

OSOGBO FESTIVAL OF IMAGES  
AND YORUBA ART HISTORY

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## ABSTRACT

Oşogbo, the capital of Oşun State of Nigeria, has become very popular as a centre of art and culture in Yorubaland for many years. Both traditional and contemporary art forms are kept alive in the town, but the attention of the outside world has been focused mainly on the latter while the major aspect of the former, the festival of images, has been conspicuously neglected. The main purpose of this study is to examine this annual ceremony which involves a processional display of the traditional (sculptural) images of the town for a deeper understanding of the artistic heritage of the town and the entire Yorubaland.

Through participant observation and interview, the origin, development and sociological significance of the festival were investigated. The images involved in the festival were identified and compared with the representation and worship of the deities in other Yoruba towns such as Ilobu, Ibadan and Esię.

It was found that the annual festival of images at Oşogbo is meant to honour, propitiate and petition Şonponná, the Yoruba god of small-pox and other

pestilences; and that Yoruba festivals involving many images are mostly festivals of river deities at which the symbolic images of the respective deities, priests, priestesses or worshippers play a very prominent role.

The festivals also seem to have some historical implication. They are in one way or the other connected with Old Oyo. The inhabitants of the present site of Esie migrated to the town from Old Oyo in the eighteenth century. Available evidence shows the images at Esie as the oldest, dated to the eleventh century A.D. However, there is no proof that the festival has existed uninterrupted since that time. The most recent instances are therefore not ascertained as continuations of the practices in Esie. They are probably instances of revivalism.

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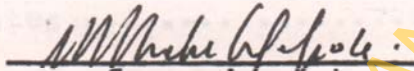
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## CHAPTER 1

OSOGBO: GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION, HISTORY,  
SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND RELIGIOUS BACKGROUNDLocation

Oşogbo, the capital of Oşun State of Nigeria, is situated on longitude  $4^{\circ}50'$  East of Greenwich and Latitude  $7^{\circ}75'$  North of the Equator. It was built up in a low-lying range of hills where the great grass plains of the northern savannah meet the forest region of the southern rain forest belt - some thirty-five kilometres north-north-west of Ile-Ife, where the Yoruba are believed to have first established their cultural and political centre.

The core of the present site of the town is about two kilometres from the banks of river Osun which had been the main source of water supply to the community. It is also to the river that the foundation of the town is closely knit and it was from its name that Oşun State derived its name.

The palace of the paramount ruler - Oşogbo's political and spiritual core - is centrally located in the native area of the town. Nearby in the King's

Market (Ojà-Oba)<sup>1</sup> is the Oṣun Temple which enshrines the images representing the traditional and protective deities of Oṣogbo.<sup>2</sup>

There is an overwhelming dominance of traditional Yoruba compounds in the native quarter which forms the core of the whole town. There are however a few modern multiple storey houses built on family lands - punctuating the long row of enclosed compounds. On the outskirts of the native quarters are areas composed almost entirely of modern residential houses, business houses such as banks, public churches, mosques, schools and hospitals. Still on the outer part of this area are factories, State administrative buildings, State High Court of Justice and the Police post. There is a government reservation area (G.R.A.) consisting residential houses mostly for some top civil servants. In another area, far from the centre of town, is a Sabo quarter inhabited solely by Hausa traders. Generally, most of the houses on the outskirts are owned by the non-natives of Oṣogbo.



### Foundation and historical development

The natives of Oṣogbo originally belonged to the Ijesa sub-group of the Yoruba. Osogbo tradition indicates how Larọ, the first traditional ruler of Oṣogbo, and a small band of his followers left Ibokun, the original home of all the Ijesas (only twenty kilometres from the present site of Osogbo) over a chieftaincy dispute.<sup>3</sup> They first settled at Ipolé, but had to move because of a severe drought. Wandering through the forest in search of water, Laro and his people found river Oṣun and decided to settle at its bank.

According to the account, they set up a fire at the foot of a tree to keep warm from the cold river breeze when one day the tree gave way and fell on the river thus breaking the dye pots of the goddess of the river, Oṣun. The goddess immediately jumped out to shout: "Spirits of the forest, spirits of the forest, they have broken all my dye pots" (Oso igbo 0, oso igbo 0, gbogbo ikoko aró mi ni won ti fó tán). The contraction of Oso Igbo in the statement is what has now become Oṣogbo - the name of the town. The town developed after a pact had

been made with the goddess by Laro that the bank was sacred to her and that he, Laro, must not settle near but further away on the hill. Laro and his people should also respect the sacred grove and the goddess, in turn, would help them multiply and protect them from hostile invasion.

Lárò thereupon promised to worship annually at the river-bank and moved up-hill to build his palace at the present site of the kings market. Lárò's palace still exists (Plate 1) but has ceased to be used as a palace. It is now being used as, and called, Oṣun Temple ("Ilé-Oṣun") and it houses all the sacred images that are involved in the annual festival of images, which is the subject of this research. The venue of the pact at the Oṣun river bank (where Lárò first intended to build his palace) became the Oṣun river shrine, and it is still the site of the annual ritual in the worship of the goddess.

Closely connected with this foundation story is the origin of the word "Atáója" - the traditional title of the paramount chief of Oṣogbo. The title is a contraction of A té owó gba eja ("He who stretches out his hands to receive fish"). The title is

a reminder of the first great favour which Ọṣun bestowed on Laro when she cured him and his wife of sterility, giving him one of her own children, a fish, in adoption.<sup>4</sup> The Àtáọ́ja carried it home on her instruction, and gave it to his wife to care for, ritually as well as physically. The royal palace was soon swarming with children. The first child that Laro's wife had (named Ọ̀ròkí) was said to be born with a small live fish in his hand. The fish was taken as the emissary from the goddess.

My informant told me further that during the offerings that take place at the river shrine at the climax of the annual Ọṣun festival, the Àtáọ́ja must move to the river-pool altar (ọjúbọ).<sup>5</sup> After a ritual feeding of the fishes around that spot, the Àtáọ́ja would stretch his hands into the river and lift out a live fish - as a re-enactment of the first experience. He lets the fish go. Then, a big fish, believed to be the legendary Osun's emissary would emerge and spit a large volume of water into a bowl held in anticipation by the Àtáọ́ja. The spit water was, and is still, believed to be effi-

<sup>4</sup> Yoruba and Fulani protracted wars of the 19th century.

cacious in making barren women bear children.<sup>6</sup> Today, this belief lingers on as the fish is said to still spit water at the appropriate time of the annual Oṣun festival.

The foregoing tradition of the founder of Oṣogbo and the title of the paramount ruler cannot be reconciled with Johnson's account that the town was a military outpost of the Owa of Ilesa, intended to guard the frontier against the warlike Tlmi of Ede, one of the generals of the Aláàfin of Oyo.<sup>7</sup> However, the suggestion by Johnson and some other historians that Oṣogbo was founded in the 17th century during the reign of Kori as the Aláàfin of Oyo, the ancient political capital of Yorubaland, was probable.<sup>8</sup> The present Atáọja, Oba Iyiola Matanmi III, is the sixteenth on the king list of the town which seems to confirm that the town is hardly more than three hundred years old.

Oṣogbo has a reputation in Yorubaland as a town of peace. The town has never been known to play a leading part in wars and has been extremely fortunate to escape being captured by enemies during the Yoruba and Fulani protracted wars of the 19th century.

Indeed, up to the days of Fulani wars, the history of Oṣogbo was remarkably unadventurous. It was the Fulani wars in the 19th century that brought it into key position in Yoruba history.

The Fulani had been in Hausaland before the 19th century. In 1804 they, under the leadership of Usman dan Fodio, declared a "jihad" or holy war in the town of Gobir in the north-west corner of Nigeria. The Hausa states fell to them one after the other, Usman dan Fodio died in 1817, but local Fulani warriors extended the "jihad" to Ilorin, where they established their strong base. In 1834 the Fulani had succeeded in destroying the ancient capital of old Oyo (Oyo Ile) and other important towns including Ikoyi, Offa and Erin-Ile, and they tried to press south through Oṣogbo in an attempt to conquer and Islamise the entire Yoruba country. To stop the advance of the Fulani, the Àtáója of Oṣogbo sent to Ibadan for help. It was outside Oṣogbo town that the jihad finally came to an end with the Fulani decidedly beaten by the Ibadan army.<sup>9</sup>

A number of factors contributed to the defeat of the Fulani outside Oṣogbo. First, Oṣogbo is on

the fringe of the forest zone, where the Fulani calvary cannot be effectively used. Secondly, the strength of the Ibadan army was such that the Fulani probably never met before.<sup>10</sup> There was also the British intervention which prevented a further outbreak of fighting and drew the boundaries between the warring factions in 1894. However, the people of Oṣogbo attributed much of the Yoruba victory over the Fulani to the intervention of the water deity of the town, Oṣun. This belief is discernible from one of the praise-songs (oríkì) of Oṣun usually rendered by traditional balladeers which goes thus:

Oṣun Oṣogbo Òròkí àsálà,  
 Òmi lẹ̀gbelugbu, ilú ààbo,  
 O bùkún àwọn eniyan rẹ̀ lalẹ̀  
 Òru nìkan làsikò isinmi atí inàyìn  
 f'awọn àgbẹ̀.

Oṣun ki i j'eso èèwọ̀ ti yo o  
 jẹ́ k'ogun o kó'lúu Oṣogbo.  
 Oṣun, egbelugbu omi;  
 Ooje k'ogun o kó'lúu rẹ̀.

Oṣun ki i jẹ́'fọ̀ òdú  
 Igba eni ló ni k'ó wa yánrin lẹ̀;  
 Oṣun Olárùka idẹ̀.

[Oṣun Oṣogbo, Oroki a refuge,  
 Sparkling water, place of protection  
 that blesses its people in the night  
 Darkness, the only time for farmers  
 to rest and strengthen their back-  
 bone.

Oṣun never eats forbidden fruit  
 which will enable the war to capture  
 Oṣogbo  
 Oṣun, sparkling water, you never allowed  
 war to capture your town.

Oṣun never eats òdú leaves  
 She sends two hundred slaves to watch  
 the Latuca species;  
 Oṣun with the big brass rings<sup>7</sup>.

In this oríkì, the fact that the town of Oṣogbo has never been devastated by war is attributed to the strict observance by the Oṣun goddess of certain taboos, and her cultivation of the magic herb Latuca species (yánrin) which made the people of Oṣogbo immune to the poisonous medicines and weapons of enemies.

The victory at Oṣogbo was a most important one and forms a turning point in Yoruba history. It saved the Yoruba country as such from total absorption by the Fulani as a tributary state. The entire character of Oṣogbo was particularly changed by the Fulani war. Because of the protection of the Ibadan army and the security credited to the Oṣun goddess, as well as the generosity of the Ataoja in accommodating the refugees, the town Oṣogbo became flooded by refugees from the war-torn Yoruba settlements. The refugees were predominantly Oyo-dialect speaking Yoruba. Thus Oṣogbo is today regarded as an Oyo-

Yoruba town. The inhabitants now speak the Oyo-Yoruba dialect rather than the Ijesa one and by the 1991 census, has a population of about 355,000 people.<sup>11</sup>

The extension of railway, telephone and telegraph lines to Oşogbo from the port of Lagos in 1905 marked the beginning of a widely ramifying change in the economic life of the community. Oso-  
gbo was many years the northern terminus of the railway that now extends to Kano. It is also a nodal point for a system of local roads extending to surrounding towns. Consequently, Oşun Divisional Headquarters was located at the town in 1951, and it quickly became the centre for European commercial houses and for wide-scale trading activities.<sup>12</sup>

New avenues of occupation were opened. European firms and governmental agencies needed clerks, teachers, buyers and labourers. Garages, motor-repair shops, and building contractors provided a variety of jobs to be filled. The increased availability of and desire for goods and tools encouraged the emergence of traders. New craft occupations - carpentry, tailoring and brick-laying, for example - emerged to help supply the increased wants of the people.



The expanded economic activities of the town and its commercial potentials have further attracted many migrants, especially from the surrounding Yoruba towns, to Oşogbo to work as traders, bankers, teachers, labourers, or in other capacities. The establishment of a Steel Rolling Mill, a Machine Tools factory and lots of small scale industries in the town in recent years, coupled with its newly bestowed status of the capital of the newly-created Oşun State in 1991, has boosted the political, industrial and commercial position of the town.

#### Oşogbo social system

The Oşogbo traditional social system was based upon a central political authority, pyramidally organized. Final authority and responsibility were vested in the Atáója, the paramount ruler of the town. Subordinate to the paramount ruler were a number of ranked chiefs, some of whom carried specific military, administrative, ritual or religious duties.

Each member of the community - chief and commoner alike - acknowledge the final jural and economic authority of the paramount ruler, and owed him total

loyalty, taxes, tribute, and military support. In turn, the paramount ruler was expected to protect the community from external threat and was also responsible for its spiritual, economic, and political well-being. He was in addition the supreme head of all religious organizations and cults, and symbolized in his person the unity and exclusiveness of Osoḡbo. The stability and solidarity of the community resided in the position of the paramount ruler as in all the paramount rulers in Yorubaland.<sup>13</sup>

Colonial administration was firmly established in the community by 1905, taking over from the hands of the paramount ruler the responsibility to maintain social order and provide alternative channels of authority such as formalized courts, which rendered traditional channels somewhat less effective.<sup>14</sup> This situation remained when the country, Nigeria, became independent in 1960, and has continued till today. The central government does not, however, encroach upon the ritual and mystical values attached to chieftaincy, and the Àtáója has remained the symbol of unity. This government stance has

helped to perpetuate the observance of traditional festivals and religious rituals as well as the use of the sacred art objects that accompany the rituals.

The most important single principle of organization in traditional Oṣogbo is kinship - a system of norms and values and common purposes which stresses corporate responsibility and solidarity.<sup>15</sup>

The Oṣogbo kinship system is based on segmentary lineages. Schwab and Lloyd aptly describe the most important unit of this as the exogamous corporate patrilineage (ìdílẹ̀) defined by reference to its remotest acknowledged male ancestor and embracing all the descendants of its founder.<sup>16</sup>

Residence in the native area of Oṣogbo is patrilocal and each lineage, or segment, shares a common residence or compound. Relationships are conceived in terms of corporate lineage group rather than in terms of individual interaction. Some of the more wealthy may build storey houses or bungalows and decorate them in accordance with western fashions, but this is done within the limits of their lineage compounds. They thus continue to remain within the jurisdiction of their lineages

physically and otherwise. This state of affairs favours the perpetuation of reciprocal and mutual services, the sentiment and ritual bonds of kinship such as ancestor worship, which focus on solidarity, stability, security and continuity of the corporate lineage. It also explains, at least partially, why the values attached to traditional festivals and other age-long observations have remained tenacious in Osogbo.

### Economy

Most of the traditional Osogbo men are subsistence farmers, living in town compounds and farming peripheral lands around it. Some make a daily journey to and from the farms, which may have habitable shacks if not solid buildings. Others come home from their agrarian residence only on occasions of cultural events that concern their families. Beside farmers, Osogbo also has hunters, skilled artisans, artists and entertainers, native doctors and diviners. Women are engaged in craft occupations such as weaving or tie-dyeing, and others are petty traders hawking agricultural produce or craft products through the market and town.

It is worthy of note, however, that the new avenues of occupation opened by the economic and social growth in Oṣogbo are independent of lineage affiliation. The introduction of formal education - initially by missionaries (see page 35) and eventually by government - has provided literacy and new skills, thereby facilitating an approach to situations quite different from those held in the traditional culture. Yet, there has not been major cleavages between individuals and their lineages, or between old and new norms in Oṣogbo. An obvious reason for this phenomenon is the relative absence of remarkable geographical mobility involving a physical separation of kinsmen. Agriculture is still the base of the economy. There are relatively few people who have left Oṣogbo to find work in other areas. Many of the people who have attained various levels of literacy education and have acquired new skills are engaged in the new job opportunities that abound in the town, and many of them still reside in their family compounds.

The foregoing explains why traditional life continues to thrive in Oṣogbo in the midst of rapid

modern development. Indeed, Oṣogbo is just one of the few Nigerian towns where tradition and progress are marching side by side. They may not be perfectly in step and progress seems to have the better stamina; but each is still an essential characteristic of the town.

### Religious background

In order to obtain a thorough grasp of the Festival of Images at Oṣogbo and Yoruba traditional festivals involving sacred images, it is necessary to make adequate reference to the religion of the people because religious activities or worship play a very prominent role in most of their festivals.<sup>17</sup>

Apart from being a centre of refuge during the nineteenth century Yoruba warfare, Oṣogbo has also been a meeting point of foreign and indigenous religions since the first decade of the twentieth century. Three types of religious faith - indigenous, Christianity and Islam - exist comfortably in the town. The indigenous religion centres round the belief in a Supreme God (Olodumare) worshipped and approached through many minor gods and goddesses (òrìsà), each of whom is believed to supervise specific departments like agriculture, family life, and diseases.<sup>18</sup>

Before 1900, only the indigenous religion existed in Oṣogbo, featuring the worship of the Osun river goddess (for fertility and protection generally) and other major Yoruba deities, namely, Ọ̀bàtálá (the senior Ọ̀rìṣà and god of creation), Ọ̀rìṣà Oko (the god of agriculture), Ẓàngó (the dynamic god of lightning and thunder), Ọ̀gún (the god of iron), Ifá (the Yoruba oracle divinity), Ẓònpònná (the god of small-pox and other pestilences), Egúngún (Masqueraders associated with ancestors), and Èṣù (mostly referred to as the Trickster god but in essence is the messenger to all gods).<sup>19</sup>

The influx of refugees into Oṣogbo from the war-torn Yoruba towns, with their concomitant religious cults and shrines, further enhanced the worship of many deities and countless traditional observances and customs in which sacred images featured prominently.

Of the two foreign religions - Christianity and Islam, Christian missionaries established themselves first, arriving in Oṣogbo in 1903.<sup>20</sup> Shortly thereafter, Muslim proselytizers began efforts at conversion. The Christian missionaries established schools immediately they arrived Oṣogbo, thus providing the

town its first direct contact with western way of life. But the somewhat "strict" approach of the mission made it lose much of its initial ground to Islam. For instance, the Christian missionaries demanded that the convert be able to read and write so that he could read the Bible before he could be baptized.<sup>21</sup> They also advocated a change from the extended family into nuclear family - expecting the convert to divorce all wives but one - which posed some obstacles to easy acceptance and which when adopted, knocked away the props of the traditional society. Above all, the church leaders insisted that the dead be interred in church-yards instead of in their houses as it is traditionally done - thus discouraging ancestor worship and the use of sacred ancestor figures.

On the other hand, it is possible to become affiliated to Muslim groups without relinquishing certain fundamental traditional beliefs and practices. For instance, polygyny is acceptable to Islam if one could afford it. The natives of Osoḡbo, as well as other Yoruba people, had for a long time practised polygynous marriage because in the main,



a man required many hands on his farm, a reason why his wealth had always been reckoned in the number of wives and children, rather than in any other way.<sup>22</sup> Besides, the Muslim religion does not dictate the burial places for the deceased. These particular differences between the two foreign religions explain Schwab's conclusion that the majority of the people of Osogbo are Muslims - at least nominally.<sup>23</sup>

But religious syncretism apparently holds sway in Osogbo. Although both Christianity and Islam are generally against the use of sacred images - a prominent practice in the rituals of traditional Yoruba religion - there has not been any friction whatsoever among the different religious sects in the town. The fact that the Catholic mission, which now forms a considerable size of the Christians in the town, still displays sacred images of its Saints in churches, hospitals and educational institutions suggests a possible source of the compromise.<sup>24</sup>

Also, apart from the sacred images issue, the other aspects of Islamic faith (mentioned above) appear really congenial to Yoruba customs and therefore easy to live with. One chorus usually rendered by

cult groups as well as large crowds of Christians and Muslims during traditional festivals confirms the religious syncretism in Oṣogbo. Here goes the song:

Awa y'ó ṣ'orò ilé wa o)2ce  
 Igbàgbó/Imòle ko pé, ó o e  
 Igbàgbó/Imòle ko pé k'áwa má ṣ'orò;  
 Awa y'o ṣ'orò ilé wa o.

(We will vitalize our culture heritage  
 Christianity/Islam is not a hindrance;  
 We will observe our cultural heritage).

Thus, the people of Oṣogbo believe that the indigenous religion compares favourably with the foreign ones and many of them would not forego the former totally for the latter. They seem to tolerate any religion regardless of the form - believing, most probably, that all human beings worship for the same basic reason which, according to Afolabi Ojo, is "to enable man to cope with the intransigences of the natural environment and its effects on human activities."<sup>25</sup> Despite the spread of christianity and Islam in almost a century of missionary activity in Oṣogbo - with scores of churches and mosques all over the place - the most interesting cultural life is still provided by traditional ceremonies and customs.

Contrary to Beier's observation that indigenous religions have been retreating all over the African continent, symptoms of which are shrinking community of worshippers, cessation of many festivals and rituals and crumbling of many shrines,<sup>26</sup> traditional religion and festivals as well as the art associated with them are still very much alive in Oşogbo. The shrines of the major Yoruba deities still exist. Apart from such public "orisa" festivals like Oşun, Şàngó, Ifá, Eşu, Şonponná, Obátálá and "Egungun", carried out on behalf of the entire town with the participation of the Ataoja, there are innumerable private celebrations by all the worshippers in their own compounds and shrines. This sustenance is due largely to the religious impetus of the people of Oşogbo as well as the fervour of Sussane Wenger and her group of "New Sacred Art" movement in reconstructing and decorating the ancient shrines in the town (see page 3 of the Introductory part of this essay).

It is pertinent to note that Sussane Wenger's decision to settle in Oşogbo for the fifth decade running is not unconnected with the fact that Oşogbo

is the site for probably the most popular traditional religious festival in Nigeria (The Oṣun festival). As her mission is to imbibe the traditional Yoruba religion and transpose it into artistic language in order to make the religion accessible to a wider circle of people,<sup>27</sup> it is easier for her to work in a context where art and religion are still tightly knit. She said that the religious impetus of the people of Osogbo provided a conducive environment for her artistic and religious temperament.<sup>28</sup>

#### The artistic popularity of Osogbo

Oṣogbo has become remarkably popular as a centre of art and culture in Yorubaland in the last three decades. One of the factors responsible for this popularity was the Mbari Mbayo which was established there in the 1960s. It was a club meant to promote both Yoruba theatre and visual arts.

The original Mbari club was founded in Ibadan in 1961.<sup>29</sup> At the club, writers and poets, actors and visual artists met and stimulated one another to experiment and criticize. There, artists could exhibit and writers could publish their works - the

club ran a small publishing venture, an art gallery, and had an open courtyard in which plays could be performed.

The club was extended to Oşogbo in 1962 at the instance of Late Duro Ladipo, the Oşogbo composer and dramatist whose family compound was to be used for most of the club's activities. Its original name Mbari, an Ibo word which means "creation" or the "art of creation" was Yorubanized to Mbari Mbayo, which literally means "If I see, I shall be happy".

In the years 1962, 1963 and 1964, Ulli Beier organized series of summer art schools and workshops at the Oşogbo club.<sup>30</sup> The aim was to discover local artists, and this initiative sparked off new creative activity and new "schools" of painting. The participants were encouraged to work spontaneously, and Ulli Beier also drew their work to the attention of the outside world particularly in his film, New Images in a Changing African Society.<sup>31</sup> From this experiment, a number of artists were discovered. Prominent among them are Taiwo Olaniyi (Twin Seven-Seven), Muraina Oyelami and Jimoh Buraimoh. Today, Twin Seven-Seven's

Art Studio (Keke Elemu) and gallery have a family of artists in Osogbo while Jimoh Buraimoh runs a private African Heritage Art Gallery, which displays mosaic mural and bead-paintings, the latter a unique contemporary African art style.

Ulli Beier also started a collection of images and artifacts enough to build a museum. He eventually founded the Osogbo museum which, though handed to the Institute of African Studies, University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) on his departure from Nigeria, was located in Osogbo at his request. The museum is still well-maintained. In the performing arts, late Duro Ladipo and Late Kola Ogunmola brought the town to limelight and theatre in the town is still sustained by Oyin Adejobi and Yemi Elebubon.

Apart from the foregoing, Osogbo has become one of the sites for the restoration of traditional Yoruba beliefs. At present, Osogbo is perhaps the only town in Yorubaland where ancient shrines and monuments are not collapsing and decaying, but being rebuilt and not as slavish imitation of the past. They are recreated and adorned by Susanne Wenger and her group of "New

Sacred Art" movement.

Susanne Wenger, an Austrian artist, has been resident in Oṣogbo for the past forty years, trying to understand and live traditional Yoruba religious and philosophical life through her new art-form. According to her, the "New Sacred Art of Oṣogbo is modern art in the ritual service of traditional Yoruba religion - Orisa."<sup>32</sup> The "New Sacred Art" in its seemingly organic form on the sites of the old shrines, depicting the artists' conception of attributes of each of the Yoruba deities has turned Oṣogbo into a tropical Disneyland. The artists of the "New Sacred Art", apart from Susanne Wenger, include carvers, bricklayers, carpenters, blacksmiths and local priests, all inspired by a religion and a way of life that is believed by many to be dead or, at least, decadent.

It is important to note however that prior to the inception of Mbari Mbayo and the "New Sacred Art", Oṣogbo had been well-known for traditional tie-dye (adire) textile production. Oṣogbo is still full of artists and craftsmen who carry on this traditional industry though in a modernized form. Besides, the

palace of the Ataoja, the traditional ruler of Osogbo, has been a traditional repository of ageless works of art, mainly sculptural images, kept in shrines where they still fulfil their traditional function.

It is the lively existence of different artistic forms and cultural activities that has made Osogbo the Byzantium of Yoruba art - the poet's imaginary world of art and artists; an eternal world immune to cultural decay through art; a bizarre world where ancient and contemporary art forms co-exist. This view of Osogbo is evidenced in a film about the arts and Osun festival of Osogbo by Ulli Beier and Frank Speed.<sup>33</sup>

#### Literature Review

The popularity of Osogbo as a centre of art and culture has attracted the attention of scholars especially within the past four decades.

Beier avers that Osogbo could boast of magnificent art treasures but that most of them had been bought and taken away by a number of unscrupulous Europeans and Americans.<sup>34</sup> He adds that the most important shrine in the town houses over thirty carvings named after different orisa and that four of these were



stolen by thieves and probably smuggled out of the country and sold.<sup>35</sup> He, as well as Schwab,<sup>36</sup> discusses the historical background, geography and traditional social, economic and religious system in Osoḡbo.<sup>37</sup> Elsewhere, Beier bemoans the death of traditional African art and discusses how the meeting of European and African artists had sparked off new creative activity. He highlights the establishment of Mbari Mbayo club at Osoḡbo and how the contemporary artists in Osoḡbo were "discovered" in three summer schools and art workshops organized in 1992, 1993 and 1994.<sup>38</sup>

Roy Dean, in his article, "Osoḡbo Art in London", discusses the works of Yoruba artists from Mbari Mbayo club at Osoḡbo which formed the main part of an exhibition of modern art from Africa staged at the gallery of the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London from 17th March to 18th April, 1967. He observes that contemporary artists from Osoḡbo have emerged from "the rigid forms of traditional carving or Islamic abstract pattern".<sup>39</sup>

Jean Kennedy witnessed a festival of images at Osoḡbo and describes it in an article titled "I saw

and I was Happy Festival at Oṣogbo." The festival under reference is different from, and has no connection whatsoever with, the one that is the subject of this study. The one she describes was made up to mark the establishment of Mbari Mbayo club at Oṣogbo in 1962. For the festival she describes, carved images from the Sango shrine in Ede were brought to Oṣogbo on loan from the Timi of Ede (the traditional ruler of Ede) a town situated about twelve kilometres south of Oṣogbo. Late Duro Ladipo, the Oṣogbo dramatist at the instance of whom Mbari Mbayo was established in the town, took charge of the procession, helping to place the images on the shoulders of twenty-four teenage boys who carried them with aplomb.<sup>40</sup>

Tunde Omotunde's article, "Art Lives in Osogbo", spotlights what makes Oṣogbo popular as a centre of Yoruba culture and contemporary (modern) art. These include the annual Osun festival which attracts people from all parts of the country, Nigeria, and overseas; the museum (Ulli Beier's collections); Susanne Wenger's "New Sacred Art" constructions; private art galleries set up by modern artists originating from the summer

art school organized by Ulli Beier at the Mbari Mbayo club; as well as the modernized traditional tie-dye industry. The author says nothing about the annual festival of images in the town. However, he gives the hint that the palace of the traditional ruler is a traditional repository of "ageless Osogbo images."<sup>41</sup>

Idowu,<sup>42</sup> Gleason,<sup>43</sup> and Wenger<sup>44</sup> provide a profound insight into the traditional religion (orisa) of the Yoruba. Wenger, however, focuses on how she has adopted and assimilated it in Osogbo. She bares her sadness and outrage at the way the colonial powers, the established christian and muslim orthodoxy have ridicled and desecrated traditional Yoruba religion, showing how the latter shares the basic values which underlie the principal faiths of mankind. She writes the obsequies of traditional Yoruba art, saying, "the ancient art of the Yoruba is sublime beyond doubt but it is gone,"<sup>45</sup> and describes her "New Sacred Art" of Osogbo as one of the two distinct roads that (modern) Osogbo art has developed into (The other form of modern art is the one emanating from Ulli Beier's Mbari Mbayo summer school and workshop).

