AN OUTLINE OF THE COSMOLOGY AND CULT ORGANIZATION OF THE ỌYỌ YORUBA[1]

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I. A New Model of the Yoruba Cosmos

THE structure of the Yoruba cosmos is broadly evident in their creation myth and can be discerned as presupposed behind many other myths, praise songs of the gods, and other symbolic utterances. These formulations help us, too, to construct a more detailed model of this cosmos than is available in any single mythical form. A model worked out from these sources is preferable methodologically to one derived from interrogating informants to get at their personal ideas and formulations, because these myths and liturgical expressions are relatively permanent features of Yoruba culture and are the materials for informants' constructs. Furthermore, it is not on intellectual grounds that myths survive and one must therefore beware of jockeying informants into making untypical intellectual abstractions from them and then using these abstractions as one's main primary source material. However interesting in themselves their own attempts at a generalized statement of the cosmos may be, informants can better be used to clarify over-condensed or allusive passages in myths and to check one's own interpretations, and again, to supply evidence for the details of the analysis through, for instance, their assertions about the locations of the various gods, spirits, and the ancestors.

The Yoruba creation myth, which will be known to many readers from the writings of Frobenius and several more recent investigators,[2] has its local variations; in the most widely current version, Oduduwa, founder of the kingship in Ifẹ[3] and ultimate begetter of all Yoruba kings, is the protagonist. God sends him from the sky in a canoe, which floats on the waters of the earth. Oduduwa has a bag of sand[4] which he opens and pours on the water, and then a five-toed chicken, sent down in the canoe with him, scratches and scatters the sand, which becomes the first dry land; then people are created and the town of Ifẹ is built, where Oduduwa rules, the first king. This is only one of several versions known in Ọyọ. In the palace at Ọyọ the myth is told with a different protagonist, Ọranyan, the first king of the Ọyọ Yoruba. He comes down from the sky carrying soil and two chickens, all tied up in a woman's kerchief. The chickens scatter the soil to the right and left of Ọranyan, who becomes the owner of all the land; and this, the myth ends, is how it comes about that the kings of Ọyọ, the *Alafin*, are called *ọba onilẹ*, kings who own the land.

[1] This paper has been developed from a shorter one read to the First International Congress of Africanists in Accra, December 1962, and is printed here with permission of the Joint Secretaries of the Congress. I am grateful to Professor Daryll Forde for encouraging me to expand the earlier paper and for finding room for it in *Africa*.

[2] Frobenius, 1912; English translation, 1913, i, pp. 283 f. The earliest reference to the creation myth seems to be R. Lander's (Lander, 1832, p. 180—journal for 15 May 1830).

[3] The orthography current among the Yoruba is used in this paper. The letters have the values of the *Africa* alphabet of the International African Institute, except that *ɛ* is replaced by *ẹ*, *ɔ* by *ọ* and *ṣ* by *ṣ́*, that *p* is the double plosive *kp*, and that when *n* follows a vowel it serves only to indicate that the vowel is nasalized. Tones are not marked, but they may be found by reference to R. C. Abraham, *Dictionary of Modern Yoruba*, London, 1958.

[4] The Yoruba word *ẹrupẹ*, generally translated 'sand', primarily denotes dry, powdery earth or soil, rather than the sand of the sea beach.

In all forms of this myth the threefold structure of the cosmos is clear enough—a pre-existing, primeval sky and ocean and a subsequently created habitable world. Yoruba have names for these three: for the firmament (visibly sky, mystically heaven), *ile ọrun*, house of the sky, or *oke ọrun*, hill of the sky; for the lowest level, *ilẹ*, which, it is important to observe, means Earth rather than water. The primeval waters must be thought of as both equivalent to the Earth in some sense and also as having covered the Earth before being displaced by the dry land. The middle zone, the habitable land, is called *ile aiye*, the house of the World.

This term *aiye*, world, has a wide meaning: it means the civilized, ordered world, organized into states and governed by kings, the place where people live amidst their cultivated land; it includes the pattern or idea of life properly lived and the notion some European languages convey by ' the times ', as in ' times aren't what they were '. It has recently been reported by the Rev. Dr. E. B. Idowu that the Yoruba conceive of evil as being essentially located in the World, as a property of *aiye* in its mystical aspect.[1] Much more could be said about the meanings of the word *aiye*, but I shall limit myself here to saying what it does not mean: it does not seem to include the distant uncultivated bush or the forest, or even, on occasion, long standing, wooded, fallows.

We must, therefore, imagine the cosmos as made up of Sky and Earth enfolding an island-like World. Beyond the limits of World, Sky and Earth may be thought of as touching, since it is believed that certain spirits pass freely between them. We are at once reminded of the dual relationship of the God of Heaven and the Goddess of Earth symbolized by the two halves of a whitened closed calabash among the south-western Yoruba, where they are called Ọbatala and Oduduwa, or in Dahomey, where they are called Mawu and Lisa.[2] It should, however, be noticed that this image was not encountered in Ọyọ, or in Ifẹ either.

This model of the cosmos has, typically of Yoruba religious conceptions, some relativity of scale in its application. It allows us to think of the whole world of mankind as *aiye* lying between Earth and Sky; or to think of each Yoruba kingdom separately as *aiye*, its limits the edges of its cultivated land, which in turn are surrounded by unfarmed land merging into the domain *ilẹ*. We can do this figuratively, although in fact states are connected to one another (in the old order as well as today) by well-maintained paths and roads and the farms of one state may adjoin those of another. We are dealing with the idea of the state and of the cosmic order, not with geography. The three domains of Sky-Heaven, World, and Earth have their proper denizens. There are some regional variations in beliefs about who they are, the main line of contrast being between eastern Yoruba, including Ifẹ, and the western, dominated by Ọyọ. The rest of this description applies to the Ọyọ Yoruba.

[1] Dr. Idowu's is the only published discussion of the Yoruba conception of *aiye* that I know (Idowu, 1962, pp. 177–80). His discussion centres on the problem of the source of the evil that can conflict with and spoil the worldly destiny God gives each human being upon his leaving the Sky to be born and live in the World; and it is a convincing and valuable addition to our knowledge of Yoruba metaphysical ideas.

[2] Ellis, 1894, p. 41; Herskovits, 1938, ii, pp. 10–14; Mercier, 1954, pp. 218–20. Maupoil, 1943, shows an elaborate construction (fig. 1, p. 62), which represents the cosmology of his principal informant, the famous Gẹdẹgbẹ, chief Ifa diviner to the last two kings of Dahomey. Gẹdẹgbẹ, uterine nephew of King Gezo, was of Ẹgbado Yoruba parentage, and met many Yoruba diviners in Abomey; but he passed all his life in Abomey and his ideas are the remarkable fruit of his own joining of Fọn and Yoruba conceptions. Cf. p. 250, n. 1, below.

