé Şàngó (Şàngó's wand)

The current *ẹlégùn* (Şàngó's mouthpiece) of Sábẹ is Arobotan Afolabi Saala (plate 50). Arobotan has a shrine dedicated to Şàngó in a corner of his house. In the shrine, a number of objects are displayed; there are numbers of *ẹdun àrà* (thunderbolts), cowries, rattle gourds, and *osé Şàngó*. Plates 51 and 52 are Şàngó wands in the possession of Arobotan. He inherited both wands from his father, who was the *ẹlégùn* Şàngó of Sábẹ before his demise. And he had inherited them from his own father. Arobotan said carved wooden objects (*osé Şàngó* and *odó Şàngó*) employed in the service of Şàngó worship are brought from Ketu. According to him Şàngó wands are sacred and cannot be equated with other carvings. He stated that when a Şàngó wand is commissioned, the carver is paid with hot drinks, kola-nuts, bitter-kola, palm-oil, alligator pepper, chickens and money.

The wand in plate 51 has a stylized axe on the head of a human figure. The axe has the shape of an inverted arc. The axe-head appears like a 'c' facing down. Its head is embellished with short vertical lines running from the right end to the left. The axe is mounted on the head of a male figure that has an elongated torso. The figure holds sacrificial animals in both hands. The figure has a loin-cloth around its waist. The cloth worn by the figure is painted yellow, while the loin-cloth appears to have patches of reds and grays (probably as a result of series of paints being applied to it from time to time). The size of the head of the figure takes a large proportion of the entire human figure. The face and frontal part of the figure is given detailed attention than all other parts of its

body. By implication, this carving conforms to typical Yorùbá *osé* Şàngó described earlier.

Plate 52, another wand in the possession of Arobotan Afolabi has in its central portion, between the axe-head and the handle, a female figure. One of the means of identifying gender in Yorùbá carved wood figures is the conspicuous and exaggerated portrayal of sex organs. The figure in this wand has protruding breasts and wears a loin-cloth. The arms are suspended, hanging loose on both sides. As expected, at the top of the figure is the axe-head. The axe is painted white. The Şàngó wands of Arobotan is not radically different from the ones found in Òyó-Yorùbá communities, except for the painting.

On the reason why the wand is painted with enamel paint, Arobotan explained that the objects are painted to protect them from termite attack. He particularly mentioned that it is the painting of the several *osé* in his possession that has helped preserve them over the years. He went further to say that each year, before the annual Şàngó worship, the carvings are brought out to be repainted in preparation for the festival. According to him, the painting does not only serve as protection but it gives them a new look for each festival.

***Gèlèdé* masks**

Gèlèdé is a Yorùbá word comprising three words. *Gẹ* meaning “to soothe, to placate, to pet or cuddle,” *ẹlẹ* meaning “a woman’s private parts,” and *dẹ* meaning “to soften.”⁶⁹ *Gèlèdé* is performed in some Yorùbá communities in Nigeria and Yorùbá communities in Benin Republic; it is especially popular in Ketu. Drewal,⁷⁰ Lawal,⁷¹ Thompson⁷² and Kruger⁷³ suggest that the tradition originated in Ketu. According to Lawal,⁷⁴ *gèlèdé* was brought to Ilobi, an Egbado town, by a Ketu prince. He noted that *gèlèdé* is popular in Egbado,

Nigeria, and among the Yorùbá people of Oho, Anago, and Awori areas. Lawal further stated that *gèlèdè* is an inclusive society to which the priests and worshippers of several other Yorùbá *òrìsàs* belong. He pointed out that the religious culture that is now called *gèlèdè* is quite complex, given the fact that it has some connection with ancient ceremonies associated with the veneration of Olokun, Yemoja and the ‘powerful mothers’ (*àwọn iyá wa*) as well as *òrìsà olómowéwé*, *aráagbó* and *ìbejì*. Drewal’s⁷⁵ position is not different from that of Lawal, he posited that the *gèlèdè* masking culture originated from Ketu. Thompson and Kruger equally state that *gèlèdè* spread from Ketu to other Yorùbá settlements like Awori, Egbado and Anago, and then to other Yorùbá communities.

According to Drewal and Drewal,⁷⁶ *gèlèdè* is a cult for women, especially in respect of their powers. Women in Yorùbá society are referred to as “mothers” and they are also elders, ancestors and deities that have special spiritual powers that can be both benevolent and malevolent. They are epitomes of fertility and are believed to possess power to bring and take life. This incredible power of women is said to be respected even by diviners. Diviners seek the blessings of “mothers” because without their support, they believe they cannot have successful divinations. The “mothers” are even said to be more powerful than the deities except for Ifá. Yet, Ifá consultation usually precede *gèlèdè* performances; thus the saying: *a kù jò gèlèdè ká má bi Ifá* (meaning Ifá consultation must be carried out before a *gèlèdè* performance).

Thompson⁷⁷ wrote that *gèlèdè* is first and foremost an instrument for the appeasement of witches, and principally a cultural tradition in honour of women. It is also associated with other religions like the worship of Olokun, Yemoja, Oduduwa, Òrìsà Oko and others. There is a Yorùbá aphorism that

says: *Ojú tó rí gèlèdé ti rí òpin ìran; gèlèdé ni baba ìran* (meaning “the eyes that have witnessed *gèlèdé* has seen the best of shows, *gèlèdé* is the ‘father’ of all shows”). This saying demonstrates that apart from being a religious event, *gèlèdé* shows are highly entertaining. This gender-specific religious culture is held in high esteem by the people of Sábẹ. Indeed it appears to be the most popular masking tradition in this area. Its popularity in Sábẹ and its environs can be linked with the closeness of Sábẹ to Ketu from where *gèlèdé* is said to have originated. Indeed, the interviewed practitioners of *gèlèdé* tradition in Sábẹ all said they obtain the wooden items used in their worship from Ketu.

There are two types of *gèlèdé* masks. According to Thompson,⁷⁸ and corroborated by Koshoni Owolabi,⁷⁹ there is *ẹfẹ* (lit. joke), sometimes referred to as the male, and the *tètèdé*⁸⁰ (lit. early-comer) or female. Koshoni Owolabi (plate 53) described the order of a *gèlèdé* performance; he stated that it is the *tètèdé* that usually comes out first. *Tètèdé* will sing and dance to a number of songs into the middle of the night when the stage will be set for the *ẹfẹ* to come out. The *ẹfẹ* is said to possess powers to fish out evil people in the society and this is why it usually comes out at night when it can carry out its purgative activity. Thompson⁸¹ recounted that an Awori *gèlèdé* priest explained that the *ẹfẹ* masks are worn by males only, because it is only a man who has the courage and strength to single out a person from a crowd and accuse him of having done evil. However, Koshoni Owolabi pointed out that the power of *gèlèdé* is more than mere physical powers, he explained that *gèlèdé* possesses charms, amulets and incantations that can be used to inflict harm or even kill.

The difference between the *ẹfẹ* and the *tètèdé* masks is that the *tètèdé* types are simple and are carved as a single face or double-sided face mask without a superstructure. *Tètèdé* is usually represented in the gender of a female

with woven hair style and many examples have either *àbàjá* or *pélé* face marks. The *èfè* types have two sections, the lower section and a superstructure. The lower part is usually a depiction of a human face as found in *tètèdé*; but on top of this is an upper section that bears the depiction of diverse human and animal activities. Scenes depicted in the superstructure can range from social to political themes; and even animal compositions are depicted. It should be noted that both the lower section and the superstructure, no matter how complex, is as a rule carved out from a single wood.

Plates 54, 55 and 56 are *gèlèdé* masks of the Koshoni Owolabi family of Oke Amosun, Sábẹ. The *èfè* in plates 54 is a male *gèlèdé* mask. Depicted at the lower section of the mask is a single face/head of a man with *àbàjá* face marks. The superstructure is that of a big bird, encircled by two snakes. The bird holds the heads of the snakes in its large beak. The snakes loop and entangle together to encircle the big bird. There are other smaller birds around the big one. At both sides of the mask are sheathed swords. This mask is painted with a variety of enamel paints. Koshoni Owolabi pointed out that they paint the mask from time to time, not only to prevent it from termite attack, but also to give it a new look on each occasion when it is displayed.

Koshoni Owolabi also has a *tètèdé* type of *gèlèdé* mask (plate 55). This mask is simpler in appearance and bears no superstructure as found in *èfè* type. Plate 55 is a depiction of a female head with *pélé* face marks. The mask has a Yorùbá *panumó* type of coiffure. Remnants of thick coats of paint can be observed on the mask. This is as a result of several coating and recoating with paints over the years.

Another mask in the possession of Koshoni is the one in Plate 56. This is an *èfè* type of *gèlèdé* mask. Koshoni said that the forms of this particular mask

is a replica of an old one. The human head depicted as the mask below has *àbàjá* face marks on its cheeks. The superstructure is composed of several intertwining band of wood. Depicted to the left and right sides of the superstructure are sheathed swords. Thick layers of paints can be seen on surface of the mask. The layers of paints have covered the surface of the wood, thus making it difficult to see and appreciate the beauty of the carver's knife.

The masks discussed above are still in use and, according to the owners, the masks are about 50 years old. Koshoni Owolabi said that the originals and older versions of these masks must have been stolen and sold by miscreants in the family. The masks all have typical forms of Yorùbá *gèlèdé* masks. The *tètèdé* is carved as a single face mask without a superstructure, while the *èfè* ones have the two sections typical of Yorùbá *èfè* type of *gèlèdé* masks. The superstructures as can be observed in these examples bear different themes of animal composition. According to Koshoni, the mask that bears the depiction of a bird and snake (Plate 54) demonstrates the power of *gèlèdé* to identify and fish out evil people in the society. The bird is symbolic of *gèlèdé* and its powers, while the snakes pecked by the big bird are examples of evil people in the society.

***Gèlèdé* masks at the International Museum of *Gèlèdé*, Sábẹ**

The International Museum of *Gèlèdé* (Plate 57) was established in Sábẹ by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the Benin Republic's Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MCAT). The museum houses a wide range of *gèlèdé* masks and other paraphernalia of *gèlèdé* masquerade. Objects on display at the museum include about twelve masks, four *gèlèdé* drums, a number *ìpèlè gèlèdé*⁸² and metal anklets.⁸³ According to

Akowe Sábe (the curator), the masks on display are examples of available forms of *gèlèdé* masks in Sábe and Ketu. He further explained that some of the masks were collected from their original users and that others were commissioned by UNESCO and MNAT for the museum when it was about to open. The carvers are said to be celebrated *gèlèdé* mask carvers from Cove and Ketu; notable among them are Lokossou Eloi and Okoube Maloman. Cove is about 150 kilometres from Sábe, while Ketu is about 200 kilometres away.

Many of the masks on display have typical features of *gèlèdé* masks, but some are attention-compelling. There is one which is neither a face-mask nor a head-dress; the carved wood depicts the bulging abdomen of a woman. The figure is that of a pregnant woman. On the two sides of the protruding belly are children, sucking breasts (see Plate 58). The curator of the museum explained that this mask is meant to mimic a pregnant woman and to satirise and correct women bearing children without proper spacing. He said *gèlèdé* is also used to correct social ills. The mask is not worn on the face or placed on the head; it is tied to the stomach to imitate a woman in pregnancy.

The forms of this carving are not typical of the Yorùbá wood-carving style. The torso and the children are realistically rendered. It is only the heads of the children that fall in the same proportion with Yorùbá carved wood figures. The forms of the heads are sharp, they have bulging eyes and coiffure. Real cloths are worn on the images of the children and the carving is painted with a kind of reddish brown colour.

Also worthy of note in the museum is a *gèlèdé* mask that the curator pointed out as being the oldest in the collection of the museum (Plate 59). He said it was acquired from a *gèlèdé* family when the museum was about to open. The mask is carved with a number of wooden bands around a carved human

head, and the bands are painted with different colours; the lips of the carved head are painted red and the beard is black. It has blue *pélé* face marks on its cheeks; the marks are not carved but painted on.

Some other masks in the museum can be seen in Plates 61, 62 and 63. Generally, the lower parts of the *èfè* masks in the museum have fixed looks, although with slight variations but the differences are not too radical. The superstructures bear different human and animal activities. It is only the piece in Plate 58 that is radically different from the others. This *gèlèdé* carving is not a face mask nor a head-dress. It is the only one of its type found in the course of this work in Sábẹ, Cove and Ketu.

There are four *gèlèdé* drums on display at the museum (Plate 60). The drums are used for *gèlèdé* performances. Their shapes are basically the same, but they vary in size. The biggest has a long (about 80cm) cylindrical body, towards the top and the base the body steps in to form smaller cylinders. Thus the upper and the lower parts appear like smaller cylinders projecting out of the bigger middle cylinder. At the top, round pegs are driven into the edges of the big cylinder to hold the leather surface of the drum. Strings are used to stretch the leather of the drums taut; the strings are tied to the pegs.

It is important to note that the Yorùbá people, culture and especially wood-carving traditions discussed in this thesis have migrated from the east (Nigeria) to the west (Benin Republic and Togo) in all cases. However, the *gèlèdé* masking tradition is an exception. As earlier stated, Lawal, Drewal, Thompson and Kruger have attested to the Ketu origin of *gèlèdé*. It is a west to east (Ketu to Nigeria) phenomenon. Although contradicting the usual east to west movement of Yorùbá arts in the West African region, it stands to corroborate the fact of diffusion theory that people tend to migrate back to their

place of origin. When they do, they go back with newly acquired cultures, particularly, art. This backward movement is also demonstrated in a Yorùbá aphorism that says *ilé làbò simi oko* (home is the final resting place after travels). *Oko* literally interprets as ‘farm’, but a more encompassing interpretation of the word is ‘travels’.

The plausibility of the *gèlèdé* originating from Ketu is evident in its distribution in Nigeria. It can only be found in Nigeria among the Yorùbá towns at the borders of Nigeria and Benin Republic. If *gèlèdé* had been an original Yorùbá tradition, one expects to find some of its traces in the Yorùbá hinter-towns like Ekiti, Owo, Ilorin, etc. This brings to light the fact that the understanding of the border-line interaction between the Yorùbá in Nigeria, Benin Republic and Togo has a big role to play in the understanding of the peopling, cultural influences and changes within the Yorùbá people in the West African region.

***Ère ìbejì* (twin figures)**

The Yorùbá are said to have the highest twinning rate in the world,⁸⁴ with the ratio of about 45.1 per 1000 births. The high rate of infant mortality among twins has been said to account for the ubiquity of these small wooden carvings in Yorùbáland. The Yorùbá believe that twins are special children with supernatural powers and are therefore to be venerated. Indeed, after the birth of twins, the mother of the children must carry out oracular consultations, in which the *babaláwo* (Ifá priest) will check the *esèntáyé* (general outlook of life’s circumstances) of the children and find out the wishes of the new-born twins. According to Houlberg,⁸⁵ some twins may want their mother to change occupations, ask her to dance in the market begging for alms or to sell beans

and palm-oil (a delicacy that is believed to be the favourite food of twins). At specified intervals, the mother is expected to gather children in her neighbourhood and serve them with beans; this act is called *sàárà* (free gift). It is also believed that if one of a pair of twins die, the spirit of the dead may continue to trouble the one that is alive. Ultimately, the dead may invite the living into the world beyond. For this reason, a carved wood figure is commissioned. When completed, the spirit of the dead twin is invoked into the carved figure and venerated as if it were alive. In a situation where the two twins die, two figures are carved. The Sábẹ Yorùbá also uphold the belief in the *ìbejì* (twins) cult.

Carved *ìbejì* figures have been observed to have a number of characteristics. They are carved nude, usually male and/or female; the head is proportionally oversized when compared with the size of the body; attention is paid to the head and its frontal parts, the features of the head are bold, the eyes are protruding and the nose is pointed. It appears as though the remaining parts of the body are given less attention, but this is dependent on the region where the carving is from and indeed the carver. The arms are mostly at the sides of the body, but sometimes they extend out from the thighs or are left dangling. The sex organs are pronounced, making it easy to identify the sex of the carved twins. In females the breasts are protruding and they wear elaborate coiffure and in the male figures the genitals are erect. In some cases, the wrist and waist of the figures are bedecked with cowries, beads or coins. Sometimes the images are clothed with small jackets.

Bada Taiwo Joseph of Agba Idiko in Sábẹ said his twin brother died when he was young and not long after that, his parents also died. At about the age of 12 Bada's aunt consulted the Ifá oracle to ascertain the cause of the death

of Bada's parents, and she was told by the *babaláwo* that the twin brother of Bada (the dead twin) was the cause of the death of his parents. The *babalawo* thereafter prescribed that an *ère ibejì* be carved to forestall further loss in the family. A wood-carver was commissioned to carve the *ère ibejì* in plates 64a and 64b.

This carving is lacking in details; it appears like the work of an amateur carver, or is perhaps unfinished. It is obviously male, because breasts are not represented and the male genital organ is present, though not as pronounced as it is in some other works. The head of this *ibejì* is not particularly big and the eyeballs are small. Interestingly, however, the face has some sort of happy expression, with lips pursed in a whistling position. The hands are suspended at the sides with the fists terminating at the thigh. This carving does not pass for one of the better examples of typical *ère ibejì* in Yorùbáland. Since the attempt is not a photographic resemblance, it has served Bada Taiwo Joseph as a representation of his dead twin brother and it has brought a stop to occurrences of death in his family.

YORÙBÁ WOOD-CARVING TRADITIONS IN IFÈ-YORÙBÁ COMMUNITY

Atakpame is small town located over a hundred kilometers away from the coasts of Togo. A large population of Yorùbá-speaking people live in this town. A large concentration of Ifè-Yorùbá people can be found at the north-western part of the town. They reside mainly in Gnagna and Tchetti areas. This Yorùbá stock has been variously referred to as Ifè, Fè and Ana Yorùbá. A few kilometers to Atakpame, coming from Lome (the capital city of Togo), a smaller settlement also hosts a substantial number of Ifè-Yorùbá people; the name of the village is Datcha. Beyond Atakpame, towards the northern parts of Togo, an Ifè-Yorùbá community also exist in Kaboli. Kaboli is over a hundred kilometers from Atakpame. Scattered as they are, they all claim to have a common ancestry from Ilé-Ifè, Nigeria, and also point at Oduduwa as their progenitor. Major evidences that corroborate their claim are that they all speak a dialect of Yorùbá and still practice the religion and arts associated with Ọ̀yọ́ and Ilé-Ifè Yorùbá people in Nigeria. In all these communities, Yorùbá religion and cults and, consequently, arts thrive. In Atakpame region, especially in Gnana and Tchetti areas, which is the focus of this research, Ifá worship, and *ìbejì* and *egúngún* cults and their associated arts are still in practice; however, Ifá worship is by far the most prominent.

Ifá objects

Of all the communities visited for this research, it is only in Ifè, Atakpame, that a peculiar Ifá art object called *káká* (plate 65) was encountered. Although the object is made with cut pieces of calabash, the uniqueness of this object makes it worthy of some attention. The owner of this object is the incumbent king of the Ifè-Yorùbá people in Atakpame, Iba Oyekotan (plate 66), who resides in

Tchetti area of Atakpame. *káká* is made from cut pieces of calabash, which is cut into triangular shapes, each measuring about $7\frac{1}{2}$ centimetres. The pieces of calabash numbering 256 in all are perforated and strung together in a single bunch. On each of the piece is a written symbol of an *odù* of Ifá, written on all are the 256 symbols of *odù* Ifá. This type of divination accessory is not known anywhere else in Yorùbá-land.

Opón Ifá (divination boards)

Plate 67 is the divination board of Faturu of Gnagna area of Atakpame. This board is rectangular with the sides curved in a concave manner. The edges of the board have decorations with linear and zoomorphic representations. On the upper edge are two snakes facing each other, each stretching in a wavy movement from the left and right edges of the board to the centre of the border; the snakes do not touch each other as there is a little gap between their heads. A replica of this snake image is also found on the lower border of the board. On the left and right vertical edges are rows of short horizontal relief lines running from the top to the lower side of the board. A cowry shell is carved at each of the four edges.

As much as this board conforms to the use of zoomorphic and geometric decorations found on other Yorùbá divination boards, the absence of the face of Èsù at the top central position raises concerns. The owner of the board pointed out that the snakes represented on the upper and lower parts are Èsù. He equated the snake with Èsù. The source of his assertion is easy to identify in Christianity. Could *babaláwo* Faturu be equating Èsù, a Yorùbá god, with Lucifer who appeared in the form of a snake in the Bible?

The representation of snakes on carved Yorùbá wood objects and other art forms is not unusual. It did not originally symbolize Èsù. A number of divination boards that were discussed earlier have snake images at their edges. Filani⁸⁶ discussed the representation of snakes in Yorùbá arts, including some contemporary usage of snakes as decorative motifs in paintings. In an earlier work, Filani⁸⁷ decrypted the representation of snakes in Yorùbá arts to variously mean the continued existence of the Yorùbá world and swift and strong powers of judgment and punishment.