In another book, Susanne Wenger defines her "New Sacred Art" as a modern art in the ritual service of the traditional religion and philosophy of the orisa. She describes the new orisa shrines in Osogbo, using a hand-sketch map of their location. She also explains the philosophy behind their construction and gives portraits of the artists who produced them.<sup>46</sup>

Ogunba<sup>47</sup> and Ekpenyong<sup>48</sup> are notable among scholars who have observed that in human societies the world over festivals have their genesis in some historical events. Specifically, Ogunba observes that Yoruba ceremonies especially the festivals are rich as a source of Yoruba history. This observation is instructive because the institution of the festival of images is in itself a giant cultural establishment which accommodates virtually every experience of the community and consequently yield some material on Yoruba art history.

Accordingly, Ulli Beier's description of the procession of images that accompany's the annual worship of Erinle in Ilobu traces the origin of six of the images involved to Ibadan.<sup>49</sup> Thompson<sup>50</sup> and Adepegba<sup>51</sup> also have observed that some of the ritual objects and one of the images in the Erinle shrine in Ilobu originated

from Egbado - Yoruba area. Besides, Stevens writes extensively on the annual festival of the stone images at Esie.<sup>52</sup> He and Adepegba<sup>53</sup> have suggested some historical link between the images and ancient Ife because of their observation that the face markings on the Esie images are various components of the striations on Ife art adopted alone or partially combined.

#### The Problem of Study

The foregoing review underscores the fact that the artistic popularity of Osogbo is traceable to the lively existence of both traditional and modern (contemporary) art forms in the town, but the attention of the outside world has been focused mainly on the latter. This is probably because of the assumption that traditional African art generally is dead already or, at least decadent and disappearing.<sup>54</sup>

There is no gainsaying the fact that Beier's experimental art workshops at the Mbari Mbayo club and Wenger's persistent sense of purpose with her "New Sacred Art" movement have earned Osogbo an enduring focus and popularity as a centre of contemporary Nigerian art. However, a very important and extant aspect of the artistic tradition of the town - the

Festival of Images, has been conspicuously neglected. The objective of this study is to examine this annual ceremony.

The Festival of Images, a one-day experience, takes place once every year. This period, all the carvings kept in the central market shrine are brought out for some rituals and carried in a procession round the town amidst vivacious music, dance, prayers and praise-songs of the protective deities of the town.

The Festival of Images is distinctive from other festivals and certainly it is the next crowd-puller to Osun - of all traditional festivals of the town. However, the only record available on the festival is contained in Beier and Speed's film, New Images in a Changing African Society. In it, it is summarily lumped together with the other festivals of the town and appears to us to be part of Osun festival. But actually they are not. Indeed, the festivals are separate, and they take place at different times of the year. Other features of the film are Egungun masquerade, the new experimental arts and the new religious outlook of the town. Most of these also form part of distinctive festivals.

### Significance of the study

This study focuses on the Festival of Images in Osogbo for better understanding of the religion and artistic heritage of the town.

Osogbo is not the only Yoruba town where festival of images takes place. Of course, the Osogbo festival of images began as a festival of the gods in general but was eventually associated, particularly, to the worship of Sonponna, the Yoruba god of pestilence. At Ilobu, too, a procession of images takes place every year when Erinle is worshipped.<sup>55</sup> Parrinder gives the hint that also at Ibadan, a procession of images used to accompany the worship of Yemoja.<sup>56</sup> Then of more historical significance, there is an annual festival of images featuring the worship of the over eight hundred stone images as community deities in Esie.<sup>57</sup>

Therefore, the study is envisaged as being capable of increasing our understanding of the rationale for such festivals in Yorubaland and consequently the arts that are associated with them. This research will also increase our understanding of the religious and socio-economic functions of traditional Yoruba art and shed light on the history of some of its associated practices.

Besides, it will highlight the peculiarity of Osogbo, as a remarkable centre of traditional and contemporary art in Yorubaland.

#### Scope of the Study

As the art of a people is almost invariably integrated with all the major aspects of existence - religion, philosophy; as well as social, economic, political and judicial practices and events,<sup>58</sup> this study explores the origin, purpose and development of the festival of images in Osogbo.

The study also identifies and classifies the images involved in the festival; discusses their age, origin, form and style; and compares them with the representation and worship of the deities in other Yoruba towns - to throw light on both Yoruba art and religion.

Further, as the festival at Osogbo by itself cannot yield the full result of historical investigation until it is compared with similar festivals in other parts of Yorubaland, a study of similar festivals at Ilobu, Ibadan and Esie is undertaken; comparison is made and possible historical links are established.



### Hypothesis

As it seems that the images serve as crowd-pullers during the festival, it is hypothesized that the festival was originally motivated by the need to propitiate the gods, attract members of the community and promote social identity, social cohesion and cultural continuity - in accordance with Gotshalk's theory of the social functions of works of art:

What are called works of "primitive art" - statuary, music, dance - have usually been created primarily to propitiate the gods of war, marriage, earth, sea or to whip up communal spirit for a group activity . . . . This is the function of satisfying certain so-called "mental" group needs, e.g. communication of feelings and experiences, the welding of the individuals of a group into a purposively active, unified society.<sup>59</sup>

It is also hypothesized that this research will, in the final analysis, belie the impression created by some writers that traditional art of Africa generally is already dead and that their original meaning is irrecoverable.<sup>60</sup> It is reckoned that without the need for some assurance of survival and its social implications, it would probably not have been necessary to create an annual outing for the images and involve the community in a fiesta for the supposedly living spirits that they

(the images) are taken to represent. Indeed, the annual traditional festival of images or procession of images accompanying the worship of the gods in many Yoruba towns and villages affirm sufficiently that many traditional carvings remain in such places, where they still fulfil their traditional functions - even when their number is naturally decreasing.

### Methodology

An empirical and interdisciplinary method was adopted in conducting this study. Empirical approach relies on perception, experience and observation, thus it provides knowledge provable by both reason and the evidence of the senses.<sup>61</sup>

Generally, the study of African sculpture, which began in the first decade of this century adopts the empirical approach. The study initially followed one or the other of two by-ways: the ethnological one, which considers a knowledge of the social and cultural bases of a work of art to be essential to its understanding and even for its appreciation; and the aesthetic one, which considers that such a knowledge may not be necessary for its appreciation.<sup>62</sup>

However, the two schools of thought have gradually approached each other because of the realization that form and content are scarcely separable in societies, like those in Africa, where the artist's role is not to express his own personality but rather to serve communal values.

Accordingly, this study draws on anthropological and art historical ways, exploring the philosophical and cultural bases of the festival as well as the formal manifestations of the images involved in the festival.

#### Procedure

Two basic procedures were adopted: Interviews and Participant observation. But before embarking on them, the following preliminary steps were taken:

- (i) As much information as possible were gathered from books, journals and archival records on Osogbo.
- (ii) Osogbo was visited with a letter of introduction from the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan to the Ataoja, the traditional rulers of Osogbo and community leader of the town, asking for his approval for the

research. The approval was obtained.

- (iii) Personal contact was made with the Osun State Zonal Cultural Officer resident in Osogbo and the Iya Osun (the chief priestess of Osun and highest priestly authority of all the orisa worship in Osogbo) for up-to-date information on the date of the annual festival of images.

After the preliminaries, careful investigation was carried out using reliable, knowledgeable and willing informants in the community identified through the help of the Osun State Cultural Officer for Osogbo zone, Mr. Adetunji Araoye. The services of a number of different informants, who occupy diverse positions in Osogbo community, as well as in Ilobu, Ibadan and Ile-Ife were also sought - taking cognizance of the fact that no one informant is a sufficient source of information about a given subject. The names of such informants and other details about each of them are supplied at the appropriate places in the text. Information from different informants were cross-checked for comparison.

Oba Iyiola Matarimi III, the Ataoja of Osogbo, the chief priest, the chief priestess and members

of the central cult of community religious observances of Osogbo were met and interviewed before and during the festival. I was shown the images in the shrine on the eve of the festival. Through interview, some fundamental information was gathered from the chief priestess and cult members on the following:

(a) The Images

- (i) Origin and producer.
- (ii) Date of manufacture.
- (iii) Materials used in producing them and their sources.
- (iv) Nature and purpose of their forms, especially their decorations.

(b) The Festival

- (i) Origin and purpose.
- (ii) Preparations, e.g. washing and painting of the images.
- (iii) Relationship of the festival to other traditional festivals of the town.
- (iv) Membership of the cult and their respective functions.

Permission to take notes and photographs as well as use tape-recorders where necessary was sought and

obtained before and during the interviews.

### Participant Observation

During the festival of the images, my participant observation was aimed at providing answers to the following:

1. What is going on.
2. The participants (their respective age, sex function, position in society, cult and isolates).
3. The frequency and duration of the situation being observed.
4. The meaning of the activity to the participants and those who are not taking part.
5. The extent to which these meanings are specific to the festival, relatively circumscribed or basic to the whole value system of the participants or the community as a whole.
6. Whether the relationships among the participants are relatively stable or they go through regular phases or cycles.
7. The effect of the setting (environment) on the activities, participants and relationships.

Since most of the participants in the festival were illiterates or semi-illiterates who often look

on writing with suspicion, writing was minimized during the festival. Mental notes - key words or ideas to serve as reminders - were taken in the midst of activities but written out in details after the activities as in the case of the interviews. The detailed note includes a description of what has been observed as well as inferences and ideas for analysis. Photographs of the images and the participants were taken in the context of the festival to corroborate written records.

The data provided by myths, praise-songs and other symbolic utterances were also noted and analyzed, as they are of considerable value in establishing historical connections.

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See also: (1971) *Oracles, A. O. Oshin, University of*  
*the Yoruba (Ibadan)* (Ibadan: O. S. Oshin, 1971,  
 pp. 50-61, see "A little new light on the collapse  
 of the Alafinship of Yoruba" in *Studies in Yoruba*  
*History and Culture*, O. S. Oshin (ed.) Ibadan:  
 O.S.O. University Press, 1981, pp. 57.

## NOTES

1. King's Market (Oja Oba) is the major market in any Yoruba town and is invariably just outside the palace.
2. There are two shrines dedicated to Osun River goddess in Osogbo. One is at the bank of the river ("Ojubo") the other is in the King's market (Oja-Oba).
3. Oral tradition gathered from the present traditional ruler of Osogbo, Oba Iyiola Matanmi III, through personal interview on 7th December, 1990.
4. Like all the other Yoruba deities, Osun is believed to be capable of giving children, curing diseases and fulfilling all wishes. See Ulli Beier, The Return of the gods: The Sacred Art of Susanne Wenger. (London: Cambridge University Press), 1975, p. 36.
5. As in Note 3 above.
6. See S. Wenger, The Sacred Groves of Osogbo. (Worgl, Austria: Augustine Mereeder), 1990, pp.29-30.
7. S. Johnson, The History of the Yorubas (Lagos: CMS Bookshop), 1921, pp 285-9 says that the Owa of Ilesa, imitating Alaafin of Oyo's earlier appointment of Timi of Ede to check the Ijesa plunderers who kidnapped their neighbours in their farms and molested caravans to and from Apomu, a frontier town where a large fair was periodically held for the exchange of goods with the Ijebus, posted an opposition kinglet to Osogbo named "Atawoja".
8. S. Johnson (1921) Op.cit., R. Smith, Kingdoms of the Yoruba (Norwich: Methuen & Co. Ltd). 1976, pp 60-61, and "A Little New light on the Collapse of the Alafinate of Yoruba" in Studies in Yoruba History and Culture, G. O. Olusanya (ed) Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1983, p. 47.



9. M. Crowder, Story of Nigeria (London: Longmans) 1962, p. 106 gives 1840 as the date of the battle. See also J.F.A. Ajayi & R. Smith, Yoruba Warfare in the 19th century, 2nd Edition. (Ibadan & Cambridge) 1971, p. 33; and T.G.O. Gbadamosi, The Growth of Islam Among the Yoruba, 1841-1908 (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press) 1978, pp. 37-42.
10. S. Johnson (1921) Op.cit., p. 286 describes the unprecedented size of the army mounted by Basorun of Ibadan against the Fulani at the Osogbo battle.
11. 1991 Population census figure of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (provisional).
12. See Appendix I for archival documents relating to the location of Osun Divisional Headquarters at Osogbo in 1951.
13. G.J.A. Ojo, Yoruba Palaces, A Study of Afin of Yorubaland (London: University of London Press Ltd), 1966, pp 13-18.
14. W. B. Schwab, "Osogbo - An Urban Community?" in M.H. Kuper (ed) Urbanization and Migration in West Africa (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1965, p. 101.
15. O. Otite & W. Ogionwo, An Introduction to Sociological Studies (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nig.)Ltd., 1979, pp 91-106 give detailed description of Kinship system.
16. For a more detailed description of the Yoruba lineage system, see P.C. Lloyd, "The Yoruba Lineage System", Africa xxv, July 1955, pp 235-51; and W.B. Schwab (1965), Op.cit., p. 91.
17. G. Ekpenyong, "Festivals in Nigeria: A Bibliography" in Nigeria Magazine, No. 136, 1981, p. 36 says this is typical of the Yoruba, the Ibibio and the Nupe people.

18. See E.B. Idowu, Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief (London: Longmans) 1962, pp. 71-106, describes Orisa as "Ministers of Olodumare."
19. The Osun Festival has been described in some detail by Ulli Beier: "The Osun Festival" Nigeria Magazine, No. 53, 1957, pp 170-87.
20. Rev. Mr. Green of the Anglican mission was the first Christian missionary who settled in Osogbo in 1903. See U. Beier (1975) Op.cit., p. 19, and W.B. Schwab (1965) Op.cit., p. 97.
21. See U. Beier, "Osogbo: Portrait of a Yoruba town" in Nigeria Magazine 1960 - A Special Independence Issue (Lagos: Federal Ministry of Information), p. 153.
22. For further details of the factors influencing the spread and adoption of Christianity and Islam and for their effects on the lives of the people of Southern Nigeria, see E.D. Morel, Nigeria, Its Peoples & Problems (London: Macmillan) 1912, pp 213-221.
23. W.B. Schwab (1965), Op.cit., p. 79.
24. Censuring the religion of the people of Abeokuta, Townsend says that there is no much difference between Catholicism and indigenous Yoruba religion because "the Orisa are their images and crucifix." See Rev. Townsend, Church Missionary (London: Gleaner) 1849, p. 18.
25. G.J. Afolabi Ojo, Yoruba Culture (University of Ife & University of London Press Ltd), 1966, pp. 158-9.
26. Ulli Beier (1975) Op.cit., p. 12.
27. S. Wenger, A life with the gods in their Yoruba homeland. (Worgl: Perlinger Verlag Ges), 1983, p. 19.

28. Sussane Wenger arrived in Nigeria in 1950. She stayed for a short time in Ibadan and Ede before she finally decided to settle at Osogbo. This information, contained in S. Wenger (1990) op.cit., p. 56, and U. Beier (1975) Op.cit., pp. 29 & 39, was confirmed when I interviewed her personally at Osogbo on 8th December, 1990.
29. Critic: "Mbari Mbayo", Nigeria Magazine, No. 78, 1963, pp 223-228, recalled that the original Mbari club was founded in Ibadan by a group of intellectuals, including the dramatist Wole Soyinka; the poets J.P. Clark and Christopher Okigbo; the Yoruba author D.O. Fagunwa; South African writer Ezekiel Mphahlele; the painters Demas Nwoko and Uche Okeke; and the poet and writer Ulli Beier.
30. Ulli Beier invited Dennis Williams (a West Indian painter & scholar) to run the Osogbo experimental schools in August, 1962 - August, 1963. Georgina Beier, Ulli Beier's wife, ran a permanent workshop open for some of the artists produced at the experimental school and ran a third summer school at Osogbo in August, 1964. See Ulli Beier's Contemporary Art in Africa (Paul Maul Press, London 1968, pp. 107-9.
31. Ulli Beier & Frank Speed: New Images in a changing African Society (1964) - A film about the arts and Osun festival of Osogbo.
32. Sussane Wenger, The Sacred Groves of Osogbo. (Worgl: Merceder) 1990, p. 14.
33. Ulli Beier & Frank Speed, Op.cit., (Note 3 above).
34. Ulli Beier (1960), Op.cit., pp 146-156.
35. Ulli Beier (1975), Op.cit., pp. 22; 85-87.

36. w.B. Schwab (1965) Op.cit., pp. 89-97.
37. Ulli Beier (1960), Op.cit.
38. Ulli Beier (1968), Op.cit., p. 102.
39. Roy Dean, "Osogbo Art in London", Nigeria Magazine, No. 95, 1967, pp 291-294.
40. Jean Kennedy, "I saw and I was Happy Festival at Osogbo," African Arts, Winter 1968, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 8-16.
41. Tunde Omotunde, "Art Lives in Osogbo," Sunday Concord (weekly Newspaper) (Ikeja Concord Publications), March 6, 1983, pp.
42. E. B. Idowu (1962), Op.cit., pp. 61-176.
43. J. Gleason, Orisa: The god of Yorubaland. (New York: Anthenuem), 1971, pp. 48-119.
44. S. Wenger & G. Ghesi (1983) Op.cit., p. 11.
45. S. Wenger & G. Ghesi (1983) Ibid., p. 207.
46. S. Wenger (1990) Op.cit., pp. 29-30.
47. Oyin Ogunba, "Ceremonies" in Biobaku, S.O. (ed.) Sources of Yoruba History (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 1973, p. 88.
48. G. Ekpenyong, (1981) Op.cit., pp. 31-36.
49. Ulli Beier, "The Story of Sacred Wood Carvings in one small Yoruba Town" - A Nigeria Magazine special publication (pages unnumbered).

50. See William Fagg's "Foreword" to Kevin Carroll's Yoruba Religious Carvings (London: Geoffrey Chapman), 1968, p.12. See also Ulli Beier (1960) Op.cit., pp 28-31 and S. Wenger & G. Ghesi (1983), Op.cit., p. 207.

50. R. Thompson, "Abatan: A Master Porter of Egbado Yoruba" in Biebuyck, D.P. (ed.) Tradition and Creativity in Tribal Art (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1969, pp 145-146.
51. C.O. Adepegba, "The Essence of the Image in the Religious Sculptures of the Yoruba of Nigeria", Nigeria Magazine, No. 144, 1983, p.
52. P. Stevens Jnr. "The Festival of the Images at Esie". Nigeria Magazine, No. 87, 1978, pp. 237-43.
53. C.O. Adepegba, "The Historical Significance of the Esie Stone Images" in Moyo Okediji (ed.) Yoruba Images: Essays in Honour of Lamidi Fakeye. (Ile-Ife: Ife University Humanities Society Publication), 1988, pp. 61-88.
54. See U. Beier (1968), Op.cit., pp. 3 & 131. See also S. Wenger & G. Chesl (1983), Op.cit., p. 207.
55. Ulli Beier, "Festival of Images", Nigeria Magazine, No. 45, 1954, pp. 14-20.
56. G. Parrinder, Religion in an African City. (Wesport: Negro University Press) 1953, pp. 29-30.
57. P. Stevens Jnr. (1978), Op.cit., See also C.O. Adepegba (1988), Op.cit.
58. G.J.A. Ojo, Yoruba Culture (London: University of Ife & University of London Press Ltd.), 1966, pp. 232-268.
59. See D.W. Gotshalk, Art and the Social Order (New York: Dover Publications Inc.), 1962, p.158.
60. See William Fagg's "Foreword" to Kevin Carroll's Yoruba Religious Carvings (London: Geoffrey Chapman), 1966, p.ix. See also Ulli Beier (1968) Op.cit., pp 3 & 31 and S. Wenger & G. Chesl (1983), Op.cit., p. 207.

61. For detailed information on Empirical approach, see Chaya & David Nachmias, Research Methods in the Social Sciences (London: Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd.), 1982, pp. 47-48.
62. Frank Willett, African Art: An Introduction. (London: Thames & Hudson), 1971, pp. 36-42.

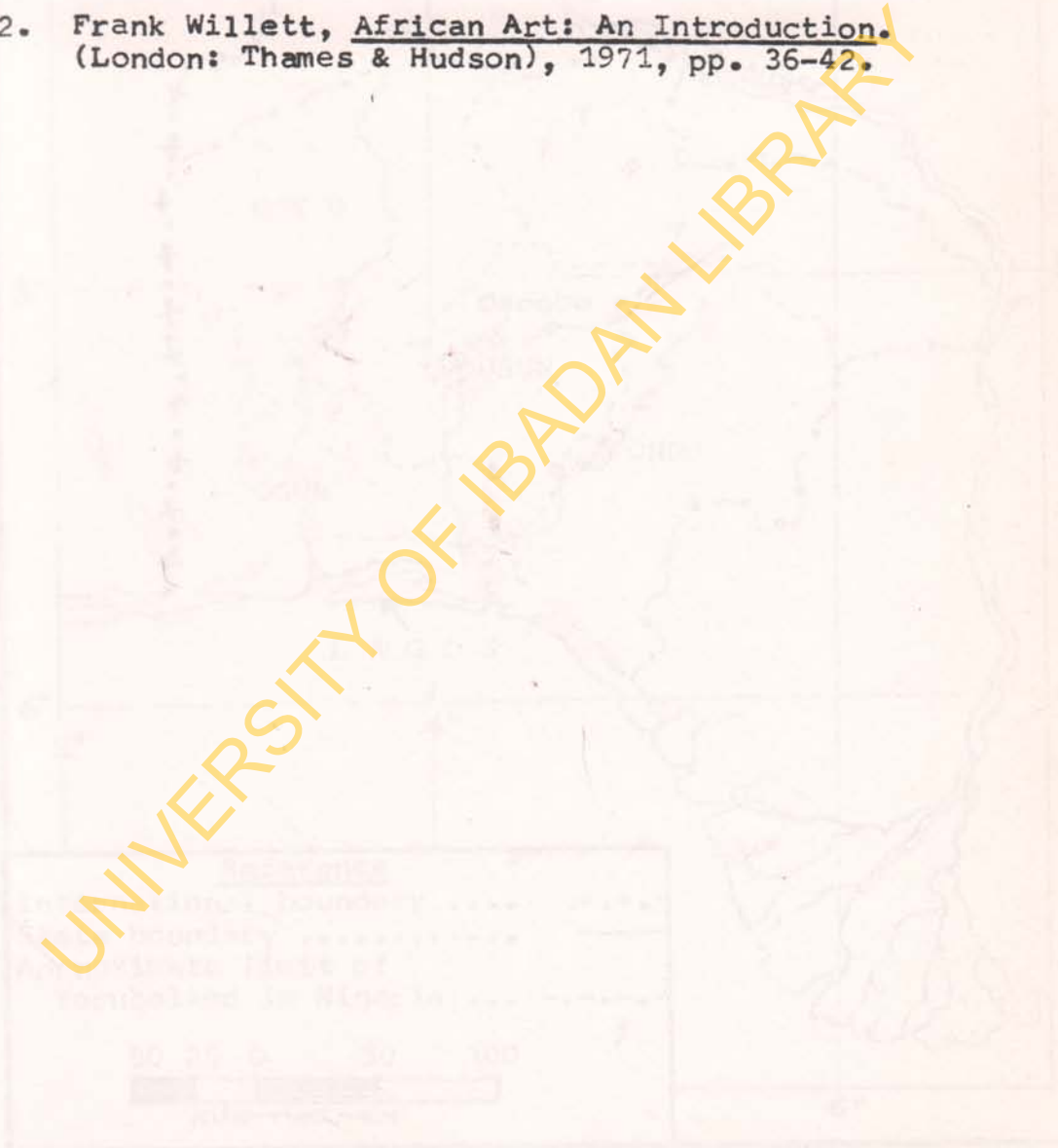


Figure 1 - Map showing the outline of Nigeria and Chad, showing the international limit of the Sahara Desert.

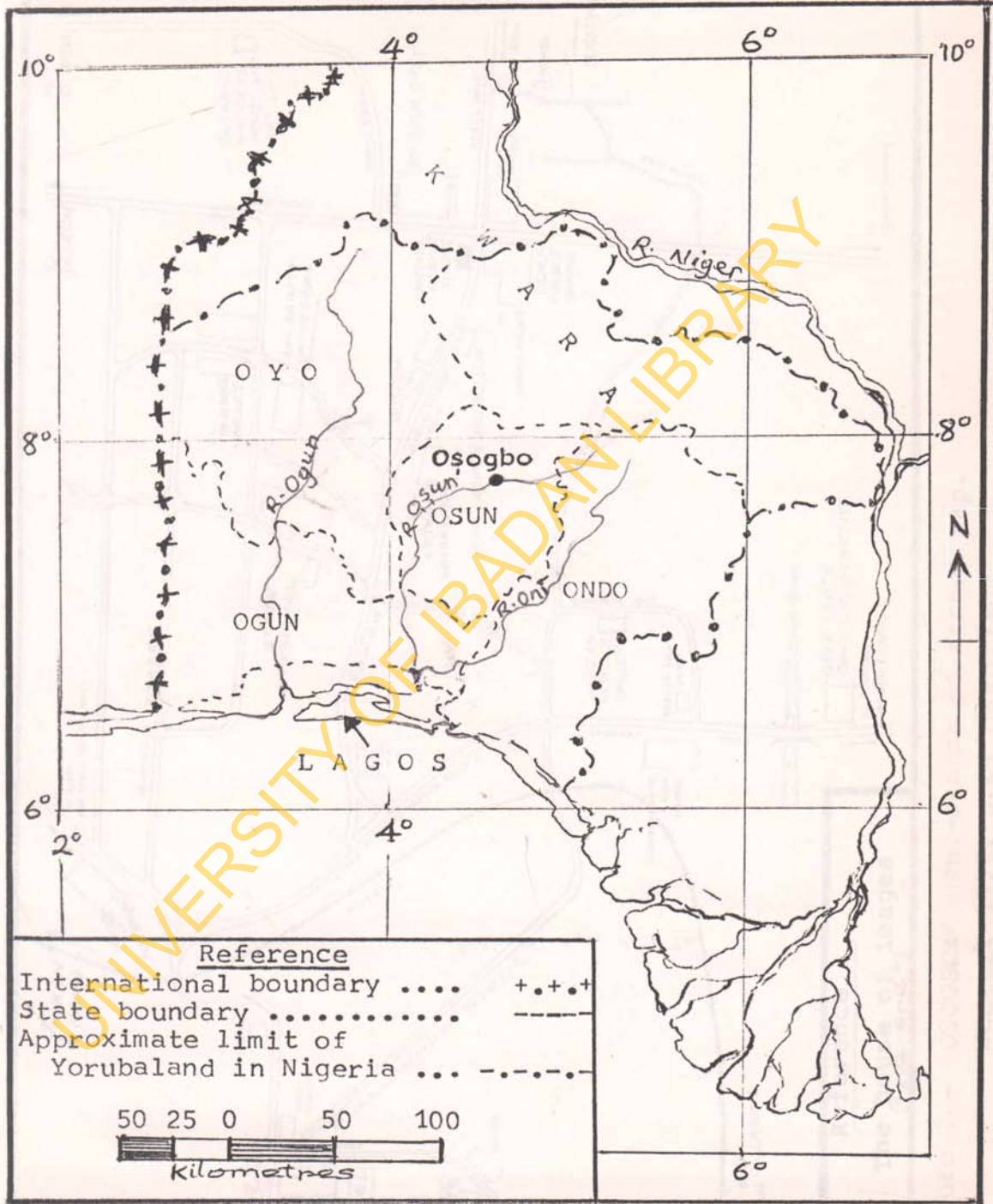


Figure 1 - Map showing the position of Osoḡbo and Yoruba-speaking States of South-western Nigeria.