The House of the Sky is the domain of the Supreme God, Ọlọrun Olodumare (Ọlọrun means ' Sky-Owner '). He is male and rules the sky as a king. Next to him are his principal subjects, beings called, collectively and specifically, *orișa*. These we may also call ' gods '. In some myths they appear as royal children of the Supreme God, and in others as his creations who stand to him rather as vassal kings stand to their suzerain, the Alafin of Ọyọ, in this world. They, rather than Ọlọrun, control, or interfere with, relations between Sky and World, and what goes on in the World, although Ọlọrun is the ultimate source of their powers. In terms of the contrast between their and God's relation to the World and mankind, there is a rather close analogy with relations between the Alafin of Ọyọ, a secluded king rarely to be seen by his subjects but ultimately responsible for everything that happens in his realm, on the one hand, and his duly appointed agents, the state officials, who are his intermediaries with all the corporate groups in his realm and with his subjects individually, on the other.[1] The principal *orișa* are each the head of a hierarchy of lesser (usually more localized or specialized) *orișa*, much as both high officers of state and also vassal kings head hierarchies of lesser officials. A third kind of being in the sky are the *ara-ọrun*, sky-people, who are the spirit doubles of the living and souls awaiting rebirth. The term *ara ọrun* is sometimes used also to denote a set of spirits otherwise called *ẹgbẹ ọrun*, ' the band of heaven (or sky) ', who are from time to time incarnated in *abiku* children; the Yoruba belief is that a woman who gives birth to a succession of children who die in infancy is repeatedly bearing the same *abiku* spirit, the spirit returning to its companions when they call it back.[2] Yoruba, nevertheless, do not confuse these troublesome spirits with a person's *ara ọrun*, or *ọrun*, as it is more simply called.

The Earth is the domain of the goddess Onilẹ, Earth-Owner, who is sometimes simply called Ilẹ, i.e. Earth personified. She is conceptually the counterpart of the Sky God, since Earth and Sky are coeval; and she is asserted by those Yoruba who worship her to have existed before the other gods, the *orișa*. In her rites she is addressed as *Iya*, Mother. She receives the souls of the dead, who become Earth-dwelling spirits.

Associated with her, or perhaps better thought of as manifestations of her power, there are certain vengeful spirits who punish misdeeds on the part of members of her cult, the Ogboni.[3] She also has in her domain the ancestors and other dead, who can pass through to the sky whence they can be reincarnated through the power of Olorun and the *orișa*. Last, certain forest spirits and tree spirits, called collectively *ẹgbẹ ọgbẹ*, the company of the forest, are also in her domain.

Spiritual beings, whether of Earth or Sky, are collectively termed *irunmọlẹ*. Etymologically this word can only mean earth-spirits; but it seems to include all spirits in so far as they can be encountered on earth. It is not ordinarily used by Ọyọ or western

[1] Idowu (1962, pp. 48 f.) uses this analogy of God and king, too. Because so much writing on Yoruba religion has been derivative from earlier writings, and often without acknowledgement, it is worth saying that I obtained it quite independently, so that it must represent a widely held Yoruba view of God's role.

[2] Morton-Williams, 1960*a*, p. 35 and plate 1.

[3] I have described some of these in a previous paper (Morton-Williams, 1960*b*, pp. 36 f. and plates I and II). See also p. 255, n. 4, below, on the ambiguous location of the ancestors; some Yoruba tend to think of them as essentially inhabiting Earth, others as being with the *oriéa* in the Sky. The Ogboni burial liturgy says ' we are bringing him [the dead] home to become an Earth-dwelling spirit '.

Yoruba to refer to *orișa*, except when they are thought of as being possibly involved in uncanny phenomena which could have been caused by any kind of spirit. For instance, travelling from town to bush one becomes aware of the nearness of the Earth Goddess's domain and of the presence of *irunmọlẹ* when the branches of trees stir and the leaves rustle, although no wind blows, or a dry tree spontaneously catches fire.

Life in the third cosmic realm, *ile aiye*, the house of the World, is good only when good relationships are maintained with the gods and spirits of the other two. Spirits of every category have their peculiar and essential roles to play to enable mankind to live, prosper, and reproduce itself.

God himself gives each human being his fate, his distinctive character, before he is born, as W. R. Bascom has well described;[1] thereafter, the human creature is in the care of the *orișa* rather than of God, who has no cult in the world, though men appeal to him in extreme despair. He is also invoked at some stage in prayers and sacrifices to the *orișa* and in certain conventional utterances, most noticeably in pious remarks to the parents of new-born children.[2]

The *orișa* give to their worshippers the blessing of children, health, and, if their God-ordained fate permits it, wealth. They are vengeful if affronted through neglect or impiety. It is not, however, in relation to their devotees but in relation to the world as a whole and to the community that the various hierarchies of *orișa* have specific functions—control over lightning and the tornado, over activities such as hunting, smithing, war, and now driving, involving the use of iron; over smallpox, the fertility of farm and forest, and so on. Within a hierarchy certain *orișa* may have specialized roles serving its more general function. Besides being defined in terms of their role, *orișa* are also differentiated individually or as members of a hierarchy through prescribed or tabooed offerings, by other taboos observed by their worshippers, by the use of certain drums and distinctive dances in their rites, and by the human idiosyncrasies attributed to them, both such broad categorizing characteristics as being of a ' hot ' or ' hard ' or ' cool ' disposition and also, for some of them, individual traits (such as the arrogance and impatience of Ogun) described in their myths and praise songs. Among the multitude of *orișa* (201, 401, and 1600 are conventional numbers), nevertheless, only the principal members, sometimes only the head, of each of the dozen or so hierarchies served in Ọyọ can be seen, through myth and the behaviour of worshippers when ' possessed ' by one, as a clearly characterized personage. The lesser members of any hierarchy are said to associate with their principals, as their ' followers ', because they are of like disposition. It is noteworthy that definite personalities or dispositions are believed to characterize members of their various cults too, and there seems to be good empirical support for this belief—worshippers' characteristics being either remarkably like those of the gods or else clearly complementary to them.[3]

[1] Bascom, 1960, p. 409, cf. Idowu, 1962, ch. 13.

[2] Examples: (i) To the mother of a newly-born child: *Ọlọrun a wo o!*, ' God will watch over it! ' (ii) Conventional greeting: *O daaro o! Ọlọrun ji wa o!* ' Good night! May God awaken us! ' There is no need to suppose a direct Christian or Muslim intrusion into Yoruba culture here, whatever may be the ultimate source of Yoruba—or other West African—religious ideas. We should remember that not only Islam but Christian and Jewish influences penetrated the Sudan from the East many centuries before Ọyọ was founded.

[3] This is not the place to discuss this thesis; but cf. Wescott and Morton-Williams, 1962, pp. 25–27.

The ancestors have powers for their lineage members and their wives, just as the *orișa* have for their adherents, of bestowing children, health, and prosperity, if properly served. Their displeasure is roused by moral shortcomings in a way that the anger of the *orișa* is not, since they are concerned with behaviour between kin and in the community, and with the good reputation of their descendants, not, as the *orișa* are, with relationships to environmental and cosmic forces.[1]

There is a fierce spirit, Oro, whose place in the cosmos is hard to assign. He has the power to cleanse a town of that evil propensity of women, witchcraft. His voice is the bull-roarer or rhomb, and, as might be anticipated from the use of this ancient instrument, his cult is open only to men. The cult does not appear to have been as prominent in Qyọ as it was (and is) among the southern Yoruba; indeed, as will be argued later, the Qyọ may have adopted it as lately as the nineteenth century, after they had settled in their present town, a hundred miles south of Old Qyọ. In Qyọ the head of the cult recited a myth telling that his ancestors obtained the rites from God through a diviner to enable them to call upon Oro to prevent their children dying. Myths of the cult's origin collected elsewhere are concerned to show why its secrets must be kept from women. In the few of its myths that have been published by others[1] Oro is described as a spirit of the land where the first human beings settled, or as a supernatural hunter ' owning ' the land and heard calling in the forest. No myths tell of him as inhabiting heaven and periodically visiting the world, as the *orișa* do. Some of my southern Yoruba informants associated him with the power of the collective male dead in the earth. It might be urged that he is a spirit of *aiye*, World, but on the other hand, he is called from the forest, marginal to the domains World and Earth, and does not dwell in the town. On balance, I incline to assign Oro to the category Earth spirits, but this may be imposing system on Yoruba notions where there is none. It is clear enough that his cosmological status is of no interest to the Yoruba: what this spirit is concerned with is the solidarity of men and their relations with women in *aiye*, expressed in the symbolic language of witchcraft and rites to counter it.

