

SECTION V: THE MYTHIC PROCESS AND THE HISTORICAL TRANSFORMATION OF POWER IN YORUBA MYTHOLOGY

In the flesh of discourse, the Yoruba symbolic idiom does not generate a homogeneous set of statements about the sources and means to power. In this Section, I will analyze the mythology of Yemoja, Yoruba goddess of the waters and mother of the gods, with an eye toward its divergent constructions of the locus of power in Yoruba history. Such a view occasions a critical consideration of the structuralist interpretive paradigm. Not only do these myths demonstrate the key features of that idiom, but they constitute a debate on changing historical circumstances. In review, the Yoruba show a diversity of economic and political forms. From the 16th to the 19th centuries, the Oyo Empire of the savannah benefited tremendously from trade with its Hausa neighbors farther to the north. Using horses and veterinarians purchased from the Hausa, the armies of the Oyo kingdom subdued the greater part of the Yoruba-speaking peoples and imposed an internal peace that endured for several centuries. In the 19th century, the long-autonomous peoples and subject kingdoms of the south became the principal agents in the growing trans-Atlantic trade. Especially because of the southern source of guns and other key trade goods, the focii of symbolic and economic power shifted southward. The same process surged forward under the Pax Britannica and in the neo-colonial period. Though by indices of traditional rank and prestige, the Oyo-

speaking kings of Oyo and the Yoruba holy city Ile-Ife would remain supreme, the southern peoples earliest associated with the coastal trade, the missions, and the colonial administration--like the Ijebu, the Awori (Lagos), and the Egba (Abeokuta)--would become the chief brokers of economic, political, and, therefore, symbolic power in the 20th century. Thus I wish to frame this analysis in terms of two key historical contrasts: First, I shall distinguish the northern geographical focus of the Oyo Empire (along with the associated priesthoods and its chief trade partners to the north and northeast) from the southern/southeastern geographical focii of the independent and constitutionally federal Ijebu, Awori, and Egba kingdoms (along with their associated priesthoods and their chief trading partners on the southern coast). Second, and corollary, is the distinction between the Oyo mythic conception that divine power originates in the north and northeast and what I will argue is the southern conception that it originates from the coastal depots to the south.

I postulate that the 19th- and 20th-century mythology of Yemoja bespeaks the decline of those agents of authority associated with Oyo and sustained by overland trade to the north and, likewise, the rise of southern repositories of power sustained by water-borne trade from the south. In the 19th-century chronicles of Yoruba mythology from Abeokuta (Egba) and Lagos (Awori), the tale of Yemoja's parturition is pre-eminent; no other myths appear as frequently.

However, its apparent popularity is neither primordial nor extant. Nor was this particular myth documented outside southern Yorubaland. We may safely infer that the importance of this myth during this period addresses some peculiar historical circumstances for a generation of Yoruba thinkers. The myths of Yemoja I recorded from the priesthoods of the central Oyo region are, by comparison, narratively rudimentary--indicating their relative unimportance in contemporary social interaction and negotiation of power relations. The mythology and ritual of Ogun--hunter, blacksmith, and lord of technology--seems to have prevailed in the late 20th-century negotiation of power. This phenomenon, beyond the purview of this essay, has been discussed at length by Sandra Barnes (1980). Nonetheless, the Oyo myths concerning Yemoja remain a profound^{ly} informative piece of historical evidence, particularly in comparison with myths recorded during a time when and in places where the goddess was preeminent. Future researches will reveal how Yemoja tales have been transformed in Brazil, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and related communities in the U.S., where the goddess remains preeminent. The central Oyo myths tend clearly to corroborate ongoing central Oyo claims to monopolize the true source of divine power--the foundation of that kingdom's past sovereignty and of its contemporary prestige. Thus, despite later recording dates, Oyo myths about Yemoja retain an ancient and well-codified set of interests in the

symbolic negotiation of power relations. The central Oyo tales have not entirely resisted the historical transformations implicit in the southern tales. Comparing the two sets, I will demonstrate that the myths recorded among southern priests reflect some key processes of synchronic and diachronic transformation in Yoruba society, and that ultimately, the myths of Yemoja manifest conflicting assertions in a shifting balance of power.

A) Variation, Diachrony, and the Structuralist Paradigm
Nonetheless, I have argued that within a vast array of phenomenal circumstances--geographical and temporal--Yoruba people share a common idiom in the expression and manipulation of the hierarchical relations that constitute kinship, polity, and worship. Hegemonist views of "acculturation" notwithstanding, the Yoruba were never simply receptive to Western domination and the worldview of its emissaries. Historical change has always been subject to interpretation by Yoruba people in their own dynamic symbolic idiom, and in that idiom Yoruba are themselves key agents of historical change. Yoruba ritual processes--including their political and economic efforts, which share the cognitive design of processes that Westerners might distinguish as religious--are based on the fundamental aim to gain power. Known as ase, power is necessary not just for self-aggrandizement but for protection against enemy

forces that would diminish the subject. By the Yoruba formulation, all of life and human, as well as godly, endeavor are efforts to regulate advantageously the flow of ase from its various sources into its various vessels.