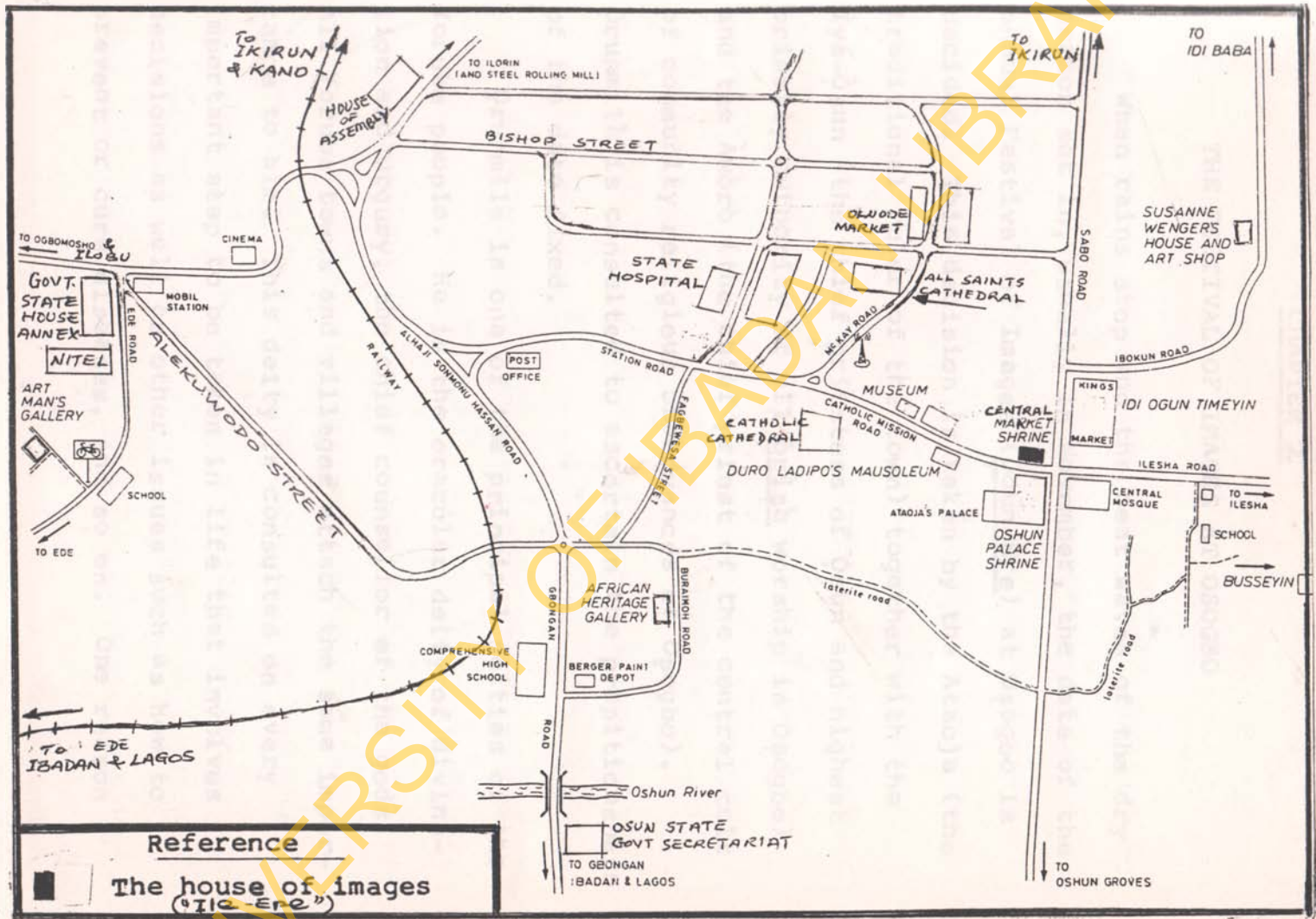


Figure 2 - OSOGBO: Hand-sketoh of street Map.  
Wenger: 1990, p.24 (modified)



CHAPTER 2

## THE FESTIVAL OF IMAGES AT OSOGBO

When rains stop and the heat waves of the dry season set in, usually in November, the date of the annual Festival of Images (Odún Ère) at Osogbo is decided. This decision is taken by the Ataoja (the traditional ruler of the town) together with the Ìyá-Òsun (the chief priestess of Oṣun and highest priestly authority of all òrìṣà worship in Osogbo) and the Àwòrò (the chief priest of the central cult of community religious observances of Osogbo). Oṣunmilà is consulted to ascertain the propitiousness of the date fixed.

Oṣunmilà is one of the principal deities of the Yoruba people. He is the oracular deity of divination and augury, the chief counsellor of the gods. All Yoruba towns and villages attach the same importance to him. This deity is consulted on every important step to be taken in life that involves decisions as well as other issues such as how to prevent or cure diseases, and so on. One reason

given for Òrúnmìlà's intimate knowledge of matters affecting man's destiny is the Yoruba belief that he (Òrúnmìlà) is present when man is created and his destiny sealed. Thus he can predict what is coming to pass or prescribe remedies against any eventuality.<sup>1</sup> Òrúnmìlà's mind is read by learned priests (babaláwo) through the Ifá divination system - a system operated with the help of a meta-algebraic universe of equations that manifests itself in some symbol-laden poems called odù.<sup>2</sup> Òrúnmìlà is also referred to by some writers as Ifa, which can also stand for the oracular system.<sup>3</sup>

The date fixed for the festival usually falls on the first or second Monday in December. Once the date is fixed, the information is conveyed to the community through the Àwòrò. In the past, the Àwòrò would direct the town-crier to make the announcement; but these days, the information is passed to the community and the public at large through various mass media like the radio, television and the dailies.

The images are ritually "bathed" and painted nine days before the festival day, and are re-arranged in the shrine. The "bathing" and painting are

carried out in the inner court of the shrine housing the images by members of the central cult of community religious observances. Only members of this cult also exclusively do the carrying of the images out of, and into, the shrine. Nobody else is allowed to handle the images at this stage.

The central cult of community religious observances is currently headed by Chief Madam Oṣawèoyè Àsàndé, the Ìyá Oṣun (The chief priestess of Oṣun and highest priestly authority of all orisa worship in Oṣogbo - Plate 3). Membership of the cult include Chief Fọlọrunṣọ Babalola (the Àwòrò - plate 4), Chief Madam Oṣunyóyin Àyóká (Ìwòrò) chief Madam Mopélólá Abike (Iworo), Chief Aríyányò Ajani Olagunju (Ìwòrò) Chief Mrs. Omílani Egbèdara (Ìwòrò), Chief Sangofunke Abike, Chief Oṣuntóògùn Oyèbamijí and Mr. Owólabí Àyíndé. The terms Àwòrò and Ìwòrò are membership titles of the cult. The titles are hierarchical: Ìwòrò is lower than Àwòrò, while those of them without any title are neophytes. The Atáọja and traditional ruler of Oṣogbo plays a supervisory role on the cult.

After the whole community has been informed about the date of the festival, members of the cult and many other adherents of traditional religion bring in extra good stuffs and new cloth is prepared. The food-stuffs brought in from the farm is supplemented with the ones obtained from the local markets. Every devotee dates his appointments from the coming festival - eight days; five days; the day after tomorrow; and then the vigil comes and the people greet each other, "Happy Festival of the Images" (E kú odún Ère).

The actual festival of the images at Osogbo lasts a whole day. The night vigil preceding it is observed at the premises of the Oṣun temple and house of Images (the central market shrine that houses the images) by members of the central cult of community religious observances, many other followers of traditional religion, as well as other interested persons. At dawn on the day of the festival, before people are astir, the Head cult-drummer uses his pressure-drum to sing the praise of Ṣònpònná, the Yoruba god of pestilence. One of the praise-songs rendered goes

thus:

Obalúayé, Obalúayé,  
 Ibà Baba-àgbà.  
 Odio, àgbàlagbà Ifè  
 Omọkúnrin wànkúkú wànkòkò.  
 Sònpòná fi'dí àpó so'le,  
 Abi'ja wàrà, bi Oba Kòsò.  
 Ogbọ'mọ odó kiguñ s'ona ofun  
 Oniwọwọ adó  
 Oru'mọ 1'ogun ikà dànù.

Fi'lé mi b̀nmi	)	
F'omo mi b̀nmi	)	
F'aya mi b̀nmi	)	
F'oko mi b̀nmi	)	Chorus
Fi baba mi b̀nmi	)	
F'iya mi b̀nmi	)	
Owọ Baba-agba.	)	

Obaluayé, Obaluayé,  
 Courtesy, elderly father.  
 Oodio, an aged person of Ife,  
 Strong and powerful young man.  
 Sònpòná who nails down the sheath to  
 the ground,  
 He who fights hastily like Sàngó the god  
 of thunder, the king of Koso.  
 He who uses pestle to push medicine down  
 the throat.  
 He with multifarious charms kept in ado.  
 He who makes one to destroy poisonous medicine,

Spare my household	)	
Spare my children	)	
Spare my wife	)	
Spare my husband	)	Chorus
Spare my father	)	
Spare my mother	)	
The honourable elderly man	)	

The supporting drummers join in beating the chorus and the whole praise-song is repeated a couple of times. The head-drummer then sings the praise of the other major Yoruba deities, namely, Oṣun, Ṣàngó, Oya, Ọbàtálá, Ọrúnmìlà, Eṣu and Ọgún.

As soon as the drummer finishes sounding the praise song of the last deity, the Àwòrò (the senior cult priest) and other agile members of the cult sing and dance about the town. They are accompanied only by their voices and drummers beating their drums. The only sound produced with the pressure-drums, which the team chants over and over again in a lilting rhythm is the chorus given above. This aspect of the festival is simply a harbinger of the major aspects, which come up later in the day.

Shortly after the harbinger group has returned to the shrine, the cult members proceed to the inner court. There is dead silence. A big ram is led in by two of the cult men and killed on the ground in front of the shrine altar. Some of the blood is collected in a basin and sprinkled on the images, while the rest is allowed to sink into the ground

to propitiate the spirits of the earth (Irúnmolè).  
A prayer session follows.

The men take the carcass of the slaughtered ram to a corner outside the shrine complex. A fire is made and the carcass is laid over to singe off the hair. This done, the bowel is opened up and the gut is removed. The remaining parts are separated and cut in pieces. They are all thoroughly washed in water and put in a large pot. Coindiments are added and the pot is placed over the fire and left to simmer.

Nearby, the women are boiling water in large pots to make stable food items, namely, yam-flour meal (àmàlà), cassava-flour meal (èbà), bean-cake (àkàrà) and steamed blended beans with coindiments (móinmóin) Basket-fulls of corn meal wrapped in leaves (èko) have been prepared on the eve of the festival and kept in the shrine pantry.

Preparation of food does not end until around noon. But whilst this is going on, the images are brought out of the shrine and arranged along the verandah outside the shrine complex (Plates 2a & b) where they remain-in-state till late in the afternoon

when the procession begins. A number of rituals featuring praise-singing, drumming and dancing, sacrifice and feasting take place at regular intervals throughout the time the images are in state.

#### First phase of the rituals

Once the arrangement of the images is completed, the food items that are ready are brought out and laid before the images. These include lumps of eko, bean-cake (àkàrà), yam porridge, cooked beans and vegetables, àádùn (corn powder mixed with palm-oil, pepper and salt), ripe bananas, salt and honey. A basin containing kolanuts is also brought and put in front of the images. There is continuous drumming as the stage is being set. People start trickling in (Plate 5). Some come with various kinds of presents for the deities while others, just passers-by who are obviously attracted by the images and the drumming, call to look at the images and watch what is to happen next.

The stage having been set, the Ìyá Ọ̀ṣun moves to the row of images and sits in front of the one close to the middle - the Ọ̀ṣun goddess symbol, before which



the basin containing kolanuts is. The followers, that is, the senior priest (Àwòrò), the junior priests and priestesses (Ìwòrò) and the neophytes, seat themselves in front of some of the other images. The non-cult members present either sit on benches or stand in the vast open ground in front of the 'stage.'

Now, all is silent. The Iyá Ọsun presents the sacrifice of food before the images and addresses them in a soft voice (Plate 6). She offers the thanks of the people of Ọṣogbo to the gods for their protection over the people throughout the outgoing year. She explains that the people have brought many gifts for them and prays for the guidance and protection of the deities in the nascent dry season. She specifically requests Ọṣun and other deities to intercede with Ọbalúayé (originally known as Ẹ̀nṣònná) for the people of Ọṣogbo - to spare them and their children of the attack of small-pox and other virulent pestilence. These deadly diseases are believed to be manifestations of Ọbaluayé's anger and occur mostly in the dry season. She also prays for long life and prosperity for her people. Finally, she asks the deities

to accept the sacrifice the people have brought for them, swaying her hands across the things laid before the images.

The Chief Priestess (Iya Osun) then takes up a quatre lobate kolanut (obì àbàtà or obl-gidi) from the basin, breaks it open and casts the four cotyledons at once on the matted floor. It is significant to note that each of the kolanuts in the basin is four-valved. This species of kolanut is a traditionally important symbol used for divination. By contrast, the recently introduced variety, sterculia nitida (qóórò or gbànjá) is of no ritual significance.<sup>5</sup>

The throwing of kolanuts is probably the simplest Yoruba divination system. It apparently requires no great learning - unlike the Ifa oracle which can be carried out only by professional diviners. Through the kolanut divination the relationship with the deity is tested and adjustments are constantly made. The purpose of casting kolanuts at this stage of the festival, therefore, is to see whether the offerings are acceptable or not and whether the images, symbolizing the deities, are satisfied with the general well-being of the town; if the women who want children

will have them; if the sick will recover; and, more specifically, if the children as well as adults in the town will be spared the wrath of Obalúayé this dry season. The response of the images to the priestess' supplication is divined in the following way:

If all the cotyledons turn down this is greeted with the statement "security is guaranteed" (O p'òtá kú). If all are up, the divination is greeted with the words "health and peace" (àláfíà), that is, the deities are pleased. If three of the segments lie with the inner sides down, and one faces upwards, this appearance is greeted with the word kòyàn, an expression signifying dismay and disappointment and general anxiety because it denotes that the deities are so far not pleased with the ritual. In this respect, it is the job of the priestess, through further questions and casting of the kola, to find out why they are displeased and what more they desire.

If three of the cotyledons turn up and one down, it is termed "manner" (ìwà), meaning that the previous conduct of the sacrifice has been acceptable, but something more is desired. If two valves turn down and two up, this is the best possible answer,

and general rejoicing occurs. This combination is greeted with the words ó yàn, literally meaning all things are in a state of equilibrium: the sacrifice is acceptable and the requests will be granted.<sup>6</sup>

As the chief priestess (Ìyá Ọ̀ṣun) bends down to inspect the fall of the kola, the faces of the onlookers are apparently tense with anxiety. Two of the valves turn up and the other two down. As she turns to the onlookers and announces ó yàn! the tense faces break into smiles and cries of èrò (soother). The kolanuts in the basin are then broken into smaller pieces and passed round all persons present to eat. The shared pieces, though small, are taken with great relish. Drumming is resumed instantly and the Iya-Ọ̀ṣun dances (Plate 7). The Priests and priestesses (Plate 8) and other cult members (Plate 9) get up from their seat in front of the images to the open ground also to dance.

More and more people, some in what appear to be their best clothes, arrive at the venue either with offerings or to look at the images. Some of the new arrivals, as well as other non-cult members who have already been there (Plate 10) join the dancing cult

members in dancing, singing:

Obalúáyé, Obalúáyé,  
 F'omọ mi b̀nmi.  
 F'okọ mi b̀nmi.  
 F'aya mi b̀nmi.  
 Fi'yà mi b̀nmi.  
 Fi baba mi b̀nmi.  
 Fi'lé mi b̀nmi

Obaluaye, Obaluaye,  
 Spare my children.  
 Spare my husband.  
 Spare my wife.  
 Spare my mother.  
 Spare my father.  
 Spare my household

After this dancing session comes the first part of the feast of the festival. The Iya-Osun now places a handful of each of the various foods in the big basket and bowl in a plate and puts it at the feet of the image symbolizing Obalúáyé (Ṣonpónná). She also repeats this at the feet of the symbols of Oṣun and Obàtálá, and at short distances along the line in front of the other images in a way that suggests that the food-content of each of the plates are to be shared by two or three images. Each plate of food is accompanied by a basin of water so the images can have a drink after eating. The food items remaining in the basket and bowl are passed round all the people present. Thus the images and the people all symbolically partake of the same food at the same time.

Having finished this, all the participants and onlookers wait patiently chatting to themselves while some walk from time to time up to the altar to gaze silently at the images. A basin of water is also

### Second phase of the rituals

The period between the first-meal and midday is continually punctuated by the head-drummer ushering in important visitors to the festival with the beats of his pressure-drum. Also with the drum he sounds the praise-songs (oríkì) of the deities one after the other. As he does this, votaries of various traditional Yoruba deities such as Obàtálá, Oya, Oṣun, who are present, get forward to pay their respect. They look at the symbolic image of their god/goddess, pass in front of it reverently, then sing and dance.

Soon after midday, the ram-stew is ready. It is poured into a bowl and carried to the middle of the altar where the images are arranged as if in state. Also brought to the altar are baskets containing wrapped yam-flour meal (àmàlà) and cassava meal (èbà) and a bowl of cooked vegetables.

The chief priestess (Iyá-Oṣun) puts some of the choicest pieces of meat in a plate and places it

together with some lumps of àmàlà and èbà, as well as some of the cooked vegetables, at the feet of the image symbolizing Oṣun - which is placed in the middle of the row of images. A basin of water is also put on the altar - presumably for the images to drink after their meal. More kolanuts are cast - presumably to determine that the images are pleased and that the people may join them in partaking of the sacrifice. There are indications that all is well: the chief priestess smiled and started dancing even before drumming is resumed. The remaining food, stew, meat and vegetables are passed round the participants to share.

The period between this second part of the feast and the cooling hours of later afternoon is filled with praise-songs (oríkì) of the deities, especially Obalú-ayé, and dancing. The praise-chanting is carried out by some old women cult members who urge each other on and who remind each other of more and more of the traditional praises to the deities. The drummers likewise recite the praises with their drum-beats as they supply the rhythm for the dance.

Honour, to you, the elderly father.  
 Obalúyá, Obalúyá,  
 Honour to you, the elderly father.

### Procession with the Images

The procession begins in the late afternoon amidst vivacious music. The images are carried on heads on which head pads are first put. These help to balance the weights of the images as well as cushion their hard effects on the head (Plates 11a, b & c). The Àwòrò, the chief priest, leads the way. But the chief priestess (Ìyá Ọ̀ṣun) and Arèsà stay back in the house of Images or the central shrine, presumably for their senility. At the outset, there are lead drum-beats and choruses which are pleas to Ọ̀balúáyé to spare their lives:

Ìbà Baba-àgbà.  
 Ọ̀wò Baba-àgbà.  
 Ọ̀balúáyé, Ọ̀balúáyé,  
 Ìbà Baba-àgbà.

E jẹ́ n'ò'nlẹ̀ léèrè,  
 Bì o jẹ́ 'a jó;  
 E jẹ́ k'íá b'ò'nlẹ̀ léèrè,  
 Bì o jẹ́ a jó.  
 Ìbà Baba-àgbà.

Filé wa b̀nwa )  
 F'omò wa b̀nwa ) Chorus  
 F'aya wa b̀nwa )  
 F'okò wa b̀nwa, etc)

Homage to you, the elderly father.  
 Honour, to you, the elderly father.  
 Ọ̀balúáyé, Ọ̀balúáyé,  
 Homage to you, the elderly father.



We obtain the landlord's permission  
 To permit us to dance  
 We ask the landlord  
 To permit us to dance.

Spare our household        )  
 Spare our children        )     Chorus  
 Spare our wives            )  
 Spare our husbands, etc)

As the procession nears the shrine of Eṣù, the drummers beat a special rhythm to the deity, Eṣù, and the whole procession change their dance steps to the special Eṣu-steps. As the people pass on to all the other shrines the drum rhythms also change and the dancers have to change their steps accordingly. It is believed that each òrìṣà responds best to his or her rhythm and to his own repertoire of praise-songs (oríkì). However, the images, more than anything else, form the cynosure of the whole crowd which surges along the streets between traditional mud-walls. Many people join the crowd and move along with it in order to have a closer gaze at the images. The spotty paintings on the images also contribute immensely to the emotional response of the people. They remind them (the people) of the dreaded manifestation of the wrath of Ọbalúáyé, which is small-pox.

Indeed, the appearance of the images as they are carried above the general level of the sea of heads is like an impressive and theatrical spectacle, at which the awe-stricken spectators share the experience of the make-belief appearance of Ọbalúayé. This sort of spectacle is similar to what Nietzsche saw in the Birth of Tragedy:

The chorus is now assigned the task of exciting the minds of the audience to such a pitch of Dionysian frenzy, that, when the tragic hero appears on the stage, they do not see in him an unshapely man wearing a mask, but they see a visionary figure, born as it were of their own ecstasy. . . . And this is nothing else than the Apollonian dream-state, in which the world of today is veiled and a new world, clearer, more intelligible, more vivid and yet more shadowy than the old, is, by a perpetual transformation, born and reborn before our eyes.

Thus says the Greek chorus and drama.<sup>7</sup> It is a "new world", free of smallpox and other symbolic manifestations of the wrath of Ọbalúayé, the Yoruba god of pestilence that the images are ritually placated before the very eyes of the spectators.

Beside the shrines, the procession visits each quarter head's (baálé's) house and ritually and symbolically clenses it of any pestilence that might be

lurking there. The symbolic cleansing takes the form of incantations made with some gestures by the Awòrò (the chief priest) to the invisible spirit of Ọbalúáyé and like the papal bulls, are considered infallible. The benefits of the preventive and curative powers of the deity is thus believed to be individually acquired in a communal therapeutic manner throughout the community.

The final place of call and turning point is the Ìdí Bábà shrine. This is the home-shrine of Ẹ̀nṣòṣòṣò. It is situated in the bush along Oṣogbo-Ibòkun road, some seven kilometres away from the "Ile Ere" (the house of images, that is, the central market shrine). The "Ìdí Bábà" shrine has a special importance to the followers of traditional religion in Oṣogbo because no "oriṣa" ceremony is complete until a last sacrifice has been given to Baba-Agbà (another appellation of Ọbalúáyé who is also called Ẹ̀nṣòṣòṣò). In the old days this shrine was in the forest but in recent years it has been encroached by farmlands and is now close to a main road and a path that leads right past it.

At the Idi Bábà shrine, the Awòrò pours some libation of palm-oil and palm-wine at the foot of

one of the sacred dracaena fragrans (pèrègún trees) saying some prayers. The actual annual sacrifice to Sonponna at this shrine usually takes place seven days before this outing of the images; hence there is no need for another elaborate sacrifice during the outing. Indeed, the outing of the images is regarded as the grand finale of the annual festival of the images.

When the sun is about to set, the procession returns to the starting point, that is, the central market shrine which houses the images (Ilé-Ère). The return procession goes through a different but shorter route. On their return the Atáója is visited in his palace which adjoins the Ilé-Ère. A short dance which he joins is made by the cult members. All the images involved in the procession are thereafter returned to the Ilé-Ère, where the deities they symbolize are ritually thanked for their participation. The origin of the festival<sup>8</sup>

The origin of the festival of images at Oşogbo dates back to the time of the Fulani wars in the mid-nineteenth century (See Chapter 2). Many refugees fleeing from the war-torn Yoruba towns like Oyo-Ilé, Oşfà and Erin-Ilé settled at Oşogbo and

its environs. The fugitives brought and have since been practising their various religions and other aspects of Yoruba culture.

Apart from Oṣun, other deities like Ọbàtálá, Ṣàngó and Ògún have their separate festivals. The deities are believed to have been responsible for the welfare and prosperity of the town, hence a collective festival of the gods was instituted. At first the votaries of each of the deities used to gather at the central market shrine with or without the symbolic images of their respective gods. The festival normally featured a great feast and sacrifice offerings by the devotees to the gods. The gods were invariably thanked for their benevolence throughout the past year and petitioned for fertility of women and land and protection, especially over the children, in the new year. Now, the central shrine itself houses the images representing all the major deities of the environment. The images in the central shrine as well as the ones brought in by the votaries symbolize the physical presence of the gods at the festival.

The festival has undergone some slight modifications since its inception. The procession of the

images as part of the rituals of the festival is a relatively recent development. Before the reign of Oyèdòkun Látòṅà II as the Atáọ́ja of Oṣogbo (1926-1943), all the rituals connected with the festival used to be carried out in the premises of the "House of Images" (Ilé-Ère) that is, the central market shrine.

In 1936 during the reign of Oba Látòṅà II, an unprecedented number of persons died within a short time during the dry season as a result of small-pox epidemic. The Atáọ́ja, realizing that the security and survival of his people were threatened, consulted Orúnmílà (the Yoruba god of wisdom) for a solution. The Ifá priest revealed that the terrifying malady was indeed a manifestation of the wrath of Ṣònpònná (the Yoruba god of ~~the~~ pestilence), the worship of which the reigning Atáọ́ja had been observing only superficially since the death of his forefather. The oracle prescribed that a ceremony featuring a great feast and sacrifice addressed to the supernatural forces, especially Ṣònpònná (otherwise called Obalúayé),<sup>9</sup> must be held in order to avert total disaster in the town. The ceremony should, above all, involve all the towns-

folk.

The Atáója, in consultation with the Iyá-Oṣun (chief priestess) and the Awòrò (chief priest) of the central cult of Oṣogbo community religious observances, thereupon decided to have a procession of all the sacred images in the town during the annual festival of the gods, which, incidentally, was just a couple of weeks ahead.

Apart from the existing symbol of Ṣònpònná (Plate 13) among the images in the Ilé-Ère, the Atáója commissioned a new one (Plate 14a & b) in readiness for the festival. This new image and all the old ones were carried round the town as scheduled and the small-pox epidemic subsided. Since that year the annual festival of images - the gods' images - has invariably been held at the beginning of the dry season. It is note-worthy that the dry season, because of its characteristic high temperatures and little or no rainfall, provides the ideal climate for the spread of small-pox. This explains why, throughout each festival of images at Oṣogbo, sacrifices and petitions are addressed generally to the gods but specifically to Oḃalúayé.

The significance of the festival

The festival of images at Oṣogbo was motivated by the need to bring the force and power of the spirits to bear upon the prevention of diseases, especially small-pox and allied pestilences, and for some assurance of security and survival. It is believed that the super-natural beings could help to ensure these if honoured, propitiated and petitioned in a traditionally prescribed pattern.<sup>10</sup>

Another need served by the festival is the desire for continuity and stability of the community. A paramount characteristic of traditional Oṣogbo life is a rigorous adherence to tradition. The small-pox epidemic which occurred in Oṣogbo in 1936 was attributed to Oba Látòṅà II's neglect of his forefather's worship of Ṣònpònná. The idea that ancestors are aware of all of the activities of man is, to a very large extent, responsible for a marked and firm conservatism that permits few deviations from the customs and practices of the past. This conservatism has been a powerful stabilizing factor for the people. If rites were enacted carefully in a traditional manner, the people would feel reason-



ably confident that all would go well. Problems or illnesses are interpreted as corrective measures of the deceased but watchful kinsmen. Therefore, the festival contributes to the maintenance of continuity and stability of communal beliefs and practices.

The images involved in the festival are the visible and tangible symbols by which the spiritual forces or powers of the deities are contacted. What the sculptures symbolize and the purposes they serve heighten the aura of sacredness with which they are surrounded. They thus function as emotional stimuli for religious responses which inspire increased worship and intense ritual activity.

The images being carried in procession attract members of the community and serve as crowd-pullers during the festival, ensuring the participation of as many community members as possible.

It is therefore important to note that the images are not mere decorative embroidery on the fabric of religion; they are a vital part of the process of the generation of force. The addition of sculpture raises the intensity and efficacy of

the ritual. The sculptures serve to evoke and associate with worship a level of spirituality. The tension of the spectators is obviously reduced on seeing the images; their fears are allayed and they are filled with fresh springs of vitality. Tragedy has been averted. The future is assured.