[1] It is true that Șango in particular among the *orișa* is said to hate liars; but, as Joan Wescott has said to me in a private communication, it is the Șango possession priests who cannot tolerate deceit. I think the explanation may be along these lines: more readily than adepts of other cults, they are sent by ritual drumming, drugs, or other means into states of frenzy which are regarded as possession by the *orișa*. Fairly small shocks such as a sudden loud noise unconnected with ritual may result in ' possession '. The possession itself nearly always takes the form of raging displays of domineering power that commonly include rather bizarre and even gruesome actions. In their ordinary state of consciousness this ferocity is unconscious and therefore is projected and experienced as an attribute not only of the god Șango but also of the world, before which it seems the priest experiences himself as rather womanish—a contributing cause of the transvestitism of these priests. Indeed, because their conscious control is so precarious in the face of their own unconscious forces, they, more than most people, need reliable external relationships and cannot easily stand the shock of finding they have been lied to. Paranoia of this sort can easily enough misinterpret a casual lie as a vicious act of aggression, with shattering consequences. The eventual result, as I observed it in Qyọ and elsewhere, was an obsessive thirst for vengeance which was to be obtained through magical command of Șango's powers to punish. The peculiarities of Șango priests are further discussed in Wescott and Morton-Williams, 1962, pp. 25, 27, 28.

[2] See Batty, 1890; Parkinson, 1906. Frobenius, 1926 (I have seen only the French translation, 1949, where see pp. 91–98) cites a myth in which Oro is invented as a magical procedure and then described as the voice and power of the dead ' grandfather '—possibly a too literal translation of the Yoruba *babanla*, ancestors—literally ' great fathers'). Bascom (1944, pt. iii) writes: ' informants in Ifẹ said Oro came from heaven and is therefore an orișa ' and also their ancestor; but he does not report any myth to this effect.

Unlike the Supreme God, Ọlọrun Olodumare, the Earth Goddess Onilẹ has a cult, because she interacts directly with mankind. She is polluted by the shedding of human blood, except in sacrifice, and demands costly rites of purification and atonement. The *aiye* rests on her and she supports people during their time in the world; and she receives them when they die. Her cult, Ogboni, has an important function in the organization of the Yoruba state, and her goodwill is essential to the well-being of the king and his kingdom.

As we shall see, a person worships a narrowly limited number of spiritual beings—certain gods and his spirit double, and, we may note in passing, his own head, a spiritual component that controls his success in life, yet is partly independent of his will; but any of the spirits, whether or not he has ever worshipped or invoked them, may come into interaction with him, and he needs a means to ascertain their intentions. Again, at the level of the community, the kingdom, it is important to know what each spiritual power is doing. This can be achieved because God has sent into the world a pair of divine mediators. In some respects like *orișa*, they are analytically and in their main roles, as Yoruba themselves recognize, *sui generis*. These mediators are Ifa, the spirit of divination, and Eșu, the divine Trickster. By a careful regard for the intentions of the *orișa* and other divinities, as revealed by Ifa, and by a careful respect for the norms of society, one can hope to avoid too much interference from Eșu, whose intervention, always without one's being aware of it until too late, magnifies one's petty misdeeds and shortcomings into dire offences against the gods, ancestors, or the king, so that, it has been reported, he is sometimes spoken of as the anger of the gods.[1] There is a considerable and growing literature on these two most interesting divinities.[2]

We can summarize the Yoruba cosmology, or the model of it we have abstracted, in the accompanying diagram, fig. 1.

II. Contrasts with other Models of the Yoruba Religious System

This scheme is so unlike the conventional statement of the Yoruba religious system that we must digress for a moment to say something about that conventional model. It places the various spiritual powers in a hierarchy: at the top, the High God, Ọlọrun, without a cult; next in order of rank, the *orișa*, usually including Ifa and Eșu and sometimes arbitrarily graded into two orders of greater and lesser deities; then the ancestors; and last, minor ghosts, tree spirits, fairies, and so on. The Rev. Dr. E. G. Parrinder, one of the most widely read of more recent writers, reserves the last category for impersonal forces in charms and amulets, putting the petty spirits and fairies in the same class as the minor *orișa*. I will just say in passing that Yoruba charms and magical objects are made with the help of *orișa*, who allow them to be

[1] Wescott, 1962, p. 337; cf. Frobenius, 1913, i, pp. 230 ff.

[2] Among the many published sources, the following may be consulted. For Ifa, Maupoil, 1943, is the outstanding account of Ifa divination and associated myths, beliefs, and rites. Primarily an account of the Dahomean system Fa, which itself derives from the Yoruba Ifa, it includes much Yoruba material; see also Bascom, 1941, 1942 (a useful critical supplement to Clarke); Clarke, 1939; Epega (1931); Frobenius, 1912 (1913), ch. 12 (Frobenius, 1926 [1949], ch. 9 is substantially the same account). For Eșu see Frobenius, 1912 (1913); Idowu, 1962; Verger, 1957; Wescott, 1962; Wescott and Morton-Williams, 1962. See Herskovits, 1938, ii, for Fọn and Gun (Eastern Ewe) ideas and myths about Lẹgba, which merge indistinguishably with those about the corresponding Yoruba *Eșu* (who is also called Ẹlẹgbara).