The interpretation of the snake symbol by Faturó may be attributed to his exposure to other religions, especially Christianity; yet, this may not be right. Odesola,⁸⁸ a wood-carver in Òyó, pointed out that the head of Èsù on *opón* Ifá does not only symbolize the mythical relationship between Ifá and Èsù, but serves as a directional sign to indicate the top and the bottom of the tray. Going by Odesola's position, the snakes on Faturó's *opón* Ifá, coupled with whatever they may indicate, are indicative of the directional positioning for the tray.

The divination board of Iba Oyekotan, the paramount chief and Ifá priest of Tchetti, Atakpame is shown in Plate 68. The board is not carved by a wood-carver but was made by a carpenter. The board is made up of thin rectangular plywood, framed with about an inch strip of square wood. The frame on the edges is not decorated but it is observed that the top central position where the head of Èsù is usually represented has two indented grooves. These grooves, according to Iba Oyekotan, are representational of Èsù's eyes.

This board is unique in that it is a product of modern technology, yet its features represent tradition. The variation found on this board is credited to the limitations occasioned by the tools and skills of the maker. Generally speaking, however, the board possesses the basic features of a divination board, which are

the *ojú ọpón* (face/top of board), *ọ̀nà ọ̀gánrán* (right-hand side), *ọ̀nà múnu* (left-hand side), *ẹ̀sẹ̀ ọpón* (bottom of the board) and *àárín ọpón* (centre of the board). Moreover the fact that this board is used for divination will allow it to pass for a Yorùbá divination board.

Plate 69 is a divination board from Oosha, Datcha. The board belongs to Ataye of Datcha, who claimed to have inherited it from his father, who he said in turn inherited it from his own father. The board is a rectangular one meant to be positioned in a landscape format. The decorative reliefs around it are high and sharp. The head of Èsù is positioned at the *ojú ọpón* (top central position on the edge of the board). The left and right-hand sides of the board (*ọ̀nà múnu* and *ọ̀nà ọ̀gánrán*, respectively) are decorated with linear patterns that appear somewhat highly abstracted. Similar abstracted forms are carved on the bottom line edges of the board. Depicted at the *ẹ̀sẹ̀ ọpón* (central bottom line) are two horizontal lines of five cowries; the number of cowries on the two lines add up to ten.

On this board, the style of the carver is evident, his knife strokes and the resulting fluidity of forms betrays the unique organic tactile appearance of his textures. His straight lines appear wavy and his zig-zags vary in strength. His forms and lines are fluid, thus lacking the usual angularity and rigidity of Yorùbá wood-carvings. All these qualities give this piece organic and enchanting appeal. An image that compels attention is the disturbing depiction of ten cowry shells at the *ẹ̀sẹ̀ ọpón*. The parallel arrangement of nuts or cowries on Ifá divination boards usually symbolize *ọ̀pẹ̀lẹ̀* (divination chain). However, the total number of the cowries or nuts must be eight pairs in order to conform to the actual number of Ifá nuts. Contrary to this iconography, the *ọ̀pẹ̀lẹ̀* depicted on the board in Plate 69 has ten cowries. Ataye, the owner and user of

the board, surprisingly admitted that he himself had pondered why the nuts on the *opele* are ten. This leaves one to wonder if this was the instruction given to the carver by the original owner of the board or a design error.

Also worthy of attention is the head of Èsù at the *ojú opón*. The features on the head or face are simple. The eyes are represented with oval shapes in horizontal positions, they have no brows. The nose appears a little realistic; it runs down from the rim of the board to the lower part of the head. The mouth is simply represented with a thin and short horizontal lump. The head extends slightly into the *àárín opón*, a feature which has been observed^{89,90} to characterize the boards from Ijebu and Isale-Òyó areas of Nigeria.

Agere Ifá (divination palm-nut bowls)

Other traditional Yorùbá wood-carvings found among the Ifẹ̀-Yorùbá people of Atakpame include two divination palm-nut bowls (Plates 70 and 71). These bowls are in the service of Ifá worship and they possess features that are typical of Yorùbá *agere* Ifá bowls. The bowl in plate 70 belongs to Chief Aiyeto of Gnagna, Atakpame. Depicted is a male figure with a bowl on its head. The figure holds certain objects in its hands, one in each hand. A cowry each is stuck to the top of the objects in its hands. The entire figure is placed on a round pedestal that serves as a rest for the entire structure.

The bowl on the head of the figure has linear surface embellishment. The pattern observed in this embellishment is akin to the ones found on Òyó-Yorùbá wood-carvings and *àdìrẹ ẹlẹko* (Yorùbá batik cloth). Indeed, Filani's⁹¹ study on the decorative motifs of the Yorùbá categorized this motif under the group of 'technomorph motifs' and identifies this particular one as a 'linear motif'. Another feature that associates this figure to Yorùbá wood-carvings is the facial

marks on its cheeks. The marks are called *pélé*. *Pélé* marks are commonly carved on carved Yorùbá wood figures and they are still worn in present times by Yorùbá people in Ilé-Ifè, Òyó and other Yorùbá towns in Nigeria. The length of the entire carving is about $4\frac{1}{2}$ times the size of the head, thus also conforming to the Yorùbá-wood carving proportion; it's a way of acknowledging the highly esteemed position of *orí* (the head) as the most important organ of the body and an object of worship.

The second *agere* Ifá in plate 71 is that of Chief Oyekotan, Tchetti, Ifè, Atakpame. This *agere* has the typical kneeling female figure holding its breasts, each one with one hand, and it has a bowl on its head. The figure wears *àbàjá* facial marks. The kneeling female figure can be said to be the most utilized and emblematic of all Yorùbá icons. Abiodun⁹² attempted the interpretation of Ifá art objects; by suggesting that the depiction the woman, usually represented in a kneeling position, is a symbol of *ikúnlè abiamọ* (kneeling with pain at childbirth). This act is often regarded as the greatest act of reverence that can be shown to any being, especially in order to appease the gods and solicit their support.

Ère ìbejì (ìbejì figures)

The figure in Plate 72 belongs to Gee of Tchetti area of Atakpame. Gee said it was given to him by Ayole, who has relocated to Lome. He narrated how Ayole converted to Christianity and needed to do away with the carving of his surrogate twin brother. He therefore asked Gee to get rid of the wood-carving. But Gee did not dispose of it, rather he kept it, hoping that Ayole would one day come back to his senses and ask for it. The figure is a male with a cap on its

head and the cloth depicted on it is *esíki* Yorùbá style. Real beads are tied around its neck and right leg.

The features of this *ère ibejì* are not typical of Yorùbá *ère ibejì*. The figure is carved with draperies on, whereas Yorùbá *ère ibejì* are typically carved nude and their genitals are made obvious for the identification of their gender. Only a few of its features link it with other Yorùbá twin wood-carvings. The cap depicted on its head is *gòbì*, a Yorùbá type of cap; the proportion of the head to the body is in line with the one found in other Yorùbá wood-carvings and the eye-balls are big and bulging. This figure has been considered an *ère ibejì* only on the basis that it has served and has been venerated as one.

Lom-Nava is an area of Atakpame but it does not have a large population of Yorùbá people. The area is said to be occupied by strangers and non-indigenes. The information obtained from the secretary to the king of Ifè in Atakpame indicated that one Ifè-Yorùbá man named Ojei, who came from Kaboli to Atakpame had two *ère ibejì* and one *osé Sàngó*. The *ère ibejì* are the ones in Plate 73. The female to the left is standing upright on a pedestal. The figure is nude and has well-defined breasts. Its hair style is unusually woven from the sides to the centre and from the centre it rises up to form a flat ridge that runs from the front of the head to the back. A string of cowries is tied around the waist of the figure. The male figure, to the right, has a similar posture as the female. The overall shapes of the heads are oblong but they narrow down towards the chin. The eye-balls are located high up on the heads and their noses appear flat but realistic.

In their general appearance, these figures conform to the features typical to Yorùbá *ère ibejì*; some of their features are however peculiar. The coiffure is not typical of Yorùbá hairstyle. The rendition of the facial features appears to

be the personal style of the artist. In all, the nudity, size and the function to which the figures are applied makes them authentic Yorùbá images.

Osé Şàngó (Şàngó's wand)

The *osé* in Plate 74 also belongs to Ojei of Lom-Nava. Ojei is a devotee of Şàngó. The axe on the wand is square in shape, and the figure underneath is that of a female. It is considered to be female because it has breasts, even though there is no other feature that qualifies it as one. The figure leans on hunched legs, thus half-kneeling and not totally standing upright. The figure has lost its right arm. The entire structure is placed on a round pedestal that partitions the figure and the handle.

This wand is a classical example of Yorùbá *osé* Şàngó; however, the individual peculiarities of the artist are obvious. For instance, the facial features of the figure are realistic and the proportion of the head to the body is not totally in conformity with the Yorùbá style. The figure is also neither kneeling nor standing, it is squatting. The carving has the three sections associated with Yorùbá *osé* (as indicated earlier) and that it is used in the service of the Şàngó Yorùbá deity makes it acceptable as an authentic Yorùbá *osé* Şàngó.

Kneeling female figure

The kneeling female figure in Plate 75 belongs to Priest Alagbe Olubuku (plate 76), the high priest of Ifá in Ifẹ, Atakpame. He called the figure *òrìşà abiamọ*. Alagbe Olubuku said he has had this figure in his shrine for a long time and has venerated it consistently. Even though the carving displays typical features of Yorùbá wood-carving style, *òrìşà abiamọ* to which it is associated is not a known deity among the Yorùbá. The Yorùbá deities that are associated with

giving children are Olokun (owner of the seas) and Osun (owner of the Osun river). Perhaps *òrìṣà abiamọ* is a fledgling deity in Atakpame.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSES OF SOME YORÙBÁ WOOD-CARVINGS IN ÒYÓ, SÁBÈ AND IFÈ

This section presents the comparative analyses of wooden paraphernalia in the service of Yorùbá pantheon in Òyó, Sábè and Ifè. Seven categories of paraphernalia are considered, namely *opón Ifá*, *agere Ifá*, *ìróké Ifá*, *osé Sàngó*, masks, *èrè ibejì* and kneeling female figures. Under each category, a maximum of three wood objects (tagged 1, 2 and 3) are selected to represent each community. Consequently, a category contains a maximum of nine objects representing the three communities under this study. Objects under each category are arranged side by side in a tabular form, from where they are compared and contrasted.

In cases where available extant paraphernalia for a community on a subject matter are not up to three, the researcher borrowed from existing literature. This, it is believed, will widen the coverage and time span of objects to be discussed. However, there are cases where the objects used to represent a community under some categories are not up to three.

It is also important to mention that the field work for this research did not yield any Yorùbá masking tradition for Ifè as such; no mask is recorded for this community. Also to be noted is that *gèlèdé* worship is more popular than *egúngún* worship in Sábè, therefore for the purpose of compactness, *egúngún* and *gèlèdé* masks are grouped and compared together in the same category. This is due to the fact that both are products of masking cultures and are quite similar in appearance and use.

Each category of objects has a table. The table has a general name which is a reflection of the genre of objects it contains. In the discussions, each object is referred to by the name of the community of its origin and its number on the table.

Relief Sculpture

***Opón Ifá in Òyó, Sábẹ and Ifẹ* (Table 1)**

Table 1 presents Ifá trays from the three communities under this study. Shapes of divination boards are either circles or rectangles. The ones from Òyó and Sábẹ are circular, except for 'Sábẹ 1' which is oval in shape. The ones from Ifẹ are all rectangular. The decorative composition on 'Òyó 1' is a combination of zoomorphic and anthropomorphic elements. Though 'Òyó 2' and 'Ifẹ 1' have the images of a snake, they are combined with linear and geometric patterns. All other boards in the table combine linear and geometric forms without animal or human decorations. 'Ifẹ 3' is different from the others because it is bare and undecorated.

The Èsù head, present in many Ifá trays as discussed earlier is mostly confined within the border bands of the boards in this table, except for 'Òyó 2', 'Sábẹ 2' and 'Ifẹ 2'. The rendition of the Èsù face in 'Òyó 2' is distinctive, the head is semi oval, the upper edge terminates at the rim of the tray. The semi-oval bit projects slightly into the centre of the board. The head is broad and the eyes are oval. The head is unusually very large, quite similar to those from Ijebu discussed by Witte⁹³

Also worthy of note are the rendition of the Èsù heads in 'Òyó 3', 'Sábẹ 1 and 3'. The heads are all confined within the band of the borders and all appear to be cut out from a pre-defined rectangular shape defined by the carver.

The heads on ‘Òyó 3’ and ‘Sábe 1’ both have *pélé* facial marks. The representation of the Èsù heads in these boards are similar to those from the Osogbo region⁹⁴

Generally, the decorations on the boards are zoomorphic, anthropomorphic, linear and geometric; sometimes these elements are combined and sometimes they are applied independently. However, there appears to be a strong stylistic similarity in the carvings of the Èsù heads in ‘Òyó 3’, ‘Sábe 1 and 3.’ Also observable is that trays from Sábe are painted.

Three Dimensional, Three-section Sculptures

(*agere* Ifá, *iróké* Ifá and *Osé* Şàngó)

Agere Ifá, *iróké* Ifá and *Osé* Şàngó are Yoruba religious wood sculptures that are characterized by three-section carving format. *Agere* and *iróké* are employed in Ifá worship, while *Osé* is used for Sango worship. All three paraphernalia perform different functions, though, but the three section carving format they share is the basis for their being grouped together in this research, that seeks to study their forms.

The three section format may have been informed by the function of the paraphernalia, but the possibility of a significance to the three section may not be totally overruled. The figure ‘3’ (*méta*) is significant in the world view of the Yoruba. On occasions when the spirit of the dead had to be invoked, it had to be called three times. Also, when there is need to command a rapt attention of someone, the person’s name will be repeated three times, and on such occasions, the person will be asked by, usually an elderly person, the caller, ‘how many times did I call you’, and he has to answer; ‘three times’. Interestingly too, sacrifices to the gods are usually asked to be place at *oríta méta* (junction where three roads meet). Therefore there is a significance of three in Yoruba tradition that these sculptures may have drawn from.

Agere Ifá in Ọ̀yọ́, Sábe and Ifẹ̀ (Table 2)

According to Roache,⁹⁵ there is a wide variety of *agere* Ifá in use and the depictions in them range in style from very simple ones with a single simple column supporting a large dish at the top to ones with a plethora of complex mythical images. From the field work of this research however, all the *agere* found in Ọ̀yọ́, Sábe and Ifẹ̀ have human figures as their central theme. Notable is that the figures are mostly of females. ‘Ọ̀yọ́ 1’, ‘Ọ̀yọ́ 2’, ‘Sábe 1’, and ‘Ifẹ̀ 2’ are nude figures. Except for ‘Sábe 1’ all of these are in kneeling positions and have exposed breasts. ‘Ifẹ̀ 2’ is not only nude and kneeling but holds her breasts in her hands in the classical position described by Abiodun⁹⁶ as symbolizing *ìkúnlẹ̀ abiamọ̀* (the pains of mothers at child-birth). The holding of the breasts also suggests motherhood, nurturing and, in fact, the bond that exist between children of the same mother who must have sucked from the same breasts.

As earlier discussed, *agere* Ifá usually has three sections; the topmost section being the cup in which the *ikin* Ifá are placed, the middle section where a variety of illustrations can be depicted holds the top section in position and the bottom section serves as the pedestal on which the entire structure stands. All the *agere* Ifá in the table above have the three stipulated sections. They also all have human forms as their central theme. However, while some of the human are females, others are males. The figures depicted in ‘Ọ̀yọ́ 1, 2 and 3’ bear no facial marks while those of ‘Sábe 2 and 3’ and ‘Ifẹ̀ 1’ wear *pélé* facial marks.

Ìróké Ifá in Ọ̀yọ́, Sábe and Ifẹ̀ (Table 3)

It has been pointed out in the main body of this chapter that *ìróké* Ifá has three main sections. Five of the eight *ìróké* images in the table above have their three

sections. ‘Ọ̀yọ́ 3’ is an *ìróké* covered up with special beads called *otutu ọ̀pọ̀n*. ‘Ifẹ̀ 1 and 2’ appear like sticks and are not carved. The frequent appearances of the equestrian figure (‘Ọ̀yọ́ 2’) and the kneeling female figure (‘Sábe 1 and 2’) have been well discussed earlier and are characteristic of the iconography of *ìróké* Ifá, *agere* Ifá, and *osé* Sàngó.

Three important differences are however observed in the three groups of *ìróké* in the table. The first is that all the ones from Ọ̀yọ́ have bells attached to the inside of their handles, thus making the handles large. While the handles of ‘Sábe 1 and 2’ are slim because they are not hollow out or have bells within them. The second difference to note is that the *ìróké* in ‘Ọ̀yọ́ 3’ is covered up with beads. The appearance of this beaded *ìróké* in literature is rare and is not found in the other two communities covered by this study. This *ìróké* serves as a symbol of prestige as it is commonly taken out by diviners on importance social ceremonies. Thirdly, ‘Ifẹ̀ 1 and 2’ are not carved by carver but shaped by a carpenter but they are however used as *ìróké* .

***Osé Sàngó in Ọ̀yọ́, Sábe and Ifẹ̀* (Table 4)**

All the *osé* in this table, except for ‘Ifẹ̀ 2’ conform to the three component parts said to characterize the iconography of *osé* Sàngó. ‘Ọ̀yọ́ 1 and 2’ are classical examples of the nude, kneeling female figure holding its breasts. ‘Ọ̀yọ́ 3’ is the image of a mother and her twins. The twins are held firmly on the left and right hand sides of their mother, the head and upper part of the torso of the twins lean away from the body of the mother, flanking the female figure on both sides. The depiction of twins in Sàngó paraphernalia is not uncommon; twins are often referred to as ‘children of thunder.’

‘Sábe 1’ and ‘Sábe 2’ are images of standing male and female figures. Although ‘Sábe 3’ is the image of a nude, kneeling female figure, but rather than holding its breasts in the classical posture, its hands are attached to the extensions on the left and right sides of the axe-head.

‘Ifè 1’ is the depiction of a female figure squatting on its heels. The features of this figure are not clear but it appears it has breasts, a common feature for identifying female figures in Yorùbá wood-carving. ‘Ifè 2’ has two sections, with no middle section. Consequently, there is no depicted of anthropomorphic or zoomorphic image on it. It comprises only the axe-head, which has the shape of an ‘X’ and a long thin handle.

All the *osé* discussed here have human figures in their middle sections, except for ‘Ifè 2’ that has no middle section. The middle section that serves as the illustration platform is missing. From the above examples, *osé* with anthropomorphic representations are much more in use than the ones with other types of imageries in Òyó, Sábe and Ifè Yorùbá communities.

Masks

***Egúngún* and *gèlèdè* in Òyó and Sábe (Table 5)**

This table compares the *egúngún* and *gèlèdè* masks of Òyó and Sábe, respectively. As earlier noted, these two genres of art tradition have been grouped together for reasons of their graphic similarities and that they are both paraphernalia of masking traditions. In this comparison, however, no mask is recorded for Ifè, as none was found extant in the course of this research.

‘Òyó 1’ is an *egúngún* head-dress; depicted is what appears like the image of a human male head, but it has woven hair. Woven hair is used in identifying female figures in Yorùbá carving, except in the representations of

Ṣàngó worshippers. In this case, therefore, this must be the head of a female figure. The mask has *àbàjá* marks on its cheeks. ‘Sábe 2’, like ‘Ọyọ 1’ is a single face head-dress, it has no adjoining carvings. Although ‘Ọyọ 1’ and ‘Sábe 2’ have similar graphic qualities, it should be noted that ‘Ọyọ 1’ is an *egúnún* mask and ‘Sábe 2’ is a *gèlèdé* mask.

‘Ọyọ 2’ is an assemblage of male and female figurines. The figures are carved independent of one another, but in this head-dress, they are tied together and made to exist as a single piece; a form of ‘installation art.’ Individually, the figures are akin to Yorùbá *ère ibejì*. The figures are nude and their sexual organs are exposed, their heights and sizes are also within the range of those found in *ère ibejì*. The images in ‘Ọyọ 3’ is a juxtaposition of human and animal forms. The image of the animal at the centre is like that of a leopard. The human heads are carved from the head down to the neck. They are all carved together out of a single piece of wood.

‘Sábe 1’ is a *gèlèdé* head-dress, its features are complex, it has hang-ons and extensions, but all are carved from a single piece of wood. On the whole, it has two sections, the upper and lower sections that are said to characterize *gèlèdé èfẹ* masks. In the upper section there is a depiction of a large bird in an inter-twining encounter with an enormous snake, while the lower section bears the carving of a mask in the form of a human head.