1. See E. Bolaji Idowu's Olofin, God in Yoruba Religion (London: Longmans, 1962), pp. 11-12.
2. For detailed account of Ifa Divination System, see "Ifa Cult" in S. O. Biobaku ed., Sources of Yoruba Culture (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1970), pp. 36-76. See also Evelyn Roscoe, "The Art of the Ifa Oracle" in African Arts, 8, No. 1, 1974, pp. 21-29.
3. Such writers include N.A. Leys, The Sociology of the Yoruba (Ibadan University Press), 1970, p. 269 and St. Wenger & F. Chesl, A life with the gods in their Yoruba homeland (Parlinger, Austria) 1963, pp. 74-75.
4. The verbal interpretation of the drum-beat was given as by Mr. Ibe Ayantunde Aro-Ilu, the cult Head-drummer, later on the day of the festival (9th December, 1991).
5. Onuora Nkomo describes the place of kola nut in the religious, economic, and social life of Nigeria. See "Kola Nut" in Nigeria Magazine, No. 71, December, 1961, pp. 296-305.
6. The interpretations of the ways the kola nut was to be fall were given as by Chief Folorunso Adedokun (Age 73 year) the 'Awofa', that is, the chief priest of the central cult of community religious observances in Osofo (Plate 4) - 9th December, 1991.
7. F. Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy; Reprinted in The Philosophy of Nietzsche (New York: Modern Library) 1971, pp. 118-19; and in The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Everyman's Library) 1957, p. 86.

## NOTES

1. See E. Bolaji Idowu's Olodumare, God in Yoruba belief (London: Macmillan) 1962, pp 77 & 176.
2. For detailed account of Ifa Divination System, see Wande Abimbola's "The Literature of the Ifa Cult" in S. O. Biobaku (ed.) Sources of Yoruba History (Oxford: Clarendon Press) 1973, pp 41-62; and "The Ifa Divination System" in Nigeria Magazine (FESTAC Edition) No. 122-123, 1977, pp 36-76. See also Evelyn Roache's "The Art of the Ifa Oracle" in African Arts, Vol. 8, No. 1, 1974, pp 21-25.
3. Such writers include N.A. Fadipe, The Sociology of the Yoruba (Ibadan University Press), 1970, p. 269 and S. Wenger & Gert Chesi, A life with the gods in their Yoruba homeland (Perlinger, Austria) 1983, pp 74-9.
4. The verbal interpretation of the drum-beat was given me by Mr. Sule Ayantunde Are-Ilu, the cult Head-drummer, later on the day of the festival (9th December, 1991).
5. Onuora Nzekwe describes the place of kolanut in the religious, economic and social life of Nigeria. See "Kolanut" in Nigeria Magazine, No. 71, December, 1961, pp 298-305.
6. These interpretations of the ways the kolanut valves fall were given me by Chief Folorunso Babalola (Age 73 year) the "Awòrò", that is, the chief priest of the central cult of community religious observances in Osoḡbo (Plate 4) - 9th December, 1991.
7. F. Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy; Reprinted in The Philosophy of Nietzsche (New York: Modern Library) 1871, pp 218-19; and in The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Everyman's Library) 1967, p. 66.

8. I gathered this history of the origin of the Oṣogbo festival of Images from Oba Iyiṣa Oyewale Mátànmì III, the present Atáṣja (13 December, 1991).
  9. See Chapter 4 of this dissertation for detailed euphemistic appellations of Ṣònpònná.
  10. G. D. Ekpenyong observed that religious activities or worship play a very prominent role in most Yoruba festivals. See her article, "Festivals in Nigeria: A Bibliography" in Nigeria Magazine, No. 136, 1981, p. 31. For some related opinion on meaningful appraisal of works of art of any community see C. A. Cone & P. J. Pelto, Guide to Cultural Anthropology (Illinois: Scott, Foresman & Company) 1967, p. 95.
- Èrè, used in a singular or plural sense, is therefore the Yoruba word for "sculptural image." Many of such images are sacred and used in traditional Yoruba religious worship. The Oxford Dictionary of the Yoruba Language defines Èrè as "Image, Idol or statue." However, the common usage of the word by the Yoruba does not confuse it with the spiritual beings that the sacred Èrè represents. To the Yoruba, Èrè is simply an accepted symbol of the spiritual being that is worshipped - like a crucifix in a christian church. The image is never taken to be the deity itself or a residing place for the spiritual

## CHAPTER 3

## THE IMAGES: CLASSIFICATION &amp; STYLES

The word "Image" as used in this thesis refers primarily to representational art forms. The form of such representations may be three-dimensional or two-dimensional. If it is three-dimensional, the Yoruba call it Ère. Adepegba distinguishes this interpretation of the word "Image" from the Yoruba interpretation of the two-dimensional figural form, which is called àwòrán - the short form of àwòránfí.<sup>1</sup>

Ère, used in a singular or plural sense, is therefore the Yoruba word for "sculptural image." Many of such images are sacred and used in traditional Yoruba religious worship. The Oxford Dictionary of the Yoruba Language defines Ère as "Image, Idol or statue".<sup>2</sup> However, the common usage of the word by the Yoruba does not confuse it with the spiritual beings that the sacred ère represents. To the Yoruba, Ère is simply an accepted symbol of the spiritual being that is worshipped - like a crucifix in a christian church. The image is never taken to be the deity itself or a residing place for the spiritual

being. Ulli Beier rightly describes the significance of ere in traditional Yoruba religion in the following words: "It embellishes the shrine, creates atmosphere and stimulates religious feeling."<sup>3</sup>

The Yoruba believe in a supreme God, Olodumare, but their ritual activities centre round the various lesser divinities, òrìṣà. Relationship between Olodumare and the òrìṣà has been variously described. Some writers have said that they are little more than messengers who carry sacrifices to God.<sup>4</sup> Others have compared them to the Roman Catholic saints who intercede with God on behalf of man.<sup>5</sup> Idowu regards the òrìṣà as "Ministers of Olodumare", who look after the affairs of the universe and act as intermediaries between Him and the world of men.<sup>6</sup> All told, Olodumare is very strong in the awareness of the Yoruba people. He is the most powerful force in the world - one force from whom everything emerges, and the òrìṣà are spiritual, supernatural, part-representations of Him. Originally, the images were about

The òrìṣà are numberless, variously put at one thousand seven hundred, or four hundred and one.<sup>7</sup> The actual number is not known. Of the large number

of the gods worshipped in Yorubaland, the majority are of only local importance, their worship being confined to particular communities because they are guardians of the communities concerned. Some are even spirits of hills and rivers. A small number, however, are of "national" importance - worshipped everywhere in Yorubaland every year. These include Ọ̀bàtálá, the creator deity and senior òrìṣà; Orúnmilá, the god of wisdom and divination; Eṣu, the messenger that receives sacrifices for other deities erroneously called "trickster" by many people; Ògún, the god of iron and war; Sònpònná, the god of small-pox and other pestilences; and Oriṣa-Oko, the god of agriculture.

However, only few of the images involved in the Oṣogbo festival of images represent the gods (òrìṣà) that are worshipped nationally by the Yoruba. A considerable number of them represent local ones while others simply represent cult members or priests and priestesses. Originally, the images were about thirty-six, but four of them were reported stolen and probably smuggled out of the country in 1970.<sup>8</sup> All the remaining images are wood-carvings, thirty-

one free-standing and a composite one consisting of a big figure flanked by ten smaller figures. There are also two face masks, òtònpòrò. All the images are made after human form, male and female, of varying sizes and heights and in standing position.

The images that symbolize deities:

Şònpònná

This is the deity in whose honour the festival of the images at Oşogbo is held annually. According to a tradition, Şònpònná (Plates 13 and 14a & b) was born in the Nupe country where he was a warrior and king,<sup>9</sup> deified after his death.

Şònpònná instils great fear in the mind of people because of the deadly disease, small-pox, and other pestilences which the people believe he inflicts on those he is angry with. He is so dreaded by the Yoruba that they call him a number of euphemistic appellations. The appellations, which best reflect his personality in Yoruba consciousness, include: Qbalúayé ("King who is Lord of the earth"). This is probably the more common and less offensive of the salutations; Baba-Àgbà ("the elderly father");



Olóde (the Lord of the open space which comprises of the ground on which man treads, builds and cultivates. He is also called A sòro pè l'èèrùn ("one whose name is dangerous to mention in the dry season"). Care is taken, especially during the dry season when, as already indicated, small-pox is common and the festival in his honour is held. Other appellations of his are Ilè'gbóná ("Hot earth") and Alápadúpé ("One who should be thanked for killing").

When a person has small-pox or suffers any of the afflictions believed to be caused by Ṣònpònná, the Yoruba describe the situation in a way that betrays their dread of, and respect for, the divinity. They claim the victims are in the servitude of the king, o nsin oba; or is being afflicted by hot earth, Ilè'gbóná nbáà jà. Because Ṣònpònná is called Ilè'gbóná, the Yoruba traditionally do not say Ilè'gbóná ("The ground is hot") when the ground is truly hot in the dry season. They euphemistically say Ilè' tutù ("The ground is cold") - the opposite of what they mean.

Before now that Western medicines are used for curing the disease, a white flag used to be raised

before the house of someone suffering from small-pox to mark the temporary shrine or abode of the dreadful god. Because the god is believed to be fond of palm-wine - a drink that has a very cooling effect especially in the dry season, big gourds full of the wine used to be set by the entrance of the house. Plenty of the wine was also poured out on the threshold. The wine poured out dries up instantly and the one in the gourds normally evaporated very fast. This happened because of the hot and dry weather characteristic of the season when small-pox is most rampant. But the Yoruba believe that the palm-wine disappeared fast because the god took it with great relish. Red palm-oil also used to be poured out for him because of its soothing effect, and the oil used to be kept in a container alongside the gourds of palm-wine. Other sacrificial items for the god of pestilence include fish, cock, camwood "cream", powdered corn mixed with palm-oil and salt (àádùn), sugar-cane, honey, snail and a variety of Yoruba staples.

A victim of small-pox usually had his body rubbed with a cream made up of powdered camwood

(osùn) and palm-oil throughout the healing period. Indeed, no medicine - western or traditional - used to be applied. Even sacred medicines and charms used to be removed from the house of someone afflicted by small-pox, otherwise, it would amount to challenging the king's authority. The belief is that such an action was a taboo to him. If Ṣònpònná "enters" a house by way of affliction and any counteracting medicine was used, the whole house or community would, according to the people, severely pay for it. For this reason, Ṣònpònná is also called A ru'mo l'ógùn dānù ("one who causes medicines to be thrown away or ineffective"). Even to isolate someone afflicted by his infectious emissions would be impertinence towards the god.

The people do not mourn a dead victim of small-pox or any other pestilence attributed to the god, for death is believed to be the final reception into the ranks of those closest to him or the affectionate of his slaves (erúu Baba).

It used to be the task of his priests to treat his victims (mainly a ritual treatment, since deconterminating medicines were forbidden) and also

their duty to bury the dead victims. All properties of those who died of the god's "sting" used to fall to the priests, who were not only immune but versed in traditional methods of cleansing themselves of the disease.

Members of the cult of Şonpòná were fond of threatening to "fight" anybody or any community, using the weapons of Şonpòná. It was believed that they usually had in their possession some virulent preparations made up of powdered scrabs of the skins of small-pox victims, or fluid which they obtained through the action of the weather and putrefaction from corpses of victims which could stealthily spread the disease. Idowu recounts how this type of incident was traced to a proficient undertaker during an epidemic of small-pox in a Yoruba town sometime ago.<sup>9</sup>

In 1917, Dr. Oguntola Şapara, an English-trained medical doctor, swindled himself into initiation as the son of a family involved in Sonponna cult in Ibadan. He eventually denounced the god's worshippers and made some stunning revelations on how the disease germs of small-pox had often been exploited with

disastrous consequences by unscrupulous members of the cult. Following this exposure, it was held that members of the cult were instrumental in spreading small-pox. The cult was prohibited by order of the Colonial Authorities that year. All identified *Ṣònpònná* priests were arrested and all their ritual paraphernalia, including symbolic images, were confiscated by government.<sup>10</sup>

The foregoing action of Colonial government virtually dealt a death blow to the cults of *Ṣònpònná* throughout Yorubaland. The intensification of western education and introduction of vaccine in the wake of Dr. Sapara's revelations neutralized most of the rituals of the cult of *Ṣònpònná* and put small-pox and other pestilence under effective control. For instance, the "Oshogbo District Native Authority (Public Health) Rules of 1952" made under Chapter 183 of the Public Health Ordinance (Appendix II) spells out regulations designed to keep sanitation of premises and infectious diseases under effective management.

Nonetheless, it is difficult to totally eliminate a cult with such a tremendous potency among

the Yoruba. Even now, the cult still exists openly in some towns and villages. However, such an existence is merely a shadow - an echo - of its old awful perception. In fact, what happens now, generally, is that descendants of old members of the cult of Ṣònpònná endeavour to keep the worship of the god alive in form of annual festivals in order to avert possible disastrous consequences of neglect of such traditional beliefs and practices.

Ṣònpònná is symbolized in two different ways in the Oṣogbo group of images. The two symbols are however anthropomorphic, just as all the images in the group are, and they both reflect the historical background and people's conception of the attributes of the god. One of the symbols is free-standing, while the other is composite.

The free-standing symbol (Plate 13), 1.5 metres high, is the only equestrian statue in the whole group. It reflects the initial iconography of Sonponna as a warrior on horse-back with a spear held in one hand, which suggests the dignity appropriate to the king in his earthly life - "the lord of the Earth." Horse is symbolically regarded as a vehicle of power. Obviously, this is the reason why the

adherents of Ẹ̀ṣ̀nṣ̀nṣ̀ná chose it as the symbol of their god.<sup>11</sup>

A similar equestrian figure holding a club and also symbolizing Ẹ̀ṣ̀nṣ̀nṣ̀ná is among the columnal statues in the temple of Ẹ̀ṣ̀ngó at Akúrú quarters in Ibadan (Plate 28b). Chief Omikunle Omàmoḡbà Akúrú, a centenarian who is the chief priest and custodian of the temple, gave me this information on August 24, 1992. He added that some of the other columnal statues in the temple (Plates 28a and 28c) symbolize some of the major Yoruba deities while the others represent some Ẹ̀ṣ̀ngó cult members. The spotty painting on the statues which is characteristic of small-pox symbol is, according to Chief Akúrú, reminiscent of the affinity between Ẹ̀ṣ̀ngó and Ẹ̀ṣ̀nṣ̀nṣ̀ná. The two of them were said to be brothers, born of the same parents, and that Ẹ̀ṣ̀nṣ̀nṣ̀ná was the younger. This belief is so strong that the worshippers of Ẹ̀ṣ̀ngó count themselves immune from molestation by Ẹ̀ṣ̀nṣ̀nṣ̀ná, and vice versa.

The belief about the common origin of Ẹ̀ṣ̀nṣ̀nṣ̀ná and Ẹ̀ṣ̀ngó is somehow confirmed by some of their individual appellations and praise-songs. For instance, Ẹ̀ṣ̀nṣ̀nṣ̀ná is described as "Baba mi, Gàmbàrì, omo kò

gb'édè ("My father, Gambari, who hails from those who do not understand Yoruba; or, "Gambari, Úkù-Úkù, Ará Alausa, Ara Tapa" ("Gàmbàrí, Úkù-Úkù, indigene of Hausaland, indigene of Nupeland"). Şonponná is also connected with Islam somehow. He is called On'mòle, Oba ní Mósálásí, Alágbádá ("The Muslim, King of the mosque, one who wears the voluminous garment").<sup>12</sup>

Şàngó is also sometimes described as A kéwú-gb'erú, Akéwú-gb'eşin, A ş'alùwálá nibi ofà gbé nròjò ("One so versed in Arabic reading as to win slaves and horses. One who performs oblations under a rain of arrows"). These appellations and praise-songs seem to relate the two deities to the North of Yorubaland and Islam.

As in the case of almost all traditional Yoruba equestrian statues, for example, Plates 13 and 28a, the horse in the Şonponná symbol is extremely small in proportion to the rider. But the carver of the Şonponná symbol has succeeded in creating an impression of latent motion by inclining the rider.

The composite figure that contains the second symbol of the god (Plates 14a & b), 1.2 metres high, was carved in 1936; but nobody now remembers the



carver. It was commissioned by Oba Oyedokun Latòná II, the Atáója, when, as already indicated, he was advised to resuscitate the worship of Şònpòná in order to avert the destruction of his subjects by small-pox. The carving consists of eleven figures carved out of a single block of wood but arranged in two tiers. The lower tier is made up of four figures symbolizing four other deities (Ọbátálá, Şàngó, Ọgún and Erinlẹ); while the upper tier consists of the principal figure, "Ọbalúáyé", and six attendants. The variation in the symbol of Ọbalúáyé and those of the other deities particularly in their arrangement into upper and lower tier, is not hierarchical. The figure symbolizing Ọbalúáyé is however made biggest probably because the whole composite carving was commissioned and produced in his honour.

In this sculptural composition, Şònpòná (Ọbalúáyé) is symbolized both as a king and as a dynamic Islamic dignitary with the characteristic flowing garment, short but thick turban, royal beads, rosary and well-trimmed beard.

This composite carving resembles a typical Epa mask of the North-east Yoruba without the mask base. Epa masks usually consist of two parts: the mask

proper and a superstructure. The superstructure usually contains many figures, but both helmet part and superstructure are invariably carved out of one block of wood. The highly stylized forms of Epa masks contrast with the more naturalistic treatment of the superstructure. (Plates 33 & 34).

All the figures in the composition are rendered with stylized naturalism. They are all dwarfish. The principal figure has three horizontal face markings on each cheek, three short vertical ones on the forehead and a long one placed diagonally between the left cheek and the nose and mouth. The facial features of all the figures are stereotypical. The nose and the mouth are typically negroid, being thick and wide. The eye takes either of two forms: ellipse or semi-circle, and is painted white with a black spot, representing the iris and pupil, in the middle. The ears are placed far back on each side of the head.

The rendering of the attendants on the top tier is also stereotypical. Apart from the facial features, their caps and dresses are uniform. The only exception is the only female figure in ordinary

wrapper and plaited hair. The six attendants are symmetrically grouped on both sides of the principal figure, and the ones at the extreme right and left are blowing heraldic trumpets. The dresses of the figures in the lower tier are slightly different from those of the figures in the upper tier: the former are in trousers while the latter are in shorts. However, their bodies are all painted red and their dresses black and white, except for one of the four figures in the lower tier (Plate 14b), which represents Ọbàtálá and is thus painted in the symbolic white of the deity, with a touch of red for the eyes and black for the beard. Only the Ọbàtálá symbol breaks the frontality rendering of the whole carving by facing backwards.

The iconography of the composite carving reflects the social, political and religious life in Oṣogbo by 1936 when it was produced. As I said in Chapter two of this dissertation, Islamic religion had taken root in Oṣogbo by 1936. Also, colonial administration had established courts of justice and maintained a Police Force. The Police Force was categorized into two, namely, Nigeria Police and Local Authority Police. Traditional rulers in Yorubaland then had a number

of palace attendants and messengers called "Akoda" whose official uniform was similar to that used by the Local Authority policemen (Plate 32a). This uniform corresponds with the one depicted on the attendants of Sonponna in the composite carving.

It is worthy of note, too, that Ọba Oyedokun Látònà II, the Atáọja who commissioned the carving, was a Muslim before his ascension to the throne (although his position automatically made him a member of all religious groups in his domain). Besides, his lineage face markings are identical to the ones on the face of the principal figure (symbolizing Ọ̀nponná) in the composite carving.

This observation about the corresponding socio-political and religious background and face markings corroborates the views expressed by scholars against the usual practice of the Yoruba in associating their images with their deities. For instance, Frobenius says:

We shall learn further on that the figures and other fragments and symbols are never actual representations of the gods, but rather of priests and others engaged in sacrificial or other ceremonials in honour of some particular deity. . . . In most cases the native is quite wrong in claiming a particular image as

being that of a particular deity.<sup>13</sup>

and, according to Adepegba,

... A pointer to the fact that most of the images do not represent the gods is the fact that the Yoruba face markings which are seen displayed by the images are according to families or lineages. Therefore, unless the gods are thought of as being members of the different families of worshippers, the artists did not have the image of any gods in mind.<sup>14</sup>

Therefore, the conception of Ṣonpònná as an Islamic dignitary and king with specific face markings by the carver of the composite figure was most probably influenced by the personality of Ọba Látòṅà II who commissioned the carving. The uniform on the attendants in the carving is also reminiscent of the uniform used by the Akòḍà (palace attendants) and Local Authority policemen of the time. All told, the symbols of Ṣonpònná and those of the four other gods in the composite carving, are representations of persons but not actually of the gods.

It is also noteworthy that the practice whereby two different images (one, an equestrian statue and the other, representing an Islamic dignitary and king) are used to represent a deity is another convincing

evidence that Yoruba images do not represent the gods in person; rather, they are made-up symbols intended to create religious atmosphere and serve as convenient means of concentrating attention during worship.

### Òrìṣà-nlá

Orisa-nla is believed to be the senior and head of all the òrìṣà of the Yoruba. He is also called Obàtálá. He is credited to be the god of creation who assists the supreme God in all matters connected with the shaping and moulding of the physical appearance of human beings. He does this out of clay and presents the moulded forms to Olodumare (the Supreme God) to blow the breath of life into them.<sup>15</sup> Thus, Obàtálá has been given the prerogative to create as he chooses, so that he makes men of shapely or deformed features. Any physical malformation is seen as a punishment or evidence of wrath from Obàtálá. For instance, the hunch back, the lame and the albinos are regarded as special creatures (Eni-Òrìṣà) principally because of their deformity.

This belief is not conceived as historical for the Yoruba say that Obatala still creates every child in the womb. So, in order to secure the favour of

Ọ̀bàtálá, the traditional Yoruba sing:

Ènì ẹ̀'ojú ẹ̀'e'mú;  
Ọ̀riṣa nì mǎ sìn.

A dá'ni b'ó tì rí;  
Ọ̀riṣa nì mǎ sìn.  
Ènì rǎn mǐ wá;  
Ọ̀riṣa nì mǎ sìn.

He who makes the eyes, and the nose;  
It is Orisa that I will serve.

He who creates as he chooses;  
It is Orisa that I will serve.

He who sends me here;  
It is Orisa that I will serve.

It is also believed that when Orisa-nla was coming down to the world, Olodumare invested him with some of His divine attributes in order to fit him for the delicate work of creation. This explains why Ọ̀riṣà-nlá represents to the Yoruba the idea of ritual and ethical purity and therefore the demands and sanctions of high morality.

Immaculate whiteness is associated with this Yoruba creator-god because the colour symbolizes "holiness" and purity, as well as calm, quiet contemplation. He is often pictured as clothed in white and bedecked with white ornaments (Plates 15, 31 and 32a & b). Votaries of this deity have a number of taboos such as that which forbids them to take palm

wine. They must eat only white food (without palm oil) on certain days and appear in white robes if not always, at least during the period of the festival in honour of their god, Qbàtálá's normal sacrificial meal is the bloodless snail cooked in shea-butter.

The water in Qbàtálá's shrine is changed daily with the cleanest and clearest water drawn very early in the morning from a spring. Worshippers of Qbàtálá are enjoined to be upright and true: they must be clear in their hearts and behaviour "so that their lives would be as clear and pure like water drawn early in the morning - when not disturbed" (kí ayé won kí ó le tòrò bí omi tí a f'òwùrò ọ̀n).

Other praise-songs of Qbàtálá include the following:

Ọ̀rìṣà Olúfón,  
Alaṣẹ, Alaṣẹ ọ̀là,  
Alámọ̀ tí nmo ọ̀rì,  
Alagbèdẹ ọ̀run, ab'ẹ̀wìrì í kù bí ọ̀jò,  
Alagbèdẹ ọ̀run,  
Bee, iwọ́ l'ó nwo ọ̀mọ̀ tí o ntun ọ̀mọ̀ rọ;  
Ire ni o rọ́ fún mi o.

Ìròkò ni baba igi,  
Awèrè ni baba ọ̀bọ,  
Ọ̀lómọ̀ ẹ̀kàtà ni baba àgbàdọ;  
Ọ̀rìṣà Olúfón, iwọ́ ni baba aláṣọ funfun,  
Ọ̀kọ abuké, ọ̀kọ aro, ọ̀kọ aràrá b'ori pètẹ.  
'Lere Ajọbọ, ikú tí gbogbo wa ọ̀ nbo.



Aṣọ àlà l'ó gbó ti mo nró tòbí,  
 Aṣọ àlà l'ó gbó, ki n ma wá oníṣésé 'fun lọ.  
 Akintondé, bi oníde ntaà ni egbèjé,  
 Owo t'emi kò si nibe  
 Egbèrindínlógún ni n o r'òjé,  
 Ibi dandan-ndan ni ki o maa bá oníde.

Orìṣà Olúfón  
 Conjurer, Conjurer of riches  
 The moulder who moulds the head,  
 The blacksmith of heaven, whose bellows  
 sounds like thunder  
 The blacksmith of heaven,  
 Thus it is you who takes care of the  
 child and remoulds the child.  
 Mould goodness for me.

Irókò (tree) is the father of all trees.  
 Awèrè is the father of all monkeys/apes,  
 Olomọ síkàtà (maize with scattered grains)  
 is the father of all maizes,  
 Orìṣà-Olúfón, you are the father of all  
 weavers of white cloths  
 Lere Ajoḅo, death that we all worship.

It is the white clothe that is old that  
 makes me tie an apron to the loin,  
 It is the white clothe that is old which  
 has made me to look for onisesefun.  
 Akintonde, if the brass owner is selling  
 it for three and half kobo  
 My own money is not there.  
 I will buy lead for eight kobo  
 At all cost evil shall befall the brass-  
 owner.

This deity is known by different names in different parts of Yorubaland. The mode of worship also vary in all the places where the deity is religiously worshipped. For example, it is known as Orìṣà Oglyán at Ejigbo; Òrìṣà'kire, at Ikire; Òrìṣà alaṣọ funfun

at Iragbiji; Orisa-Olufon at Ifon; and Obatalá in very many places. However, it is significant to note that all the statues symbolizing Obatalá are painted white throughout Yorubaland. This is evidenced not only in the two images of Obatalá in the Oṣogbo group of images (Plate 14b and 15) but also in the columnal group of images at Akúrú quarters in Ibadan (Plates 28a & b). Indeed, worshippers of Obatala have equally been so consistent in their wearing of white dresses and ornaments, especially during the worship of the deity (Plates 31 and 32a<sup>b</sup>), that the traditional Yoruba do not hesitate to associate any sacred material or object in white to Obatalá. This phenomenon may provide an exception to Carroll's assertion that the Yoruba name some images specifically after some of their traditional gods. According to him:

The people do sometimes identify a carving as Sango, Obatala, Oduduwa, etc., but there is usually nothing in the carving to support the identification.<sup>16</sup>

This consistency in colour association also contradicts his view that "Esu is the only òrìsà with a distinctive character whom I find actually

portrayed".<sup>17</sup> While there is consistency in the (white) colour used to paint Obatala symbols, Esu has been variously portrayed in sculptural forms. He is sometimes portrayed riding a horse with his pipe and pigtail and his club for making trouble;<sup>18</sup> as a Janus-headed god;<sup>19</sup> or with a kind of crest or head-dress protruding from the back of the head.<sup>20</sup>

### Ògún

The statue in Plates 21a & b symbolizes Ògún, the Yoruba god of iron and steel and therefore all things made from them. He is acknowledged as the deity of war and warriors, of hunters, smiths and mechanics, all engine drivers and machine menders; and of course, all who deal in anything made of iron and steel.

Because the impact of Ògún is felt almost everywhere, he is regarded as a presiding deity over oaths and covenant-making or the cementing of pacts. In our courts of justice people who are neither christians or Moslems take their oaths to "speak the truth and nothing but the truth" by kissing a piece of iron. The pact or covenant made before Ògún is considered most binding. Anyone who swears falsely by Ògún, or

breaks an oath or covenant made before Ògún, incurs his severe judgement: death, mutilation or deformity through gun-shot, matchet-cut or an engine or machine accident.