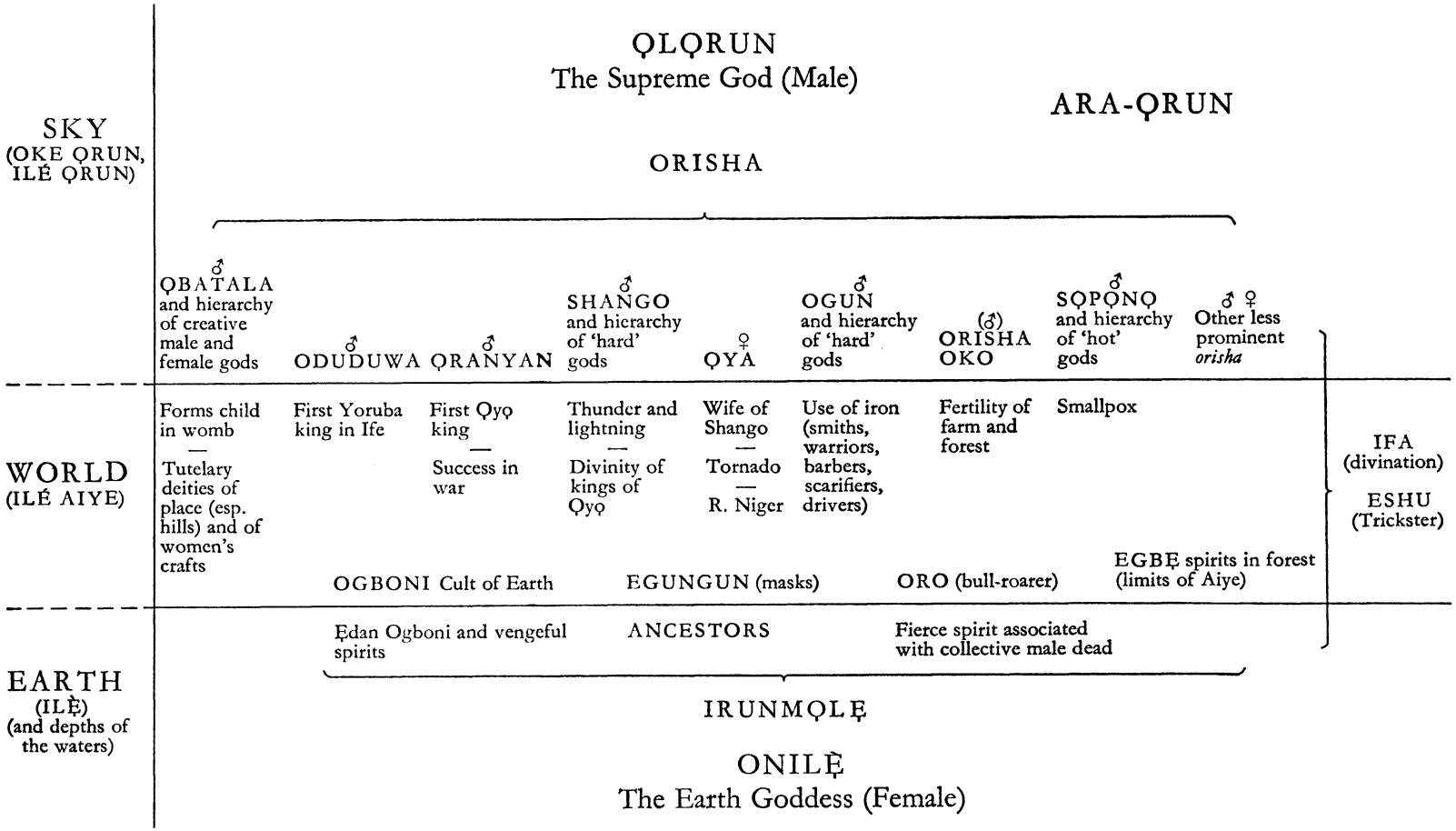


FIG. 1. The Yoruba cosmology.

used as storage cells, as it were, for some of their power. This hierarchic model, more or less developed, is to be found in the work of Crowther (1852), Bowen (1857—Burton's original), Burton (1863), Baudin (1884), Ellis (1894), Frobenius (1912), Talbot (1926), Epega (1931), Bascom (1944), and Idowu (1962). Its fullest exposition is to be found in three doctoral theses on Yoruba religion: S. S. Farrow (Ph.D. [Edinburgh], publ. 1924), E. G. Parrinder (Ph.D. [London], publ. 1949), and J. O. Lucas (D.D. [Durham], publ. 1950).

Enough ethnographic material has now been published[1] to show that this model is inadequate. It fails to reproduce Yoruba categories closely enough and ignores the Yoruba cosmological system. That it has endured so long is curious. Christianity appears to have prejudiced the investigators, many of whom are clergymen, so that (apart from the effects of romantic theories of 'primitive monotheism') a complementary being to the God of Heaven might have been readily imaginable only in terms of a Manichean Enemy, a notion quite alien to West Africa; while Eṣu was cast for the role of the Christian Devil. Possibly, too, later writers have uncritically accepted as generally true for all Yoruba Baudin's and Ellis's accounts of Ifọnyin and Awori Yoruba beliefs (gathered in the area from Porto Novo to Lagos) in a female Earth Goddess (Oduduwa) paired with Ọbatala and not Ọlọrun. Even so, Ellis's statement that 'Odudua is the wife of Ọbatala, but she was coeval with Ọlọrun, and not made by him, as was her husband' ought to have been elucidated.[2] The inadequacy of the model, indeed, has been implicit since the earliest writers, because it has failed to find a place, cosmologically, for the Ogboni cult, although the vast importance of Ogboni, to the south-western Yoruba at least, was recorded by Baudin (1884), Ellis (1894), and Dennett (1910), and Frobenius even became initiated into the cult because he realized that in it lay the key to the secrets of all other cults. A cult so plainly unique in function could only be classed with *orișa* cults or with so-called ancestor cults on positive evidence that the spiritual beings worshipped were either *orișa* or ancestors. No such evidence has been discovered; instead, the functional distinctiveness of Ogboni has been minimized by most writers (though Biobaku's publications[3] on Ogboni in Abẹokuta have corrected this approach); and it has been assumed that all cults that have obvious political or executive powers in the state (or that can impose legitimate coercive sanctions over non-members) can be grouped together functionally (in fact, Ogboni, Oro, and Egungun, to name only

[1] The work of P. Verger deserves especial mention here.

[2] The duality of the Dahomean Mawu-Lisa has been inescapable, but, although they are sometimes said to be fused in an androgynous being, missionaries have gone so far as to equate Mawu (the female member of the pair) with God the Father and Lisa with Jesus Christ! (See Baudin, 1884 (1885); Ellis, 1890; Labouret and Rivet, 1929; Mercier, 1954; and Verger, 1957, ch. 16). The Dahomean Lisa is obviously cognate with the Yoruba Orișala (The Great *Orișa*), an alternative name for Ọbatala (loan words from Yoruba drop the initial vowel in Fọn and *l* is regularly substituted for the Yoruba *r*). The Dahomey Mawu I believe to be cognate with the name of the consort of Ọbatala in Ifẹ, Yemoo (contracted from Iye Mowo—*iye*, 'mother', Ifẹ dialect, Mowo, or Moho, proper name). But a full discussion requiring substantial analysis and demonstration, because in the western Yoruba area bordering on Dahomey, Ọbatala is paired with Oduduwa, must be postponed. P. Verger (Verger, 1957, ch. 14, 15, 16, esp. pp. 449, 552), too, has concluded that the *vodun* Mawu is equivalent to the *oriéa* Yemo(w)o, in a notable review of the published evidence and his own field material. He also discusses inconclusively the question whether there existed in the hinterland of Western Dahomey or Togo, apart from Christian influence, a separate belief in a male sky god also called Mawu. Among the Krobo of SE. Ghana, the Sky God is called Mawu, the Earth Goddess Kloweki (Mate Kole, 1955, p. 134).

[3] See Biobaku, 1952 and 1956.

the most widely distributed of these, operate their sanctions in quite different ways). It has then been further assumed that the objects of worship, though undisclosed because of the secrecy of the cults, are therefore similar and are somehow concerned with the ancestors—and this although Baudin (1884, Engl. transl., 1885, pp. 63 f.) wrote: ' The divinity of the Ogboni is Ilẹ (the earth), one of the names of Odudua the great goddess ', which Ellis (1894) repeated; and Bascom (1944) plainly stated that the ' symbol ' of Ogboni was Earth.

My own model has, then, advantages over the one used by my predecessors and colleagues in their analyses. Its main outlines conform to Yoruba cosmological categories, as given stereotyped expression in myth. It matches Yoruba religious conceptions in assigning the different categories of spiritual beings each to its proper domain and not merely classifying by function and inferred relative importance. And by respecting these Yoruba cosmological ideas, it helps us to understand more thoroughly the correspondence between the religious system and the religious organization and to see how religion functions in culture and society.

III. The Cults in Qyq

Each of the various hierarchies of *orișa* is worshipped through a cult with a priesthood organized into a hierarchy of ranked offices. There are likewise cult organizations for Egungun and Oro, and the rites for the Earth are performed by a strongly corporate cult association with a powerful hierarchy of priests. Lineage ancestors are worshipped with offerings made by the lineage head or senior priest in the lineage at their graves, and also through some of the rites of the Egungun masked cult. Ifa, the divination spirit, is served by a corporation of diviners and he provides the benefits and sanctions of an *orișa* for a diviner's near agnates, wives, and dependants. Eșu too has an organized cult but, consistently enough with his propensity for disorder and lack of regard for authority, his priests do not form a titled hierarchy.

To the distinctions in the proper domain of the various categories of Yoruba deities there correspond differences in the spheres of activity of their cults.