‘Sábe 3’ is although a *gèlèdé* piece, but it is not worn on faces or carried as a head-dress; rather, it is carried with the two hands and suspended at the level of the belly to mimic a pregnant woman. It is a piece meant to satirize parents who continue to bear children without consideration for proper spacing.

Although the masks of Ọyọ and Sábe are employed in the service of different religions, they bear graphic similarities. In all the examples on the

table, except for 'Sábe 3' they are all head-dresses. 'Ọyó 1' and 'Sábe 2' are particularly similar in appearance. They are both single head masks with similar hair-styles. The two masks have *àbàjá* facial marks on their cheeks, except that 'Sábe 2' is painted on. 'Sábe 3' is radically different in that it is neither a face mask nor a head-dress. It is the image of the abdominal region of a woman, with two children at the sides, sucking the breasts on both sides. Generally, the images that dominate the masks found in the three communities are zoomorphic and anthropomorphic.

Three Dimensional, Free standing sculptures

***Ère ibejì* in Ọyó, Sábe and Ifè (Table 6)**

The *ère ibejì* in 'Ọyó 1' have elongated heads that are similar to those carved by Igbomina carvers⁹⁷. 'Ọyó 2' *ère ibejì* has robust cheeks, large eyes and nose, and has its mouth slightly opened as if it is whispering. The figure stands straight; it has square shoulders in a posture that appears like a military stance. However, the figure is that of a female because it has breasts. The breasts are flabby and not robust and protruding like those carved by Igbomina and Ekiti carvers. The arms are carved straight down to the sides; the palms are attached to the sides of the thighs. The *ère ibejì* in 'Ọyó 3' has an enormous head, strong features and angular volumes. The entire figure leans forward as if it is tilted to the front. The head is given particular attention over other parts of the body (a feature that characterizes figures of Yorùbá wood sculpture). On its head is an elaborate coiffure, large eyes, detailed nose and mouth. The facial features are like those of a male figure but for the breasts on its chest and the absence of a male genital; it is certainly a female figure. Although, the breasts are not flabby and not sumptuously carved.

‘Sábe 1’ figures have round faces like the *ère ibejì* carved around the Egbado region⁹⁸ The breasts of the female figure are rotund, and the coiffure on its head is not very different from that of the male. The hands are hanging straight to the sides and the palms are attached to the thighs. ‘Sábe 3’ figures are also images of a male and female *ibejì*. The coiffure on the head of the male figure, to the right, without protruding breasts, is more elaborate than the one on the head of the female, to the left, with breasts. On the contrary, one would have expected the elaborate coiffure to be on the female figure as this is one of the identification marks of female figures in Yorùbá wood-carving. To buttress this point, one would observe that the coiffure on the male figure in ‘Sábe 3’ is similar to the one on the female figure in ‘Ifè 1’.

Generally, ‘Sábe 2’ and ‘Ifè 2’ are peculiar. ‘Sábe 2’ appears totally unfinished, yet it is accepted and used as a surrogate *ibejì* by the owner. ‘Ifè 2’ is larger than usual and has cloth and cap carved onto it, thus covering up the genitals with carved draperies, an unusual phenomenon in *ère ibejì* iconography. All these unusual attributes cannot however condemn these figures as authentic *ère ibejì*, because they have served as surrogate *ibejì* figures. However, the physical features of these figures do not qualify them as classical examples of Yorùbá *ère ibejì*. It is also noted that the facial features of male and female *ère ibejì* are not different and their gender can only be identified by their genitals, coiffure and breasts.

Kneeling female figures in Òyó, Sábe and Ifè (Table 7)

Kneeling female figures (called *olúmẹyẹ* in the Igbomina and Ekiti regions) are commonly found in Yorùbá shrines. The Ekiti people believe that the image is that of a woman who is a messenger of the spirits. Such sculptures are used for

the kola-nuts offered to visitors, as shrine containers for offerings to *òrìṣà* and to hold palm-nuts in Ifá divination. More often than not, they are carved nude with protruding breasts and carrying a bowl in the form of a rooster. When the bowl is carved in a rooster form, the upper part of the rooster is usually removable and serves as the lid. The lower part, which is the body of the rooster, serves as the main bowl. The bowl is placed in the hand of a kneeling figure and are all attached to a pedestal. Many Yorùbá kneeling figures are carved with a child on their back.

The kneeling figure in ‘Òyọ́ 1’ possesses most of the characteristic features associated with Yorùbá kneeling female figures, but rather than a rooster, it holds an ordinary bowl with lid. ‘Òyọ́ 1’ and ‘Òyọ́ 2’, apart from the bowl in their hands, also carry bowls on their heads. They both have children on their back. ‘Òyọ́ 3’ is a classical example of a kneeling figure with a bowl. This particular figure has a lot of linear surface decorations on both the body of the figure and the rooster.

‘Sábe 1’ and ‘Sábe 2’ are also typical Yorùbá kneeling female figures carrying bowls with the image of roosters. They both have unique coiffure. The hair-style is such that the woven sides are directed towards the centre, at the centre, the hair rises to form an intricate fan running from the back of the head to the front. This hair-style has been found common on figures from Sábe and Ifẹ Yorùbá communities and is different from the *ṣùkú* hair-style found on many Òyọ́ kneeling female figures.

The facial features of ‘Sábe 1’ and ‘Sábe 2’ are sharp and bold. The eye-balls of ‘Sábe 1’ are particularly large, with the nostrils and mouth wide and shooting out. The two carvings from Sábe are rich in surface embellishment.

They have linear scarifications all over their bodies. ‘Sábe 2’ wears a *gòmbó* facial marks. Mostly, carvers use *pélé* or *àbàjá* marks on faces of their figures.

All the kneeling figures carry bowls because the bowls are functional. However, although ‘Ifè 1’ is a kneeling female figure (it is nude and has breasts), it holds no bowl in its hands; rather, its hands are placed on its stomach. The stomach appears bloated, as if the figure is pregnant. It has *àbàjá* facial marks on its cheeks. Without a bowl in its hand, it may be difficult to acknowledge the figure as an *olúmèyẹ*. However, the figure was found being venerated within the context of a Yorùbá shrine.

Most of the objects in the categories discussed conform to the iconographic characteristics of their groups. The *osé*, *ìróké* and *ageres* are typically characterized by their three-section tiers; the top, middle and bottom sections. All the *ageres* in the table conform to this principle. However, there are instances where some objects, for instance, *ìróké* in ‘Òyó 3,’ ‘Ifè 1 and 2’ and *osé* in ‘Ifè 2,’ are fundamentally different from their iconographic specifications. Also observable in the *ère ibejì* category is that ‘Sábe 2’ and ‘Ifè 2’ do not have the generally known appearances of Yorùbá *ère ibejì*. It is important here to mention that these variations cannot disqualify these objects as authentic Yorùbá wood-carvings.

The observed difference in some of the carved wood items discussed can be viewed from various angles. It can be said to be innovation occasioned by the distance between the worshipers and where typical carvings can be obtained. It can also be explained from the point of view of natural human predilection to depart from known conventions. Perhaps, the points of departure can further be explained as ‘add-ons’ that the culture acquired from its immediate surrounding cultures. More important is that, it is the ability of the

culture to adapt and innovate in diaspora that determines its survival and continuity.

Relief Sculpture









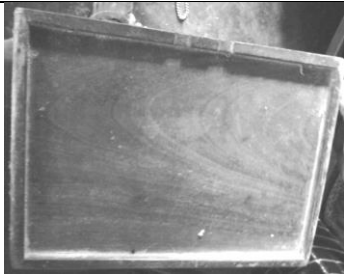
<i>Ọpón Ifá</i>			
ỌYÓ	 1	 2	 3
SÁBÈ	 1	 2	 3
IFÈ	 1	 2	 3

Table 1. Ọpón Ifá in Ọyó, Sábè and Ifè

Three Dimensional, Three Section Sculptures








<i>Agere Ifá</i>			
ỌYÓ	 1	 2	 3
SÁBẸ	 1	 2	 3
IFÈ	 1	 2	

Table 2. *Agere Ifá* in Ọyó, Sábẹ and Ifẹ

<i>Ìróké Ifá</i>			
ÒYÓ	1 	2 	3 
SÁBẸ	1 	2 	3 
IFÈ	1 	2 	

Table 3. *Ìróké Ifá* in *Òyó*, *Sábẹ* and *Ifẹ*

<i>Osé Şàngó</i>			
ỌYỌ	 <p>1</p>	 <p>2</p>	 <p>3</p> <p>99</p>
SÁBẸ	 <p>1</p>	 <p>2</p>	 <p>3</p> <p>100</p>
IFẸ	 <p>1</p>	 <p>2</p>	

Table 4. *Osé Şàngó* in Ọyọ, Sábẹ and Ifẹ

Masks







Masks		
<p>ỌYÓ</p>  <p>1</p>	 <p>2</p>	 <p>3</p> <p>101</p>
<p>SÁBÈ</p>  <p>1</p>	 <p>2</p>	 <p>3</p>
<p>IFÈ</p>		

Table 5. Masks in Ọyó and Sábe

Three Dimensional, Free standing sculptures









<i>Ère ìbejì</i>			
ÒYÓ	 <p>1</p>	 <p>102</p>	 <p>103</p>
SÁBÈ	 <p>1</p>	 <p>2</p>	 <p>3</p>
IFÈ	 <p>1</p>	 <p>2</p>	

Table 6. *Ère ìbejì* in Òyó, Sábè and Ifè







Kneeling figure		
<p>ỌYÓ</p>  <p>1</p>	 <p>2</p>	 <p>3</p> <p>104</p>
<p>SÁBẸ</p>  <p>1</p>	 <p>2</p>	
<p>IFÈ</p>  <p>1</p>		

Table 7. Kneeling female figures in Ọyó, Sábẹ and Ifẹ

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CHAPTER FIVE

BIOGRAPHIES OF SOME MASTER WOOD-CARVERS OF ÒYÓ AND SÁBÈ

Wood-carving is the exclusive preserve for men in Yorùbá-land. It is practiced as a fulltime profession and categorized as a major art genre. Wood-carving is a lineage profession that is passed down from father to son and from one generation to the next. Yorùbá wood-carvers are proud of the fact that their art is inherited from their ancestors. Abimbola¹, Picton² and Aremu³ have studied the ancestry and lineage of wood-carvers in major Yorùbá towns. Abimbola and Aremu opined that many wood-carvers in Yorùbá-land trace their ancestry ultimately to Lagbayi, who has been variously referred to all over Yorùbá-land as Abogunde, Ajibogunde, Oloje, Olojowon and Agbo, a shortened version of *Agbó-mó-tî Oje* (descendant of Oje, who lived to a ripe old age and still remained agile). Lagbayi's name features in many praise-poems of Yorùbá wood-carver lineages. Abimbola⁴ reveals that Are Lagbayi started out as a court artist during the reign of Alaafin Abiodun in Old Òyó. Alaafin Abiodun reigned between 1775 and 1805.⁵ Wood-carvers point at Lagbayi, a reputable carver in history, as their ancestor not only to associate themselves with the success and popularity of Lagbayi but also to underscore the nobility of wood-carving as a profession.

Among others, to establish the retention of wood-carving traditions in Òyó, Sábè and Ife and to identify and investigate the traditions of renowned wood-carvers in the selected communities are some of the main objectives of this research. This chapter therefore records biographies of the practicing master wood-carvers in Òyó and Sábè. Today, Sábè depends entirely on carvers

from Cove and Ketu, (both are about 150kilometres and 200 kilometres away from Sábẹ) for their wood-carvings, hence wood-carvers from Cove and Ketu are studied. In the case of Ifẹ, their own wood-carvings are supplied from several places and hence no carver from Ifẹ was studied. Ifẹ wood-carvings are bought from carvers and merchants from Benin Republic and they even buy from as far as Nigeria. Given this situation, the research concentrates on extant carvers in Ọyọ (Nigeria), Cove and Ketu (neighbouring towns of Sábẹ).

MASTER WOOD-CARVERS OF ỌYỌ

Odekunle carvers' family: an atelier of wood-carvers in Elekara, Ọyọ Emmanuel Olaoye Odekunle

The wood-carving atelier of the Odekunle family is located at Elekara Market in Ọyọ. The studio is one of the market stalls built by Afijio Local Government of Oyo State. The studio houses a large number of wood-carvings done by Late Mr. Emmanuel Olaoye Odekunle and his five male children. According to Odesola, one of the sons of Emmanuel Odekunle, all his father's male children can carve, but not all of them are presently into full-time carving. The male children of Emmanuel Olaoye Odekunle are Olatoye Odekunle, who is now a Methodist Church reverend father in Sagamu; Adebola Odekunle, an administrative officer at the Emmanuel Alayande College of Education in Ọyọ; Sunday Olaotan Odekunle, who works with the Nigeria Prisons Authority in Agodi, Ibadan; Olayemi Odekunle is in Ọyọ town; and Odesola Olajide Odekunle, the only one who is into full-time wood-carving. Odesola resides in one of his father's buildings behind Alliance Hotel area, Ọyọ.

Pa Odekunle (Plate 77) was born in Opopo-Yeosa in Ibadan about 85 years ago (c.1928). His father is said to be a wood-carver in Agugu area of

Ibadan. Odekunle attended Elekuro Methodist Primary School, Elekuro, Ibadan. After his primary school education, he attended Anglican Methodist Modern School, Elekuro, Ibadan. After this, he went to Òyó to attend Olivet Baptist High School, where he dropped out of school, due to financial difficulties. In line with the belief of the Yorùbá that a child may not learn a trade or skill from his biological parent, Odekunle was sent to his uncle in Ijebu-Igbo where he was apprenticed to a wood-carver. The information on his training in Ijebu obtained from Odesola, his son, and that of Madam Adebisi, his first wife, appears contradictory. Adebisi narrated that her husband was at Ijebu for training in wood-carving and it was in Ijebu that they met, but the same woman also said he at one time trained or worked as a carver with one Ekiti man in Ilorin. Whereas Odesola, said that his father was actually apprenticed to Bandele and was also part of the workshop established by the Catholic Missions in Oye- Ekiti. Further interrogation revealed that at another time Pa Odekunle probably went for further training in Bandele's workshop in Ekiti, after his training in Ijebu-Igbo, or visited the Oye-Ekiti workshop and had rapport with Bandele and Fakeye. After the completion of his training, he opened a studio in Owode, Òyó. He bought a piece of land from one Baba Tegbe at Owode, the centre of business activities in Òyó, and he built a shop with planks. During his training in Ijebu-Igbo he had met his wife-to-be, Adebisi, who later joined him in Òyó when he had a studio and was making constant income.

All the male children of Pa Odekunle are trained in the art of wood-carving. They grew up assisting their father in his studio and unintentionally they were initiated into the art of wood-carving. According to Odesola, he did not have a formal training, but he gained wood-carving skills along the line

while helping his father to handle one chore or the other in the studio. As a matter of fact, their father was not even interested in training them as wood-carvers; if he were, he would not have bothered to finance their education to university level. Moreso, he would have outrightly sent them to another carver for training. Pa Odekunle died on December 1, 2010 (Plate 78).

His works

A sizeable number of the works of Pa Odekunle are still on display in his studio at Elekara, Òyó. The themes of his works fall within the Yorùbá wood-carving corpus. He carved a wide range of items used in the service of the Yorùbá pantheon. His works include: *Ọpón Ifá*, *ère ìbejì*, *osé Sàngó*, *odó Sàngó*, *Ọya*, door panels and verandah posts.

Plate 79 is one of the decorative works of Pa Odekunle. The title of this work is *Ìyá Ìbejì*. The carving has two sections, one up and the other down. The two are separated by a thick flat, square lump of wood, decorated at the edges. At the top of this carving is the image of a woman holding two babies, one on each side. The female figure has an intricate coiffure, her large ears are adorned with long earrings, she has round and large eyeballs. The figure has a necklace that runs down from her neck to rest on her exaggerated, protruding breasts. Her legs appear too short for her size. At the lower section are four kneeling figures, each acting as a support on the four edges of the wood separating the upper and the lower sections. All the four figures are males; they are kneeling and each is holding a bowl in its hands. Odesola interpreted this carving as *Ìyá Ìbejì*, the mother of twins, and said that this work was carved by his father as a eulogy to the twin cult, an important Yorùbá cult. The sumptuousness of the woman symbolizes the affluence usually associated with the birth of twins, this is

demonstrated in a praise-poem for twins which says: *Ó wolé alákísà, ó sọ di aláşọ* (They entered the house of the poor and made them rich). The kneeling figures are said to be carrying bowls filled with beans. Beans is believed to be the favourite food of twins and it is often cooked from time to time and given out to other children as *sààrà* (gift of edibles to children and adults alike) by mothers of twins.

The robustness and monumentality of Pa Odekunle's Oya (Plate 80), a robustness also found in *Ìyá Ìbejì*, appear to be an influence from his contact with Ekiti carvers. This carving depicts a kneeling female figure with an overblown *osé* (Şàngó's dance wand) above her head; the slit between the two axe-heads has the carving of a human face. The axe-head has a rocky tactile texture. The figure itself has a *sùkú* coiffure on its head. The central figure is Oya; she is depicted with her torso naked, as is popular with Yorùbá carved wood figures. Her breasts stick out sharply from her body. Oya in Yorùbá mythology is the favourite wife of Şàngó, one-time king of Òyó, who was deified as the god of thunder and lightning. The texture on the pedestal of this piece is achieved by diagonal lines running from the top to the bottom. The texture is akin to the ones found on carvings by Lamidi Fakeye.⁶

The stool in Plate 81, according to Odesola, was carved by Pa Odekunle. The title of the stool is *Kìnìún loba ẹranko* (the lion is the king of animals). It is a pictorial composition of animals and hunters. There are several images of human figures intertwined and dressed in the traditional Yorùbá hunter's attire called *ẹsíkí* and oversize *gòbí* cap; they have on their *àdó* and *ifún pá* (charms and amulets). The hunters hold their guns in different postures; one of them is

blowing the *ekùtù* (hunter's flute). At the lower part of the stool is a large lion's head and next to it, in the front, is an elephant. The general shape of the stool is rotund.

The sumptuousness and monumentality of *Ìyá Ìbejì* and *Oya* by Pa Odekunle has been said to be akin to the works of Ekiti master-carvers. This parallel can be attributed to the possibility that Odekunle trained under Bandele, as his son and wife suggested. Even if he did not train as an apprentice under Bandele, mere contact with and seeing the works of Bandele, who was probably a master-carver at that time, was enough to influence Odekunle. The stool in Plate 81 reveals a different hand at work; although the stool is said to be carved by Pa Odekunle, a close look at it shows that it appears fluid and more dynamic than the other works done by him. However, it still possesses the monumentality of the carver and the base of this carving has the rocky tactile effect found on the *osé* in *Oya*. This might be one of Pa Odekunle's later works. His hand (skill) might have dwindled over time. Or it may be the work of one of his sons.

Odesola Olajide Odekunle

Odesola Olajide Odekunle is the only child of Pa Emmanuel Olaoye Odekunle who works as a full-time wood-carver (see Plate 82). Odesola was born in January 1979 in Ile Gbegilere, Jowoju area, Hospital Road, Òyó. His mother's name is Elizabeth Kudirat Odekunle (Pa Odekunle's second wife). Odesola attended Akeetan Methodist Primary School I, Akeetan, Òyó, from 1983 to 1990. He also attended St. Bernadine's Grammar School, Òyó, from 1990 to 1996 for his secondary school education. He obtained his National Diploma in

Statistics from Osun State Polytechnic, Ire, between 1999 and 2002 and a Higher Diploma in Mathematics and Statistics from The Polytechnic Ibadan, Ibadan, between 2003 and 2005. Odesola also possesses a post-graduate diploma in Education (PGDE) from Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti. He did his youth service in Katcha I Local Government Area, Niger State, in 2006.

His career

As the son of a carver, Odesola cannot say precisely when his training as a wood-carver began. All he can remember is that as early as age ten he had started chopping off wood from logs in attempts to carve images. However, his first lessons in wood-carving were carried out with the use of nail points to trace out the shapes of leaves and animals on wood. After this stage, he graduated to using chisels to carve out the shapes. It was from this point that he was allowed to carve simple domestic objects like spoons, bowls and dolls. Years later he started to carve more complicated wood-works.

Odesola has never exhibited his works in a formal show. His works are sold to traditional worshippers in Òyó and a few members of the elite who use them for decoration; some take his works abroad for sale or use. However, he said that people who carry them abroad for sale buy more than those who use them for religious worship. There is no doubt that people buy traditional carvings for worship in Òyó. The *irókẹ* Ifá of Chief Morakinyo Fatokun and the *agere* Ifá of Agboola Famoriyo, discussed earlier, are said to have been carved by Odesola Odekunle. The only public event where he showed his work was an agricultural exhibition organized by the Oyo State government in Iseyin in 1997.