Although Ògún is more commonly associated with Ire and Shaki, he is known and worshipped all over Yorubaland. However, his cult exists more prominently in Ìrè, Ondo, Ileṣa and Ọka-Àkókó. His sacrificial meals vary according to localities as suggested in this ballad:

Ògún méje l'Ògún mi  
 Ògún Alará ni'gba aja;  
 Ògún On'Irè a gb'agbò  
 Ògún Ikọlà a gbà'gbín;  
 T'Eleṃona a je ẹsun iṣu  
 Ògún gbèṅgbèṅà ẹran ahun ni'je;  
 Ògún Makindé ni Ògún l'ẹhin odi -  
 Bì on kò bá gba Tápà, a gb'Abokí,  
 A gba Úku-úku, a gba Kẹmberí.

There are seven Ògún who belong to me,  
 Ògún of Alara takes dog;  
 Ògún of Ire habitually takes ram  
 Ògún of surgery habitually takes  
 snail;  
 That of Eleṃona takes roasted yam;  
 That of artisans takes the flesh of  
 tortoise while  
 Ògún of Makinde which is outside the  
 city-wall, where takes foreign enemies.

The emblems of Ògún are various. They may be metal-scrap, wrought or graven; or a plant called dracaena fragrans (pèrègún); a rock or a piece of

rock; or an anthropomorphic carving with a cutlass and shield. The Ògún shrine at Oşogbo has a fence of mud-wall enclosing pèrègún plants which dominates about half of the enclosed space. The god is also accorded an anthropomorphic representation in the Oşogbo group of images under discussion (Plates 21a & b). The coiffeur on the head of the statue is one of the most exciting of the images involved in the festival of images at Oşogbo.

Generally, projections bursting from the heads of most of the images vary in form, ranging from long-tail coiffeurs (Plates 21a & b) to special àgògo hair style (Plate 23), peaked hats and caps (Plates 11, 15, 16, 17 and 27) and felt-caps (Plates 13, 18, 20 and 24). The àgògo hair style is usually plaited by Şàngó and Oşun priests and priestesses. Peaked-caps and felt-caps are commonly used around Oşogbo so the carver might have been influenced by environmental factors. Long-tail coiffeurs are however not common. In Oşogbo, long-tail caps, like the one depicted in Plates 21a & b and 25 are won mainly on ceremonial occasions by Ògún priests, especially the Head of the hunters (Olú-Ode) of the town.

Both visibly and metaphorically, the long-tail coiffeurs really suggest "command", because it is believed that potent medicines that enable things to happen, oògùn-àṣẹ, are embedded in them.

As already indicated, the image with long-tail coiffeurs in Yoruba art is particularly prevalent in Esu imagery. This is probably because Esu, as the messenger god, personifies action, generative power, and command - the ṣẹ that animates the Yoruba world.<sup>21</sup> However, the symbolic coiffeur associated with Esu should not be lumped together in terms of content-association with all other projections from heads of Yoruba images as Drewal has done when he says,

All head-projections in the form of long-tail coiffeurs or peaked caps, blades, or phalluses . . . evoke the union and passage between this world and the realm of divine forces.<sup>22</sup>

Not all projections from the heads of Yoruba images are symbolic of ṣẹ. For instance, the type of peaked caps and felt-caps depicted on the heads of some of the Oṣogbo group of images (Plates 11, 13, 15, 16, 20 & 24 ) are not traditionally believed to be embedded with medicines.

### Oṣun

Oṣun is a river goddess. It is also widely worshipped in Yorubaland. The source of Osun river is in Igèdè-Ekiti but its most important shrine is in Oṣogbo.

According to Bascom's account of a related legend, Oṣun was a tall, light-complexioned and gorgeous woman with beautiful breasts and admirable hair. Conscious of her beauty, Osun would bathe several times a day and adorn herself with brass bracelets reaching from her wrist to the elbow. She was said to have turned herself into a river because the other gods kept fighting over her after the death of Ṣàngó (Oṣun was a favourite wife of Ṣàngó, the Yoruba god of thunder).<sup>23</sup> The special relationship that exists between the town of Oṣogbo and the òriṣà Osun lies in the myth that it was by her injunction that the town was founded on its present site (see chapter 2).

Like most Yoruba òriṣà, Oṣun is credited with the power to give children to barren women, cure diseases and fulfil all wishes.

In the town, there are two principal shrines

dedicated to her worship. The main shrine is inside the grove near the banks of the river named after her. This is the place where sacrifices are annually offered to Osun. The second shrine, the Oṣun Temple, is in the palace of the Atáṣija. It is here that the sacred brass images and bracelets, Edan Oṣun, are kept. They are usually brought out from the inner to the outer chamber of the temple and laid-in-state for people to see during the annual Oṣun festival.

The carving that symbolizes Osun among the wooden group of images involved in the Oṣogbo festival of images (Plates 16a, b & c) is 1.25 metres tall. It manifests the carver's intuitive alteration of natural forms to suit the peoples' conception of the attributes of the goddess. Oṣun is believed to have supernatural power of sight to see everything within and beyond her territory, so she could easily forestall any invasion of the town. She is also believed to be capable of hearing everything - petition or propitiation. Hence, the artist has made the eyes of the image so large as to occupy about half of the whole face, leaving no room for the nose; while each of the ears occupies the whole side of the head and even projects down to the shoulder. The abnormally large eyes and ears are balanced at



the lower part of the carving by the Janus-faced pedestal on which it stands.

Oṣun-Ijùmú

Ijùmù is a Yagba Yoruba town with which Oṣun is associated. Oṣun-Ijùmú (Plate 17) symbolizes the deity of one of the tributaries to river Oṣun, hence it is regarded as Oṣun's messenger. Here, as in the case of Oṣun goddess symbol, the carver intuitively combines semi-abstract forms with natural ones to produce a conceptual reality of a spirit. The statue looks like siamese twins with one torso but two cyclopean heads. The fused torso backs what looks like a baby-monkey and the whole figure (.75 metres tall) stands on a Janus-faced pedestal.

Oṣun-Ipòndá

Oṣun-Ipòndá (Plate 18) symbolizes the goddess of river Ipònda, also one of the tributaries to river Oṣun and therefore one of her subordinates. River Ipònda flows into Oṣun at a point about thirty kilometres from Oṣogbo - around the original Ijeṣa homestead of the people of Oṣogbo. The statue, .7 metres tall, manifests all the external feminine features but has a peaked-cap on. Peaked-caps are traditionally worn by men.

Òkòòkò

Òkòòkò (Plate 19), .7 metres tall, represents the goddess of a river that bears the same name. The river flows right through the north-eastern part of Oşogbo township into river Oşun. The goddess is regarded as one of the numerous assistants of Oşun. The statue is depicted backing a baby but wearing a men's hat and holding what looks like a walking stick or a staff of office in one hand and a cult object in the other hand.

Ògbàágbàá

The carving in Plate 20 symbolizes Ògbàágbàá, the goddess of a small river that flows into river Oşun at a place about four kilometres to Oşogbo. This tributary itself is named Ògbàágbàá. The statue .75 metres tall, has almost everything to suggest the gender of the deity except that the felt-cap depicted on its head is usually worn by men.

2. Oşogbo images that represent the priesthood and worshippers

Ìyá-Olódò

Ìyá-Olódò is another name for Iyá-Oşun, that is, the chief priestess of Oşun cult in Oşogbo. The statue in Plate 22 (.4 metres tall) represents

a typical Iyá-Ọṣun. Because Ọṣun is the foremost traditional deity in Oṣogbo, the cult of Ọṣun is practically synonymous to the central cult of community religious observances and Iyá-Ọṣun is automatically the highest priestly authority of all òrìṣà worship in the town.

The Iyá-Olódò must be an elderly woman who has passed the age of child-bearing. The incumbent is succeeded on her death by someone else from the royal family. The choice is made through divination. The present Iya-Olódò is Madam Ọyawẹ́oyẹ́ Asandé (Plate 3).

Once a person is made Iyá-Olódò, she must pack her movable property into the Ọṣun temple, situated in the Atáọ́ja's palace. She then resides in the temple for the rest of her life together with some of the members of the cult of Ọṣun and central cult of the community's religious observances. Her main function is to oversee, on behalf of the Atáọ́ja, the general management of the cult objects in the Ọṣun temple and the house of the images, the central shrine that houses the images involved in the festival under study. For instance, at the Ọṣun temple, the "Iyá-Olódò" and the Àwòrò (Chief

priest) make offerings to the goddess of Ọṣun on special days called Ọṣẹ-Ọṣun, "Ọṣun weekly rituals", performed at intervals of four days, which make a traditional Yoruba week.

In the statue of Iyá-Olódò, the head is conspicuously exaggerated, being about a third of the whole body. However, the features of the face are about normal; and the statue is usually bedecked with colourful beads and gorgeous head-tie and wrapper.

#### Àwòrò

The statue in Plate 25 (.75 metres tall) represents Àwòrò, that is, the Chief Priest of the central cult of Ọṣogbo.

The Àwòrò must be a man who has stopped fathering children. He is usually appointed by the Atáọ́ja. His function complements that of Iyá-Ọṣun as regards the custody and general administration of all the cult objects and rituals in Ọṣun shrine and the house of the images. Specifically, the Àwòrò supervises the preparation of all sacrificial offerings meant to be administered by the central cult of community religious observances and leads the procession of images during the festival of

images. The present Awòrò is Chief Fọlọrunṣọ Babalọla (Plate 4).

The Aworo statue is depicted carrying cult objects in his hand. The features of the face are rendered in low-relief and virtually eclipsed by the spotty painting that characterizes all but one of the images involved in the festival of images at Oṣogbo. Although shorter, the long-tail coiffeur on its head resembles the one on the head of the Ògún statue (Plate 21b).

### Ìyá-Ayé

Ìyá-Ayé ("Mother of the world") (Plate 23), .8 metres tall, symbolizes all elderly women especially those who are believed to possess super-natural powers that enable them to operate in the physical and spiritual realms. In Oṣogbo, such women are said to belong to the Ògbóni society. The Ogboni society is one of the oldest cult groups in Yorubaland. It is an awe-inspiring society, popularly known as a secret society because of its passwords and secret rituals. Members of the Ògbóni society in any Yoruba town or village are mostly the elders who are renowned for their wisdom and their mystical and political prowess. The members are prominently

men, women members are comparatively few in number; but they are all held in the highest esteem.<sup>24</sup>

The image of a woman as "Mother and child" is a fundamental motif in Yoruba art. It evokes the rich and contented state of a mother which any Yoruba woman wishes to attain. No worship is also complete without the Yoruba soliciting for children or long life. The iconography of Iyá-Ayé without a child, either in her hands or on her back or around her, is therefore unimaginable.

#### Iyá-Şàngó

Iyá-Şàngó (Plate 27), .5 metres tall, depicts a Şàngó priestess carrying a baby on the back and standing on a make-belief head-mask pedestal which looks like an inverted pot with the features of the face drawn boldly with paints. The pedestal, as well as others like it in the Oşogbo group of images (Plates 17, 20, 23, 26 & 27), has no underneath hollow through which it could be worn like Èpa masks.

Şàngó is the Yoruba god of thunder. According to Rev. Johnson in his book, The History of the Yorubas, Şàngó was the fourth Aláàfin of Oyo. He was powerful, temperamental and eager to fight. He is said to be a tyrannical king who ruled his people

with iron hand. He was so oppressive that two of his lieutenants hatched a rebellion against him. However, Sango got to know of this and consequently set one against the other. The more powerful defeated the other and, after realizing Şàngó's plot, led his contingent against Şàngó. Eventually Şàngó committed suicide by hanging himself on a tree.<sup>25</sup>

The few supporters of Şàngó became objects of derision among the people. They there-upon sought for and got the medicine that could bring down lightning and thunder (symbolizing Şàngó's wrath) on their opponents. With this they harrassed and tormented their opponents into reversing their slogan from "The king hanged himself" (Ọba so) to "The King did not hang himself." (Ọba kò so).

Since the period Sango's wrath was symbolically brought to bear on his detractors after his death, the worship of Şàngó has become an annual event by his adherents. Shrines dedicated to him are more prominently located at Ọyọ, Ẹdẹ and Ibadan.

Most worshippers of Şàngó male and female, have Şàngó shrines in their individual houses (Plates 28a & c; 30 ). At the shrine of the most senior

member of the cult there are often heavy wooden bowls covered with large lids. The content of the bowls invariably include stone axes called "thunderbolts." The carved bowl, and sometimes the group of images, in the Sango shrine usually have white spotty painting on them - signifying, most probably, the relationship between *Ṣàngó* and *Ṣònpònná*.

The adherents of *Ṣàngó* often wear beads of red and white (*kòlẹ*) round their necks. Their hair-do is unique: it is in the form of an inverted semi-circle with fine finishings. This hair-do is called *Àgògò*. It is an identification trait of both male and female *Ṣàngó* worshippers as evidenced on the head of the *Iyá-Ṣàngó* statue.

The *Iyá-Ṣàngó* depicted in the Oṣogbo group of images (Plate 27) is comparable to a *Ṣàngó* priestess (Plates 29a & b) dancing during the 1991 annual *Ṣàngó* festival at Agbowo, Ibadan. However, the carving carries a child while the dancing priestess does not.

As already said, the image of a woman carrying a child either in her hands or on her back or having children around her (Plates 23 & 36c) is a fundamental motif in many Yoruba art forms and in many spheres



of Yoruba life. The Yoruba have always been preoccupied with the problems of fertility. Every worship, no matter of which the deity, is incomplete without solicitations for children or for their long life; it could also be for land fertility or better crop yield. The iconography of Iyá-Şàngó, Iyá-Ayé (Plate 23) and Yemoja (Plates 35 and 36c) as "Mother and Child" in this respect is therefore understandable.

### Àyàn

Àyàn (Plate 24) symbolizes the cult-drummer. The image is a generic symbol for the group of cult drummers as if representing those who supply ritual and secular music for Oşogbo. The word Àyàn is an appellation for anybody who comes from a family of traditional drummers in any part of Yorubaland. Indeed, Àyàn usually prefixes the name of such a person. For instance, the names Àyànyemi (Drumming pays and fits me), Àyànwálé (The Drummer reincarnates and comes back home) and Àyàngadé (The Drummer is enthroned) suggest the traditional family background of the bearers.

GENERAL OBSERVATION

The composite figure (Plates 14a & b), as already said, was carved in 1936 but nobody knows when the single free-standing ones were carved. Although nobody now remembers who carved the images, it is easy to see that they came from two different workshops. All the free-standing ones were apparently produced by the same artist, because of the similarity of the style, while the composite carving was made by another artist.

As I have said at the beginning of this chapter, both the free-standing statues and the composite one are made after the human figure, but the forms are somehow stylized and transposed with the natural proportions altered to suit the carver's artistic intentions. As in most of other African sculptural forms, spectators find in each of the Oṣogbo images an over-large head and a trunk too long for the legs. Each of the carvings, except the only equestrian statue, represents either male or female human figure set in a pose of alertness or attentiveness. The carver has made no attempt to portray emotions of fear, anger, or joy; rather, most of the images assume the semi-divine of dynamic relaxation: a perfect state of mind where

intense concentration seems to reside.

Although the images are each named after a deity or cult-official, no attempt has been made to represent individual personalities. The free-standing images are provided with pedestals, which vary in thickness and form (Plate 26). Some of the pedestals look like inverted pots comparable to Epa helmet masks with human head features boldly indicated on them. These are however make-belief masks because they have no hollow beneath them as in Epa masks.

The most dramatic features in the Oşogbo images is the projections bursting from their heads. The projections vary in form, ranging from long-tail coiffeurs (Plates 21a & b and 25) to peaked caps and hats (Plates 11c, 15, 16 & 17), felt-caps (Plates 13, 18, 20 & 24) and special hair-style (Plate 23).

The treatment of the facial features of the Oşogbo group of images vary. In some cases the eyes, nose, mouth and ear are rendered in low relief on the face and completely or partially covered with white spots (symbolizing small-pox) on brownish-red background (Plates 11 & 25). In some cases the eyes are prominent and bulging as if they are being pushed out by some

pressure from within (Plates 16a & b and 22). On many of the images, however, the facial features are highlighted with paints. The eyes are indicated with small black spots (representing the iris and pupils) in the centre of a big circular spot painted white, or vice versa (Plates 13, 17, 19 & 26).

The nose is completely covered with paints on most of the images. The mouth is equally eclipsed by paints on some of them. Where the mouth can be seen, it is generally indicated as two parallel bars (Plates 16a & b, 26 and 27). The ears are generally depicted by some stylized semi-circular shapes set far back on the sides of the head. Whereas the ears are not indicated on the image representing *Ọṣun-Ìjùmú* (Plate 17), they are uniquely treated on the symbol of *Ọṣun* (Plates 16a, b & c).

Indeed, the treatment of the eyes, mouth and ears on the image symbolizing *Ọṣun* deserves special mention. Each eye is boldly painted out in two circles, one inside the other. The two eyes occupy about half of the whole face and the mouth is indicated boldly as two parallel bars, leaving no room for the nose between the mouth and the eyes. Each of the ears is suggested with a bat-like structure that occupies the

whole side of the head and reaches down the shoulder. I was told that the special treatment of the features reflects the people's conception of the attributes of the goddess *Öşun*: she is believed to possess the power to see and hear everything as indicated on page 100.

The treatment of the facial features in the composite figure is slightly different from that of the free-standing figures. The rendering of the eye, nose and mouth on all the eleven figures is stereotypical and naturalistic. However, the eye takes the form of a semi-circle with a black spot in the centre representing the iris and pupil.

It is noteworthy that colour plays a very important role in the *Öşogbo* group of images. The images are usually "bathed" and repainted every year by the cult members shortly before the festival as indicated in Chapter 3. The spotty and linear motifs are invariably employed but the rendering of these on the images is slightly modified from year to year. Plate 16b manifests the *Öşun* symbol as it was painted and used in the 1990 procession of images, while Plate 16a is the same image as it was rendered and used for the 1991 festival. The way the eyes are exaggerated with paint

in Plate 16a conveys at once, and emphatically, the "all-seeing" attribute of the goddess Oṣun, which the exaggerated eyes suggest. This impression is complemented by the two parallel bars of paint used to suggest the mouth, and balanced by the boldly-painted part of human facial features on the pedestal below.

Unlike most of the other African sculptures where the application of paint is optional to the understanding of their contents, painting helps in the Oṣogbo images to further define the sculptural forms. In most cases painting even disregards the underlying sculptural details in order to help the beholder identify what the images represent. For instance, the application of spotty painting on all the free-standing images is very instructive on the purpose of the festival. This impression is more overwhelming in the case of Nana-Buku, "Ṣonṣoná's wife" (Plate 11c) and Awòrò (Plate 25) statues where every part of the figure, except the coiffeur and the lower limbs, is covered with the spotty painting. The spotty painting is symbolic of small-pox, and therefore the problem that the festival of images at Oṣogbo is out to avert.

Moreover, the painter apparently uses the small-

pox motif with a creative love of decoration to satisfy his aesthetic sense by applying the spotty painting, which designates the problem, in a rhythmically appealing way. One would naturally feel that the visual symbol of such an awfully dreaded Yoruba god as Sonponna should have a stark, awe-inspiring shape and repulsive features devoid of any embellishment. On the contrary, we find that the sizes of the spots are regular, their arrangement is rhythmical, and their transposition with lines is seemingly calculated. All these might have been done for no other reason than to give the images an attractive and pleasing appearance - possibly to attract many members of the community to the rituals.

The decorative rendering of the painting therefore connotes an euphemistic visual expression of the virulent scourge of small-pox. There is also a psycho-analytic interpretation of this euphemism. The Yoruba say Ohun tí o bá kojá ekún, èrín ni a fi rín, that is, "any unpleasant experience that is beyond shedding of tears should be laughed off" - obviously to neutralise or reduce its psychologically painful and dreadful effect of such a thing in one's mind.

Fears usually arouse two types of reaction in

human beings: flight (or evasion) and fight (struggle). In the case of a neurotic who chooses flight, this choice may end in panic or the collapse of the will to live. The painter of the Oṣogbo images chose to fight; and the attractive portrayal of the spotty small-pox motif on the images is evidently the painter's device to dominate the fear of small-pox, on behalf of the community, unloading it in the style the images are painted.

4. See J. Gleaner, Orisha: God of Yorubaland, (New York: Atheneum), 1961, pp. 48-119; J. S. Nwiti, African Religion and Philosophy (London: Heinemann) 1963, p. 76; and U. Fadipe, The Religiosity of the Yoruba (Ibadan: University Press), 1970, pp. 261-287.
5. Rev. H. Townson, Church Missionary (London: Gleaner) 1884, p. 18; and W. H. Suttles, "The Yoruba in Cuba," World Magazine, No. 37, 1951, pp. 14-20.
6. S. O. Osofisan (1982), *Op.cit.*, p. 63.
7. J. S. Nwiti (1963) *Op.cit.*, p. 75; S. O. Osofisan (1982) *Op.cit.*, p. 67; U. Fadipe (1970), *Op.cit.*, p. 269; and U. Beloni, The Return of the Gods: Sacred Act of Susanne Wenger (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge) 1975, p. 9.
8. Bill Peter (1975), *Op.cit.*, pp. 35-6.



## NOTES

1. C. O. Adepegba, "The Essence of the Image in the Religious Sculptures of the Yoruba of Nigeria", Nigeria Magazine, No. 144, 1983, p. 14.
2. A Dictionary of the Yoruba Language (London & Ibadan: Oxford University Press), 1913 (rpt. 1976), p. 71.
3. Ulli Beier, "The Story of Sacred Wood Carvings in one small Yoruba town," Nigeria Magazine, Special Issue, 1954 (pages unnumbered). See also E. B. Idowu, Olodunare God in Yoruba Belief (London: Longmans) 1962, p. 64; K. Carroll, Yoruba Religious Carvings (London: Geoffrey Chapman) 1966, p. 41; A. P. Talbot, Peoples of Southern Nigeria (Oxford University Press) 1926, Vol. 1, p. 19; and L. Frobenius, The Voice of Africa (London: Hutchinson), 1913, Vol. 1, p. 196.
4. See J. Gleason, Orisa, the god of Yorubaland. (New York: Atheneum) 1971, pp 48-119; J. S. Mbiti, African Religion and Philosophy (London: Heinemann) 1969, p. 76; and N. A. Fadipe, The Sociology of the Yoruba (Ibadan University Press), 1970, pp. 261-287.
5. Rev. H. Townsend, Church Missionary (London: Gleaner) 1849, p. 18; and W. R. Bascom, "The Yoruba in Cuba," Nigeria Magazine, No. 37, 1951, pp 14-20.
6. E. B. Idowu (1962), Op.cit., p. 62.
7. J. S. Mbiti (1969) Op.cit., p. 76; E. B. Idowu (1962) Op. cit., p. 67; N. A. Fadipe (1970), Op. cit., p. 268; and U. Beier; The Return of the Gods: The Sacred Art of Susanne Wenger (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge) 1975, p. 9.
8. Ulli Beier (1975). Op. cit., pp. 85-6.

9. See E. B. Idowu (1962) Op. cit., pp 98-99.
10. For details of the revelation made by Dr. Oguntola Sapara, see J. O. Lucas, The Religion of the Yorubas (Lagos: CMS Bookshop) 1948, pp 131-4. See also G. Parrinder, Religion in an African City (Negro University Press, Westport, Connecticut) 1953, p. 60.
11. See Supo Ibikunlé & Obi Owolabi, Iwe Ijinle Yoruba Apa Ketá (Ibadan University Press) 1972, p. 8.
12. "Gàmbàrí" or "Úkù-úkù" are generic terms used to describe most of the people from Northern Nigeria.
13. L. Frobenius, The Voice of Africa (London, Hutchinson) 1913, Vol. 1, p. 196.
14. C. O. Adepegba, "The Essence of the Image in the Religious Sculptures of the Yoruba of Nigeria", Nigeria Magazine, No. 144, 1983, p. 18.
15. E. B. Idowu (1962) Op. cit., pp 71-5.
16. Kevin Carroll, "Art in Wood" in S. O. Biobaku (ed.) Sources of Yoruba History (Oxford, Clarendon Press) 1979, p. 168.
17. Kevin Carroll, Yoruba Religious Carving: Pagan & Christian Sculpture in Nigeria and Dahomey (London, Geoffrey Chapman) 1966, p. 25.
18. Kevin Carroll, "Ekiti Yoruba Woodcarving" in "ODU" Journal of Yoruba & Related Studies, No. 4, 1962, p. 5.
19. See Henry John Drevoal, et. al., "Yoruba: Nine Centuries of African Art and Thought" (Abbreviated version) in African Arts, November, 1989. Vol. XXIII, No. 1, p. 71.
20. Kevin Carroll (1966) Op. cit., - Note 17 above, pp. 25; 51-52.

21. For detailed account of Esu imagery, see J. Pemberton, "Eṣu/Èṣẹgba: The Yoruba Trickster god", African Arts 9, 4: pp 20-27; 66-70.
22. M. Drewal, "Projection from the Top in Yoruba Art", African Arts 11, 1: pp 43-49; 91-2.
23. W. Bascom, The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston) 1969, p. 90.
24. See. D. Williams, "The Iconology of the Yoruba 'Edan Ogboni,'" Africa, Vol. xxxiv, No. 2, 1964, pp. 146-7.
25. S. Johnson, The History of the Yorubas (London), 1921, p. 138.

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International boundary .....  
 National boundary of Nigeria .....  
 Northern boundary of rain forest .....  
 Major towns and cities .....  
 Scale 1:500,000  
 1960

Figure 1. Map of South-western Nigeria showing the limits of the Yoruba region as well as the northern limit of the forest region of the area.

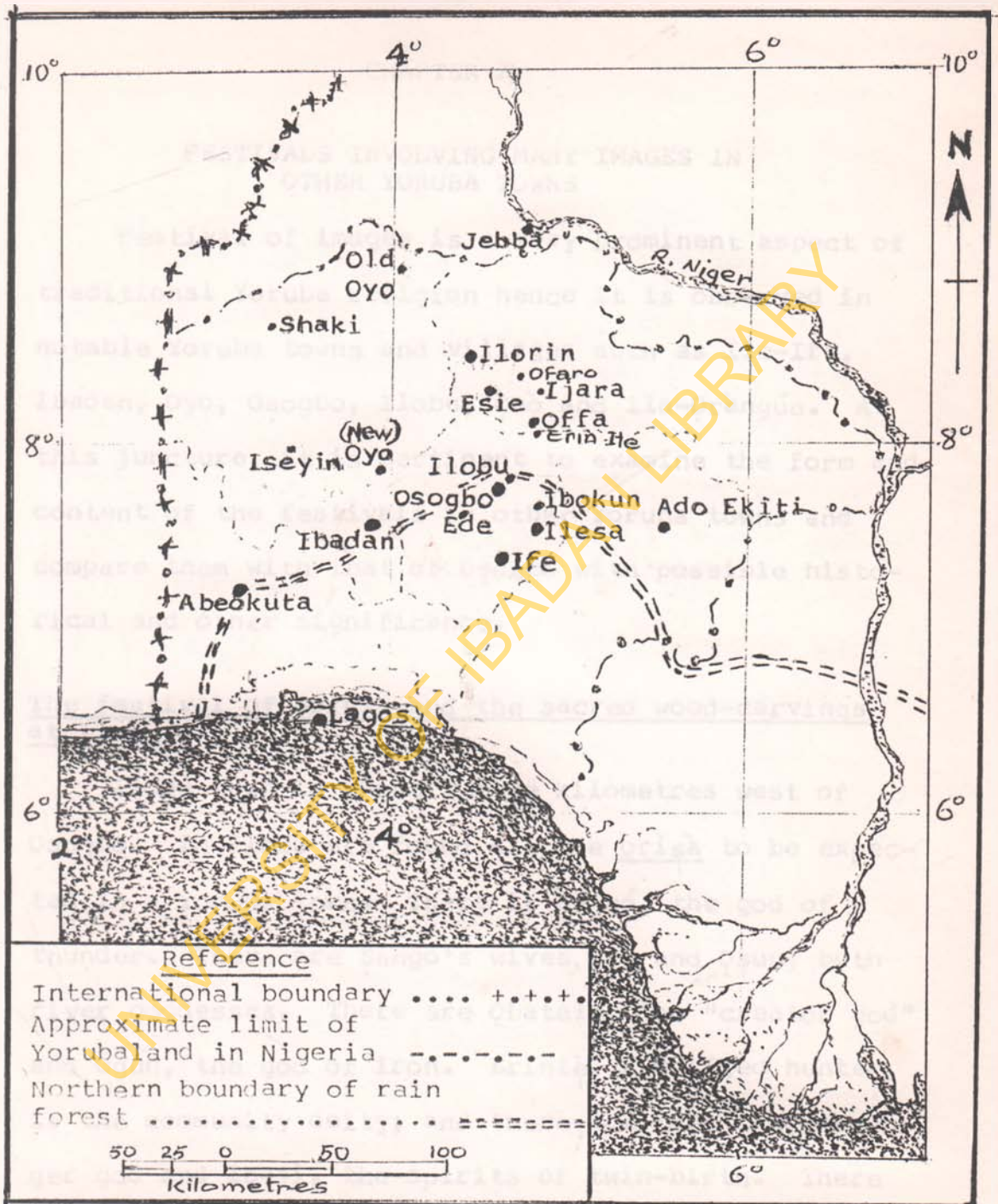


Figure 3 - Map of South-western Nigeria showing the towns mentioned in this dissertation as well as the northern limit of the forest region of the area.