The *orișa* are believed to control external natural forces, including epidemic diseases. The cult associations could impose religious sanctions upon the community (and to a very limited extent are still occasionally permitted to do so); but they could do so only under special circumstances—either when the *orișa* had indicated that it was making demands, for instance through the outbreak of a smallpox epidemic (which indicates that Șọpọnọ[1] is dissatisfied), or the destruction of a part of the town by fire after lightning (indicating the same of Șango), or when the community was making demands upon the *orișa*, such as for rain (Șango) or for success in war (Qranyan and Ogun). On such occasions, the priests divined to ask the *orișa* what offerings were required and, later, to ask if the *orișa* was satisfied with the offerings made. Beyond these special occasions it was the duty of the cult association to ensure that the *orișa* was properly and adequately served at its annual festival, and its service might involve some constraint of the community; to ensure the next harvest, for example, no one was permitted to eat new yams before Orișa Oko's annual festival

[1] Șọpọnọ, who is responsible for smallpox, is an ordinary *orișa* in Qyọ; its homologue, Sagbata, in Dahomey, is, according to Herskovits and others, an earth deity.

had been observed. Ṣango, as will be seen, is in a rather special position, as he is not only an *orișa* but also a royal ancestor—he came to furnish the most potent symbol of the power of Ọyọ kingship, and he sanctioned certain of the Alafin's diplomatic acts or relations. Ṣango, however, had two cult associations, one in Ọyọ town and the other in the nearby village of Koso, supposedly the site of his apotheosis, and the latter was directly organized from the palace—it was in fact the king's cult of Ṣango.

The Ogboni, the cult association for Earth, which had judicial and political functions, sanctioned bloodshed, for to shed human blood on the ground was a grave sin against Earth. Egungun and Oro sanctioned sorcery and witchcraft. All three, more generally, sanctioned competition or rivalry with the government within the kingdom. In contrast to the *orișa* cults, then, they wielded sanctions upholding important features of the social structure or rules directly related to these features, as will be shown in more detail later on. The ancestors were concerned with proper behaviour in the household and lineage group and also sanctioned marital relations.

The cult of the divination spirit, Ifa, was the concern of a corporation of diviners and was held to provide information necessary for taking decisions within the general sphere of government (beliefs about the activities of spirits were an essential principle of explanation in making events intelligible), while the cult of Ifa's counterpart, Eṣu, was considered vital for the general peace and order in the community, and in particular for quiet in the market, where there might be several thousand people.

Admission into a cult is sought from a variety of circumstances. It is expected that a Yoruba will attend and contribute towards the cost of rites for the *orișa* worshipped by both parents; but he does not necessarily become initiated into these cults or even observe their taboos (*eewọ*)—there must first be some evidence that an *orișa* requires his service. This may be a simple matter of asking a diviner which of the parents' gods the child should serve. It has been said earlier that children are the gift of *orișa*; and it is expected that the child will one day become a worshipper of the *orișa* through whose agency his parents conceived him. Ordinarily, this is one of the *orișa* worshipped by the parents, but not necessarily so, because a childless woman may be told that a neglected *orișa* is the one who has a child for her. If it is not already one of their *orișa*, then the parents undertake its worship for the child until he can be initiated into its cult. Later in life, a person may find his way into a new cult through having been 'possessed' by the god, or as a result of personality disorders, or by being called by the god in dreams, or through the agency of Ifa. But, while several gods may be worshipped, the cult of only one as a general rule commands most of a person's participation and enthusiasm, or excites much desire to learn its esoterica and perhaps undergo training for its priesthood.

The highest and, in most instances, all the titled priestly offices in a cult are vested in certain lineages; but it will be obvious that cult members are recruited from a large number of lineages, and it rarely happens that only one *orișa* is served within a lineage, though the lineage members may think of themselves as predominantly—or even exclusively—worshippers of a particular *orișa*.[1] Thus cult membership results in associations that cut across the lineage organization, with its associated compounds, and this alternative set of organized associations has been given governmental functions complementary to those based on locality. These functions, resting on their

[1] On the numbers of *orișa* served within a small agnatic group, see Dennett, 1910, pp. 181 f.

control of various religious sanctions, gave religious leaders political roles, and provided some of the cults with privileged revenues arising out of their administrative functions.

It may perhaps be recalled from my earlier paper, ' The Yoruba Ogboni cult in Qyọ ',[1] that the two main organized groups in the Qyọ government are the king with his palace organization, confronted in structural opposition by a corporation of titled officials, the Qyọ Mesi, the Council of State. A third corporation, the Ogboni cult of the Earth, had a mediating role between them, the Qyọ Mesi having seats in the Ogboni lodge but no priestly offices in it, so that they could participate in its deliberations but not command them. The Ogboni cult met in its lodge in the palace forecourt and the king was represented there by a woman, who reported its transactions to him but could not take part in its decisions. The Ogboni was recruited from free Yoruba on a basis of age, presumed wisdom, and some prominence in secular or religious life. It worked closely with the corporation of diviners.

These three central organizations of government all had a hand in the control of the cults. First, it was the king's duty to ensure that all the gods were worshipped, and in the course of an annual cycle of festivals he received the homage and tribute of each group in turn. He had the last word in the appointment of successors to vacant priestly offices. His three main roles—judicial, religious, and military—were largely delegated to three eunuchs. The Qtun Efa (Eunuch of the Right) represented his religious person. Each cult group negotiated with the king and his high officials through its official intermediary, who was either a woman of the palace appointed *iya kẹkẹrẹ*, ' little mother ', of the cult, or a titled slave, the *baba kẹkẹrẹ*, its ' little father '.

Secondly, the main temples of the various *orișa* hierarchies were distributed throughout the various wards of the town; the principal temple of Ṣango, a deified Alafin, was in the royal ward, the others in wards governed by different members of the Qyọ Mesi. Lesser temples of each cult were often set up in the compounds of titled priests, or the priests otherwise set aside a room as a shrine, and most worshippers set up a small shrine in their own compound. The titled priests, like compound heads, frequently communicated with the ward head and joined in periodical assemblies of ward elders; they were responsible to the ward elders and to that member of the Qyọ Mesi who was ward head for the religious well-being of the ward. The Qyọ Mesi also received customary gifts when priests celebrated the annual festival at their temple or shrine. Further, certain members of the Qyọ Mesi were responsible for rites important for the whole kingdom. In the Qyọ Mesi as reconstituted by Alafin Atiba, first king of New Qyọ, in the middle of the nineteenth century, and as it endured until 1956 when it was again reconstituted, five of its seven members held this responsibility and it is said that four of these five had held it in Old Qyọ; the fifth, the Aṣipa of Qyọ, was first admitted to the Qyọ Mesi by Atiba, who built New Qyọ on the site of the camp of an Old Qyọ man holding the title of Aṣipa, the chief title of the *ẹgbẹ ọdẹ*, the association of hunters.

The head of the Qyọ Mesi, the Baṣọrun, divined once a year to find the state of the relationship between the Alafin and his spirit counterpart in heaven; a bad relationship could, it was said, be made to justify a demand for the king's suicide. The Alapini

[1] Morton-Williams, 1960*b*.

was head of the *egungun* cult, which had an important function in government, as we shall see later. The Agbakin headed the cult of Ọranyan, first Alafin of Ọyọ, to whom human sacrifice had to be offered before any war as a condition of success. The Laguna was head of the cult of Orișa Oko, god of the fertility of farmland and of game in the bush. The Aṣipa, in virtue of his role as chief of the hunters' association, was head of the cult of Ogun, god of the use of iron, and the *ọdẹ* were, under his command, the advance guards of the army and scouts in defensive war. The Ọyọ Mesi, then, had a twofold part in the control of cults. One was a rather general and limited control of cult activities going on in their wards (such as the Aṣipa's over the rites of Ọbatala, whose temple was in his ward). This control was nevertheless important because the cults were not only charged with the satisfactory worship of a god whose goodwill was essential to the kingdom; cult associations also commanded powerful religious sanctions, since they could obtain magical powers from the gods and use them against their enemies. The other kind of control the Ọyọ Mesi had was through the Baṣọrun's role in the service of the king's *ọrun* (spirit double) and the role of certain others as heads of cults that were both vital to the spiritual well-being of the kingdom of Ọyọ and also, as far as the cults of Ọranyan, Egungun, and to some extent Ogun were concerned, were cults that gave their leaders political power —Ọranyan and Ogun in external relations, Egungun within Ọyọ.