His sources of inspiration

Like many traditional Yorùbá carvers, many of the items carved by Odesola are based on existing icons. To a large extent, the demand made on him determines the type of wood objects he carves. Most of Odesola's carvings are within the confines of the Yorùbá repertoire of images. To exemplify this constraint Odekunle said that there are four image types of Èsù figures: there is one with the figure of a kneeling or standing woman holding her breasts, another depicts a man holding a rattle and a fly-whisk and having a face on the tip of the phallic extension behind it, another is carved as a horse-rider and, lastly, he identifies the Èsù that can be in the form of a male figure with a flute. He however states that the highlighted features can be intermingled.

According to him, theme depicted on *opón* Ifá also have no restrictions except for the head of Èsù, which is usually placed at the top central position of the tray. In his submission he observed that the positioning of the Èsù head at this point on divination trays is to indicate to the user the top and consequently to identify the 'foot' of the tray. The identification is necessary because the Yorùbá believe that whatever is called the head should not be used as the foot, and this is demonstrated in a Yorùbá aphorism that says: *Ibi tó bá jé orí, a ò gbodò fi tẹlẹ̀*. He mentioned that some trays have the Èsù head only at the top and some have it both at the top and 'foot' of the tray and that some even have four (located at the left, right, top and 'foot' of the tray). He equally mentioned that when his clients commissioned him to carry out any carving, they mostly give him a description of what they want. Some ask for zoomorphic, anthropomorphic or geometric images, and some allow him to extemporize. It is important, however, that whatever form or pattern he chooses, it must be within the repertoire of the imageries of the Yorùbá wood-carving corpus.

His works

According to Odesola, the following three figures (Plates 83, 84 and 85) exemplify three of the four possible iconographic variations that can be found in Èsù figures. These carvings are the works of Odesola and they are carved according to the choice of iconography dictated by the end users (i.e., *babaláwos* from Isale-Òyó). Plate 83 is the figure of Èsù with a flute. The central figure here is a male wearing what looks like a cap or it might be a type of hairdo. At the back of the cap or hairdo is the image of the head of a man. The figure has large protruding ears; its cheeks are puffed out, assuming air-filled curvatures. The flute of Èsù is in the image of a kneeling woman, though not holding her breasts; her arms are extended over her head holding the mouth-piece of the flute. The application to which the artist puts the image of a kneeling woman here is noteworthy. Rather than being used as the central figure, it is used as a supportive element. This shows that there can be cases when seemingly highly symbolic image or even an entire icon can be reduced to mere decoration.

In Plate 84, Èsù is depicted as a horse-rider yet it has a flute in its mouth. In this Plate, the figure of Èsù on the horse is exaggerated, thus the horse is dwarfed. The head of the horse appears more like a relief than a rendition in the round. Depicted in Plates 85 and 86 are other models of Èsù. These ones are females; the one in Plate 85 is standing, while the one in Plate 86 is kneeling. Phallic structures extend from the back of the heads of the two. The phallic structure in Plate 85, according to Odesola, is the face of a human being; the elongation of this face and nose by the artist however makes it appear like the face of an animal. All the examples of Èsù figures used for this discussion are commissioned by *babaláwos* from Isale-Òyó.

Ọpọn ikófásí is a wooden bowl with a cover, inside which divination palm-nuts are stored after divination. It is different from *agere Ifá*. *Agere Ifá* is used during divination; it is the bowl where the palm-nuts are scooped out of in order to arrive at permutations to be recorded on the divination tray. *Ọpọn ikófásí* is different; as earlier said, it is a mere store box for *ikin Ifá* and *íránṣé Ifá*. *Íránṣé Ifá* are other materials such as bones and cowries used for *ìbò* during divination sessions. The iconographic imagery of this bowl can range from very simple bowls with covers and without embellishments to complex bowls with elaborate decorations on the body and a labyrinth of maze forming compartments in its inside. The ones found in Odesola's studio are reasonably attractive to be considered.

The images on the lid of the bowl in Plate 87 are those of an alligator and two tortoises. The alligator is at the centre of the two tortoises. To the front of the tortoises and to the sides of the alligator's head are cowries, one on each side. The mouth of the alligator is wide open. Odesola said the animals were extemporized and that they were not depicted on the instructions of the owner. He also said he depicted tortoise for its acceptance as a symbol of wisdom among the Yorùbá people and the alligator he simply added for no reason he himself could provide. Plate 88 is another bowl; this one has a bird on the lid. The artist himself could not tell the particular type of bird he depicted. However, from observation, the body and tail of the bird look like those of a peacock, but the head and the beak are larger than those of a peacock. At opposite sides of the lid, are heads of crocodiles; they jut out from the body of the bowl; they are meant to be handles for the bowl. There are linear and triangular decorations on the lid as well as on the main bowl itself.

Plates 89 and 90 are divination trays carved by Odesola. The tray in Plate 89 is very illustrative. The overall shape of the tray is oval. Depicted on this tray are different human activities such as hunting, divining, etc. There is a figure of a mother carrying a child on her back, medicine-men, people playing *ayò* board-game, etc. The carver said he attempted to portray various human activities. Equally enchanting is the tray in Plate 90. This one is a round tray; it has elegant, almost fragile, loops forming half-circles all around its border. Within the border are illustrations of kneeling female figures, a divination chain and birds. The circles that form the borders of this tray are perfect and may have been drawn with the use of a construction instrument. The two trays have the head of Èsù at the top central position, the hallmark of the iconography of an Ifá divination tray. Interestingly, as decorative as these trays appear, they were said by Odesola not to be meant for decorative use but were commissioned by *babaláwos*, who will very likely use them for divination.

In a corner of Odesola's studio is an incomplete carving of an *epa* mask (Plate 91). The carving has got to the stage where the forms can be identified. It is at the third stage of carving called *àlétúnlé* (redefinition of forms); the next stage will be *fínfín* (finishing or detailing). The mask has the usual upper and lower sections that characterize *epa* masks; the lower section has the usual double-face mask while the upper section has an elaborate illustration. The central illustration is that of a horse-rider who is wearing a large *abetíajá* cap. A bird perches on the head of the figure. And in the front of the horse-rider, sharing the horse with him, is a smaller figure who holds the horse's reins on behalf of the majestic figure. At the back of this big figure, there is the figure of a flutist. Beside the horse, resting directly on the mask, to the left and right-

hand sides, are drummers. One is a *bàtá* drummer and the other is a *gángan* drummer.

According to the artist, the figure on the horse is a great warrior. The bird on his head is a mark of honour signifying his high rank in the military. The artist said he borrowed this idea from the icons of birds which are placed on the uniforms of modern army generals. The figures at the front and back of the central figure are symbols of dignity, royalty and an indication that there are several soldiers under the command of the 'army general'. The flutist at his back, according to the artist, is a symbol of Èsù. According to the artist, the Yorùbá believe that successful people usually have the backing of Èsù.

On sighting this piece, the question that immediately came to mind was: Who could have commissioned an Ekiti *egúngún (epa)* mask in Òyó? Obviously, there are no *epa* masqueraders in Òyó. Odesola said the owner is one Mrs. Abimbola, the wife of Professor Wande Abimbola, who intends to travel abroad with the carving. Considering that the work will be taken abroad, I then asked the artist why he used such a heavy wood because this may attract more charges for transportation. On this issue, the artist said that weather condition where the work is being taken may be harsh and he had to use wood that can stand the condition to which it would be exposed to.

From the study of carvings in the service of the Yorùbá pantheon and those found in wood-carvers' studios in Òyó, it is obvious that Yorùbá iconographic images have unlimited application within the wood-carving corpus. An icon (for example, the kneeling female figure) can be applied in various contexts. For instance, the image of the kneeling woman used to

represent Èsù in Plate 86 is the same image used as a mere flute in the hand of Èsù in Plate 83. Furthermore, the same kneeling figure is used as the central illustration of the *osé* in Plates 36 and 37, *agere* Ifá (Plates 29c and 31); *opón* Ifá (Plates 89 and 90); and sometimes even in an *irókẹ* Ifá.

Fasiku Alaaye, Adebayo Alaaye, Olufemi Alaaye and Folorunso Alaaye: three generations of carvers from Ikerin to Ilé-Ifè and Ibadan

When John Picton⁷ discussed the genealogy of carvers from Opin, a group of twelve villages in the Ekiti region of Western Nigeria, it sounded like something from the ancient past. Picton wrote that when he visited Opin between 1964 and 1965, one of the carvers whom he found still practising was Fasiku, the Alaaye of Laye, Ikerin. His commitment to wood-carving was attributed to patronage from traders from Ibadan. Fasiku was said to have been trained by Adagba of Ikerin. Adagba was the son of Rotimi Alaari, also a carver, who died circa 1890. Adagba was the father of Yusuff Amuda, another carver of repute in the Ekiti region. Yusuff Amuda was trained by Imale of Ikerin and later served as an assistant in the studio of Fasiku. Such is the complexity and network of relationship, ancestry and training of carvers in Picton's story. The genealogy and line of masters appear difficult to follow; however, taking a closer look at the history, one comes to the realization that some of the carvers Picton⁸ discussed belong to the 1960s and this raises hope of finding the 'marks' of some of the carvers in a more contemporary context. Such was the case when the researcher met a young carver at the Department of Fine and Applied Arts of the Polytechnic, Ibadan. He is a part-time student and a professional carver who works and lives in Ibadan. He calls himself Folorunso Alaaye. He is a grandson of Fasiku Alaaye (the one mentioned by Picton). His

father's name was Lawrence Adebayo Alaaye (Plate 92, the black man on the extreme right) who was also a carver in the Mayfair area of Ilé-Ifè before he died. One of Lawrence Adebayo's work is the *epa* masks in Plate 93. Further investigation into the history of this family reveals that Folorunso has a brother, Femi, who is also practising as a full-time wood-carver in Academy area of Ibadan. What the researcher set out to do was to record a meager biography of these three generations of carvers, due to the constraints of time and space on this research project. A more in-depth research can be carried out on these families by a researcher with more resources of time and space.

Lawrence Adebayo Alaaye

Lawrence Adebayo Fasiku was a prince of Alaaye, a community of four villages. The four villages are called Ikerin. Yet the four villages (Alaaye, Demorun, Olowa and Olopin) are a part of the 12 villages that are together called Opin. Fasiku was the community head of Alaaye (sometimes called Eaaye), the leader of the four villages of Ikerin. According to Folorunso,⁹ Lawrence Adebayo, his father, underwent some training with his father before he was later taken to the workshop of Bandele Arowogun to complete and perfect his skills. Folorunso said that the time of Adebayo's training coincided with that of Lamidi Fakeye in Bandele's workshop in Osi. When Adebayo completed his training with Bandele, he opened a studio at the Mayfair area in Ilé-Ifè. He later got married to Aduni Afuye. Afuye, the father of Adebayo's wife, was also a carver from Oke-Opin. Sadly, Adebayo died in a motor accident on November 15, 1982, on his way to Ikerin where he had just completed a building in preparation for that year's Christmas.

Folorunso Gabriel Adebayo

His career

Folorunso (Plate 94) was born in Ilé-Ifè to the family of Adebayo and Aduni Fasiku. Folorunso was born in 1979. He had to relocate with his mother to her home town at Oke-Opin due to the death of his father. There, he attended Oke-Opin Central School, Oke-Opin between 1986 and 1992 for his primary education, then he proceeded to Anglican Comprehensive High School, Oke-Opin. After he got to Junior School III, he stopped schooling because his mother could no longer finance his schooling. While still in Oke-Opin, he continued to farm and learnt a bit of carving from Ajayi Afuye, his maternal uncle, for two years before he was sent to Ibadan in 1996 to live with his brother, Olufemi Adebayo Alaaye. When he got to Ibadan, he continued schooling again; he was registered at Eleta High School, Ibadan. Olufemi is also a carver, so, while staying with him, Folorunso combined schooling with learning wood-carving. By the year 2000 he had completed his secondary education and, according to him, he had also perfected his wood-carving skills. He then joined his brother, Olufemi, as a full time wood-carver in the Academy area of Ibadan. Folorunso later rented a place he used for his studio at Iso-Pako market, New Ife Road; he also has a studio at the crafts shops of the National Museum, Alesinloye, Ibadan. Thence, he has combined carving with schooling. As at the time of this research interview with him, he was a student of the Polytechnic, Ibadan.

His works

The scope of Folorunso's is within the repertoire of the Yorùbá wood-carving corpus; for instance, he carves objects like *opón Ifá*, *agere Ifá*, *èrè ìbejì*, *ìròkẹ*

Ifá and equestrian figures. Beyond these, he also carves decorative wood sculptures that can serve pure aesthetic functions. Plate 95 is an example of *opón* Ifá carved by Folorunso. The illustrations on this board are those of a chameleon on the *onà múnu*, and a bird on the *onà ògánrán*. At the *esè opón* are divination chains that appear to have been assembled with cowries, and at the *ojú opón* is the face of Èsù. The *àárín opón* of the tray is left bare as this is where actual divination is carried out. This tray conforms to the model of Yorùbá divination tray; however, the carver said he is not sure of the use to which his carvings are put because his clients are mostly Brazilian tourists and a few *babaláwos* in Nigeria. He mentioned that Taiwo Abimbola, an Ifá priest from Isale-Òyó, is one of his foremost clients.

Plate 96 is another *opón* Ifá by Folorunso; this one is smaller than the one discussed above. At the upper left interval is the figure of a man, holding an *àfòşẹ* (animal horn stuffed with charms). The image has a cloth around his waist and is wearing a cap. The man bows as if he is paying homage, a position that may be assumed in honour or salutation of spiritual forces, including *ẹlẹye* (witches), *alálẹ* (ancestors), *àwọn àgbà* (the elders or the knowledgeable) and others. After such salutations, incantations leading to pronouncement of benedictions or curses may then follow. Folorunso says that the figure is that of an Ifá priest paying homage to Ifá. On the opposite side of the tray is the figure of a nude woman in a kneeling position. Her hands are at her sides and not holding her breasts. On her head is an elaborate *şùkú* coiffure. A kneeling nude figure is a common icon in Yorùbá wood-carvings. The interesting but not unusual feature of this tray is that the Èsù head is at the top central position and at the same time mirrored at the bottom (*esè opón*). According to Odesola,¹⁰

some Ifá priests demand that the Èsù heads be carved in this manner. Other images on the tray are cowries and decorative line patterns.

There are two *ère ibejì* in the studio of Folorunso. Twin figures are said to demand a special type of carving. According to Lamidi Fakeye, in an interview with Pogoson and Shyllon,¹¹ carvers do not just carve *ère ibejì* without being commissioned. On the contrary, during the course of investigation for this work, many wood-carvers have carvings of *ère ibejì* ready for would-be buyers. This may tend to be a reaction in the face of changing clientele, wood-carvers now carve twin figures for clients who are mostly tourists and who use the works of art for decorative purposes. Plate 97 is of the twin figures in the studio of Folorunso. The figures are two in number, there is a male and a female and they are both nude. The female has sharp, protruding, conical breasts, while the male has erect genital. The female has an elaborate *ṣùkú* coiffure that makes its head appear elongated. The facial features of the figures are sharp but, generally, the works are poorly finished. Chisel marks are still visible all over them and the details on the faces can be better realized. Undoubtedly, the works will go for Yorùbá *ère ibejì*; however, the use to which they will be put cannot be ascertained as they are still in the possession of the carver.

Another traditional Yorùbá wood sculpture found in Folorunso's studio is an equestrian figure (Plate 98). In this carving, Folorunso depicts a man on a horse, holding a fly-whisk in his left hand and a spear in the other. The man wears a hat which looks somewhat exotic. The hat has a round brim, the cup of the cap is elongated and it has a flat top. The entire hat is embellished with a

variety of lines. The man on the horse has *pélé* facial marks on his cheeks and he wears an *esikí* cloth. There is a charm-gourd tied around his neck. The entire figure of the man on the horse is overbearing. The man bears detailed features while the horse can almost be confused for a relief sculpture. The last two observations are typical features of Yorùbá equestrian figures.

The sculpture of the horse-rider has been at the centre of discussion by scholars of African art studies. Thomson¹² demonstrated that the image of the mounted figure is widely found in West Africa as an expression of domination. Among the Yorùbá, carved wooden figures of horsemen honouring warriors are kept in the house of veterans of military exploits. Ben-Amos¹³ observed that in Benin today, figures on horseback are associated with Oranmiyan, the mythical founder of Benin and Yorùbá dynasties. Cole¹⁴ opined that the representation of horsemen in African art is a fusion of human intelligence and animal strength, creating an awesome presence far greater than the sum of its parts. Morton-Williams¹⁵ pointed out that the motifs of the mounted warrior is usually sculpted in wood and rarely in ivory. It is mostly placed in shrines and temples of gods (*òrìṣà*) and in palaces of kings and chiefs, and sometimes they are found on the super-structure of *epa* masks. Morton stated that when the figure is found in a home, it is usually an indication of the valiant role of an individual, as in the exploits of a leading warrior or a pointer to societal achievements. In shrines, the figure may represent a male deity in one of his manifestations (for instance, when *Ṣàngó* is represented on a horse, it is an indication of his might and destructiveness and as a divine horseman who “rides the heads of his entranced priests and priestesses”).

The origin of the figure may be rooted in the Òyó-Yorùbá cavalryman of the highest military grade. It may indeed, originally, be a representation of the Alaafin (king) of Òyó, the commander-in-chief (the èşó of the èşó). Morton Williams¹⁶ recorded that this supremo's office was created about the end of the seventeenth century when the might of Òyó was growing, winning the city prominence in the Atlantic trade. Òyó horsemen were able to range south-ward to the coast because the West African coastal forest is interrupted by an extension of savanna to the sea through what are now the Republics of Benin and Togo.

As much as the horseman of Folorunso may truly be representative of a typical Yorùbá sculpture, the hat on its head resembles one worn by British colonial administrators in Nigeria. This single feature shows that the sculpture is made by an artist who is aware of the Nigerian colonial experience. However, looking at Folorunso's age, it is clear that he was born after the British colonial era in Nigeria. The carver probably copied this work from an old master or probably just put the hat on the horse-man as a matter of fancy.

Michael Olufemi Adebayo Alaaye

Olufemi Adebayo Alaaye (Plate 99), the elder brother of Folorunso Adebayo, was born in Ilé-Ifè in 1973 to Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Adebayo Fasiku. He attended Seventh-Day Primary School, Lagere, Ilé-Ifè. In 1982, when he was in primary four, his father died and he had to leave Ilé-Ifè for Ikerin where he completed his primary school education.

His career

After completion of primary school, Olufemi came back to Ilé-Ifè in 1992 to train as a wood-carver in his father's workshop. As at that time, Gabriel Afolayan, one of his father's apprentices, was in charge of the workshop. He was in this studio until Akin Alamu, one of his father's friends who is also a carver, came to take him to Ibadan in 1993. Olufemi continued his wood-carving art in Akin Alamu's workshop until 1996 when he rented a shop that served as his studio at the Olomi area of Ibadan. He has since moved from one shop to another around the same area. So far, he has not had any formal exhibition in his entire career. According to Olufemi, the major patrons of his works are mostly tourists and a few worshippers of traditional deities from Nigeria and Brazil.

His sources of inspiration

Olufemi explained that he gets inspiration from the Yorùbá wood-carving corpus and other fanciful traditional Yorùbá themes that catch his fancy. Such themes include drummers, farmers and even encounter with Europeans. He added that sometimes his choice of themes outside the usual Yorùbá wood-carving corpus may be informed by the demand of his clients. Many of his clients who are Africans and Europeans now use wood-carvings for decoration. He mentioned that many of his clients are not worshippers of traditional Yorùbá deities and that he is not sure of the function that many of the carvings they buy are put to. Another set of clients that he works for are art dealers who sell mostly to collectors in foreign countries. Many of such art dealers are located at the Jakande Estate international art market in Lekki, Lagos.

His works

The carvings of Olufemi Adebayo are by every standard some of the best examples of Yorùbá wood-carvings. His works possess the monumentality of the Ekiti carvers, from where he hails, and his finishing strokes can parallel those of the prodigy, Lamidi Fakeye. A notable feature of his works is that they are quite larger than most of the works of other communities and artists discussed in this essay. This feature may not be unrelated with the decorative, rather than religious, function to which the carvings are put; as such, the size of the works may even have been determined by the demand from the carver's patrons. Some examples of Olufemi's works include: *Ọya*, *Şàngó*, *ọpón Ifá*, and *arugbá*.