## CHAPTER 4

FESTIVALS INVOLVING MANY IMAGES IN  
OTHER YORUBA TOWNS

Festival of images is a very prominent aspect of traditional Yoruba religion hence it is observed in notable Yoruba towns and villages such as Ile-Ife, Ibadan, Oyo, Osogbo, Ilobu, Owò and Ila-Oràngún. At this juncture, it is pertinent to examine the form and content of the festivals in other Yoruba towns and compare them with that of Osogbo with possible historical and other significance.

The festival of Erinle and the sacred wood-carvings at Ilobu

Ilobu town is about twelve kilometres west of Osogbo. In Ilobu are found all the òrìṣà to be expected in a Yoruba town. There is Ṣàngó, the god of thunder. There are Ṣàngó's wives, Oya and Oṣun, both river goddesses. There are Obàtálá, the "creator god" and Ogún, the god of iron. Erinlè, a deified hunter, is the community deity; and there are Esu, the messenger god and Ibejì, the spirits of twin-birth. There are also Egúngún masqueraders associated with ancestors; and of course, Orunmilà, the oracular deity. However,

the most important òrìṣà in Ilobu is Erinlè and it is only his worship that involves a procession of images.

The myth associated with Erinlè says that he was a powerful hunter who led the people of Ilobu to the present site of the town. According to oral tradition, the people of Ilobu first lived in a place called Iregba. There, however, the land was not fertile. Erinle, who was then hunting elephants in Iregba area, conducted Laròsìn, the first Olobu (the title of the traditional ruler of Ilobu), and his people to the present site of the town. He stayed with the people of Ilobu for many years, performing many brave deeds in times of war. The imagination of the people now associates his name with all the great wars they can remember in their history, including the halting of the Fulani advance outside Ilobu. It was due to Erinle, they hold, that Ilobu was never conquered.

According to the local tradition, after Erinlè had stayed long enough for the original Ilobu people to establish themselves, he turned into a river which is named after him. He was then deified and has since then been worshipped annually. His river is just at the main entrance of the town from Oşogbo. The spot

where he turned into a river, named Ojútù is the river-shrine where the Ilobu people gather to worship the deity every year.

Erinle festival usually takes place in October. As in the case of most other Yoruba festivals, the actual date of the annual Erinlẹ festival is fixed by the traditional ruler of the town in consultation with Ọrúnmìlà, the Yoruba god of divination. The date fixed for the festival is conveyed to the public through mass media. In the older days the town-crier used to make the announcement.

The festival lasts seven days and is marked by singing, especially singing of the praise-songs (oríkì) of Erinlẹ, dancing and feasting. On the third day of the festival, a visit is made to the river-shrine by the chief priest of Erinle, the Olobu and his chiefs, and as many of the entire people of the town as are able to attend. Egúngún masquerades, especially the hunters' masquerade (Láyẹwú), usually comes out that day and accompanies the crowd to the river shrine. Traditional rulers and chiefs from neighbouring towns and villages also join in the worship at the river shrine.

Kolanuts and prayers are offered by the chief priest of Erinle at the river bank. This is followed by the sacrifice of a ram to Erinle. This ram is simply taken to the middle of the river and sunk there. Immediately this is done, the Olobu leads a dance round a group of trees at the bank of the river. He is accompanied by the chief priest and members of the cult of Erinle. They all dance round seven times.

Thereafter, the whole congregation leaves the river for the town amidst traditional music, with women chanting the praises of the deity.

According to Beier's account, the festival used to be rounded up on the seventh day by a procession of all the images in Ilobu, first to the market place before the Oba's palace, then round the whole town.<sup>1</sup> A couple of days before the procession, the images - all wood-carvings - would be washed, painted and dressed up with head-ties and robes.

All the images in the Erinle palace-shrine would also be brought out and assembled with the ones from the town. The worshippers would sit around them feasting. Abundant stable foods and meat used to be prepared in the Olobu's palace for this purpose. After



their meals, the worshippers would sing and dance around the images, offering prayers to the various òrìṣà which the images symbolize. They would also chant their praises, particularly those of Erinlè, the chief deity of the town.

Finally, the chief priest of Erinlè would kneel down before the image that represents Erinle to offer the thanks of the people of Ilobu for the protection of the gods. He would cast kolanuts. The worshippers would resume dancing and dance to the outer chamber of the palace where the Olobu had been staying with his chiefs. They would all join in the dance and that used to mark the end of Erinlè festival for the year. The worshippers would disperse and the images would be returned to their respective shrines.

It is note-worthy that the annual Erinlè festival at Ilobu has not changed in form over the years whereas the procession of images that accompanies it has undergone some modification in recent years. The modification began in 1975, when all the images in the palace-shrine of Erinle were stolen by some unknown intruder. The theft occurred just two weeks after the Erinlè festival and none of the stolen

images has been recovered till now.

The traumatic effect of the theft of the images on the Olobu and his chiefs, as well as the Erinle priest and members of the cult, is better imagined than described. Oba Aşiru Olatoyè Olaníyan, the present Olobu of Ilobu, told me on October 29, 1992 that he was informed by the oracle that the stolen images are unretrievable and that he was instructed to make another one to replace at least the Erinle symbol before the 1976 festival. He carried out this instruction by commissioning the Erinle symbol in Plate 35 - an equestrian figure holding a gun and carrying a child on the back.

This new carving, named "Erinlè" is the only image that is now kept in the palace-shrine of the deity. The annual procession and exhibition of all the images of the town that used to constitute the final ritual of the annual Erinlè festival as described by Beier in 1957 has been discontinued since 1976.

Nowadays, the symbol of Erinlè is made to "sit-in-state" in one of the open chambers in the Olobu's palace on the last day of Erinlè festival. Here, people are free to look at, but not touch, the image. Thus, the traditional purpose of the procession is

partially achieved because quite a large crowd of people team to the palace at least to cast a glance at the image as the grand finale of the annual Erinle festival.

Although the images from the other shrines in the town are no more assembled or carried in procession, the traditional feasting, singing and dancing that accompany the procession and exhibition of the images are still observed in the Oba's palace as the Erinlè symbol sits-in-state on the last day of the festival. So, people who go to see the statue in the palace on that day are treated to free food and music.

The Erinlè symbol is withdrawn into the palace-shrine after the last free-for-all dance and meal in the evening, and this brings the festival to a close for the year.

Oba Asiru Ọlaníyan, the Olobu, told me that the reason for discontinuing the exhibition and procession of the images is mainly to secure the traditional images that are left in shrines in the town; for, according to the Olobu, "The eye can covet only what is exposed to it".

According to the oral tradition I gathered from Oba Ọlaníyan about the origin of the festival of images

at Ilobu, the annual Erinlè festival was not accompanied by procession of images initially. Exhibition and procession of images on the seventh day of the festival began in the mid-nineteenth century when the southward advance of the Fulani to the Yoruba country was halted outside Oşogbo and Ilobu.<sup>2</sup> Many refugees fleeing from Oyo-Ilé, Oḡfà, Eṛin-Ilé and other war-torn Yoruba towns settled at Oşogbo and its environs, that is, Ilobu, Oḡfà-tèdó and Eṛin-Oşun. The latter towns were new settlements established by fugitives from Oḡfà and Eṛin-Ilé.

The people of Ilobu and the refugees credited the defeat of the Fulani army outside Ilobu to the tutelage of the Yoruba traditional deities, especially Erinlè, the Ilobu community deity. An annual festival of the gods was thereupon instituted during which the deities were thanked, propitiated and petitioned. According to Oba Olaníyan, the festival used to take place a couple of weeks after the annual Erinlè festival. However, it was eventually scheduled to form the final rituals of Erinlè festival in view of the fact that Erinlè was, and still is, the principal deity that the festival of the gods was meant to honour.

Those final rituals featuring a procession of the images at Ilobu were observed regularly on the seventh day of Erinlẹ festival up till 1975.

The exact age of the Ilobu images is difficult to determine. However, most of them are of considerable age because even the oldest members of the compounds from where the images were brought for the procession in 1957, according to Beier's account, could not remember the time when or by whom they were made.<sup>3</sup> This implies that the images must be over sixty years old by 1957. Many of the images involved in the festival must have been made and used within and around the shrines before the latter half of the 19th century when refugees from the war-affected areas settled in Ilobu and the adjacent towns. This suggestion is corroborated by the fact that the worship of Erinlẹ and some other deities commenced in Ilobu right from the time Erinlẹ turned into a river in the town. This, according to oral tradition, was about fifty years before the reign of Ọba Abiọdun as the Aláàfin of Ọyo. Aláàfin Abiọdun reigned from 1774 to 1789.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, some of the Ilobu images might have been made in the early years of the 18th century.

It is also possible that the refugees brought some of the images to Ilobu from their former settlements. However, considerable number of the images used in procession during the festival of the gods in the town (which developed into the final rituals of the annual Èrinlẹ̀ festival) were probably carved in the latter half of the 19th century when the refugees settled in Ilobu and its environs. The likelihood of this last suggestion is strengthened by the fact that one Máku, a carver of great fame who lived in Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun, was said to be responsible for the production of most of the images in the environment by the end of the 19th century.<sup>5</sup> Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun is a small town about five kilometres south of Ilobu. Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun is one of the new settlements founded by refugees from Èrìn-Ilé. Since Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun was not in existence before the latter half of the 19th century, Máku, the famous carver from Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun, might have produced some of the images after the founding of the town in the late-19th century.

Èrinlẹ̀ festival is also observed annually at Ibadan and Òkè-Òdàn. Parrinder gives a brief account of the festival at Ibadan. According to him, there were two shrines to the deity at Oke-Fòkò quarters:

one near a brook marked with three trees surrounded by a low wall; the other was in a chief's compound where there were many images. During the annual festival of Erinlè, the images used to be carried in procession to the tree. The festival is still being observed annually but the procession of images has been discontinued because most of the images have been stolen while the few remaining are closely guarded in the shrine.<sup>6</sup>

This Yoruba hunter god, Erinle, is known and called "Eyinlẹ" at Òkè-Òdàn, a town in Egbado area of Yorubaland. Robert Thompson witnessed the annual Eyinle festival in the town a couple of times and says that the festival was not accompanied by any procession of images as at August, 1964. He adds, however, that the shrine of the god there was a raised platform set within one room of a compound "upon which diverse images and ritual paraphernalia rest".<sup>7</sup> The most important items of Erinlè cult paraphernalia at Òkè-Òdàn, according to him, include earthenware filled with fluvial water and smooth black stones from the Erinle river at Ilobu, a wrought-iron surmounted by the figure of a bird, and iron-chain worn round the neck and bracelets of the same material worn on the right wrist by devotees of the god.

Thompson's observation confirms Johnson's record that the chain bracelets symbolize the iron or brass bangles won by the hunters of Yoruba antiquity.<sup>8</sup>

There seems to be a strong connection between devotees of Erinle at Ibadan and Oke-Odan and those at Ilobu. Apart from the water and stones from the Erinle river at Ilobu which votaries of the god at Ibadan and Oke-Odan keep in ritual pots in their shrines, six of the images in the Erinle shrine at Ilobu are said to have been carved in Ibadan.<sup>9</sup> The images might have been commissioned by devotees of Erinle who were resident in Ibadan. On the other hand, they might have been commissioned and presented to the shrine by some individuals as a mark of appreciation of some of their blessings which they believed emanated from the deity - as in the case of an Egbado man who, according to Adepegba, presented an image to Erinle shrine at Ilobu because of the god's blessing to him.<sup>10</sup> The images carved at Ibadan and the one from Egbado are said to be among the ones stolen from the Erinle shrine at Ilobu in 1975.<sup>11</sup> It is most probable that this category of the Ilobu images were carved by the end of the 19th century because they were likely to be among



the ones brought out for the procession of images at Ilobu in 1957, the producer and the date of production of which, according to Beier, not even the oldest person around there then could remember.<sup>12</sup>

### Yemoja festival at Ibadan

Yemoja is a water deity. In Yoruba myth she was the ancient mother of all rivers and of all fishes. Tributes are paid to her whenever any river deity is worshipped in Yorubaland. This is to acknowledge her maternal relationship to all rivers.

Most of the adherents of Yemoja are women. This is understandable because a great pre-occupation of women in Yorubaland is how to obtain children and Yemoja is believed to be the Yoruba arch-òrìṣà of fertility "whose breasts", according to Gleason, "reach down to her knees".<sup>13</sup> This explains why the sacred symbol of Yemoja at Ibadan (where the deity is still being devotedly worshipped) is a composite carving of a seated woman carrying a child on the back and another one in her hand. Two other children kneel around her (Plates 36a-e). The female figure is depicted with three vertical face-markings on each cheek and it is provided with traditional head-tie of a typical

Yoruba woman, gèlè.

There are two shrines dedicated to Yemoja at Ibadan. There is an open-air one around a tree at the bank of a stream named after the deity. The stream is behind Lagos by-pass at Oke-Ado/Molete boundary. The shrine - Yemoja temple - is in the traditional family compound (Igbódù) of the priest. The temple is linked to the stream-shrine by a street named after the deity, Òpópó-Yemoja. A priest and a priestess are in charge. The temple is a room set apart to contain the symbol and altar of the goddess (Plate 36a). Unlike a church or mosque, this temple is not large enough for any but about five persons to enter with the worshippers staying in the ante-chamber.

Yemoja festival at Ibadan falls annually in the rains. It lasts seventeen days. Twenty-one days before it is due, the general public is informed about the festival through announcement and advertisement in the mass media. The announcement is usually made over the radio till the eve of the festival. The twenty-one day period before the festival is devoted to preparations for the festival. The preparations include the provision of sacrificial offerings, food-stuffs and building

of new uniform dresses by the votaries of Yemoja.

On the first day of the festival, the deity is worshipped at the shrine by the stream-side. The symbolic carving of Yemoja is not taken to the stream-shrine. The composite carving is washed and painted three days before the beginning of the festival and enthroned in the temple from the first day of the festival till the seventeenth day, ètadínlógún when it is carried in procession round the inner core of Ibadan city.

During the period that Yemoja symbol "sits-in-state" in the temple, there are lots of praise-singing of the deity and feasting around the temple as many people team in to rejoice with the devotees. Some of the visitors come with offerings of food-stuffs, fowls and kolanuts and put them in front of the enthroned Yemoja symbol. Solicitations for children, long life and prosperity dominate the prayers said in the place.

Also during the seventeen-day period, young women are seen in procession very early in the morning with round-bellied water pots balanced on their heads going from Yemoja temple to the stream-shrine to fetch water, and back to the temple.

The ètàdínlógún marks the climax of the festival when the final sacrifices for the festival are made to Yemoja and the carving is carried about a section of the city in procession. The priest and the priestess enter the temple early in the morning on that day while the worshippers and participants sit or stand in the open space in front of the temple. There is sacrifice, followed by prayers for provision of children for the barren and fever-free life and prosperity for the living children. The congregation chorus and echo àṣẹ ("so be it") to the prayers.

There is a feast. Then in the late afternoon there is another sacrifice offering and kolanut divination and, as the words Ó yàn (positive indication that the sacrifices have been accepted) are pronounced from the temple, drum starts.

The procession is about to begin. The votaries of Yemoja and some of the participants put on the commemorative uniform dresses, aso-egbè, which have been built specially for the occasion. The carrier of the symbol is also ready in her best clothes which have been built specially for the procession. The carrier, who is chosen through divination from the

family of the worshippers, must be a woman that has stopped bearing children.

The procession begins amidst vivacious drumming, singing and dancing. Immediately the carrier comes into the open with the image, there is a very loud ovation of Ìyá Ò! ("Great Mother!"). Regular sparks of this acknowledgement punctuate the drum sound and singing throughout the procession.

The procession goes along a traditional route embracing several streets within a section of Ibadan city. It features a great variety of dances, the most fascinating of which are the ones done by the carrier of Yemoja composite image, the priest, the priestess and some of the worshippers. They shake their shoulders and wriggle their trunks and limbs to the rhythm of "bata" drum sound. They, especially the worshippers, twist and turn and then pronounce their thanks to Yemoja who has blessed them with children and protected them and their blessings over the years.

All along the route, a lot of people are attracted by the carving and the music and they join the procession. Calls are made at the houses of some of the elderly votaries of Yemoja. At such places, gifts ranging from kolanuts to fowls are made to Yemoja

through the carrier of the image. In about two of such places, the carrier is made to put the image on a stool, take some water and relax for a couple of minutes. During the 1991 festival at one of these stop-overs, a young woman sang this song and danced:

Tè le Yemoja ò e,  
Tè le Yemoja ò a;  
Àgàn 'o wù mí,  
N o tè le Yemoja.

It is Yemoja I follow,  
It is Yemoja I worship;  
I detest barrenness,  
Hence I worship Yemoja.

The song was chorussed and a number of other women also danced.

The last port of call and turning point is the palace of the Olubadan (the traditional ruler of Ibadan). The crowd has usually swollen so much by the time the procession stops over at the palace that most of the available space in the palace is occupied by the mammoth crowd which spills over to the roads in front of the palace. At the palace, the carrier of the sacred image of Yemoja puts it on a low table and relaxes by it. It is constituted into the cynozure of the whole gathering. A short dance is made at which two of the Oba's wives join the Yemoja priest and priestess and two other

devotees. The Oba thanks the Yemoja cult for maintaining the tradition and endeavouring to stabilize the population.

The procession returns to Yemoja temple after the Oba's short address and prayers. The return parade is made through a different route but with the type of pomp and pageantry that characterize the onward movement to the palace. The procession returns to the temple at sunset and terminates the festival with a free-for-all dance in front of the temple. The crowd then falls back and the composite image is returned to the altar in the temple.

Although the image is brought out in procession only once annually, it embellishes the temple and creates religious atmosphere. The priest and priestess operate in the temple informally everyday, and formally every four days to mark Yemoja's weekly ritual.

Yemoja festival is celebrated with much gusto mainly because of the belief of the people that Yemoja is the source of peaceful living and that any year this act of public worship of the deity is not observed will be a year of disaster - violence, barrenness of women and poor harvest of farm products.

The function of the composite image in the festival is easily appraised by considering the reaction of the crowd on seeing it. Apart from the shout of ìyá ò ò! ("Great Mother!" that punctuates the singing and drumming throughout the procession, individuals among the crowd, especially women, express aloud their wish to be as blessed with children as the Yemoja composite carving. Obviously, such an expression would not have arisen if the symbolic image (hereby constituting a visual point of reference) did not accompany the procession. So, the image as a visual expression of the common aspiration of the community, serves as a great crowd-puller during the festival. It also makes it easy for the community to identify the procession.

The Yemoja priest, Chief Olukúnmi Egbelàdé, told me during the 1991 festival that the composite image being used now was carved in 1958 because the free-standing ones used before then had been stolen. The latter were likely to be the ones that Parrinder describes in his book, Religion in an African City.<sup>14</sup>

Although Parrinder's account of Yemoja festival at Ibadan does not include the procession of images that accompanies the festival, it gives a vivid description of the festival and the images involved



in it. According to his account, there were two temples of Yemoja at Ibadan: one in a room in a compound behind the "king's market" containing a large image of the goddess. "It is a wooden figure with large breasts, and head covered with a long cloth. Beside her are other figures." The priestesses and worshippers "assume that the goddess comes into the temple during the festival."

The other temple of the deity, according to him, was near a stream behind Ijebu by-pass. Here, there used to be a huge tree surrounded by water only in the rainy season during which the deity was worshipped. The priest lived in a shelter made in the branches of the tree for seven days during the festival, and women went there with offerings and prayed for children.<sup>15</sup>

The second temple of Yemoja described by Parrinder is most likely to be the one I have described on page 135 of this thesis. The stream referred to in his description is now named after the deity, while Ijebu by-pass has now been renamed Lagos by-pass.

The exact age of the images in the Yemoja temple described by Parrinder is not known. They might have been produced in Ibadan in the eighteenth century by

some of the Egba who were the original settlers of the town. Ibadan was an Egba village from the second decade of the eighteenth century until mid-19th century. When Old Oyo (Oyo-Ile) was sacked in 1837, Oyo fugitives and a few Ijebu soldiers occupied Ibadan on discovering the defence advantages of the town. They expelled the Egba and further developed the town into a great military centre which ensured its growth during the ensuing decades of turbulent inter-tribal warfare in which Ibadan jockeyed for hegemony. The town grew so fast that by the middle of the nineteenth century, it had become one of the largest towns in Yorubaland.<sup>16</sup> It is also possible, therefore, that the images were produced in the latter half of the nineteenth century by Oyo and Ijebu refugees who settled in Ibadan after 1837.

During the nineteenth century Yoruba civil wars in which the Ibadan army emerged victorious, such as the defeat of the Fulani army outside Oşogbo in 1843 and the destruction of Ijaye in 1862,<sup>17</sup> the people of Ibadan might have established an annual festival of the gods meant to thank, propitiate and petition the deities. As in the cases of Oşogbo and Ilobu already discussed, the festival of the gods might have featured, among others, great feasting and procession of

symbolic images of the deities. Such a festival of the gods might have been absorbed into the annual Yemoja festival or Oke-badan festival.

All told, the procession of the composite image of Yemoja that now forms the final rituals of the annual festival of the deity at Ibadan must be a reflection of the significance of the image in the festival. The mere fact that the composite symbol of the deity was made to replace the stolen ones and is being carefully guarded and maintained is an indication that the image is almost indispensable to the success of the festival.

Yemoja is also worshipped annually at Abeokuta with pomp and pageantry. According to Judith Gleason's account of the festival written in 1971,<sup>18</sup> there are two shrines of this water deity at Abeokuta. One is in Ibara quarters while the other is somewhere at the bank of river Ògùn. Here, the annual festival of the deity is accompanied by a procession of the symbolic image of the deity and other images "round the town and down footpaths to the other shrine at the bank of the river".

Gleason does not give a detailed description of the images that are carried in procession during the

Yemoja festival. However, they are likely to be of considerable age - made, possibly, in the nineteenth century when Abeokuta was founded.

Before the Egba people were forced to found Abeokuta, they occupied the forest region between the borders of modern Oyo and Ijebuland. They were grouped into three as Egba Gbagura, Egba Oke-Onà and Egba Aké. Each group founded many towns but recognized only one paramount ruler. All the Egba kingdom remained under Oyo yoke until towards the end of the eighteenth century when they successfully rebelled and asserted their independence under the leadership of Lisabi. However, the civil wars of the nineteenth century in Yorubaland forced many of them to evacuate many of their towns. They moved further south-westwards to found a place of refuge on and around the Olumo Rock between 1829 and 1830. This was how the town of Abeokuta grew.<sup>19</sup>

It is probable, therefore, that the Yemoja symbol at Abeokuta and the other images with it were produced before or after 1830.

### The festival of the images at Esie

The images at the Yoruba town of Esie in Kwara State are about the largest known group of traditional African sculptures. They are over eight hundred in number; and carved in steatite or soapstone, similar to a kind of soft stone which exists near Offa and Ilesa,<sup>20</sup> and also used for carvings in Guinea and Sierra Leone. Most of the images are seated while a few of them assume a kneeling position. They all portray an array of social roles. The origin of the images are unknown hence there has been much speculation about them.

An oral history in Esie, where most of the images have been found, says that they were discovered accidentally by the ancestors of the present inhabitants of the town. The original site of their settlement is said to be at Okodo. Water supply at Okodo was inadequate, so, hunters were sent from there to look for a new site for the town. It was during the search that the hunters are said to have found the stones. They thought them to be a good omen and decided to settle as near them as possible, adopting them as symbols of the spirits of some supernatural individuals. The hunters probably discovered a spring nearby for the town of Esie is

said to have grown from there about 1770, that is, "163 years before 1933".<sup>21</sup>

Another popular tradition of the origin of the images connects them with some pale-skinned strangers who were turned into the images by God for their intention to take punitive measures against the Elesie - the traditional ruler of Esie - for flouting an order.

The strangers, who are said to be travelling from Egypt to Ile-Ife, sent a messenger to the Elesie that they intended to visit his town and that he should stay at home till they returned from Ile-Ife. The Elesie waited for some days. However, as he had to harvest his okro lest they overgrew, he left briefly for his farm. Incidentally the strangers arrived while he was away on the farm. They took offence of the Elesie's failure to carry out their instruction and thereupon decided to punish him. Though the intended punishment is not specified, it seems to have outweighed the gravity of the offence. According to the tradition, God considered that the foreigners had exceeded their powers and turned them into the stone images.

In view of the latter oral tradition, it is strange that the natives of Esie regard themselves and are referred to as the children of the images.

Indeed, some scholars have expressed the absurdity of this phenomenon.<sup>22</sup> This aside, the images are looked upon as community deities and every year, about the end of the dry season (in the month of March) a festival takes place in their honour.

The stones used to be venerated in three towns where they have been found, namely, Esię, Ofaro and Ijara. However, it is only in Esię, where the largest collection is, that the annual festival in their honour is still being observed. The Esię images were "discovered" and brought to light in 1933 by Mr. H.G. Ramshaw of the Church Missionary Society.<sup>23</sup> The Ofaro ones were sportlighted in 1939 by Donald Friend, an Australian itinerant artist;<sup>24</sup> while Mr. Jack Legatt "discovered" the Ijara ones during geological surveys in the region in 1962.<sup>25</sup> In all the cases however, the stone carvings were already known to the local inhabitants.

When the Esię images were found by Ramshaw, they were crowded together carelessly and overgrown by weeds. Many were partially buried while a number of them were broken during the clearing of grass and weeds for the annual festival. In 1936 Messrs J.D. Clarke

and F. F. Daniel (the then Resident of Ilorin Province) built a temporary shelter for a better preservation of the images.<sup>26</sup> In 1945, however, the Federal Government of Nigeria erected a permanent shelter for the images and got them well arranged. The permanent building has been renovated a couple of times and the place is now in the care of the National Commission for Museum and Monument.

But all these have not affected the annual traditional festival of the images. The worshippers have free access to the images, although nobody is allowed to remove them. The worshippers have never carried the images in procession as in the case of most similar festivals. Because of the weight, the images at Esie are not easy to carry on the head or in the hands to considerable distances. Soft woods were used in carving the images that are carried on the head in procession during the similar festivals already mentioned.

The date of the festival is decided by the *Elesie* and the priest or priestess, the *àwòrò*, in consultation with the images through divination. The date for the 1992 festival was 27th March.

The surroundings of the "shrine" (that is, where the images are) were tidied up for the festival a



couple of days before the date fixed for it. Radio announcements were made informing the community members about the date. Sacrificial items and plenty of food-stuffs were provided. The things required for the sacrificial offering are usually dictated by the images through divination. Over the years, however, these have included a white-feathered cock, a he-goat, plenty of quatre-lobate kolanuts (obì àbàtà) and palm-oil.

In the morning of the festival day, in this case the senior priestess (the àwòrò) and many of the votaries - all women - sang and danced round the town, accompanied by drums and metal gongs. Another group of women prepared a great feast of local staple food while several men went to different places in the fields around the "House of Images" (Ilé-Ère) preparing for the annual burning of the grass, which is a part of the festival of the images.

Eventually, the ranks of the dancing group had been swelled by other townswomen. By the time they joined the cooking group the food was ready. Some of them carried bowls containing the food and they all sang joyously to the Ilé-Ère. Meanwhile, a lot of

men had gone to the premises of the Ilé-Ère, some of them taking with them the basic sacrificial items. Visitors/participants from other villages had also arrived at the premises of the Ilé-Ère. According to oral tradition, some of this category of people from other villages used to bring to the festival portable images which they normally took back after the festival rituals. No image is taken to the festival these days.