Furthermore, the Ogboni numbered among its members priests of many cults; it had a say in the timing and conduct of festivals through its right to be represented when Ifa was consulted on behalf of the town, and so an advisory as well as a directly administrative function in the control of religious affairs.

It would be hard to overestimate the importance of divination in this system, where statecraft had to take so heavily into account the intrusion of autonomous spirit powers. These powers, seen from the human point of view, were a factor that made rational decision impossible unless the diviners could reveal the intentions and desires of the various kinds of spirits. The Alafin had a hierarchy of Ifa diviners to serve the needs of state. The principal diviner, the Ọnalemọlẹ, lived not far from the palace in the royal sector of the town and, through the Osi Ẹfa (and not, interestingly, through the Ọtun Ẹfa, the eunuch for religion), he had access to the king at any time. The various Ọyọ Mesi chiefs, like anyone else who constantly had to take decisions, had each their consulting diviner; the Aṣipa, indeed, as head of the original village that had grown into New Ọyọ, had (and still has) his own high priest of Ifa with an appropriate following of titled diviners.

The Ọnalemọlẹ had a wide range of duties. He obtained Ifa's judgement on the merit of the candidate for succession after the death of an Alafin, and, again, of any candidate for high political or religious office before the Alafin would give his assent to the appointment—Ifa might reject the candidate outright, or make a conditional judgement stipulating that various offerings or purifications must first be made. He had to find Ifa's diagnosis of the general spiritual relations of Ọyọ regularly, at sixteen-day intervals, and, besides this, of any strange, portentous event. Aided by his hierarchy of diviners, he interpreted the signs and formulae of the Ifa oracle, which were generalized pronouncements in mythical language, into statements of specific application to the here and now. It has been said, of divination in general, that the oracle replaces a dilemma with an enigma (Metman, 1963); it was the duty of the

diviners at the king's court to resolve the enigma after they had produced it, the king needing information and not riddles.

Of all the *orișa* cults, the cult of Ṣango requires special mention, even in this summary paper. It was linked closely through beliefs about Ṣango as a deified Alafin and, through its organization, with the powers of the king of Qyọ, who was himself, both as a descendant of Ṣango and also as king, the vessel for some of Ṣango's powers. The principal Ṣango temple was situated in the Alafin's ward in Qyọ town, although the chief possession-priest lived and had his domestic shrine in the ward of the Baṣọrun. The cult was organized on an empire-wide basis, with some central control. Succession to the highest ranks in the cult (a hereditary high-priesthood whose members were not expected to become possessed by the god) was vested in certain Qyọ lineages, most of them in the royal wards of the town; and all possession priests, though resident in the various kingdoms of their birth, had to come to Qyọ for the final stages of their initiatory training and to be equipped with the paraphernalia of priesthood.[1] Since possession priests were not only in a violent frenzy when possessed by the god, but were also believed to have the power to direct lightning, and since, further, they were authorized to collect what might be ruinously high purification fees after lightning had struck, the cult was a powerful corporation, and, outside Qyọ itself, not fully under the jurisdiction of the local state. Again, the powers of Ṣango were, it seems, made use of by the Alafin in the administration of the more distant parts of the Qyọ empire. The Alafin in the late eighteenth century appointed titled slaves as his agents (*aṣoju ọba*: king's observers, is the Qyọ term for them; they are also called *ajẹlẹ*) to ensure the loyalty and fiscal honesty of certain vassal kings, especially along the trade route to the Atlantic ports. Dr. Biobaku has recorded the interesting Egba tradition that the *ajẹlẹ* were all initiated priests of Ṣango;[2] as such they were believed to have magical powers, notably the power to direct lightning, and in possession were, like other priests of this deified king, accorded royal rank and in this state could confront and make demands upon vassal kings with impunity. In Qyọ the Qtun Efa (eunuch in charge of state religion) told me that while not all the *aṣoju ọba* were priests of Ṣango, those that were not always had Ṣango priests in their entourage.[3]

The Egungun cult, the masked association,[4] had a part in the government of Qyọ. Masked associations were powerful in many Yoruba states as in so many West African societies. In Qyọ the *egungun* was prominent, but not as powerful (in New Qyọ, at least) as it was in the south-western Yoruba states. Egungun masks brought back the spirits of important ancestors and also brought the gods to town,[5] so they

[1] Wescott and Morton-Williams, 1962, 23 f.

[2] Biobaku, 1957, p. 8.

[3] Clapperton, 1829, Engl. edn., p. 10, American edn., p. 36; Lander, R. L. and J., 1830, i, p. 67, describe the Alafin's representative in Ijanna (they call him ' the king of Jennah ') as wearing a red hat, which might be indicative that he was a Ṣango priest, as red cloth is emblematic in the dress of Ṣango priests. Some of the lineal descendants of the last of these representatives worship Ṣango to this day; but they, or others of his descendants, also worship Ogun, Ẹṣu, and Egungun, so it is hard to decide what can be safely inferred from this fact. These people say their ancestors brought them all from Old Qyọ, and the names of persons believed to have been born through the agency of all these *orișa* occur in the genealogies over several generations.

[4] Morton-Williams, 1956; Beier, 1956. Bascom, 1944, has some material on the cult in Ifẹ, but his account shows that the cult there differs from its structure in the Qyọ empire.

[5] Egungun were said in Ẹgbado to come from the earth; but the Yoruba sometimes call them *araọrun*, ' sky people ' (a term used primarily of the spirit-double). I have heard this term for *egungun* in Qyọ, and Idowu notes it, too, presumably as used

were considered dangerous and powerful and not merely awesome. The cult was directed by the Alapini, one of the Ọyọ Mesi, but the most powerful *egungun*, Ẹnju, was owned by the Alafin, who kept the mask in the palace, assigned it to a slave or eunuch to wear, and employed him to execute witches and sorcerers.[1]

The Oro cult, a men's secret association, was not granted in Ọyọ the political and police powers it had in the south-western Yoruba area, powers that were vividly described by the nineteenth-century visitors to Abẹokuta.[2] In southern and western Yoruba kingdoms, as well as punishing witches and sorcerers in the name of supernatural powers, the Oro and Egungun cults were also used to threaten or even to make away with those who, while lacking a titled office, were, by wealth or following, in a position to challenge the constituted authorities. In present-day Ọyọ which, it will be recollected, was founded some time after the fall of Old Ọyọ in the 1830's, the number of Oro initiates is small and its head is not one of the principal state officers, but is the head of a village community, Jabata, that came to settle within the walls of New Ọyọ in the mid-nineteenth century. Jabata is said to be a community of Ṣa (Sha) Yoruba origin, a western Yoruba people now mainly in Dahomey. The Oro cult is conspicuously developed among the Ṣa, as it is among the Ẹgba and other southern Yoruba people, while it has seldom been reported among northern Yoruba. I conclude not only that adepts in the cult from Old Ọyọ were not resettled in New Ọyọ, but, further, that the cult may not have existed in Old Ọyọ. It seems that at least over the last century it was restricted to performing rites to neutralize witchcraft as a force at large and was not permitted to make attacks on particular reputed witches.[3]

We are now able to summarize the cult organization in the Ọyọ kingdom diagrammatically (Figs. 2 and 3).