The carvings in Plates 100, 101 and 102 are of *Ọya* in different postures. These works were carved by Olufemi in his studio at the Olomi area of Ibadan. The carvings measures 103cm., 63cm. and 68.4cm., respectively. The first, *Ọya* (Plate 100), although it appears unfinished, possesses strong and bold features combined with a masterly definition of forms. The picture is that of a woman, *Ọya* (*Şàngó's* wife), carrying a bowl on her head. *Ọya* wears an elaborate Yorùbá *àdìséyìn* coiffure. The upper part of her body is bare, although she is wearing a necklace. Her breasts are protruding, and she is wearing a pleated skirt and standing upright. She holds two children, one on each side; the children are each carrying a bowl. The bowls carried by the children are in turn placed on two other children who are kneeling below. This is definitely a technical way to attach the hanging bowl to bigger forms in order to avoid fragility.

Plate 101 is another carving of Ọya by Olufemi. In this carving, Ọya, a female, is depicted standing upright and holding an *osé*. The coiffure is in the *kòléşè* hair style commonly worn by adherents of Şàngó. Her torso is nude but she wears a loincloth. The posture and composition of this figure is somewhat different from what we have in the previous Plate. In the previous Plate, Ọya is depicted in an elaborate composition with four other figures, whereas in the present Plate, Ọya is depicted as a single figure and she carries an *osé*.

Plate 102 is the third Ọya in this comparison; Ọya here is also depicted as a female figure and here she is kneeling and holding a bowl in her hands. She has a baby on her back. Her hair is carved in an extremely elaborate style. The weaving rises up to terminate in a highly abstracted *osé*. The axe of the *osé* has been reduced to what simply appears like a stylized 'X'. The two sides and the upper indents of the 'X' have an embedded human head each, thus making three heads around the 'X'. The lower indent attaches the 'X' to the coiffure of the main figure.

The mythical figure portrayed in these three sculptures is Ọya, the wife of Şàngó, the god of thunder and lightning. In the iconography of Ọya, she is always represented as a female. Also more often than not, there is always the representation of the *osé* in Ọya figures. *Osé* is the insignia of Şàngó, and it is used to denote the link between Şàngó and Ọya. As it can be observed, Plates 101 and 102 incorporate *osé* in their iconology and are therefore more easily to be recognized as figures of Ọya.

The *ọpón* Ifá in Plate 103 is another carving by Olufemi; this one is equally sumptuous in rendition. This is a round tray with decorative motifs and

patterns all around the borders. This tray has two concentric border patterns. The first border is a series of criss-cross linear patterns; within this border is another border, this time encroaching into the *àárín ọpón*. On the second concentric border is the face of Èsù directly under the criss-cross patterns. The *eṣẹ ọpón* is embellished with linear interlocking triangular patterns. Above these patterns, a little bit to the lower part of the *àárín ọpón*, is another face of Èsù, this one is smaller than the one above (at the *ojú ọpón*). The two faces, up and down, are linked by two snakes, one to the left and one to the right. The snakes run parallel to the inner border decorations, thus leaving the very centre of the tray bare. The *ona munu* has the carving of a gecko and on the *onà ògánrán*, an *òpèlẹ* is depicted.

The unique feature of this tray is the creative placement of the head of Èsù, two snakes and another head partially in the centre of the tray, thus creating a double-border impression. The tray may be highly stylized but it still employs forms and decorations commonly found on Yorùbá *ọpón* Ifá.

Conclusively on the two artists, from the information gathered, Folorunso did not have a proper training as a wood-carver; his training was as a result of his constant visiting and assisting in his father's and brother's studios. However, his years of experience have compensated for the inadequacies of his training. His works are good enough to pass for that of a master-carver, except that they lack the superb finishing and the monumentality found in the works of his elder brother, Femi. The themes of the two artists remain within the Yorùbá wood-carving corpus but their clients are mixed: some are tourists who use the wood carvings for worship and decoration, some are traditional worshippers of

Yorùbá deities, and some are indigenes who use the works of art for decoration while some are marketers who put up the works for sale. The monumentality, finishing and precision qualifies the works of Olufemi to stand at par with the works of great Yorùbá wood-carvers.

MASTER WOOD-CARVERS OF SÁBẸ

From the interviews granted by adherents of Yorùbá traditional religions in Sábẹ, it is evident that the wooden objects employed in their worship have their origin outside the community. Indeed Afolabi Arobotan, the *ẹlẹgùn* Sàngó of Sábẹ mentioned that the best examples of *osé* and *odó* Sàngó in Sábẹ were carved by an artist in Ketu (another Yorùbá community which is about 200km from Sábẹ) (see figure 3). *Akòwé* Sábẹ, the curator at the International Museum of *Gèlèdè*, also pointed out that a large number of *gèlèdè* masks found in Sábẹ township and at the museum are works of artists from Ketu and its environs. Despite all that have been said, the researcher still went to search for wood-carvers in Sábẹ who work in the Yorùbá style. The few who existed have all unfortunately, abandoned wood-carving for farming. It was only Bada Olugboye that has something to show for his abandoned skills. He brought out an unfinished *opón* Ifá; the carving is amateurish.

Faced with the reality of the situation, enquiries had to be made about celebrated Yorùbá wood-carvers in Ketu and its environs. *Akòwé* Sábẹ (curator of the *Gèlèdè* museum in Sábẹ) proved useful, he provided the address and phone number of one Lokossou Eloi in Cove (about 150km from Sábẹ but 50km from Ketu). He described him as a Yorùbá carver and that Lokossou has attended many workshops organized by the Museum of *Gèlèdè* and UNESCO.

Akòwé Sábe also suggested that Abiodun Janvier, the secretary to the Alaketu of Ketu, will help to contact carvers of the Alaketu. It was Abiodun Janvier who led the researcher to Okoube Maloman, a prominent Yorùbá carver in Ketu. Although Janvier also contacted other carvers, it was only Okoube Maloman that does the Yorùbá carving themes and is also of Yorùbá origin.

Lokossou Eloi: A Yorùbá master wood-carver from Cove

Lokossou Eloi (Plate 104), the carver of Atogan in Cove, was born in Naogan, Cove, in 1958. His father was Calix Lokossou (Plate 105) and his mother was Margeierite Goundjo Lokossou. His father was a farmer and at one time a petrol attendant in a gas station. His mother was a full-time housewife, but she also did petty trading. Lokossou said his grandparents were Yorùbá from Aize, a village in Ketu. According to him, he did not know the work his grandfather did until he started to carve. Some members of his extended family who came to visit him were surprised to find him carving; it was then that they informed him that his paternal grandfather, a Yorùbá man from Ketu, was also a carver. Lokossou attended the Mission Catholic School in Cove where he got up to 5th grade before dropping out. Currently, Lokossou carves full-time. Apart from carving, he also does little farming. His studio has always been in his house at Atogan in Cove.

His career

Lokossou started his art career as a youth; he did not undertake any form of training under a master. He was self-trained. As a youth, he loved to watch *gèlèdè* night shows and he watched a good number of them late into the night. After each show, the next day, Lokossou would look for soft wood and attempt

to carve a replica of the masks he saw the previous night at the *gèlèdé* show. Gradually, he started making progress in producing good carvings that caught the attention of people in his neighbourhood. A few started to patronize him and before he knew it, people started referring to him as the ‘*gèlèdé* carver’.

He was the limelight in 1979 when he was invited by the government of Benin Republic to exhibit at the cultural centre in Cotonou. It was a joint show; he had the exhibition along with two other artists, Dossou Zoukifoul and Dossou Amidou. After that exhibition, Lokossou was no longer a local carver; he got commissions from government and private collectors. He was especially patronized by expatriates who came to work in Benin Republic. Lokossou said that sometimes the expatriates would bring photographs of some works done by artists elsewhere and ask him to copy them. An example of such a piece is the one in Plate 106. Although Lokossou did not have the photograph from which he copied this piece, a close look at this work shows that the original may very likely to be the work of an Ekiti or Igbomina carver. To be more precise, this is an imitation of either Bandele Areogun’s work or Lamidi Fakeye’s work.

Lokossou Eloi also participated in an exhibition organized by UNESCO in conjunction with a body he called CCF in Benin Republic. The exhibition was also a joint one, and took place in Ketu in 1999.

Between 28th February and 5th March, 2005, UNESCO and JAPON l’Association Internationale Groupe *Gèlèdé* organized a workshop in Ketu, Benin Republic, in which Lokossou Eloi, Okoube Maloman and other artists participated. The theme of the workshop was “Les technique de sculpture des masques *gèlèdé*”. At the workshop, the artists were exposed to different

techniques of carving *gèlèdé* masks. At the end of the workshop the masks carved were collected and displayed at the *Maison Internationale de Gèlèdé*, Sábẹ (The International Museum of *Gèlèdé* in Sábẹ).

His sources of inspiration

According to Lokossou Eloi, inspiration comes from within, his experience of day-to-day activities and the various *gèlèdé* shows he attends. He related that many of the illustrations on his carvings and *gèlèdé* masks are from Yorúbá beliefs and what he experiences personally. Generally, his themes include: *ère ibejì*, *gèlèdé* masks, *epa* masks, surmounted pictorial compositions and others.

His works

There is just one example of *ère ibejì* in Lokossou's studio. According to Lokossou, the figures in Plate 106 were commissioned by a woman in Cove. Lokossou said that it was the woman who came to him directly and there was no *babaláwo* who acted as an intermediary between them. The figurines will serve as surrogates for her lost twins. He also said that he took money and nothing else.

The physical features of the carvings are as follow: the carving is a male and female pair (Plate 106) and the proportion of the head to the body conforms to Yorúbá wood-carving standards. On the cheeks of the two figures are *àbàjá* facial markings. The coiffure of both the male and female are uniformed. Their torsos are bare, except for an erect male organ and protruding female breasts. The female figure has round features around the belly and buttocks. The hands are hanging loose at the sides of the figures. The legs are straight cylindrical

forms terminating at the feet. No attempt is made to portray any anatomical details on the legs.

Technically, the heads are detailed and well-finished. On the contrary, the bodies show chisel marks and raised grains of wood. There are no neck or waist beads carved on the figures, although real beads can be attached later by the owner (even cloths can be sewn for and worn by the figures, as have been seen in some cases in Yorùbá twin figures). Stylistically, the artist can be said to have concentrated on the head, giving little attention to other parts of the body. The reason behind this is not far-fetched; the Yorùbá *ère ibejì* are meant to be treated like real babies. As such, the owners may like to cloth the bodies of the figures. The artist may have had this in mind, thus leaving the body poorly finished.

Many masks are to be found in the studio of Lokossou Eloi; one can safely say he is a specialist in carving *gèlèdé* masks. The number of masks in his studio and album surpasses all other genres of carving done by him. The masks are of three types; namely, *epa* masks, *gèlèdé* masks and masks for other purposes.

The *epa* masks in the studio and album of Lokossou Eloi were all commissioned by foreigners who brought pictures for Lokossou to copy. As earlier indicated, the originals of these works were very likely carved by Ekiti or Igbomina master-carvers. Lokossou has been ignorantly used to violate copyrights. These works cannot be considered traditional because they were not meant to be worn by masquerades; they were purposely carved for decoration or souvenirs. Examples of such masks are those in Plates 107, 108 and 109.

The themes of Lokossou's *gèlèdé* masks are philosophical. Plate 110 is a *gèlèdé* mask carved by Lokossou. The mask has a composition of animals for its superstructure. Central in the composition is a horse with two large birds on its right and left sides. The horse and the birds are mounted on a large writhing snake. Lokossou's explanation for this work is that God has given every animal its own abilities. The horse has the strength to run, birds can fly, yet the snake that is crawling on the ground can also run right there on the ground which is its abode. The mask below this composition bears the usual *gèlèdé* traits. The mask has Yorùbá *pélé* facial marks.

Lokossou has the tendency to render both humans and animals realistically. This can be accounted for by the fact that he did not train under any master. He sees and represents things realistically the way he sees them. The horse, birds and snake in the composition are realistic. This work is given a good finish, though it can still be sandpapered and smoothed for better effect, but considering that the end-users of the mask may paint it, such efforts will be a waste.

Another *gèlèdé* mask by Lokossou has the family as its central theme (Plate 111). The composition is that of a nuclear family: a man with two wives and children. The family is seated on a round, flat platform. Underneath the platform is the mask proper.

The heads of the figures dominate a large proportion of their bodies. The man and his wives have elaborate coiffure, although the style of the man's coiffure is different from those of the women. The women have their hair partitioned into three, one partition each to the sides and one at the centre. This

type of hairdo is still in vogue among Yorùbá women in Nigeria. It is a variation of the *ṣùkú*. Looking at the hairdo from the sides, it also appears like the one worn by devotees of Ṣàngó. Much attention is given to the head of the figures. This work reveals that Lokossou is conversant with Yorùbá wood-carving features.

Plate 112 is also a *gèlèdé* mask carved by Lokossou. On the mask is a snake swallowing a toad and the snake is in turn grabbed by two men, one to the left and the other to the right; all of which are mounted on the mask. Lokossou Eloi explained that the theme of the work is a product of his personal philosophy that to every power there is a higher power. He said the toad will eat insects, the snake will eat the toad and man will eat the snake.

The work is highly realistic. All through there is an attempt by the artist to be realistic in his rendition. The men are proportionally realistic. Chisel marks are still evident on the carving, but the work can be assumed finished as the chisel marks may be intentional. Other masks in the studio of Lokossou are those in Plates 113 (Lion, the king of the jungle) and 114.

Also found in Lokossou's studio are two large carvings. One is a composition with birds in which different kinds of birds are mounted high, while the other is a complex composition of men in different postures engaged in different activities. The composition with birds (Plate 115) is about 5ft high from the ground. It is composed of birds of different types and sizes mounted on top of one another. At the base of the birds is a mask, which Lokossou said represents man. His explanation is that the birds occupy the air above man, and man is on the ground below the birds.

The complexity and the dexterity with which this work is rendered are evidence that Lokossou is not only a skillful carver but a master wood-carver as well. The birds are all joined together with their wings, tails, legs or beaks in a manner that is delicate but not fragile. The whirling movement of the birds give it a rhythm that evokes the mood of real birds in flight. The birds appear realistic but the mask below looks semi-abstract. The mask has two faces, each facing the opposite side (the type found in the lower structure of *epa* mask).

If this mask is meant to be carried by one person, its weight will definitely constitute a problem for the carrier because it is tall and bulky. The carrier will likely have a problem balancing it on his head as the weight of the upper parts cannot be stabilized with the bare hands of one person. It is only the mask below that gives the work away as a mask, without which it would have been difficult to identify the function and origin of the piece.

Depicted in Plate 116 is a figure composition. The composition has four tiers of figure arrangements. At the topmost are two men and a woman; one of the men is holding a gun and he appears to be a Yorùbá hunter while the other man is drumming. The woman assumes a dancing posture. She is holding a whisk. The next levels are also composed of men and women engaged in different activities; some are dancing and some are drumming. A number of the figures are portrayed in different pursuits of life; there are medicine-men, farmers and so on. At the centre of the composition is a huge bowl with a lid, the bowl serves as a link between the figures on the second and third levels.

The figures in the composition appear to be Yorùbá men and women, because of the mode of their dressing. The figures are rendered realistically; no

attempt is made to follow the proportions that characterize Yorùbá sculpture. The piece is a decorative bowl. Decorative bowls are not uncommon in Yorùbá wood sculptures; the main exception in this piece is that the figures surrounding the bowls are rendered with the proportion not akin to that of Yorùbá wood-carvings. Unlike all other works of Lokossou Eloi, this piece is painted. The piece can be considered Yorùbá but it depicts figures that have proportions in line with Western art, and this stems from the artist's contact with western art.

The entire repertoire of Lokossou is a combination of Yorùbá wood-carving traditions and the themes and styles that appeal to him. Plate 111 is a *gèlèdè* mask on which a family is depicted. The proportion of the human heads to the bodies reflects the hand of a carver that is conversant with Yorùbá wood-carvings while the proportion on Plate 116 simply betrays Lokossou as not having undergone formal training. If Lokossou had undergone the Yorùbá apprenticeship training system under a Yorùbá master-carver, he probably would have stuck to the traditional manner of carving. However, because of his self-training and because he had no role model, he is influenced by themes and styles that catch his fancy, local philosophies and the demands of his clients (see Plates 106, 107 and 108).

Okoube Maloman, a master wood-carver from Ketu

Okoube Maloman (Plate 117) is an acknowledged master wood-carver in Ketu. He was born about 67 years ago in Agbole Idena, Ketu, to the family of Adegbola Okoube. His mother was Morenikeji Okoube. His parents were natives of Ketu. Maloman is the first of his mother's three children. Maloman had no formal education. When he was young he followed his father to the farm where he helped him cultivate crops meant primarily for domestic consumption.

Maloman's father was a carver and his son picked the skill off him. His father was indeed a specialist in the carving of *gèlèdé* masks. According to Maloman, his father's fame as a carver was felt all over Ketu. After he had learnt the art, he could not practice for it was tradition that a child could not practice the same art with his father until the father dies. For this reason, it took Maloman a long time to embark on his career as a wood-carver.

When he was an apprentice under his father, Maloman started with the carving of stools and other domestic objects. It was when he had spent so many years carving these objects that he graduated to carving masks and other sacred objects. He said he could not his years of training, because it spans the time he was about 10 years old to the time his father died.

His career

Eventually, when his father died, and because there were still a great demand for his father's work, Maloman therefore decided to continue the legacy. He abandoned farming and went into full-time carving. At that time, he had taken a wife who had given birth to their first child (who is now about 30 years old).

Maloman was one of the artists invited by UNESCO to the *gèlèdé* workshop that led to the establishment of the International Museum of *Gèlèdé* in Sábè. He also had a joint exhibiton with Lokossou Eloi. The exhibition was organized by UNESCO in conjunction with a body called CCF in Benin Republic.

Maloman is often commissioned by *gèlèdé* adherents to carve masks for them. He also gets commissions from visitors to the palace of the Alaketu of

Ketu. His linkman at the palace is Abiodun Janvier, the secretary to the Alaketu of Ketu.

His sources of inspiration

According to Maloman, his inspiration comes when he brings out a piece of wood to carve. He claimed that he would start carving and the forms would gradually come out of the wood. He does not use preliminary sketches for his works. Sometimes his works are reproductions of past works, while some are specified by clients.

His works

The works found in Maloman's studio are mostly *gèlèdé* masks, *egúngún* masks and a few depicting human forms. Like his father, it appears as if he also specializes in carving *gèlèdé* masks. This is probably due to the demand for *gèlèdé* masks in Ketu and its environs. At the time of this interview, a few *gèlèdé* masks were found in his studio. Plate 118 is an *egúngún* head-rest he carved. The images in the mask are that of a snake stretched out across the back of a leopard; and on the right side of the leopard is a nude female figure and on the left is a male figure. The male and female figures are painted black; the leopard is painted white with colours dotted all over it. The use of the imagery of male and female in this head-rest associates it with other Yorùbá wood-carving iconography. Male and female figures are found in *ère ibejì* and other carved wooden objects. The female figure has erect breasts as it is usually carved in Yorùbá wood sculptures. Maloman disclosed that the mask is meant for a particular *egúngún* cult in Ketu. The imagery of a leopard, snake and male

and female figures are within the Yorùbá wood-carving corpus, an indication of a strong association of this carved object with the Yorùbá.

Plates 119, 120, 121, 122 and 123 are *gèlèdé* masks carved by Maloman. Generally, these masks appear simple. The upper sections of the masks are mostly embellished with single zoomorphic forms. Plates 119 and 121 have leopards as their superstructures, while Plate 122 has an elephant as its superstructure. Plates 120 and 123 have the carving of birds as theirs. According to the artist, the animals used on the masks are significant to the *gèlèdé* cult in Ketu, and they are mentioned frequently in myths and folktales in Ketu Yorùbá community.

Another attention-compelling observation in Maloman's works is the consistent application of colours on all the masks. The colours on the masks appear to have been applied by someone who understands colour mixtures. Some of the colours are well-mixed and not raw. White is usually the background colour and other colours are applied as embellishments. Although Okoube Maloman is acknowledged by the people of Ketu as a master-carver, from a consideration of his works, his skill leaves much to be desired. His works, on the whole, appear unfinished and unsophisticated.