Women arrived at the shrine, Ilé-Ère, by noon. They stood outside the shelter for the time being and were singing - probably to announce their presence to the images. Then the Aworo and two other women devotees entered the shelter, holding some of the sacrificial offerings. They were followed by three men leading in the sacrificial goat.

Sacrificial offerings - honey, kolanuts, palm-oil, sugar-cane - were placed in front of one of the images called "King of the images" (Oba-Ère) because of its outstanding appearance. The Aworo bowed before it and addressed all the images in a soft voice. She offered the people's thanks to the images for their protection and guidance throughout the past year and prayed the images to pardon the people for whatever

they might have done wrong. She also asked for long life and prosperity for the people of Esie as well as those who attended the festival from other villages and towns. She emphatically prayed for a fever-free new year for children; and solicited protection for men who would soon begin to burn the surrounding grass. The goat and the cock were then killed and part of the blood was sprinkled over the "king" of the images. Visitors and spectators who bring offerings for the images then moved forward and put them on the floor in front of the images.

The next stage was the casting of kolanuts. The Awòrò took up one of the quatre-lobate kolanuts contained in one of the basins before the images, broke it open and cast the four cotyledons at the foot of the "king" of the images to check whether the offerings were accepted or not. Once this was ascertained some of the offerings were shared and eaten. Kola was again cast to see if the images had given their consent to the burning of the bush (the images are considered to own all the place around the shrine).

At this juncture, fire was set to the grass near the shrine as a signal for the burners in other places to set the bush on fire. As hunters with their dogs

hurried about looking for games escaping from the flames, lots of hawks hovered in the sky above the burning area while there were intermittent gunshots in the distance. All these combined to colour festivity.

Drumming and singing continued and there was a free-for-all dance led by the priestess round the "house of images". The dance was mostly by women as men were busy hunting. The dancers finally converged in front of the images and the Aworò offered some prayers. Thereafter, the dancing team and most of the other participants returned to the town and visited the Elesie in his palace. The Elesie did not go to the shrine but joined them on arrival in the dance. Traditionally, he must not set eyes on the images.

The crowd dispersed there and then, but the Aworo and the other cult members stayed in the palace eating and drinking till evening when whatever had been killed during the hunting was brought to the palace and divided. About half of the games went to the successful hunters while the other half went to the community. The share that went to the community formed the core of the feasting, singing and dancing that took place in the palace throughout the next day in which nobody

returned to Ilé-Ère. This marked the end of the festival.

The belief that the images are constantly watching over their everyday activities helps in maintaining morality and peace among the people, making them cautious of their actions to their neighbours. This belief explains the seeming absurdity in the natives of Esie calling themselves the children of the images.

The Esie images were most probably produced about 1100 A.D. This date was arrived at from the thermoluminescence dating of some terracottas found with the stone figures.<sup>27</sup> The date makes the Esie images of greater antiquity than the ones involved in the festivals of images at Osogbo, Ilobu and Ibadan (already discussed). A variety of styles has been identified within the over eight hundred images at Esie.<sup>28</sup> Besides, all of them are individually characterized and not stereotyped cult objects. They all have face markings of some sort which are displayed by the Yoruba according to families or lineages.<sup>29</sup> The images portray people of different social standing engaged in an array of social functions and possibly represent a community. This hypothetical community must have had

connection with ancient Ife, the cradle of the Yoruba people, because of similarity in the face patterns of some of the images to those on some of Ife art. Adepegba and Stephens have observed that the face patterns on the Esie images were various components of the striations on Ife art adopted alone or partly combined.<sup>30</sup>

The Igbomina area where Esie is, like the other areas of Yorubaland already discussed, suffered a lot of instability in the recent past. The area witnessed the Muslim jihad and the Yoruba civil war in the nineteenth century. Most of the towns were evacuated only to be resettled and in most cases not on their original site. The images can only be associated with Esie town because of their (the images') present location. Esie and neighbouring communities like Igbaja, Ora and Aran group are of Old Oyo (Oyo-Ile) origin. Other communities in the area such as Omu, Ahun, Agbamu, Omido and Isin groups claim to have come from Ife.<sup>31</sup>

Incidentally in Esie and neighbourhood, there is a tradition of a blacksmith warrior, Olówu. His headquarters and smithy is now a place called Okiwo which is just about three kilometres to the location of the stone images. Although "Olowu" is the name of a

person in the tradition, it is the title of the ruler of any town called Owu in Yorubaland. At present there are four towns at different locations in Yorubaland called Owu (one is near Ikire, and one each in Oyo, Ijebu and Abeokuta areas) and each of the traditional rulers of the towns is called Olowu. The "Olowu" in the local tradition could therefore be taken to be a ruler of a community, Owu, that once existed in the area. Owu, according to Johnson, is the first Yoruba town to be established from Ife,<sup>32</sup> and Mabogunje and Omer Cooper have suggested that the original Owu was mostly located in Igbomina area.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, the other Igbomina communities near Esię, which claim to have come from Ife, are possible descendants of the original Owu people. As a corollary, the community represented by the images was probably Owu.

Besides, the thermoluminescence dates of the eleventh century A.D. got from the terracottas associated with the stone images are within the range of the dates of Ife art.<sup>34</sup> Although there is no way of ascertaining whether the terracottas existed alongside the stone images or not, a terracotta head in the same style with the stone images has also been found at Ife.<sup>35</sup>

Thus the Esiẹ images can be said to have been made by some immigrants from Ile-Ife - possibly the first settlers of the original Owu.

The original purpose of the Esiẹ stone images is as enigmatic as their origin. In view of their individual characterization, however, we may rightly assume that they were not meant to symbolize any deities unless the gods were thought of as being members of the different families of worshippers with different face markings. This view corroborates the assertion made by some scholars that Yoruba images do not always represent any deities.<sup>36</sup> The Esiẹ images could be said to relate to what Frobenius claims he heard the slaves of Yoruba descent in Timbuktu say that "all their forebears who had descended into the ground had been turned into stones and still had their own heads each of which bore its own stamp."<sup>37</sup> But there is no evidence to support Frobenius' claim. The origin of the images as it relates to the story from Timbuktu is not confirmed by any traditions of the people. Besides, the present worshippers of the images at Esiẹ cannot be identified with the manufacture of the objects, hence the original purpose might be different. However, it is possible that most of them were memorial images considering the fact



that some of them appear well-dressed and dignified. This deduction is somehow similar to Lawal's view on Ife bronzes and terracottas; "The fact that some of them have been identified with some past Oòni (kings) of Ife shows that they are memorial portraiture rather than religious symbols," he says.<sup>38</sup> The original purpose of the Esiẹ images might have been to immortalize and enhance the prestige of the individuals represented.

3. U. Belier (1957) Op.cit., Note 1 above.
4. See J. A. Atanga, An Introduction to Yoruba History (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press), 1960, p. 30.
5. U. Belier (1957) Op.cit.
6. G. Parziogor, Religion in an African City (Westport, Connecticut: Negro University Press), 1953, p. 30.
7. Robert Thompson, "Assistant A Master Factor of Egbas Yoruba" in P. Simbaye (ed.) Tradition and Creativity in Tribal Art (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1969, pp. 143-146.
8. J. Gleason (1971) Op.cit., p. 37.
9. U. Belier (1957) Op.cit.
10. Adepegba, "The Essence of the Image in the Religious Sculptures of the Yoruba of Nigeria", Africa Magazine, No. 144, 1951, p. 18.
11. G. Adepegba (1963) Op. cit.
12. U. Belier (1957) Op. cit.
13. J. Gleason, Orisha: The Gods of Yorubaland (New York: Atheneum), 1971, p. 9.
14. G. Parziogor (1953) Op. cit., p. 30.

## NOTES

1. For a detailed account of the festival of images at Ilobu, see Ulli Beier, "The Story of Sacred Wood-Carvings from one small Yoruba town." (Nigeria Magazine special publication) 1957, pages unnumbered.
2. S. Johnson, The History of the Yorubas. (Lagos: C.S.S. Bookshop), 1921, Reprinted 1976, pp 603-4.
3. U. Beier (1957) Op.cit., Note 1 above.
4. See J.A. Atanda, An Introduction to Yoruba History. (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press), 1980, p. 30.
5. U. Beier (1957) Op.cit.
6. G. Parrinder, Religion in an African City. (Westport, Connecticut: Negro University Press), 1953, p. 30.
7. Robert Thompson, "Abatan: A Master Porter of Egbado Yoruba" in D. P. Biebuyck (ed.) Tradition and Creativity in Tribal Art (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1969, pp. 145-146.
8. S. Johnson (1921) Op.cit., p. 37.
9. U. Beier (1957) Op.cit.
10. C. Adepegba, "The Essence of the Image in the Religious Sculptures of the Yoruba of Nigeria", Nigeria Magazine, No. 144, 1983, p. 19.
11. C. Adepegba (1983) Op. cit.
12. U. Beier (1957) Op. cit.
13. J. Gleason, Orisha: The Gods of Yorubaland. (New York: Atheneum), 1971, p. 9.
14. G. Parrinder (1953) Op. cit., p. 29.

15. G. Parrinder, Op.cit. (as in Note 14).
16. For a detailed account of Ibadan as a settlement, see S. Johnson (1921) Op.cit., pp 17 and 244; N.A. Fadipe, The sociology of the Yoruba, F.O. Okediji (ed.). (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press) 1970, p. 46; and J.A. Atanda (1980) Op.cit., (1980), Pp 13 & 33.
17. J. A. Atanda (1980), Op.cit., p. 34. See also E.A. Ayandele, "Ijebuland 1800-1891: Era of Splendid Isolation" in G.O. Olusanya (ed) Studies in Yoruba History and Culture (University Press Ltd., Ibadan) 1983, p. 89.
18. J. Gleason, (1971), Op.cit., pp 6-10.
19. See S.O. Biobaku, The Egbas and their Neighbours (London: Oxford University Press), 1957, and J.A. Atanda (1980) Op.cit., p. 33.
20. J. D. Clarke, "The Stone Images of Esie". Nigeria Magazine, No. 14, 1938, pp 104-107.
21. Phillips Stevens Jr., The Stone Images of Esie, Nigeria. (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press & The Nigerian Federal Department of Antiquities) 1978, pp 19-20. See also O. I. Pogoson, The Esie Stone Images and their Relationship to other arts of South-western Nigeria, Ph.D. thesis, University of Ibadan, 1990, pp 11-12.
22. C.O. Adepegba, "The Historical Significance of the Esie Stone Images" in Yoruba Images: Essays in Honour of Lamidi Fakeye (Ife Humanities Society) 1988, p. 61. See also Phillips Stevens, "The Festival of the Images at Esie," Nigeria Magazine, No. 87, December, 1965, p. 238.
23. J. D. Clarke (1938) Op.cit., p. 104.
24. Phillips Stevens (1978) Op.cit., p. 21.

25. Phillip Allison, "Newly Discovered Stone Figures from the Yoruba Village of Ijara, Northern Nigeria", Man LXIII Art, 15, p. 93.
26. J. D. Clarke (1938) Op.cit., pp 105-107.
27. Phillips Stevens (1978) Op.cit., p. 33.
28. O. I. Pogoson, Stylistic Possibilities in Esie Stone Carving (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Ibadan), 1984.
29. See. C. O. Adepegba (1983) Op.cit., p. 18.
30. C. O. Adepegba (1988) Op.cit., p. 67. See also Phillips Stevens Jnr (1978) Op.cit., p. 60.
31. Ekpo Eyo, Two Thousand Years Nigeria Art (Lagos: Federal Department of Antiquities) 1977, pp 157-8. See also C. O. Adepegba (1988) Op.cit., p. 66.
32. S. Johnson (1921) Op.cit., p. 5.
33. A. L. Mabogunje and J. Omer Cooper, Owu in Yoruba History (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press) 1971, p. 36.
34. H. J. Drewal, J. Pemberton III & R. Abiodun, "Yoruba: Nine Centuries of African Art and Thought," African Arts, November, 1989 Vol. XXIII, No. 1, p. 68. See also Ekpo Eyo (1977) Op.cit.
35. C. O. Adepegba (1988) Op.cit., p. 74.
36. L. Frobenius, The Voice of Africa Vol. 1 (New York & London: Benjamin Blom Inc.) 1913 rpt 1968, p.196. See also K. Carroll, "Art in Wood" in S. O. Biobaku (ed.) Sources of Yoruba History (Oxford: Clarendon Press) 1979; p. 168; U. Beier (1957) Op.cit., pages unnumbered, and C. O. Adepegba (1983) Op.cit., p. 18.
37. L. Frobenius (1913) Op.cit., p. 216.

38. Babatunde Lawal, "Some Aspects of Yoruba Aesthetics", The British Journal of Aesthetics 14(3) 1974, pp 239-249.

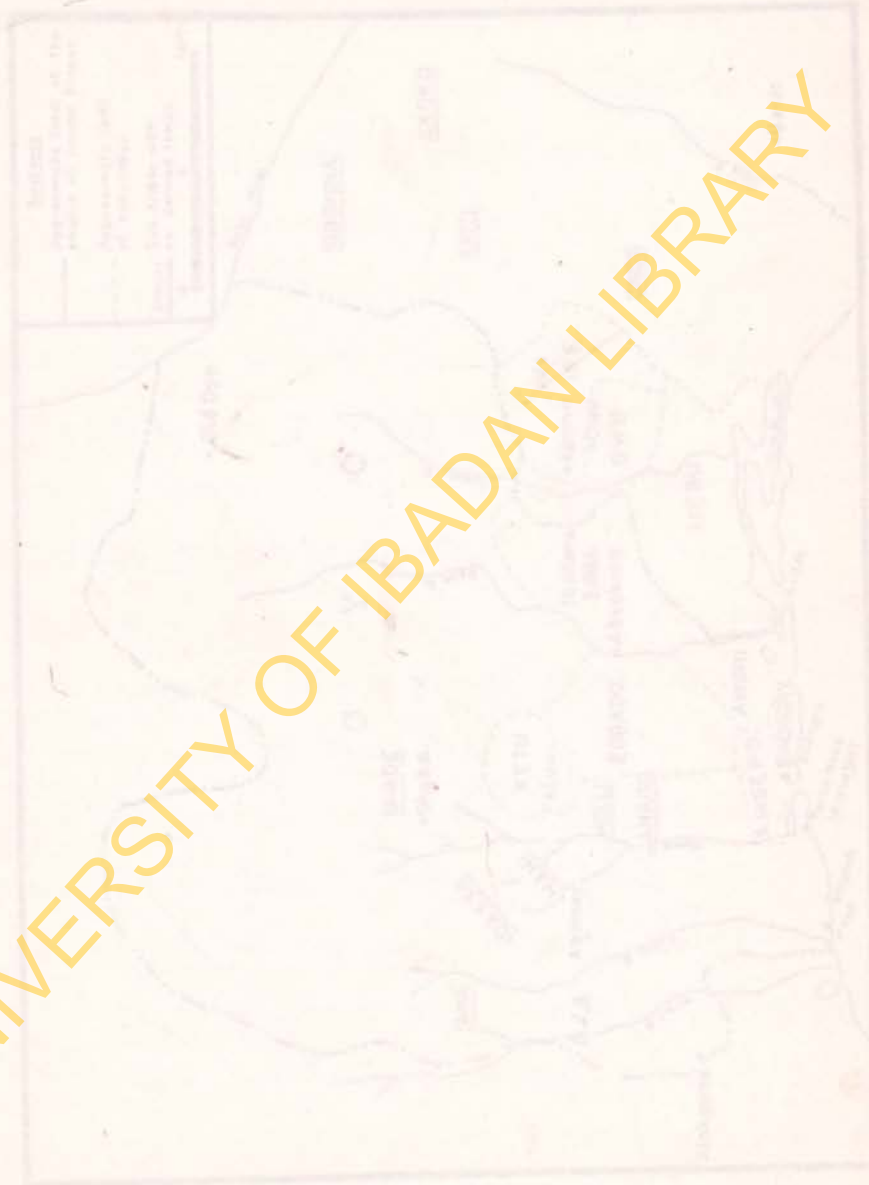


Figure 5 - Distribution of Yoruba sub-tribes in the eighteenth century

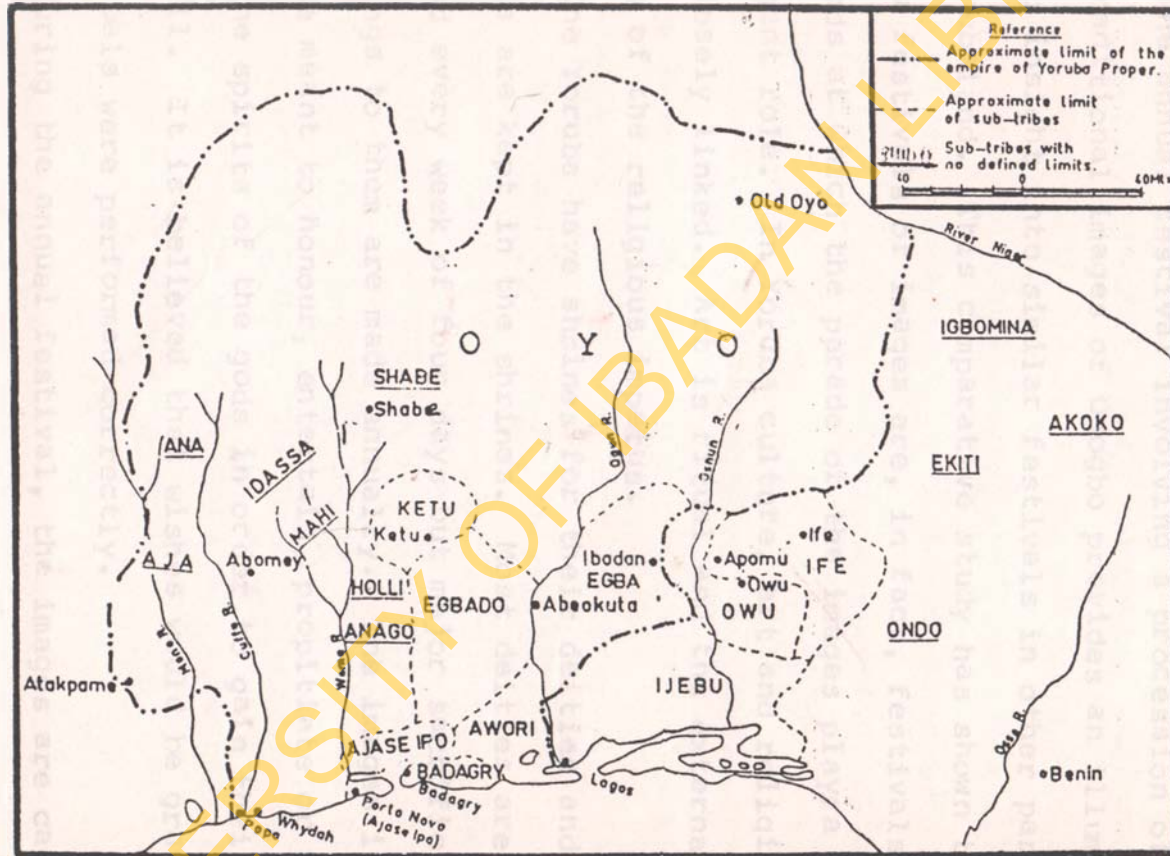


Figure 4 - Distribution of Yoruba sub-tribes in the eighteenth century (Ojo : 1966, p.39).

## CHAPTER 5

## CONCLUSIONS

The annual festival involving a procession of the traditional images of Oṣogbo provides an illuminating insight into similar festivals in other parts of Yorubaland. This comparative study has shown that Yoruba festivals of images are, in fact, festivals of the gods at which the parade of the images plays a very prominent role. In Yoruba culture, art and religion are closely linked. Art is ritual and the externalization of the religious impetus.

The Yoruba have shrines for their deities and the symbols are kept in the shrines. Most deities are worshipped every week of four days but major sacrificial offerings to them are made annually. The images involved are meant to honour, entertain, propitiate or petition the spirits of the gods in order to gain their goodwill. It is believed that wishes would be granted if rituals were performed correctly.

During the annual festival, the images are carried in procession round the town wherever possible, or exposed to the public in the shrine premises. Many of the images involved in the festivals manifest visual

expressions of the common aspirations of members of the community as well as the meaning of the traditional ritual being enacted. The images, when exposed to the public, attract members of the community and serve as crowd-pullers to the venue of the ceremony, thereby inviting some emotional response and communal solidarity from individual beholders. The images therefore serve as stimuli for religious worship and intense ritual activity.

Yoruba images as indicated are not actual representations of the deities, but rather of priests, priestesses and worshippers of some particular deities. They make the spiritual materially perceptible - like crucifixes in the Christian church. However, they are optional, as any god can be worshipped without an image and there are many shrines with carvings. The images can be replaced at will. The present symbols of Erinle at Ilobu and Yemoja at Ibadan are replacements of the old ones that are reportedly stolen. Two different images symbolize  $\text{\textcircled{S}}\text{\textcircled{O}}\text{\textcircled{N}}\text{\textcircled{P}}\text{\textcircled{O}}\text{\textcircled{N}}\text{\textcircled{N}}\text{\textcircled{A}}$ , the Yoruba god of small-pox, in the Osogbo group of images. Therefore, Yoruba images can hardly be considered as idols in the sense of symbols of worship. They are objects of beauty, to be



admired or appraised. Part of their role in the religion of the people is to enhance the prestige of both their owners and their gods.

Colours play a secondary role in Yoruba sculptures. However, the sculptures of *Ọ̀bàtálá* (the Yoruba god of creation) who is known as, and is called, the "white god" are consistently painted white in Yorubaland.

Images identifiably executed in the local sub-styles are found freely used in localities where they do not belong. For instance, the composite carving symbolizing *Sonponna* in the *Oṣogbo* group of images was executed in the *Epa* sub-style of the north-eastern Yorubaland; so also is a terracotta head in the same style with the *Esiẹ* stone images has been found at *Ife*.<sup>1</sup> There are also instances where images were made and presented to honour a deity whose shrine is located outside the localities of the presenter (as the case is of an *Egbado* man who made and presented an image to the *Erinle* shrine in *Ilobu* in appreciation of the god's blessing to him).<sup>2</sup>

Most of the festivals involving images in Yorubaland (notably *Oṣun*, *Erinle* and *Yemoja*) are

connected with river deities. So also has one of the traditions of origin of the Esie images connected the images with the search for water. However, the festival of the stone images at Esie which were carved around eleventh century A.D. certainly predates similar festivals in other parts of Yorubaland.

It also seems that all the festivals of images had Old-Oyo connection. The inhabitants of the present site of Esie migrated to the town from Old-Oyo in about 1775.<sup>3</sup> The sack of Old-Oyo in 1837 by Muslim jihadists and the Yoruba civil war, also in the nineteenth century, caused a lot of displacements and resettlements of most of the Yoruba people. Most of the towns where festivals of images are now found to have been kept alive were established after the civil war and they either have some Oyo elements or other Oyo connections.

Many of the present inhabitants of Osogbo and Ilobu are descendants of refugees from Old-Oyo. Ibadan was initially an Egba settlement before the influx of Old-Oyo refugees to the town after the fall of Old-Oyo. Some of the earlier settlers were Egba and the Egba are said to be related to the Oyo.<sup>4</sup>

The existence of the festivals in the post-Old Oyo towns can however not be taken as a continuation of an Old Oyo practice. It seems to be more of a revival than a continuation.

1. O. O. Adeniji, "The Essence of the Ibadan in the Realistic Sculptures of the Torus of the Ibadan", *Nigeria Magazine*, no. 144, 1923, p. 10.
2. O. O. Adeniji, *The Thousand Years Nigeria* (Lagos: Federal Department of Antiquities) 1977, p. 150.
3. O. Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas* (Lagos: C.N.S. Bookshop) 1921, pp. 1-10. See also J. A. Atanda, *An Introduction to Yoruba History* (Ibadan University Press) 1971, pp. 10-11, 12-13.

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1. C. O. Adepegba, "The Historical Significance of the Esie Stone Images" in Yoruba Images: Essays in honour of Lamidi Fakeye (Ife Humanities Society) 1988, p. 67.
2. C. O. Adepegba, "The Essence of the Image in the Religious Sculptures of the Yoruba of Nigeria", Nigeria Magazine, No. 144, 1933, p. 19.
3. Ekpo Eyo, Two Thousand Years Nigerian Art (Lagos: Federal Department of Antiquities) 1977, p. 158.
4. S. Johnson, The History of the Yorubas (Lagos: C.M.S. Bookshop) 1921, pp 233-236. See also J. A. Atanda, An Introduction to Yoruba History (Ibadan University Press) 1980, pp. 12-13; 32-35.

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The Secretary,  
Western Provinces,  
1948.

Form DNA. 3

**APPENDICES**

**GOVERNMENT OF THE  
FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA**

(FEDERAL MINISTRY OF INFORMATION)

**National Archives**

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN LIBRARY

PROVINCIAL OFFICE,  
IBADAN,  
NIGERIA.

APPENDIX 1

16 September, 1951.

The Secretary,  
Western Provinces,  
I B A D A N .

*See 4.16*

Oshun Division - Headquarters.

I wish to raise the subject of the location of Oshun Divisional Headquarters. In my opinion, Oshogbo is the most suitable place for the following reasons:-

- (a) Communications. Oshogbo is on the railway, telephone, and telegraph.
- (b) Certain Departmental Officers are already established at Oshogbo e.g. Medical Officer, Sanitary Superintendent, Engineer and Surveyor Posts and Telegraphs, District Engineer P.W.D.
- (c) There is already a District Office at Oshogbo which can easily be extended.
- (d) There is a house for a District Officer and the Resident's Rest House could be used for an Assistant District Officer.
- (e) Oshogbo is reasonably central within the Oshun Division.

2. If His Honour considers that the reasons set out above carry sufficient weight, I should be grateful for confirmation that Oshogbo may officially be regarded as the Headquarters of the Oshun Division.

A. J. PHILLIPS

Acting Resident, Ibadan Province.

GAS:

*Despt.  
jms 26/9*

*Res  
More for H.  
25/9*

*Return by early*

*for action on 6.14.*

Resident

*Resident M. J.*

*14/10/51  
28/10*

*Subj.*

*See 5.10.51 [copy to cover & then refer to 14]*

PROVINCIAL OFFICE,  
IBADAN,  
NIGERIA.

18 October, 1951.

The District Officer,  
Oshun Division,  
Oshogbo.

Notes on the Organisation of the  
Oshun Division.

I am sorry I have been so long in replying to your letter No. 1266/1 of the 6th of August, but it has taken a little time to clear up certain points. My comments on your letter are as follows.

Part I.  
Provincial Administration.

1. Divisional Headquarters His Honour has officially approved the location of Oshun Divisional Headquarters at Oshogbo. A copy of the relevant letter will shortly be sent to you.
2. Housing. (ii) I am trying to get more money from the Provincial Engineer.
3. Office Accommodation and Equipment (i) (a) I tried to get an additional £750 this Financial Year. See my endorsement No. 94/17 of the 5th of September. However, you will see from the circular sent with my memorandum No. 94/26 of 10th October, that there is at present no machinery for obtaining supplementary allocations so I fear we are unlucky. I have included £750 for the purpose in the Provincial Advance Proposals 1952-53.
  - (ii) We will see what we can do but the lack of machinery for getting additional funds is a severe handicap.
4. Correspondence (i) Where possible, I shall write to Iwo and Ogbomosho direct, copy to you. This is to save "post office" work on your part. In general, Assistant District Officers Ogbomosho and Iwo should write to me through you.
  - (ii) I will send circulars to Ogbomosho and Iwo direct, again to save "post office" activity.
  - (iii) (a) This has largely been done by now.
5. Communications (i) A good idea.
  - (ii) I will ask the Divisional Surveyor, Posts and Telegraphs I regret I have not yet done so.
6. Government Staff. (i) I understand from conversation with the Secretariat that His Honour has not approved an Assistant District Officer for Oshogbo. When the official decision reaches me, I intend to re-submit our case with further arguments.
  - (1)(b) We are doing what we can to get the necessary clerical staff but it is proving extremely difficult
  - /2. (ii) I understand.

See 6.30  
22/11  
New dom. from  
Admin Admin  
Estimate? file.  
22/11

(11) I understand that distribution of the clerks trained at the Clerical Training School, Oshogbo, rests in the first place with the Civil Service Commissioner and then with Secretary Western Provinces. If you can obtain two clerks by direct negotiation with the Principal, do so, but I think you will find it is irregular.