Two important points remain to be discussed. The first concerns the roles of men and women in government. In Ọyọ representatives of four categories of men: the king and men of the royal lineage, free men, slaves, and palace eunuchs, all held positions of authority within the state, secular and military as well as religious. Women too in Ọyọ could achieve state offices, but only through the cults. It has already been said that certain palace women (some the widows of former Alafin, others of slave origin, but all loosely called *ayaba*, 'king's wives') were appointed intermediaries between the king and cult officials.[4] Within the cults the structure of authority was usually dual, with separate, parallel hierarchies of offices for men and for women (in the Ọbatala cult in Ọyọ, all the offices except the highest, Ajẹ, could be held indifferently by men or women—in the 1950's, the Ọtun Ajẹ, 'right-hand [i.e. deputy] Ajẹ', was a woman). Women, of course, outnumber men as traders among the Yoruba, and women were elected heads of the associations of women traders in various specialities, such as cloth, yams, palm oil, &c. But these were lowly offices

in Ifẹ. Yet, as Verger writes (1957, p. 507): 'Egun est évoqué, appelé, en frappant le sol trois fois avec une baguette (*iṣan*).' Since there are also *egungun* masks representing, and sometimes occupied by, *orișa*, who are certainly sky-beings, there is nothing to be gained, as far as this cult is concerned, by splitting hairs over the precise location of the ancestors. 'Both' Earth and Sky beings comes nearer than 'either/or' to Yoruba habits of mind.

[1] I was told, probably truly, that Alafin Ladugbolu (d. 1947), like some of his predecessors, had sometimes worn this mask himself.

[2] Bowen, 1857, Burton, 1863, Campbell, 1861, and Farrow, 1926 are among the more readily accessible descriptions.

[3] See Morton-Williams, 1956 and 1960*a*, for a discussion of some of the functions of Oro.

[4] Cf. Johnson, 1921, pp. 63 ff.

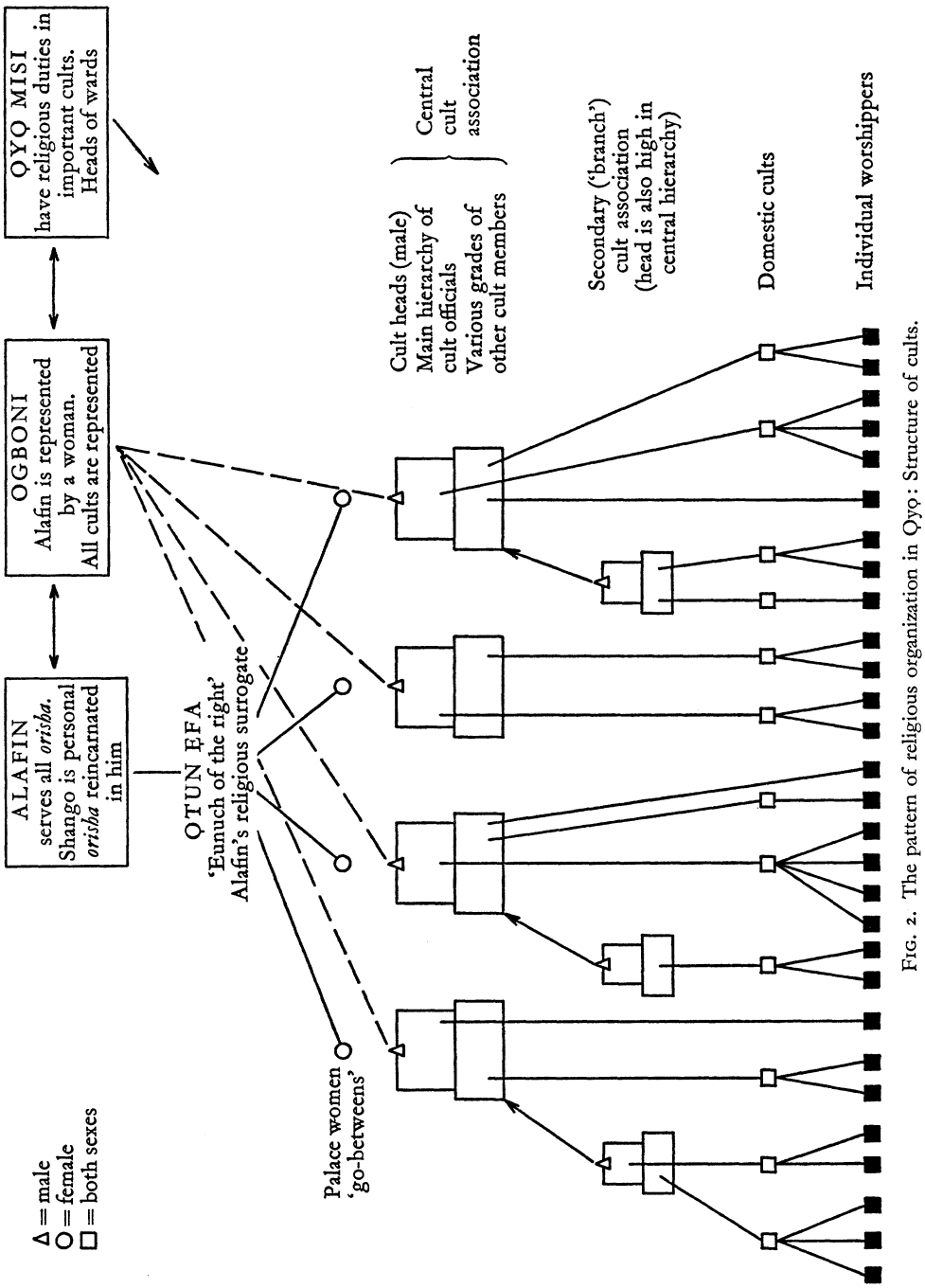
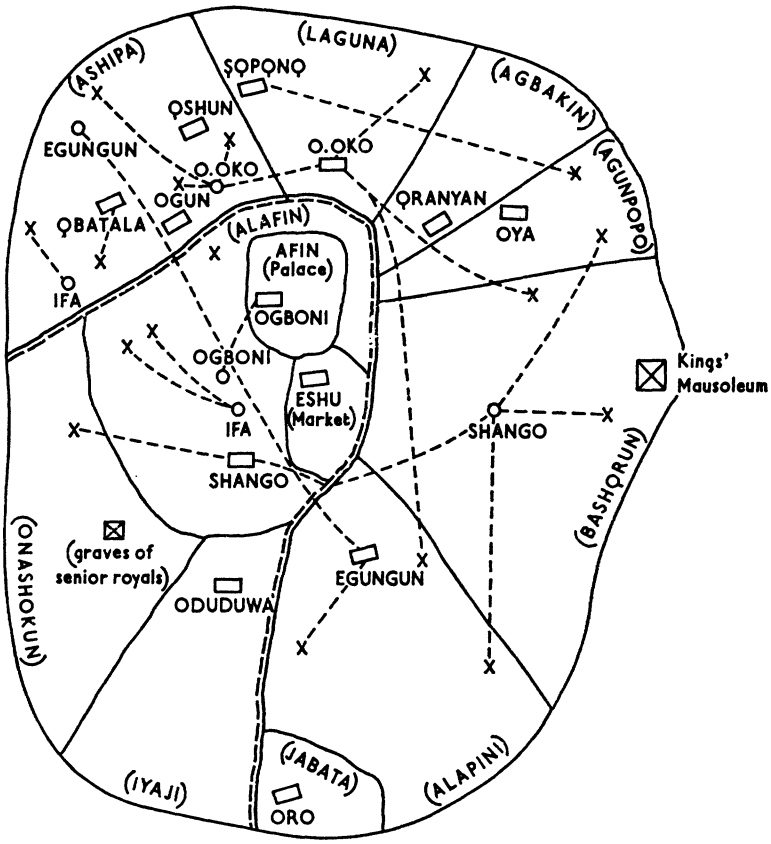


FIG. 2. The pattern of religious organization in Oyo: Structure of cults.