NOTES

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- ² J. Picton. 1994. Art, identity, and identification: a commentary on Yoruba art historical studies. *The Yoruba artist: new theoretical perspectives on African arts*. Abiodun, R., Drewal, H. J., and Pemberton III, J. (eds.). Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press. 1-34
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- ⁶ O. I. Pogason and Y. Shyllon. (2012). *Conversations with Lamidi Fakeye* Op. cited
- ⁷ J. Picton. 1994. The sculptors of Opin. *African arts*. 27.3: 46-59
- ⁸ J. Picton. 1994. The sculptors of Opin. Op. cited
- ⁹ Folorunso Adebayo Fasiku. 2013. Personal communication, National Museum, Alesinloye, Ibadan
- ¹⁰ Odesola Odekunle 2013. Personal communication, Elekara, Oyo
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- ¹³ P. Ben-Amos. 1999. *Art, innovation and politics in the eighteenth century Benin*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press
- ¹⁴ H. M. Cole. 1989. *Icons: ideals and power in the art of Africa*. Washington D:C: Smithsonian Institution Press.116-134

¹⁵ P. Morton-Williams. 2005. A superb Yoruba horseman. *African arts*. 38.1: 72-73

¹⁶ P. Morton-Williams. 2005. A superb Yoruba horseman. Op. cited

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CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS

The Yorùbá wood-carving tradition that is said to have dispersed from Òyó-Yorùbá in Nigeria to Sábẹ (Benin Republic) and Ifẹ (Togo) is still extant in the three communities. However, the practice of the tradition has become much more intense among the Òyó-Yorùbá group. This is due to the high population of adherents of the traditional Yorùbá religion, the major patrons of the wood-carvings. The Òyó-Yorùbá community is a very large one spreading from the entire northern region of Yorùbáland down to Ekiti, Ibadan and Ilé-Ifẹ regions. They are ardent devotees of Ifá, Ọbalúayé, Sàngó, Èsù, Ọya, *egúngún* and *ibejì*. In Sábẹ, there is a considerable number of adherents of Sàngó, *gèlèdé* and Ifa deities and *ibejì*. In Ifẹ, the population of worshippers of Yorùbá deities is sparse. The popular wood items carved in Ifẹ are in the service of Ifa, Sàngó and *ère ibejì*. Although much frantic efforts were made to locate and record Yorùbá masking traditions in this community, all were abortive.

This research finding has also been able to put on record the biographies of Yorùbá master wood-carvers from Òyó and Sábẹ. It is only in Ifẹ that no Yorùbá wood-carver was found within and in the immediate surrounding communities.

Also worthy of record is that the market and patronage of Yorùbá wood-carving has widened, especially in Òyó and Sábẹ. It is a known fact that there are Yorùbá communities in West Africa and in other parts of the

world, but it is interesting to know that many of these communities still depend on Ọ̀yọ́ and Sábẹ́ carvers for the supply of the wood items needed in the worship of their deities. A number of carvers in Ọ̀yọ́ and Sábẹ́ (Lokossou Eloi, Maloman, Odesola Odekunle, Folorunso Alaaye and Olufemi Alaaye) attest to foreign patronage of their wood-carvings.

The repertoire of themes by Yorùbá wood-carvers such as those of *epa gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀*, *opón Ifá*, *agere Ifa*, *iróké Ifá*, *osé Sàngó*, *omolangidi*, *Èsù*, *ère ibejì*, *opómúléro*, and carved wooden doors have been so frequently depicted that they form aspects of the undisputable corpus of Yorùbá wood-carving tradition.¹ The fixed styles with which these art forms are rendered and their consistency over space and time qualify them as cultural icons. Sylvia Williams² noted that works of art that are created according to a fixed symbolism and contains similar elements can be considered to be icons. Cole³ said that art works can be considered as icons when they achieve compelling prominence through frequent repetitions, while Vasina⁴ explained that the mental image of an icon exists before the creation of its work of art and, therefore, the idea guided the maker. Yorùbá wood-carvings are therefore icons in their own rights. There is pervading and compelling stylistic similarity in the iconographic representations in Ọ̀yọ́, Sábẹ́ and Ifẹ́ and they also evoke incontrovertible semiotic connotations. This study has therefore elevated the aforementioned traditional Yorùbá religious wood-carvings to the level of icons.

From the study of wood-carvings found in the service of the Yorùbá religions in Òyó, Sábẹ and Ifẹ, it is obvious that Yorùbá iconographic images have unlimited application within the wood-carving corpus. An icon (for example, the kneeling female figure) can be applied in various contexts. For instance, the image of the kneeling woman used to represent Èsù in Plate 86 is the same image used as a mere flute in the hand of Èsù in Plate 83. Furthermore, the same kneeling figure is used as the central illustration of the *osé* in Plates 36 and 37; *agere* (Plates 29c and 31); *opón Ifá* (Plates 89 and 90); and sometimes even in *ìróké*. This overlap in the use of forms notwithstanding, each of the worship objects have their peculiarities.

The themes of Yorùbá wood-carvings may not necessarily be religious, but may be borrowed from their experiences and belief system. An example is that of the equestrian figure which is actually an historical records of distinguished personages. The figure has been variously featured in *agere*, Èsù, *ìróké* and more. The use of the equestrian figure in Yoruba carving can be traced to the enormous success recorded by Old Òyó after the introduction of the cavalry⁵ and, because of this, figures mounted on horses were seen as superior to the ones on the ground. The grandiose position of the horse-rider and concomitant perceptions were thought befitting for the depiction of gods, this is reflected in the so many equestrian figure used in the depictions of deities (Èsù, plate 84) and on *iroke* (plate 24). Although, Akande⁶ has argued elsewhere that in some cases where the equestrian figures are found depicted on house posts and door panels, they serve as portraits of kings and nobles.

Yorùbá wood-carvings also depict aspects of Yorùbá culture such as clothing, traditional professions, greetings, facial markings, etc. For instance on the *opón Ifá* in Plates 89, the artist depicts a number of cultural activities like a woman backing a child, a woman kneeling down in a greeting posture, a hunter with a gun, a farmer, etc., and the figures are all dressed in traditional Yorùbá costumes. The women are in *ìró* and *bùbá* while the men are in *esikí* and *sòpòpò*. Equally culture-related is the different identifiable Yorùbá facial markings found on many faces of human forms in Yorùbá carvings. The Èsù figures invariably have Yorùbá facial markings. Similar markings are also on the faces of the figures carved on *agere Ifá* (Plates 70 and 71) and *gèlèdè* masks (Plates 54, 55 and 56). Identified facial marking on human subjects include *pélé*, *àbàjá* and *gòmbó*.

Abiodun, Pemberton and Drewal⁷ submitted that several fundamental concepts that are distinctive to the Yorùbá world-view provide the foundation for comprehending the dynamics of Yorùbá art and culture through time and space. In the same vein, the themes of Yorùbá wood-carvings found in Òyó, Sábẹ and Ifẹ demonstrate the world-views of the Yorùbá people. This is particularly exemplified in several representations of the kneeling figure (Plates 29c, 31, 34, 47 and 71). The kneeling figure is perhaps the most emblematic of the Yorùbá icons. The nude kneeling female figure commonly represented by Yorùbá carvers is a physical insinuation of the fertility of women. The kneeling posture of the

woman suggests the pains and travails at child-birth, a time that a child is believed to choose its destiny. Abiodun⁸ attempted an explanation of the importance of women; he noted that destiny is of utmost importance and that at child-birth, women pray for good destiny for their new born. Further demonstration of the belief of the Yorùbá in destiny is encapsulated in the following Yorùbá saying: *Àkúnlẹ̀ yàn, òun ládáye bá* (it is the destiny chosen by a child at birth (the travails and kneeling) that the child comes to fulfill in the world). The woman usually represented in a kneeling position, is said to be a symbol of *ikúnlẹ̀ abiamọ̀* (the travails of childbirth), often regarded as the greatest act of reverence, especially to appease the gods and solicit their support.

In carving the kneeling, nude figure, the breasts are exaggerated to highlight motherhood and child-nurturing. Besides, in Yorùbá belief, the breast is the physical symbol of the bond that exists between child, siblings and mother. This is especially significant in African societies where polygamy is widespread. Children with the same mother are often closer within the extended family. The breast is the symbol of the unity and bond. It is forbidden in Yorùbá-land for a woman to hold her breast and pronounce curses on her children because this act is believed to be extremely potent.

Surrounded by diverse radically different cultures, Yoruba wood-carving in Sábẹ̀ and Ifẹ̀ is forced to innovate. Yoruba wood-carvings dropped-off and added-on new features in Sábẹ̀ and Ifẹ̀ communities. As

much as these features are considered innovations, they are also to be seen as strong points of divergence from the original culture. For example, many of the divination trays, masks and *osé* (plates 46, 47, 49, 50, 51, 54 and others) that were found in Sábẹ and Ifẹ are painted. Although, the painting of Yoruba traditional religious paraphernalia is not totally strange, but the ubiquity of painted carvings in Sábẹ and Ifẹ is attention compelling. Many users in Sábẹ and Ifẹ claim that the wood-carvings are painted to prevent them from insect attack. On the contrary, most of the carvings found in Oyo are not painted.

Another point of divergence is the unusual features of some twin figure (plate 64 and 72) found in Sábẹ and Ifẹ. The figure in plate 64 from Sábẹ is rough and unfinished while the figure in plate 72 from Ifẹ is carved realistically and with drapes. These radical transmutations are borne out of desperate attempts to hold on to the belief in the propitiation of the spirit of dead twins and not minding the typicality of form and finesse of the concomitant paraphernalia.

This research also classified the Yoruba traditional religion carvings into four main categories, name: Reliefs sculptures (*opón Ifá*), 3-Dimensional objects with three sections sculptures (*agere Ifá, iróké Ifá and osé Şàngó*), 3-Dimensional free standing sculptures (*ère ibejì*) and Masks (*egúngún and gèlèdé*). This classification further led to the identification of typical forms and features in each object in the paraphernalia. The forms and features have been found to be peculiar and

consistent in particular objects over time and space. The peculiarities have thus dictated, to a large extent, the iconography of these paraphernalia. This thesis establishes that many (*ọpón Ifá, agere Ifá, iróké Ifá, osé Sàngó, gèlèdé* and some others) of the Yoruba traditional religion carvings are icons in their own right.

Ordinarily, the thinking is that Yorùbá wood-carving spread out from their ancestral home in Ilé-Ifẹ̀ to other parts of Yorùbá-land. A much wider spread of the art is believed to have been conditioned by Old Ọ̀yọ́'s bid to gain access to the coast (Quiddah and Port Novo) in an attempt to engage in the vibrant trans-Atlantic slave trade.⁹ In the process of Old Ọ̀yọ́'s expansion, communities were conquered, occupied and dominated. Regarding the Ifẹ̀ people in Togo, they had initially settled in the Savalou region of Benin Republic before they were forced to migrate due to the menacing army of the Abomey. They afterward moved to the region of Atakpame in Togo.¹⁰ It is important to point out that this east to west movement that made the culture of the Yorùbá to diffuse to the regions west of Nigeria is still on-going. It is interesting but puzzling to note that Ifẹ̀ people depend on wood-carvings from Sábẹ̀ and Ọ̀yọ́. Even the Sábẹ̀ Yorùbá sometimes buy their carvings from Nigeria. Despite their recent delineation by politics, there has been a continuous east to west interdependency for religious items between the three communities (see map figure 3).

As noted above, the Yorùbá people, culture and its associated wood-carving traditions spread from the east (Nigeria) to the west (Benin Republic and Togo) but the *gèlèdè* masking tradition however is an exception to this trend. *Gèlèdè* that is today found in Ayetoro, Yewa, Egba, Ijio and Iwere-Ile regions originated from Ketu. Lawal,¹¹ Drewal,¹² Thompson¹³ and Kruger¹⁴ all attested to the Ketu origin of *gèlèdè*. Its movement from west to east (Ketu to Nigeria) contradicts the usual east to west movement of many Yorùbá arts in the West African region. This stands to throw in a fact to the diffusion theory, that people tend to migrate back to their place of origin. When they do, they go back with newly acquired cultures, particularly art. The tendencies of the Yorùbá people to move back to their original homes is also demonstrated in a Yorùbá aphorism that says *ilé lábò sinmi oko* (home is the final resting place). *Oko* literally translates to ‘farm’, but a more encompassing interpretation of the word means ‘travels’. The point here is that wood-carving culture has existed and survived in Benin Republic and Togo, countries that are dominated by radically different cultures and have undergone totally different system of governance. Thus bringing to the fore, the argument of Yai¹⁵ that a true test of the strength of a culture is its ability to survive in the difficult conditions of exile and that it is in such conditions that a tradition can best prove its ability to innovate.”

The plausibility of the *gèlèdè* originating in Ketu is evident in its limited distribution in the Benin Republic and Nigeria border towns only. If *gèlèdè* had been an original Yorùbá tradition, one expects to find some of its traces in the Yorùbá hinter-towns like Ekiti, Owo, Ilorin, etc. This brings to attention that the understanding of the border-line interaction between the Yorùbá in Nigeria, Benin Republic and Togo has a big role to play in the understanding of the

peopling, cultural influences and changes within the Yorùbá people in the West African region.

From the evidence gathered using the arts, there is a good basis to uphold the historical and oral traditions of dispersal and migrations of the Yorùbá from Old Ọ̀yọ́ and Ilé-Ifẹ̀ to other parts of West African, such as those of Benin and Togo, respectively.

The diffusion theory states that as cultural traits move away from their original source, they thin out and become sparse. When this theory is applied to the result of this study, it upholds the fact that there has been a spreading out of Yorùbá culture and religion from their accepted origin in Ilé-Ifẹ̀. That all Yorùbá, all over the world, believe they originated from Ilé-Ifẹ̀ in south-western Nigeria has never been controverted. This research therefore using concrete material evidence corroborates the works of earlier historians who largely depended on oral traditions.

This research serves as evidential proof, using material culture evidence, to corroborate existing oral tradition of migrations of the Yoruba from Old Oyo to other parts of the West Africa such as Sábẹ and Ife in Benin and Togo respectively.

NOTES

- ¹ K. Carroll. 1967. *Yoruba religious carving*. London: Geoffrey Chapman. 27. See also Thompson, R.F. 1978. *Black gods and kings: Yoruba art at UCLA*. London: Indiana University Press
- ² H. S. William. 1989. Foreword to *Icons and power in the art of Africa* (Cole, H. M.). Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press. 7
- ³ H. M. Cole. 1989. *Icons and power in the art of Africa*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press. 12
- ⁴ J. Vasina. 1984. *Art history in Africa*. New York: Longmans Group Limited. 101
- ⁵ R. Law. 1975. *A West African cavalry state: the kingdom of Oyo*. Op. cited
- ⁶ A. O. Akande. 2011. Iconology of the equestrian figure in Yoruba wood-carving. *The Emergence: the nostalgia*. The Paintings and Drawings of Kolade Salami Oakley. Ibadan. Lucid Publications Limited. 63-78
- ⁷ H. Drewal, J. Pemberton and R. Abiodun 1989. The Yoruba world. *Yoruba nine centuries of African arts and thought*. New York: Centre for African Art and Harry N. Abrams Inc. 14
- ⁸ R. Abiodun. 1975. Ifa art objects: an interpretation based on oral tradition. *Yoruba oral traditions*. Abimbola Wande (ed.). Ile-Ife: Obafemi Awolowo University. Ch.10
- ⁹ P. Morton-Williams. 1966. The Oyo Yoruba and the trans-atlantic trade (1670-1830). *Journal of the historical society of Nigeria*. 111. 3: 25
- ¹⁰ N. L. Gayibor. 1992. Population du sub-Togo Fascicule d'Histoire. 2e annee (Deug II). 12. See also Odji, K. 1997. Contribution A l'Histoire des ife d'Atakpame des origins a 1884, M. A. thesis, Department d'Histoire, Faculte des Lettres et Science Humaines, Universite du Benin, Lome-Togo. 14
- ¹¹ B. Lawal. 2014. Personal communication with Professor Babatunde Lawal 23 February, 2014
- ¹² J. Drewal. 2014. Personal communication with Professor H. J. Drewal. 16 February to March 25, 2014

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- ¹³ R. F. Thomson. 1976. *Black gods and kings, Yoruba art at UCLA*. London. Indiana University Press. Chapter. 14:1. Also see Drewal, H. J. And Drewal, M. T. 1983. 'Gelede': *art and female power among the Yoruba*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 225
- ¹⁴ M. Kruger. 2010. Social dynamics in African puppetry. *Contemporary Theatre Review*. 20.3: 316-328
- ¹⁵ O. B. Yai. 1999. Tradition and the Yorùbá artists. *African arts*. 37: 1. 35

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PRIMARY SOURCES

Abimbola Taiwo: Ile Tuntun Oyo

Abiodun Janvier: Secretary to the Alaketu (king) of Ketu

Adebayo Folorunso Gabriel: Museum of Unity, Alesinloye, Ibadan

Adebayo Olufemi Michael: Olomi area, Ibadan

Adedokun Ojepeju: Alagba compound, Fiditi

Adetutu Akenmu: Onisabe (king) of Sabe

Aiyeto Faturu: Gnagna, area, Atakpame

Akowe Sabe: Curator of the *gelede* museum, Sabe

Arifajogun: Jabata area, Sabe

Arobotan Afolabi Saala: Alapinni area, Sabe

Ataaye Oosha: Oosha area, Datcha

Baba Oba: Oja, Sabe

Bada Taiwo Joseph: Agba-Idiko area, Sabe

Bartholomew Obaniyi Fakorede: Ile Alagba compound, Fiditi

Fadairo Agbomabiwon: Fadairo compound, Isale-Oyo, Oyo

Fadupe Elerin: Ijalumo area, Sabe

Fagbemisola Fatokun: Arowopale compound, Isale-Oyo, Oyo

Falaise Ojerinde: Alapinni area, Sabe

Famoriyo Agboola: Odo-Oje compound, Isale-Oyo, Oyo

Fasakin Araoye: Fasakin compound, Isale-Oyo, Oyo

Fatokun Morakinyo: Are Isese, Arowopale compound, Isale-Oyo, Oyo

Faturo Nathaniel: Gnagna area, Atakpame

Gee: Tchetti area, Atakpame

Iba Oyekotan: Yoruba king of Ife, Tchetti area, Atakpame

Koshoni Owolabi: Oke-Amosun, Sabe

Lokossou Eloi: Idena compound, Ketu

Marcus: Secretary to the Onisabe (king) of Sabe

Odekunle Adebisi: Gbegilere compound, Odo-Aro, Oyo

Odekunle Odesola Olajide: Elekara (studio) and Alliance (home) areas, Oyo

Odekunle, Sunday Olaotan: Nigeria Prisons, Agodi, Ibadan

Ojei Sammy: Lom-Nava, Atakpame

Okoube Maloman: Atogan, Cove

Sangodele Ibuowo: Asipa, Isale-Oyo, Oyo

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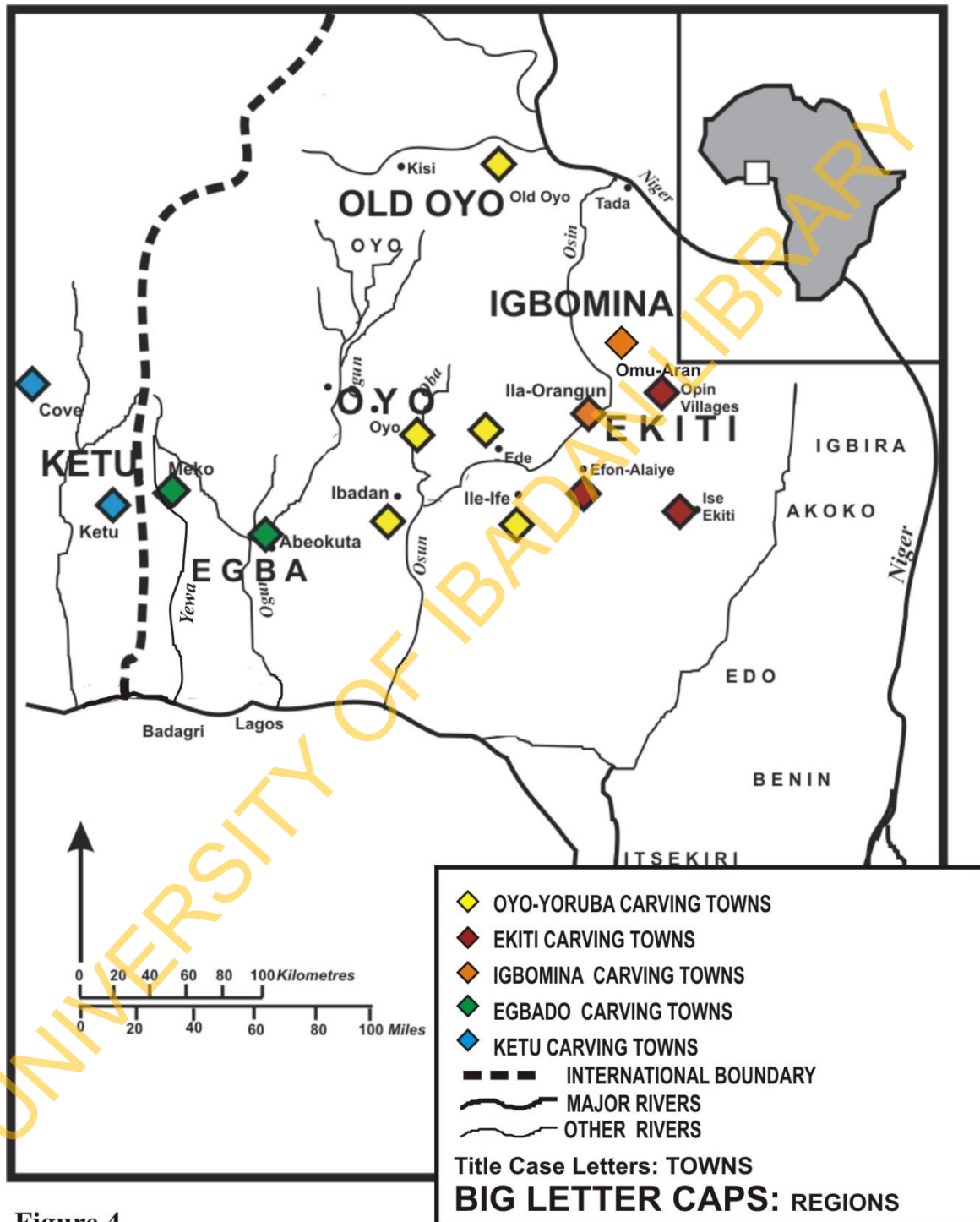


Figure 4
 Map showing Oyo-Yoruba areas of influence

Original Source: Abiodun R., Drewal H., And Pemberton J. 1994.