7. Finance. (i) and (ii), Agreed.

8. Transport.

(ii) - I would willingly make the 3 ton lorry available to you at times, but the continual bugbear of available funds arises. Enough money for running one lorry only was provided in 1951-52 and we cannot get any more. See section 3 above. We are now forced to use the lorries very sparingly. However, I will see what can be done.

9. Lands. I have written about this in my memorandum No. 325/2 of the 8th of October, 1951.

10. Departmental

(i) Public Works Department. I am still negotiating with the Public Works Department on this subject and hope to get them to agree to (c).

(ii) Medical. I am still negotiating with the Medical Department. It has already been agreed that, in 1952-53, Iwo, Aiyedade and Egbedore Districts will be supervised by the Sanitary Superintendent at Oshogbo.

(iii) Education. (a) and (b). Agreed.

(iv) Forestry

(b) There will be certain Provincial Forestry Services in 1952-53, paid for by all Native Authorities on a contributory basis.

(v) Agriculture. (a) and (b) Agreed.

11. Legislation. Amendments are being carried out as necessary.

12. Quarterly Administrative Reports. Agreed.

#### Part II Native Administration

I have discussed the proposed federation with Mr. R.E. Brown (Senior Assistant Secretary Local Government) and with you. The following are his comments.

1. Membership of Federal Native Authority. The membership should be proportionate to population.

(iii) Mr. Brown suggests one Chief



as President for one year, meetings to be held in the town where the President lives.

(iv) Mr. Brown suggests twice or thrice a year.

2. Divisional Native Administration Headquarters.

You are still considering this point with the Native Authorities concerned.

3. Native Administration Staff. Agreed.

4. Finance. Mr. Brown suggests complete financial federation with a Central Treasury and Paying Stations. You are doubtful whether the Native Authorities will accept this.

5. Judicial.

(i) Agreed. Please put up detailed proposals in due course.

(ii) Agreed. Please put detailed proposals in due course

C. J. DAVIS  
Ag. Resident, Ibadan Province.  
(Drafted by Goodk.)

GAS:

*Sept 19/51*  
*ss*

*C.J.* *17.*

*11/10*

*add done pc.*

*[Signature]*  
*18/10/51*

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN LIBRARY

## APPENDIX II

RULES  
MADE UNDER  
THE PUBLIC HEALTH ORDINANCE  
(Chapter 183)

the Oshogbo District Native Authority  
(Public Health) Rules, 1952.

In exercise of the powers conferred upon native authorities by section 42 of the Public Health Ordinance and by the Public Health (Native Authorities Enabling) order in Council, 1940, the Oshogbo District Native Authority has made the following rules with the approval of the Lieutenant Governor of the Western region.

1. (1) These rules may be cited as the Oshogbo District Native Authority (Public Health) Rules, 1952.
2. (2) These rules shall apply not only to all persons normally subject to the jurisdiction of the Oshogbo District Native Authority but also to all persons whilst within its area.
2. in these rules:-

"Health Officer" and "Medical Officer" have respectively the meanings assigned to them in section 3 of the Public Health Ordinance;

"infectious disease" in relation to human beings includes plague, cholera, yellow fever, small-pox, cerebro-spinal meningitis, diphtheria, scarlet fever, typhoid fever, sleeping sickness, relapsing fever, dysentery, pneumonia, typhus, tuberculosis, anthrax, chicken-pox, and any disease which the Lieutenant Governor may by regional public notice declare to be an infectious disease within the meaning of the Public Health Ordinance;

"Native Authority" means the Oshogbo District Native Authority;

"premises" means and includes houses, other buildings, lands, tenements, vehicles, tents, vans structures of any kind, drains, ditches or places open, covered or enclosed and any boat or vessel on any inland waters:

"Street" includes all roads, bridges, carriageways, cartways, horseways, footways, causeways and pavements.

Sanitation of premises.

3. The occupier of any premises shall
  - (a) prevent any refuse or stagnant water from lying in his premises or being deposited by the inmates of his premises on the portion of the road or street immediately adjoining his premises;
  - (b) prevent the flow of noxious matter from his premises into a road or street;
  - (c) collect daily all refuse, dung and sweepings in his premises and dispose of them in such manner and at such place as the Native Authority shall publicly direct;
  - (d) take all reasonable steps to prevent mosquitoes breeding on his premises;
  - (e) construct, when so directed by the Native Authority, saigas or other approved forms of latrines on his premises;
  - (f) construct, when directed by the Native Authority, a cov-

er or other protection to prevent surface water from draining into any well on his premises.

4. No person shall
- (a) make any excavation or hole in or within six feet of the nearest point of any street;
  - (b) permit excessive growth of long grass or weeds on his premises or on the road of street adjoining his premises;
  - (c) defecate in a public place;
  - (d) pollute any water, well stream or pond used for supplying water to man or beast.

Infectious diseases.

5. The occupier of any premises shall notify the Health Officer of any case of infectious disease on his premises. Failure to notify the Health Officer shall be an offence.
6. When any case of infectious disease has been notified to the Health Officer he may order the person suffering from such infectious disease and all persons who have been in contact with such person to remain on the premises where such person was at the time of infection and such premises shall then be placed in quarantine or he may cause them to be removed to any place provided for the reception of persons suffering from an infectious disease or for the segregation of contacts.
7. The clothing and effects of any person on premises in which a case of infectious disease has occurred may be disinfected at the discretion of the Health Officer.
8. On the occurrence of an infectious disease in any place the Health Officer may establish a cordon around such place for the purpose of preventing persons departing from or going to such place.
9. The Native Authority shall have power, on the recommendation of the Medical Officer and with the approval of the District Officer, or Assistant District Officer, to declare any area to be an infected area and may order the evacuation or isolation of all or part of such area.
10. The Native Authority or such persons as may be authorised by the Native Authority or empowered, on the recommendation of a Medical Officer and with the approval of the District Officer, or Assistant District Officer, in writing, within an infected area, may:
  - (1) prohibit the movement of persons, animals or goods in or out of such area;
  - (2) remove for examination the body of any person who has died or is suspected to have died from an infectious disease;
  - (3) cause any person in such area to be medically examined;
  - (4) place a mark on any infected building;
  - (5) order the disinfection or destruction of the clothing, bedding or other effects of any person in such area;
  - (6) order the disinfection or the destruction of any building in such area;
  - (7) order any premises in such area to be closed;
  - (8) order the detention of any person deemed by the medical officer of health likely to cause the spread of an infectious disease: and
  - (9) prohibit assemblies of persons likely to tend to the spread of an infectious disease.
11. The owner of any clothing, bedding, effects or building disinfected or destroyed and the occupier of any building closed and any person detained under the provisions of these rules shall be paid compensation by the Native Authority for any injury or loss suffered by him therefrom and the Native Authority is hereby authorised to assess such compensation and pay it to the person entitled from the revenue of the Native Authority.

41

Slaughter.

12. The owner of any animal slaughtered in an authorised slaughtering-place shall collect all blood and offal resulting from the slaughter of any such animal and bury or otherwise dispose of it in such manner and in such place as the Native Authority may direct.
13. The Native Authority or any person authorised by the native authority may inspect any meat or carcase intended for the food of man and condemn any such meat or carcase if he is of the opinion that it is diseased or otherwise unfit for human consumption, and may order such meat or carcase to be destroyed or disposed of as he may direct.
14. Any person who sells any meat which is diseased or otherwise unfit for human consumption shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable to a penalty not exceeding five shillings or to imprisonment not exceeding seven days for the first offence and to a fine not exceeding one pound or to imprisonment not exceeding fourteen days for each subsequent offence.

General.

15. Every person employed by a Native Authority and duly authorised in that behalf by the Native Authority employing him, may enter any premises within the area of the jurisdiction of the Native Authority.
  - (a) to inspect those premises;
  - (b) to ascertain whether there is any case of infectious disease on those premises.

provided that such person shall on all occasions on which he enters any such premises invite the occupier of the premises or in his absence or in the event of his incapacity to accompany him, any other male person on the premises to accompany him while he is on such premises.
16. Any person contravening or failing to comply with any of the provisions of rules 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, or 13 of these rules shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable to a fine not exceeding ₦1 or to imprisonment not exceeding fourteen days for the first offence and to a fine not exceeding ₦5 or to imprisonment not exceeding one month for each subsequent offence.

Made this 23rd day of January, 1952

(Sgd) Adenle  
Oshogbo District Native Authority

Signified in accordance with the Oshogbo District Native Authority (Standing) rules dated 26th day of May, 1949.

APPROVED this 31st day of March 1952

P. V. MAIN  
ACTING LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR  
WESTERN REGION.

CERTIFIED TRUE COPY  
(Sgd) ? H ?

CIVIL SECRETARY, WESTERN REGION, NIGERIA.  
DATE 1/4/52.

Adem.

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THE PLATES



Plate 1 - Oṣogbo central market shrine ("Ile-Ere") housing the images involved in the festival.



Plate 2a - The Oṣogbo images arranged as if in state for some rituals before they are carried in procession round the town on the day of the festival.

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Plate 2b - Details of Plate 2a.

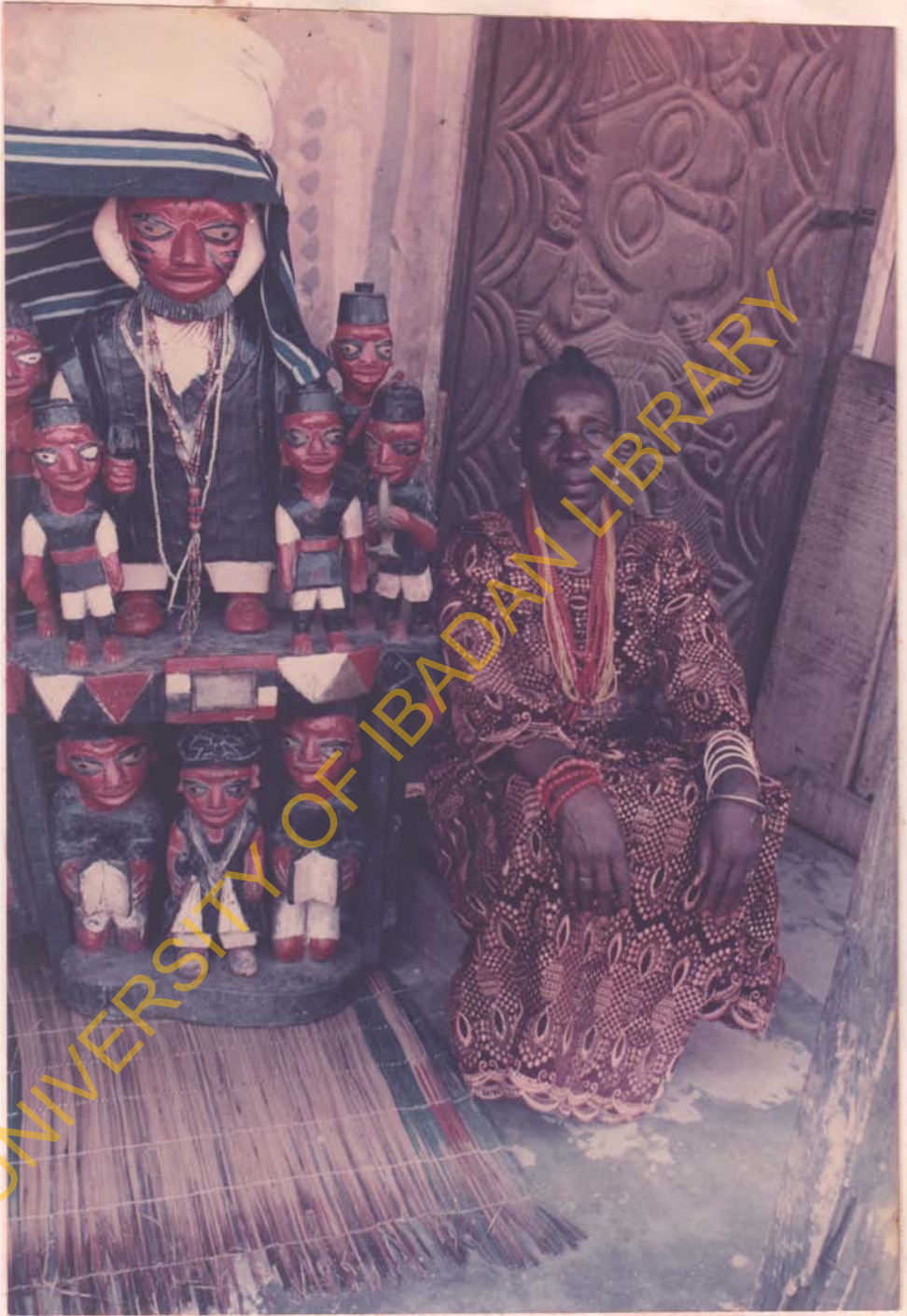


Plate 3 - Madam Oyawèóyè Àsàndé, the Iyá-Ọṣun  
with the composite image of Ṣònpónná.





Plate 4 - Chief Folorunso Babalola, the Aworo, with the equestrian and the composite images of Šonpõnná.



Plate 5 - People trickling in to see the Osogbo images as they are arranged as if in-state.



Plate 6 - The Chief Priestess talks softly to the Osogbo images, offers the sacrifice and casts kolanuts.



Plate 7 - The Chief Priestess dancing before the Osogbo images.



Plate 8 - The Aworo and two priestesses dancing before the Osogbo images.



Plate 9 - Cult members dancing before the Osogbo images.



Plate 10 - Non-cult members join the dancing cult-members in dancing at the Osogbo festival of images.



Plate 11a - Oşogbo images being carried in procession.



Plate 11b - Some of the Osogbo images and their carriers  
(Details of Plate 11a).



Plate 11c - Detail of Plate 11a.



Plate 12 - Oşogbo image:  
Nana-Buku  
("Şonpònná's wife").  
H. 90cm



Plate 13 - Oşogbo image:  
Equestrian statue  
representing Şonpònná.  
H. 150cm.





Plate 14a - Osogbo composite carving representing Sònpònná and his attendants (upper tier) and four other deities (lower tier).

H. 120cm.



Plate 14b - Back view of Plate 14a.

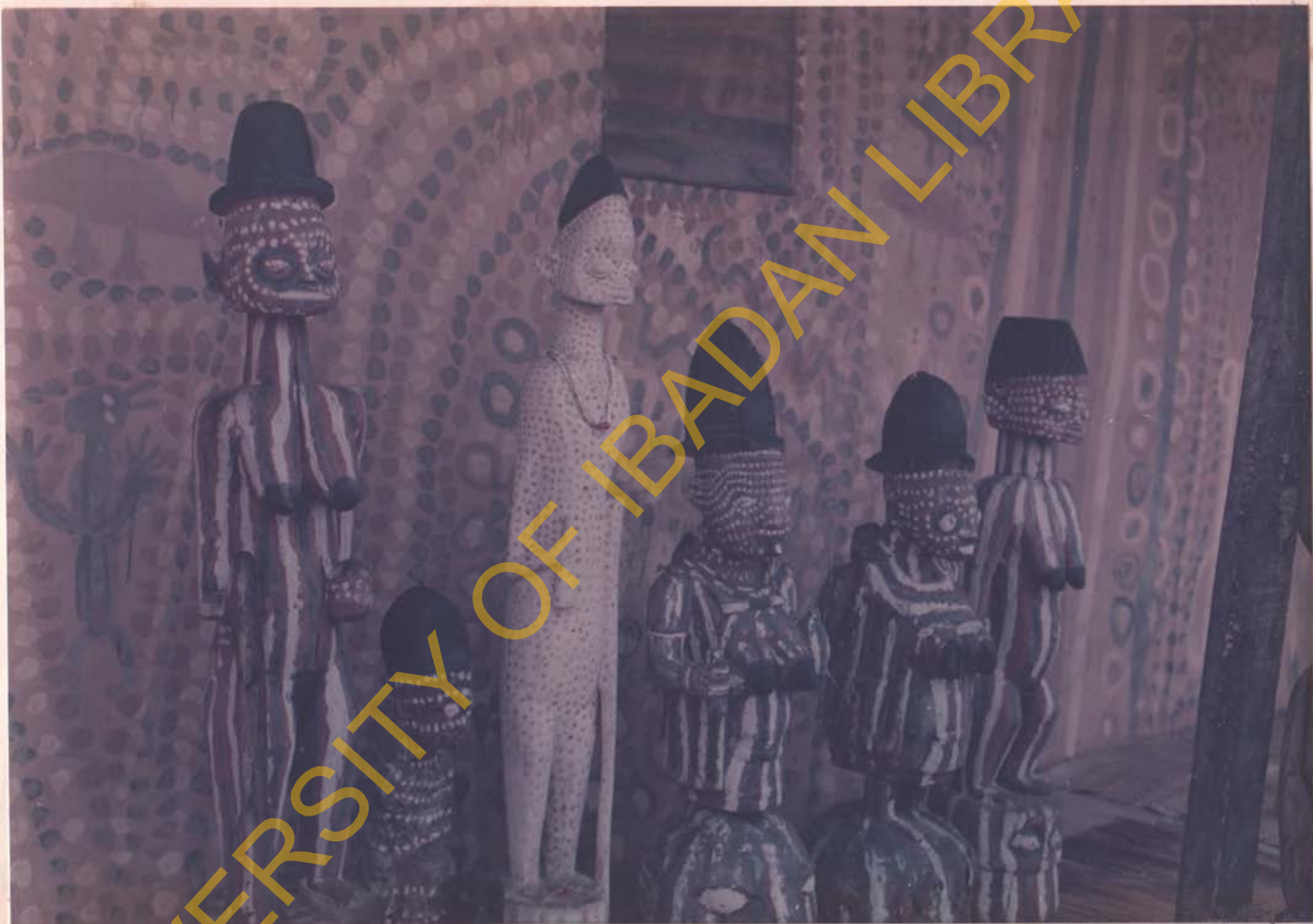


Plate 15 - Some of the Osoḡbo images. The figure representing Obatalá is predominantly painted white in Yoruba imagery.



Plate 16a



Plate 16b



Plate 16c

Plates 16a, b & c - Osogbo symbol of the Oṣun goddess.  
 (a) Front view (b) Profile (c) Back view

H. 125cm.



Plate 17 - Osogbo image symbolizing the goddess of Osun-Ijumú, a tributary to river Osun.

H. 75cm.



Plate 18 - Osogbo image symbolizing the goddess of Osun-Ipôndá, a tributary to river Osun.

H. 70cm.



Plate 19 - Osogbo image representing the goddess of river Okoko, a tributary to river Osun.

H. 70cm.



Plate 20 - Osogbo image representing the goddess of river Ogbaagbaa a tributary to river Osun.

H. 75cm.



Plate 21a

Plate 21 a & b - Oṣogbo image representing Ògún, the Yoruba god of iron.



Plate 21b

H. 80cm.



Plate 22 - Osogbo images representing Iya-Olodo, that is, Iya-Osun (left) and one of her attendants.

H. 40cm.



Plate 23 - Osogbo image representing Iya-Aye ("Mother of the world").

H. 80cm.



Plate 24 - Osogbo image: Ayàn  
(Drummer).

H. 75cm.



Plate 25 - Osogbo image: Awòrò  
(Chief Priest)

H. 85cm.





Plate 26 - Oṣogbo Images:  
Variety of Pedestals



Plate 27 - Oṣogbo image repre-  
sented Iyá-Sàngó.

H. 60cm.



Plate 28a - Columnal carvings in the Sàngó shrine at Akúru compound, Ibadan.



Plate 28b - (Detail of Plate 28a). Equestrian statue symbolizing Sònpónná.



Plate 28c - Other columnal carvings in the Šàngó shrine at Akúrú compound, Ibadan.



Plate 28d - Details of Plate 28c.



Plate 29a - An Iyá-Şàngó (Şàngó Priestess) dancing during the annual Şàngó festival at Agbowo, Ibadan.



Plate 29b - Details of Plate 29a.



Plate 30 - Sàngó shrine at Moḡbà compound, Ilobu.



Plate 31 - Qbàtalá Priestesses from Illa-Orangun.



Plate 32a



Plate 32b

Plate 32a & b - Obatala priests in procession at Ejigbo during the annual Orisa-Ogiyan (Obatala) festival in the town (Verger: 1961, pp. 215 & 216).

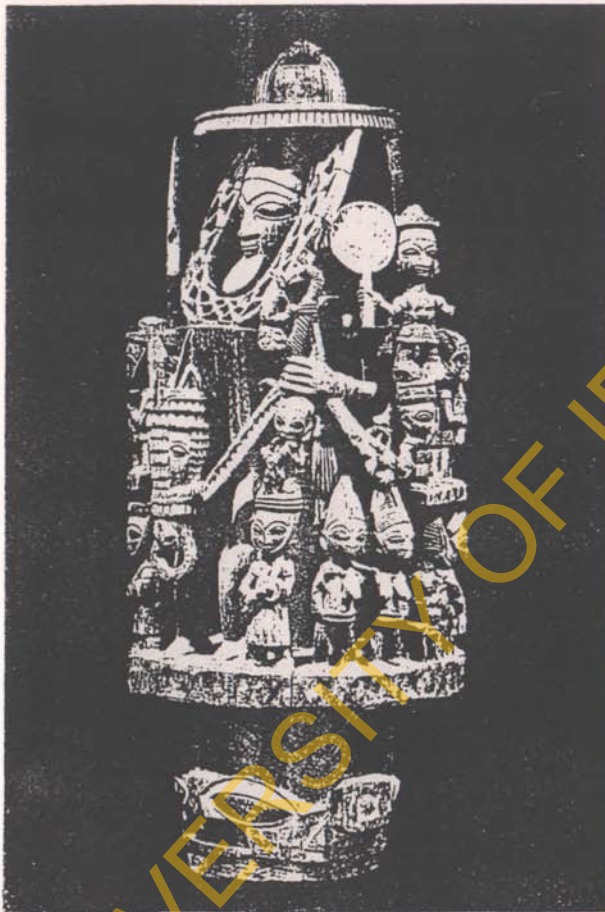


Plate 33 - Epa mask I  
H. 131cm.  
National Museum, Lagos

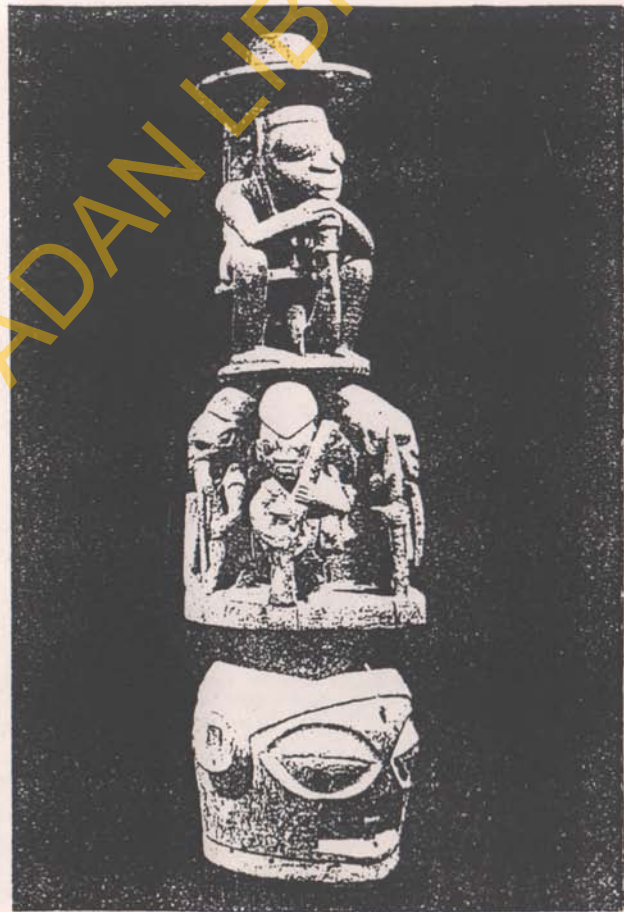


Plate 34 - Epa mask II  
H. 116.5cm  
National Museum, Lagos



Plate 35 - Equestrian statue symbolizing Erinle at the Olobu's palace shrine of Erinle, Ilobu.





Plate 36a- The symbol of Yemoja in the temple at Igbodu compound, Ibadan.



Plate 36b - Yemoja symbol being carried in procession during Yemoja festival at Ibadan.



Plate 36c - Back-view of Plate 36b.



Plate 36d



Plate 36e

Plates 36c & d - Details of Plate 36a.

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Plate 37 - Esie stone figure of a seated man.  
H. 60cm. National Museum, Esie.

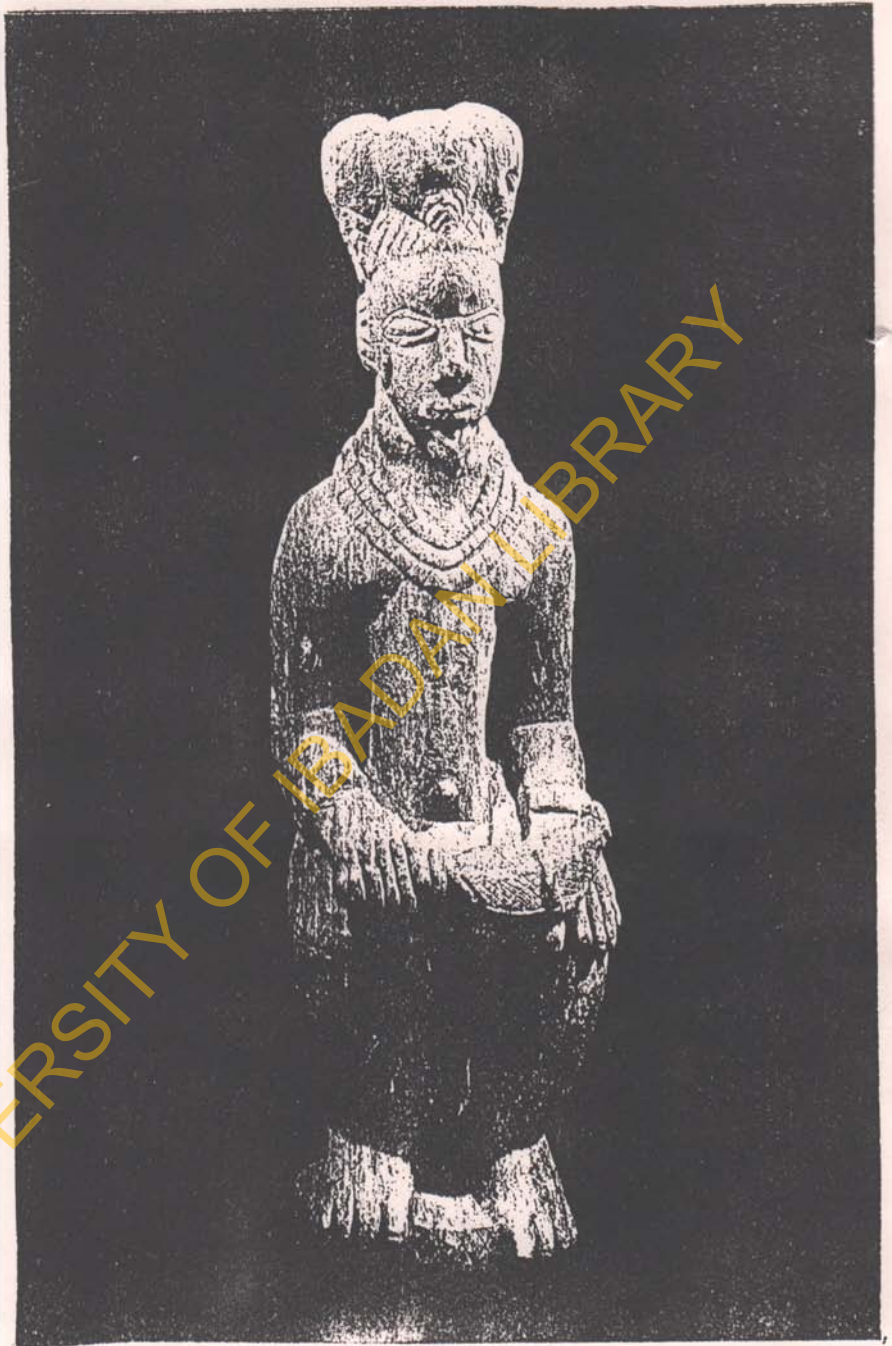


Plate 38 - Esie seated figure with a sword.  
H.75.5cm. National Museum, Esie.