KEY:

- Central temple
- O Secondary temple
- X Domestic shrines
- ---Links in hierarchy of cult organization
- ——Ward boundaries
- ==Boundary of royal section of Ọyọ
- Ward heads (royals or Ọyọ Misi) in brackets

NOTES:

1. All *orisha* have shrines in the palace, except Shango, who has his own royal village, Koso, on the outskirts of Ọyọ.
2. There is no central temple for Ifa. Certain Ifa rites are performed in a grove outside the town.

FIG. 4. Pattern of distribution of temples and domestic shrines in Ọyọ (simplified).

and not state appointments. The king's market in Ọyọ, however, was ruled over by two state officials, the Ẹni Ọja (Person of the Market), who was an *ayaba* (king's wife), and her subordinate, the Arẹ Ọja (Market Official), who was a eunuch. These were not merely secular administrators; they were priestess and priest of the central temple of Eṣu, the Yoruba trickster-divinity, believed to be thoroughly at home and busy in markets, interfering with market transactions in all sorts of mischievous

ways (in all the kingdoms of the Qyọ empire, a temple, or at least a shrine, of Eṣu is to be found in the main market). Their first duty was (and still is) to keep the sacred emblem of Eṣu, a clay pillar, moist and 'cool' with fresh palm-oil, so that Eṣu would not be angry and provoke disorder. They heard and arbitrated market quarrels because in these quarrels Eṣu was at work, and they collected market dues, usually in kind, from vendors in the market as payment for their priestly services.[1]

Secondly, cult activities brought people together across state boundaries, and in two ways. A few of the smaller cult associations in Qyọ were not integrated into the official cycle of festivals and their priesthoods were not incorporated into the structure of the kingdom. These were cults of *orișa* locally important in other places, probably brought into Qyọ by immigrants—including, of course, wives married from distant towns. Shrines for these *orișa* were set up only in the compounds of worshippers, not in public open spaces, and their festivals were domestic affairs during which cult members would celebrate in one another's compounds in turn. At present in Qyọ (it is impossible to know what happened in the old days of imperial Qyọ) the cult members also send delegates with gifts to the main centre of worship of the *orișa*. For instance, the national goddess of Oṣogbo, a large town and kingdom of Ijeṣa origin on the river Qṣun, is the *orișa* Qṣun, deity of the river;[2] she is worshipped in a few compounds in Qyọ and six or seven of her worshippers travel every year to Oṣogbo, 70 miles away, for her annual festival there. Conversely, Qyọ *émigrés* are sometimes represented at Qyọ festivals.

In concluding, we may observe that at the present time the majority of the population of Qyọ is Muslim, with a substantial Christian minority. Some people both serve *orișa* and are either Muslims or Christians, but the traditional religion is in rapid decline. Certainly it lacks the powers in the state that it formerly had, yet the cult organization has not altogether vanished and the Alafin still plays his role, though a dwindling one, in the traditional pattern of religious ceremonies, and the annual cycle of festivals, with a few gaps, continues in a modest way. The higher cult offices still carry obvious prestige and bring in small incomes, and the magical power of initiates is still feared. But recruits for even some of the highest priestly offices are often hard to find and much lore is dying with the old people who know it. The rivalries of modern party politics have penetrated the cult organization, bringing into the open old factions or mere jealousy and hardening them into permanent schisms.[3] This has done perhaps as much, during the last few years, as conversions to new religions and the exclusion of cult groups such as Ogboni from modern administration to hasten the end of the traditional pattern of religious life in Qyọ.

[1] Cf. Johnson, 1921, p. 66.

[2] Verger, 1957, pp. 405–12, gives information about the cult of Qṣun.

[3] Splits along political lines are not confined to the old cults. In several communities, including Qyọ, the Muslims have divided into Action Group and N.C.N.C. congregations, each sometimes with its own mosque and imam.

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Résumé

APERÇU DE LA COSMOLOGIE ET DE L'ORGANISATION DU CULTE CHEZ LES ǪYǪ YORUBA

Les mythes et chants liturgiques Yoruba offrent une profusion de conceptions ontologiques qui ont été abrégées et forment la base, dans cet article, du modèle de l'univers Yoruba et la place occupée par les différentes sortes d'êtres spirituels et de la race humaine dans cet univers. Il existe de considérables variations régionales dans la religion Yoruba et ce modèle ainsi que l'analyse de l'organisation du culte s'applique strictement aux Ǫyǫ Yoruba seulement.

Ce modèle nous montre un univers à trois dimensions: un Ciel (ou Paradis) et une Terre (avec l'Océan) préexistants, et entre les deux, créé subséquemment, un Monde habitable. Le Ciel est la demeure de Dieu, le Créateur du Monde et de la vie. Avec lui dans les cieux se trouvent les divinités moindres (Yoruba *orișa*) et les doubles spirituels des vivants et l'âme des morts attendant la résurrection. La Terre est le domaine de la puissante Déesse-Terre, d'esprits moins vengeurs et des ancêtres. Dans le Monde se trouvent les Humains, organisés en royaumes, qui habitent les villes et cultivent le sol environnant qui fait lui-même partie du Monde créé.

Dieu lui-même ne jouit d'aucun culte; ayant créé le Monde, il en laisse la direction aux Humains qui sont sanctionnés par les autres divinités, la Déesse-Terre et les ancêtres; il a néanmoins doué chaque être humain de sa destinée avant sa naissance et se laisse atteindre par des prières. Les autres êtres spirituels possèdent tous un culte organisé et des rites sont également offerts aux contreparties spirituelles des êtres humains. Les dieux (*orișa*) contrôlent les éléments naturels, et les individus faisant partie de leur culte sont rendus responsables par le roi de la célébration des rites afin de s'assurer que les éléments soient utilisés à des fins bénéfiques par les *orișa*. Dieu a aussi envoyé deux médiateurs dans le Monde, un esprit de divination qui révèle les intentions des puissances spirituelles, et un Fourbe divin qui pousse les humains à offenser ces puissances afin de leur assurer des sacrifices expiatoires. Ces médiateurs ont aussi un culte. La Déesse-Terre, contrairement au Dieu-Ciel, jouit d'un culte tout-puissant dans l'état, tempérant les rapports entre le roi et son Conseil d'État. Le pouvoir de ce culte repose sur l'appel des sanctions auprès de la Déesse-Terre; le culte joue également un rôle judiciaire, puisque le souillage du sol par le sang humain doit être puni et expié. On intercède auprès des esprits de la terre au moyen de leur culte pour contre-carrer la sorcellerie. Les formes de recrutement dans ces différents cultes créent un réseau de relations sociales complétant celles basées sur le lignage et la localité, et les hiérarchies de prêtres ont leur place dans la structure gouvernementale. Par contraste, les ancêtres sont vénérés par les membres vivants de leur descendance par la ligne paternelle et ils sanctionnent les mœurs de leurs descendants et de leurs épouses.

Aujourd'hui, les Ǫyǫ Yoruba sont surtout musulmans et ceci, avec les développements politiques récents, a énormément diminué le nombre des individus appartenant aux différents cultes et leur rôle dans le gouvernement du royaume.