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Modifications: Mba Ifeanyichukwu and Akande Abiodun

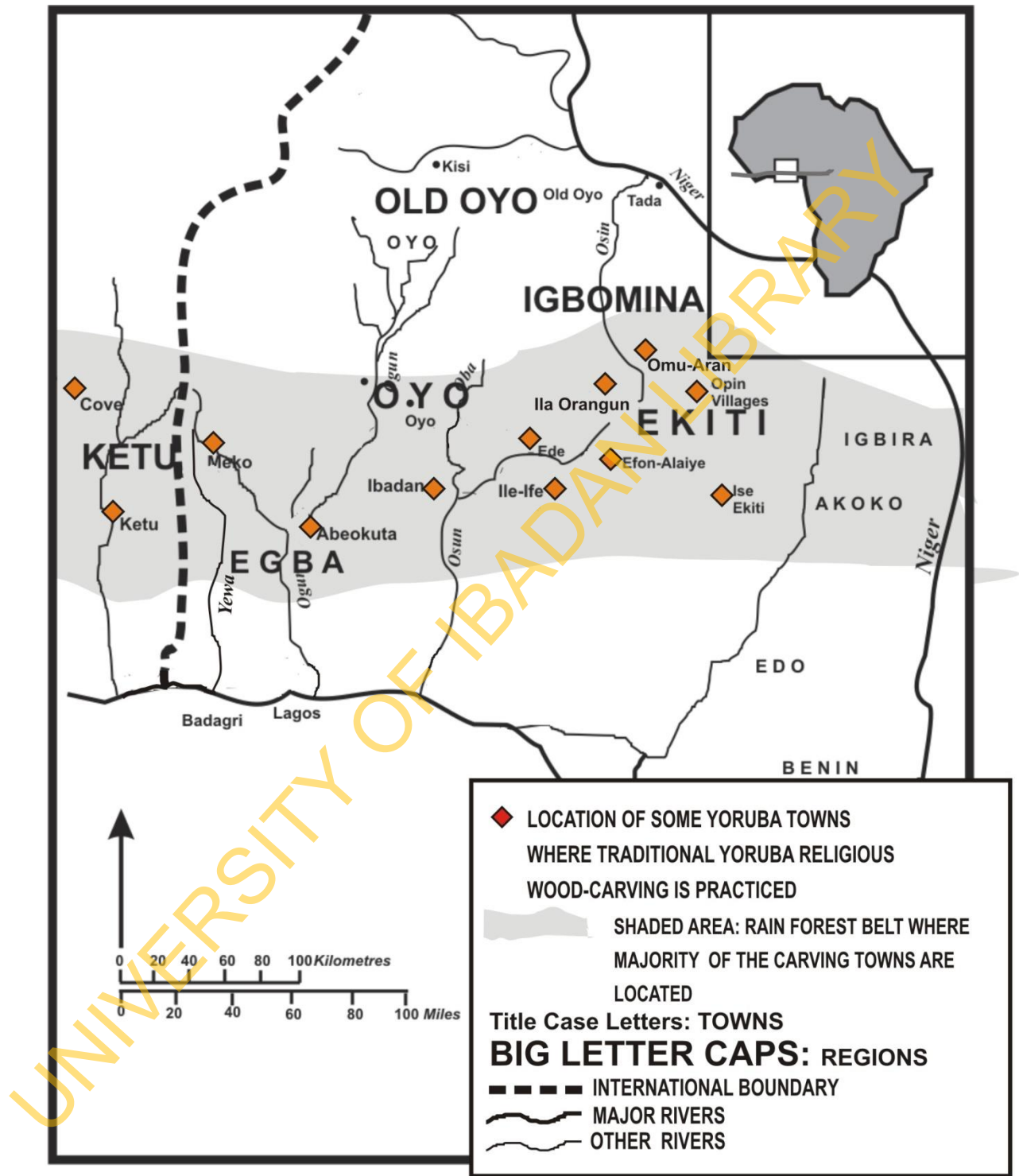


Figure 5
 Map showing locations of some towns in Nigeria and Benin Republic where traditional Yoruba religious wood-carving is practiced

Source: Mba Ifeanyichukwu and Akande Abiodun

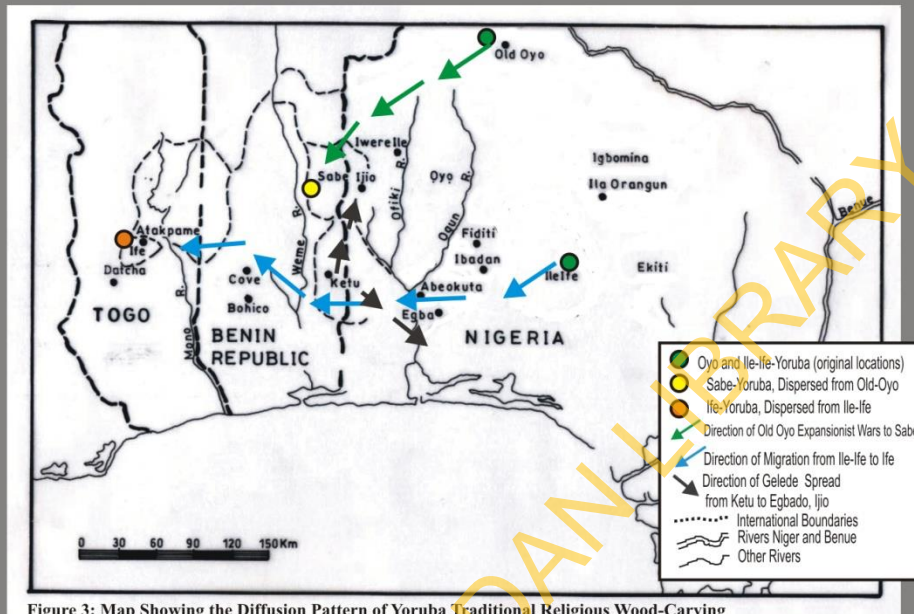


Figure 3: Map Showing the Diffusion Pattern of Yoruba Traditional Religious Wood-Carving

Source: Mba Ifeanyi-chukwu

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PLATES

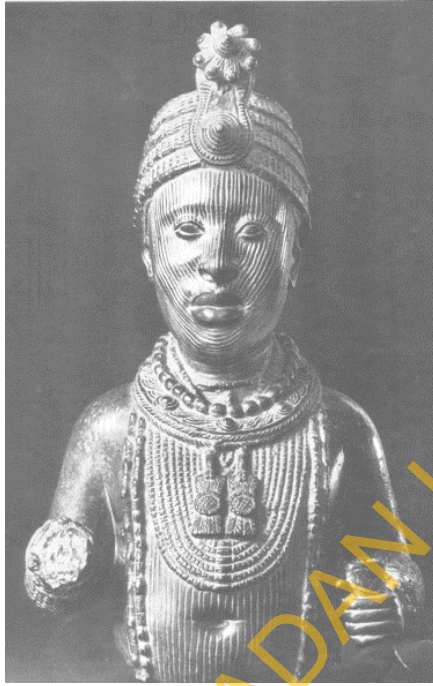


PLATE 1: Ancient bronze, half-figure from Wunmonije, Ilé-Ifè

Source: William F. and Herbert L. 1963. *Nigerian Images*. Lagos and London, National Commission for Museums and Monuments in association with Lund Humphries.

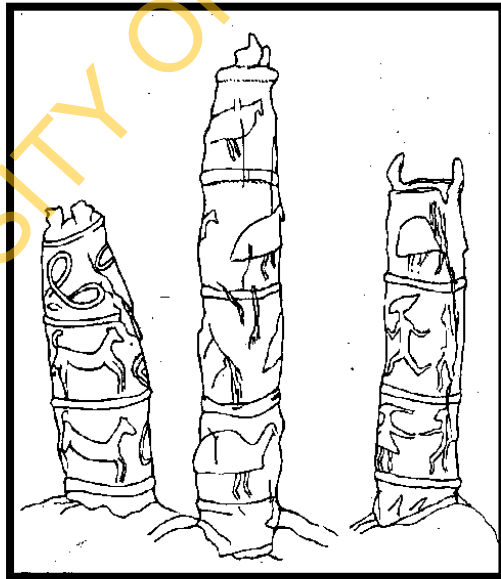


PLATE 2: Three carved posts on the palace gate mound from Old Òyó
(sketched by J. D. Clarke in 1937)

Source: Clarke, J. D. 1938. A visit to Old Òyó. *The Nigerian field*. 7. 3



PLATE 3: *Ère ìbejì* from Ifè



PLATE 4: Two figures from Ifè
The standing figure to the right appears like an *Agere Ifa*
The kneeling figure to the left has *àbàjá* facial marks



PLATE 5: *Osé Sàngó* from Ifè



PLATE 6: *Èpa* mask from Sábẹ

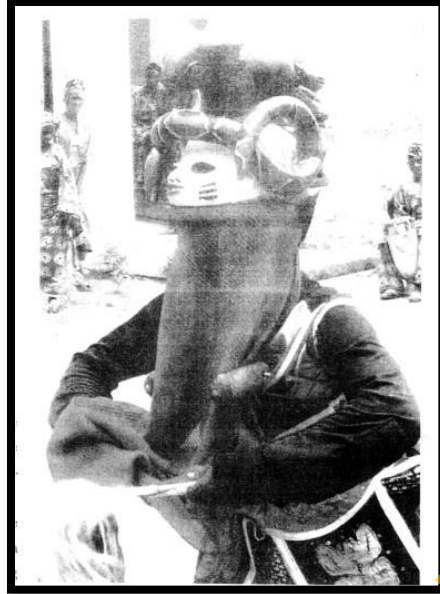


PLATE 7: *Gèlèdè* masquerade from Benin Republic
Source: Adepegba, K. 2007. *Contemporary Yorùbá wood-carving*. Lagos: Armanda. 11



PLATE 8: *Epa* mask (Areogun of Osi)
Source: Carroll, K. 1967. *Yorùbá religious carving*. London: Geoffrey Chapman

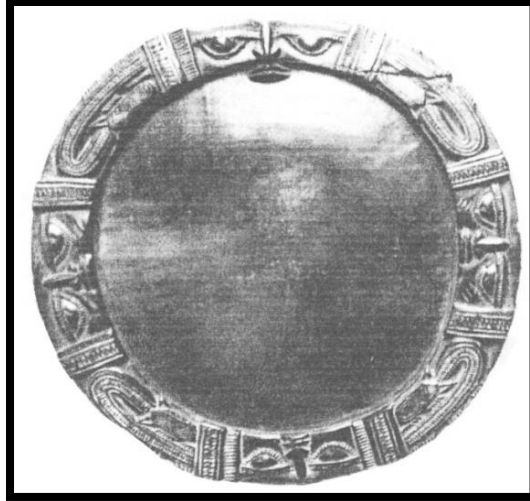


PLATE 9: *Opón Ifá*

Source: Witte, H. 1994. Ifa trays from Osogbo and Ijebu regions. (*The Yorùbá artist: new theoretical perspective on African arts*. Abiodun, R., Drewal, H. J. and Pemberton, J. III (eds.), Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press. 67)

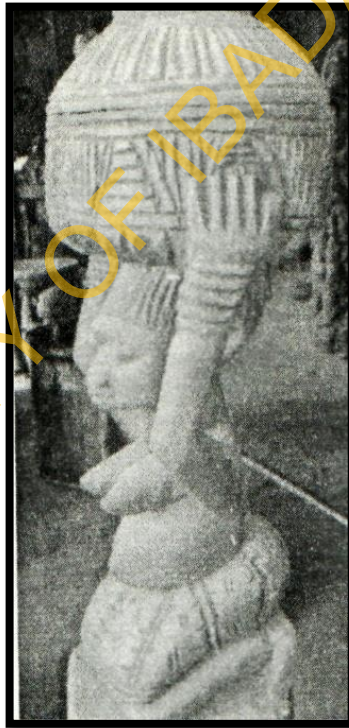


PLATE 10: *Agere Ifá* (Odekunle, Òyó)

Source: Carved by Odekunle of Elekara, Òyó

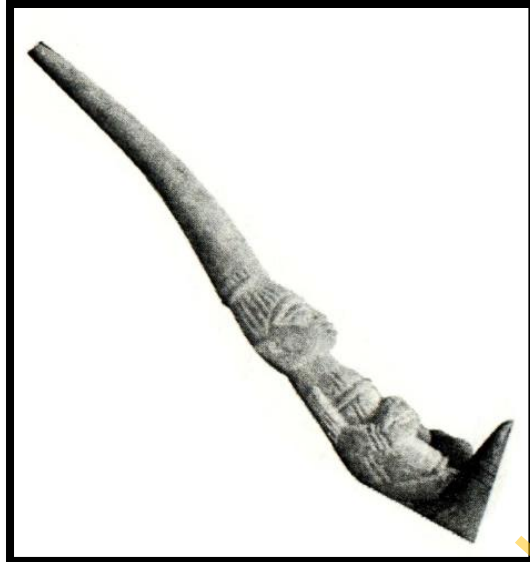


PLATE 11: *Ìróké Ifá* (Odekunle, Oyo)
Source: Carved by Odekunle of Elekara, Oyo



PLATE 12: *Ère ìbejì* (Akinjobi, Oke-Odan)

Source: Chappel, T. J. H. 1997. Akinjobi of Oke-Odan: An Egbado Yorùbá carver. *African arts*. 30. 1



PLATE 13: Èsù figure (Areogun of Osi)

Source: Carroll, K. 1967. *Yorùbá religious carving*. London: Geoffrey Chapman

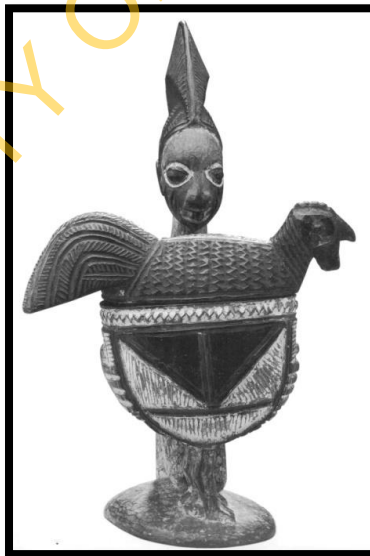


PLATE 14: *Olúmèyẹ* (Olowe of Ise)

Source: Walker, R. A. 1998. *Olowe of Ise: A Yorùbá sculptor for kings*. Washington, D. C.: National Museum of African Art. Smithsonian Institution



PLATE 15: Ògbóni drums (Bande Arowogun)

Source: Carroll, K. 1967. *Yorùbá religious carving*. London: Geoffrey Chapman



PLATE 16: House post (Obembe of Efon Alaye)

Walker, R. A. 1994. Anonymous has a name: Olowe of Ise. *The Yorùbá artist*. Abiodun, R., Drewal, H. J. and Pemberton, J. III. (eds.). Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press. 92



PLATE 17: Sàngó (Bisi Fakeye)

Source: Adepegba, K. 2007. *Contemporary Yorùbá wood-carving*. Lagos: Armanda. 11



PLATE 18: Equestrian figure (Areogun of Osi)

Source: Carroll, K. 1967. *Yorùbá religious carving*. London: Geoffrey Chapman



PLATE 19: *Omolangidi* (Olowe of Ise)

Source: Walker, R. A. 1998. *Olowe of Ise: A Yorùbá sculptor for kings*. Washington, D. C.: National Museum of African Art. Smithsonian Institution



PLATE 20: *Opón Ifá*

Opón Ifá (Taiwo Abimbola, Ilé Titun, Òyó)

36.4 cm



PLATE 21: *Ọpón Ifá*
Ọpón Ifá (Taiwo Abimbola, Ilé Titun, Ọyó)
29.6 cm



PLATE 22: *Ọpón Ifá*
Ọpón Ifá (Batholomew Obaniyi Fakorede, Olukotun compound, Fiditi)
30.2 cm



PLATE 23A: *Iroke Ifa*
Ìróké Ifá (Taiwo Abimbola, Ilé-Titun, Òyó)
24.4 cm



PLATE 23B
Ìróké Ifá (side view)



PLATE 23C

Ìròké Ifá (view from underneath the handle
cling-clang metals are attached to the hollow of the handle)



PLATE 24A

Ìròké Ifá (Taiwo Abimbola, Ilé-Titun, Òyó)
21.1 cm



PLATE 24B
Ìròké Ifá (side view)



PLATE 25
Ìròké Ifá (Chief Fatokun Morakinyo,
Are I sese and Oba Edu, Ilé Arowopale, Isale-Òyó)
30.6cm



PLATE 26

Ìròké Ifá (Famoriyo Agboola, Ilé Odo-Oje, Isale-Òyó)
10.2cm

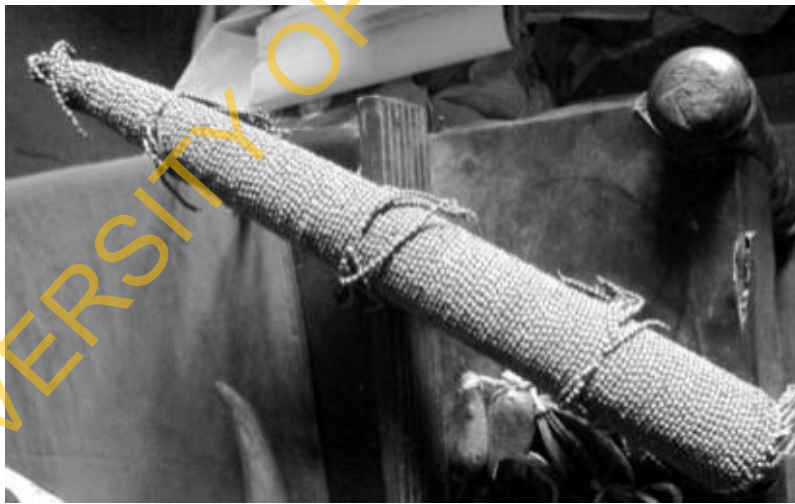


PLATE 27

Ìròké Ifá made with *Òtútù Opòn* beads (Famoriyo Agboola, Ilé Odo-Oje, Isale-Òyó)
25.7cm

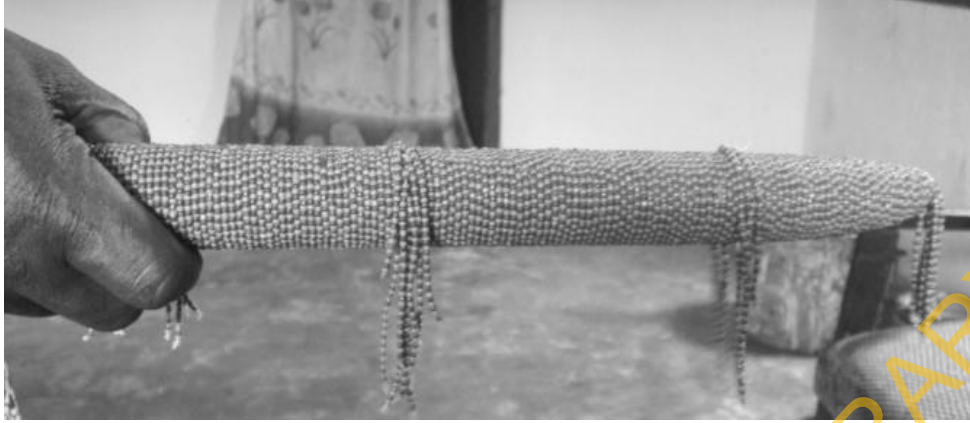


PLATE 28

Ìróké Ifá made with *Òtútù Ọpòn* beads (Ojebode Bamidele, Oroki Area, Isale-Òyó)
26.4cm



PLATE 29A

Agere Ifá (Chief Fatokun Morakinyo, Are Isese and Oba Edu, Ilé Arowopale, Isale-Òyó)
37cm



PLATE 29B
Agere Ifá (another view)



PLATE 29C
Agere Ifá (another view)



PLATE 30

Agere Ifá (Chief Fatokun Morakinyo, Are Isese and Oba Edu, Ilé Arowopale, Isale-Òyó)
31.7cm



PLATE 31

Agere Ifá (Famoriyo Agboola, Ilé Odo-Oje, Isale-Òyó)
37cm



PLATE 32
Opón ikófá sí (Famoriyo Agboola family
 Ilé Odo-Oje, Isale-Òyó)



PLATE 33A
 Èsù figure (Fadiro Agbomabiwon of Fadairo compound, Isale-Òyó)
 35cm



PLATE 33B
Èsù figure (side view)



PLATE 34: Èsù figure
(side and front views)
32.6cm



PLATE 35
Èsù Figure (Famoriyo Agboola, Ilé Odo-Oje, Isale-Òyó)
40.2cm



PLATE 36
Osé Sàngó (Sangodele Ibuowo of Asipa, Isale-Òyó)
50 cm



PLATE 37
Osé Şàngó (Sangodele Ibuowo of Asipa, Isale-Òyó)
47.7 cm



PLATE 38
Şàngó figure (Taiwo Abimbola, Ilé-Titun, Òyó)
50.8cm



PLATE 39

Egúngún mask of Akunuogan masquerade of the Ojediran compound, Fiditi.



PLATE 40

Egúngún mask of Agbele masquerade, Abefe compound, Fiditi



PLATE 41

Egúngún mask of Ajanbaku masquerade, Oguola compound, Fiditi



PLATE 42

Oba Akenmu, 1888-1925
(Front row, centre figure)



PLATE 43

Oba Ademoyegun Asingbo Akikeenju IV, 1947-1963



PLATE 44

Oba Adegeriolu Kolawole, 1964-1968



PLATE 45
Oba Adeleke Akinni Ifaa VI, 1976-2005



PLATE 46
Opón Ifá (Fadupe family of Ijalumo, Sábe)



PLATE 47
Ìróké Ifá (Fadupe family of Ijalumo, Sábe)



PLATE 48
Ọpón Ifá (Falaise Ojerinde family, Alapinni, Sábe)



PLATE 49
Opón Ifá (Baba Awo Arifajogun, Jabata, Sábe)

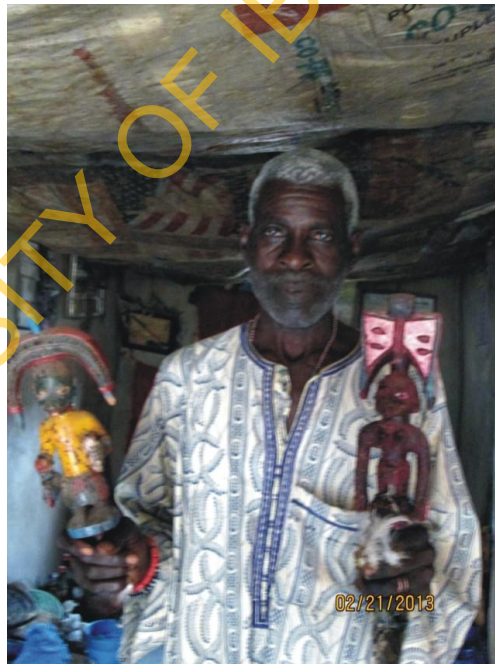


PLATE 50
Arobotan Afolabi Saala
Sango priest in Sábe



PLATE 51

Osé Şàngó (Arobatan Afolabi Saala family, Ogbo Araromi, Sábe)



PLATE 52

Osé Şàngó (Arobatan Afolabi Saala family, Ogbo Araromi, Sábe)

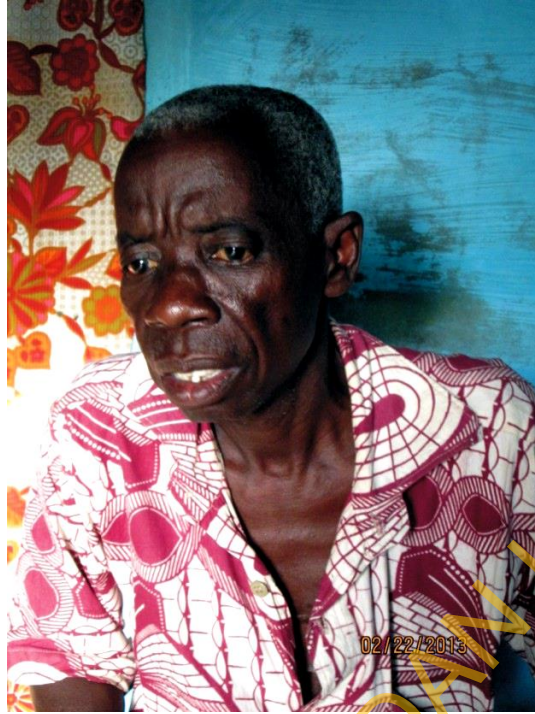


PLATE 53
Koshoni Owolabi
Oke Amosun, Sábẹ



PLATE 54a (front view)
Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀ mask (Koshoni Owolabi family,
Oke Amosun, Sábẹ)



PLATE 54b (side view)
Gèlèdé mask (Koshoni Owolabi family,
Oke Amosun, Sábe)



PLATE 55a (front view)
Gèlèdé mask (Koshoni Owolabi family,
Oke Amosun, Sábe)



PLATE 55b (side view)
Gèlèdé mask (Koshoni Owolabi family,
Oke Amosun, Sábe)



PLATE 56a (front view)
Gèlèdé mask (Koshoni Owolabi family,
Oke Amosun, Sábe)



PLATE 56b (side view)
Gèlèdè mask (Koshoni Owolabi family,
Oke Amosun, Sábẹ̀)



PLATE 57
Entrance: International Museum of *Gèlèdè*, Sábẹ̀



PLATE 58

Gèlèdè mask with Twin Figures
The International Museum of *Gèlèdè*, Sábe



PLATE 59

Gèlèdè mask
The International Museum of *Gèlèdè*, Sábe



PLATE 60
Gèlèdè drums
The International Museum of *Gèlèdè*, Sábẹ



PLATE 61
Gèlèdè mask
The International Museum of *Gèlèdè*, Sábẹ



PLATE 62

Gèlèdé mask

The International Museum of *Gèlèdé*, Sábe



PLATE 63

Gèlèdé mask

The International Museum of *Gèlèdé*, Sábe



Plate 64A
Bada Taiwo Joseph holding the
twin statuette of his twin brother



PLATE 64B
Details of plate 64A



PLATE 65

Kàkà (Stringed symbols of the 256 *odu* of Ifa
Iba Oyekotan, Tchetti, Atakpame)



PLATE 66

Iba Oyekotan
The king of the Ifè-Yorùbá, Tchetti, Atakpame



PLATE 67
Ọpón Ifá (Fagbero, Gnagna, Ifẹ̀, Atakpame)
32cm x 45cm

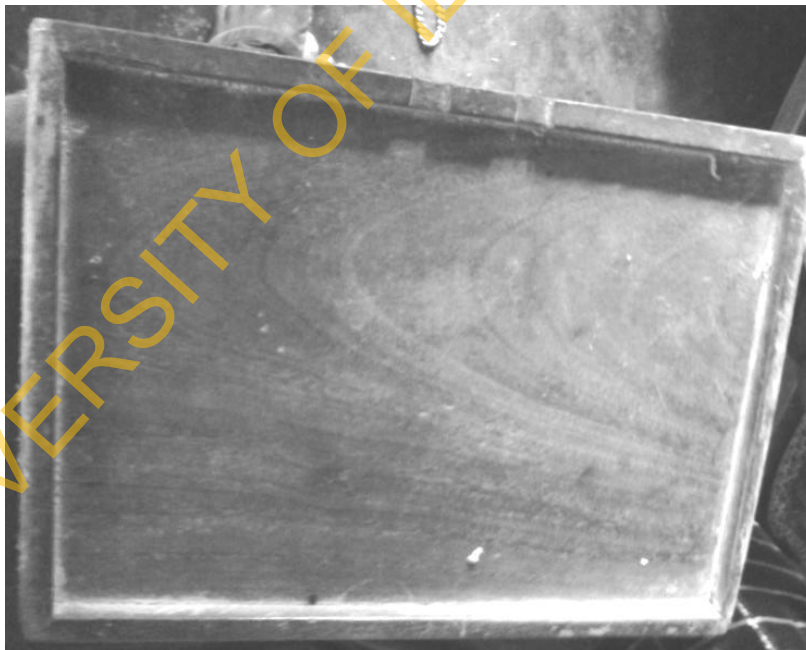


PLATE 68
Ọpón Ifá (Iba Oyekotan, Tchetti, Ifẹ̀, Atakpame)
38cm x 29.5cm



PLATE 69
Ọpón Ifá (Ataye of Datcha)
36.3 x 13.2 cm



PLATE 70
Agere Ifá (Chief Aiyeto of Gnagna, Atakpame)
40.1 cm



PLATE 71

Agere Ifá: Chief Oyekotan, Tchetti, Ifè, Atakpame.

32.4 cm



PLATE 72

Ère ibejì (Gee of Tchetti, Ifè Atakpame)

40.7 cm



PLATE 73

Ère ibejì (Ojei of Lom-Nava, Atakpame)
31.4 cm and 37.2cm



PLATE 74

Osé Şàngó (Ojei of Lom-Nava, Atakpame)
48cm



PLATE 75

Kneeling female figure (High priest Alagbe Olubuku of Oke-Tchetti, Atakpame)
47.8 cm



PLATE 76

Chief Alagbe Olubuku (the Spiritual head of Ifè-Yorùbá, Atakpame)

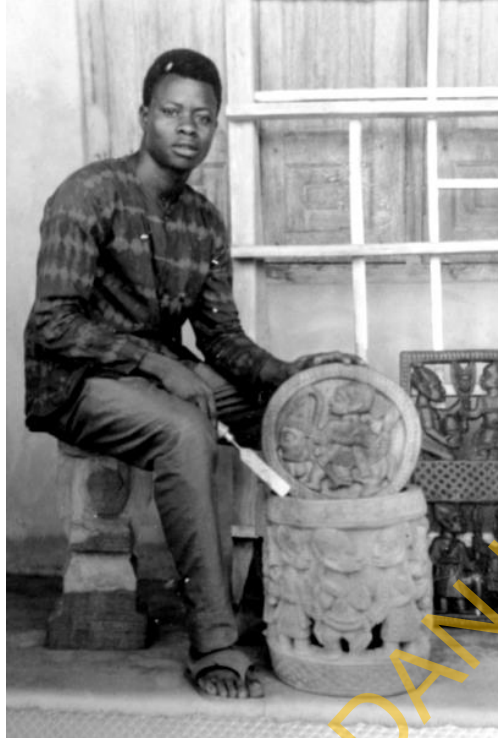


PLATE 77

Emmanuel Olaoye Odekunle
After his training at Ijebu-Igbo

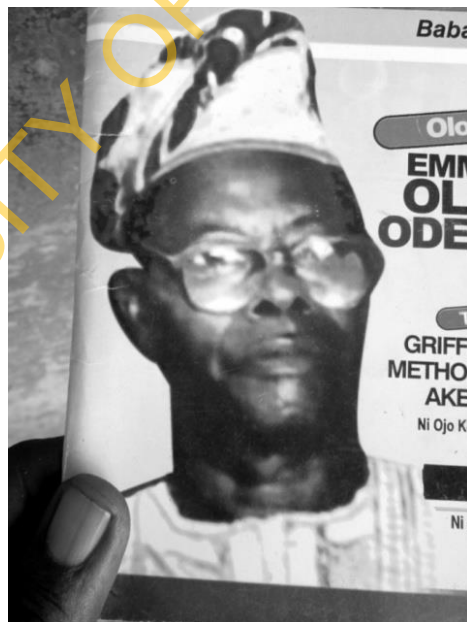


PLATE 78

Emmanuel Olaoye Odekunle
Picture on his burial programme



PLATE 79

Ìyábejì (Pa Emmanuel Odekunle
Elekara, Òyó)

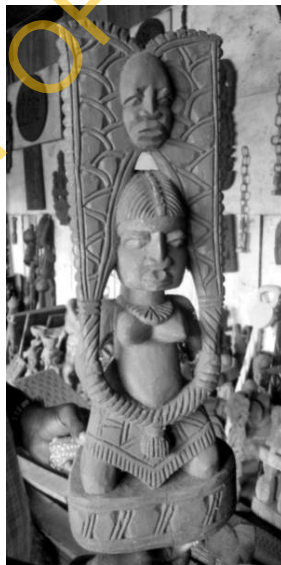


PLATE 80

Oya (Emmanuel Olaoye Odekunle
Elekara, Òyó)

48.9



PLATE 81

Stool (titled *Kìnìún loba ẹranko*)
(Emmanuel Olaoye Odekunle
Elekara, Òyó) 56.8



PLATE 82

Odesola Olajide Odekunle
Carving in his residence, Dan Zaria, Alliance Area, Òyó



PLATE 83

Èsù the flutist (Odesola Odekunle
Elekara, Òyó)
50.2 cm



PLATE 84

Èsù the horse rider (Odesola Odekunle
Elekara, Òyó)
48.6 cm



PLATE 85

Èsù the woman (Odesola Odekunle
Elekara, Òyó)
35.7 cm



PLATE 86

Èsù the kneeling woman with elongated phallic at the rear of head:
Odesola Odekunle, Elekara, Òyó
30.3 cm



PLATE 87: Side, aerial and inside views
Opón ikófá sí (Odesola Odekunle
Elekara, Òyó)



PLATE 88
Opón ikófá sí (Odesola Odekunle
Elekara, Òyó)



PLATE 89

Ọpón Ifá (Odesola Odekunle
Elekara, Ọyọ)



PLATE 90

Ọpón Ifá (Odesola Odekunle
Elekara, Ọyọ)



PLATE 91: Front, side and dorsal view
Ẹpa mask (Odesola Odekunle
Elekara, Ọyọ)



PLATE 92
Adebayo Alaaye, extreme right, addressing admirers of his works



PLATE 93

Epa mask (Adebayo Alaye)

About 90cm



PLATE 94

Folorunso Adebayo Alaye



PLATE 95

Ọpón Ifá (Folorunso Adebayo
National Museum, Ibadan)

30.3 cm



PLATE 96

Ọpón Ifá (Folorunso Adebayo
National Museum, Ibadan)

35.2 cm



PLATE 97

Ère ibejì (Folorunso Adebayo
National Museum, Ibadan)

25cm



PLATE 98

Equestrian figure (Folorunso Adebayo
National Museum, Ibadan)

28cm



PLATE 99

Michael Olufemi Adebayo



PLATE 100

Qya (Olufemi Adebayo, Olomi Area, Ibadan)

103cm



PLATE 101

Qya (Olufemi Adebayo, Olomi Area, Ibadan)

63cm



PLATE 102

Qya (Olufemi Adebayo, Olomi Area, Ibadan)

68.4cm



PLATE 103

Ọpón Ifá (Olufemi Adebayo, Olomi Area, Ibadan)

45.8cm

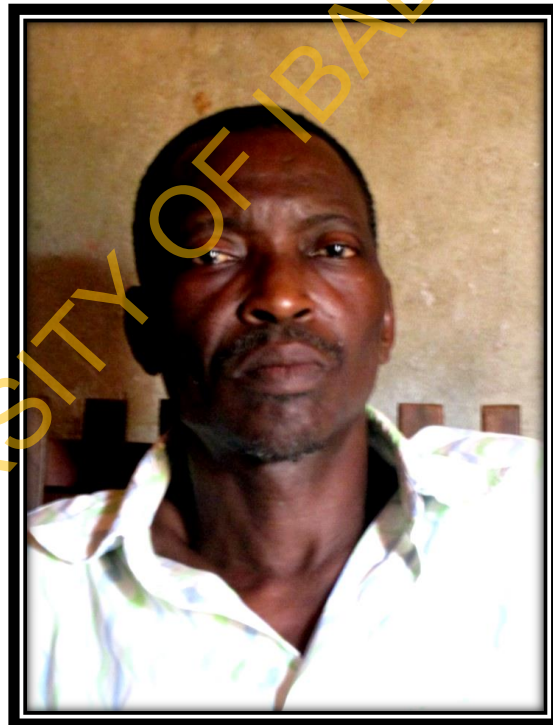


PLATE 104

Lokossou Eloi

A Yorùbá master-carver in Cove



PLATE 105

Calix Lokossou (Lokossou Eloi's father)



PLATE 106

Ère ibejì (Lokossou Eloi, Cove)



PLATE 107

Epa mask (Lokossou Eloi)



PLATE 108

Epa mask (Lokossou Eloi)

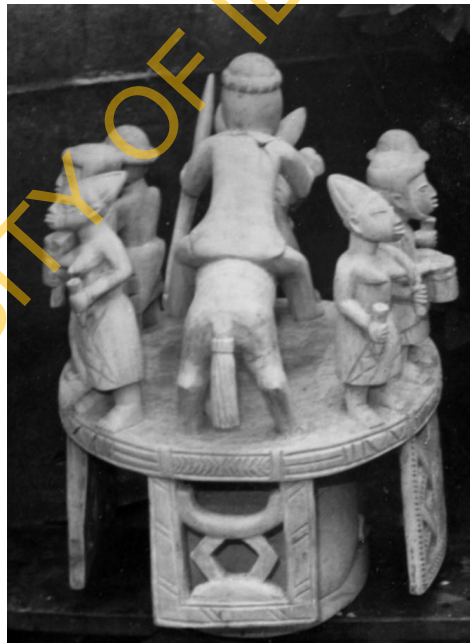


PLATE 109

Epa Mask (Lokossou Eloi)



PLATE 110

Gèlèdé mask with horse, birds and snake (Lokossou Eloi)
42.3cm



PLATE 111

Gèlèdé mask with family (Lokossou Eloi)
38.7cm



PLATE 112

Gèlèdé mask with frog, snake and men (Lokossou Eloi)

46.1cm



PLATE 113

Gèlèdé mask with animals (Lokossou Eloi)

41.3cm

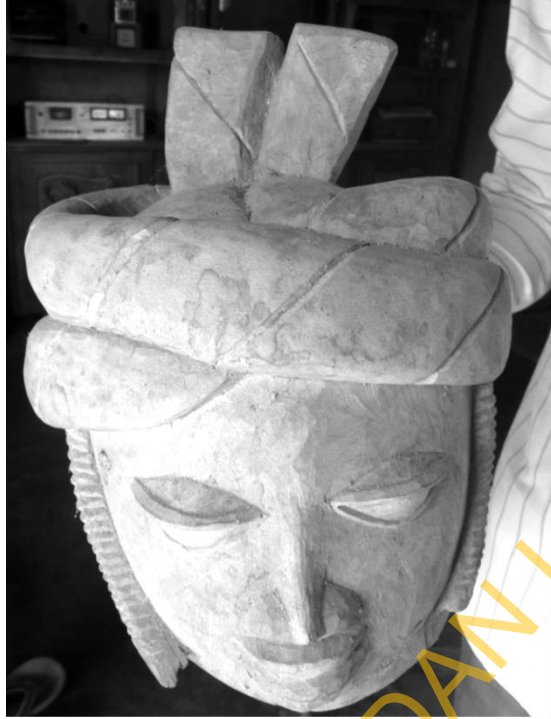


PLATE 114

Gèlèdé mask with head gear (Lokossou Eloi)

35.1cm

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PLATE 115

Mask with birds (Lokossou Eloi)

138.8cm



PLATE 116

Ceremonial bowl (Lokossou Eloi)

123.4cm



PLATE 117

Okoube Maloman

A Yorùbá master-carver in Ketu



PLATE 118

Gèlèdé mask with bird and clock (Okoube Maloman, Ketu)

41cm



PLATE 119

Egúngún mask with man, woman, snake and leopard
(Okoube Maloman, Ketu)

28.5cm



PLATE 120

Gèlèdé mask with bird (Okoube Maloman, Ketu)

32.3cm



PLATE 121

Gèlèdé mask with leopard (Okoube Maloman, Ketu)
27.7cm



PLATE 122

Gèlèdé mask with elephant (Okoube Maloman, Ketu)
25.4cm



PLATE 123

Gèlèdé mask with bird (Okoube Maloman, Ketu)

35.3cm

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