A common idiom does not imply a common exposition. The myths of Yemoja illustrate many contentions widespread in Yoruba polity, worship, and kinship, but every story I have gathered replies to a different situation, resolves a different problem, and expresses the interests of a particular individual or group. Therefore to speak of a myth, independent of any of its versions, or tellings, is artificial. The "Birth of the Gods," as I present it here, synthesized a dozen-odd versions of markedly similar narrative structure. Those versions differ with respect to peripheral details, while, as a groups those versions are structurally distinct from those I entitle "Yemoja as Bride" (see Appendix). The reader may rest assured that I have considered each version as an organic narrative and as a contextualized act of storytelling--with a specific raconteur, audience, intonation, and political context, for example. Footnotes to the presented text will give the reader an idea of the data from which I have distilled the narrative and contextual factors salient to the present analysis. Thus, I do not claim that the text presented, or that any particular text, suffices to prove what "the myth" is "really about." Thus, the interpretation I present does not exhaust possible interpretations or distill the essence

of an infinitely complex bunch of story-tellings--there is none. Above, I have implicitly invoked the Saussurean distinction between langue and parole, inherited in turn by Levi-Strauss, in order to outline a synchronic and abstract langue of Yoruba praxis. However, the status of that langue is purely heuristic and analytic. I reject the realism of "the myth" as much as I do the reification of the langue. What passes for the myth in many folkloristic and anthropological analyses is but a single instance in or the writer's distillation of a varied set of narratives. The discussion entitled "The Birth of the Gods" concerns the parole of Yoruba life.

B) The Birth of the Gods The present analysis of the earliest available myths about Yemoja, goddess of the waters and mother of the gods, rests on the distinct geographical and historical circumstances of two groups of priests and the resultant divergence between their mythological reflections on power. In the tales recounted by her priests, by the priests of other divinities, and in the oracular poetry of the Ifa divination cult, the goddess appears variously as mother of the gods, as the bride of kings, as co-wife, and as wicked sorceress. In all these personae, she is visualized in human form but in the context of some primordial or distant-past time, when important geographical features or dynasties first came into being.

In still other tales, Yemoja may receive no somatic characterization but is simply credited as the invisible source of affliction or healing. Altogether, Yemoja enacts what are, according to the Yoruba conceptualization, the three chief transformations of the female role--mother, bride, and witch (aje). In the interest of brevity and thoroughness, I will detail only the first in the text of the present essay. In the Appendix, I have recorded and annotated another myth, synthesized from a set of contemporary tales concerning the goddess as a bride. Some of the themes prominent in those tales reflect clearly on the interpretation of the 19th-century tale I have entitled "The Birth of the Gods." Together, these myths illustrate in an ostensibly familial setting some key issues of historical change in Yorubaland.

The following myth comes from 19th-century sources in coastal Yorubaland (Awori Yoruba--Lagos):

A long time ago, the god Obatala and his wife Odudua bore a son and a daughter¹⁷ named Aganju and Yemoja¹⁸. They grew older, married each other, and bore a son named Orungan.¹⁹ As he grew older, Orungan²⁰ fell in love with his mother, but she refused to indulge his passion. So, one day, he raped her.²¹ She fled in horror as Orungan pursued hotly, declaring his passionate love and assuring her that no one else would ever know. He offered her the prospect of two husbands, one acknowledged and the other secret, but she declined the offer and continued running.²² As Orungan gained on his mother and reached out to her, she fell down in exhaustion.²³ Two streams of water gushed forth from her huge breasts, and these eventually united to form a lagoon near Lagos.²⁴ Her body swelled, and her abdomen burst open. From the gaping body emerged (1) Dada (God of Vegetables and Newborn Babies), (2) Sango (God of Thunder and Lightning), (3) Ogun (God of War, Iron, and Hunting),

(4)Olookun (God or Goddess of the Sea), (5)Oloosa(Goddess of the Lagoon), (6)Oya (Goddess of the River Oya), (9)Orisa Oko (God or Goddess of Agriculture), (10)Osoosi (another God of Hunting), (11)Oke (God of Hills), (12)Aje (God or Goddess of Wealth and Luck), (13)Sonponnon (God of Smallpox and other Disease), (14)Oorun (the Sun), and (15)Osu (the Moon).²⁵

To commemorate this event, a town was built on the spot where Yemoja's body burst open. This town was named "Ife," which means "distention, enlargement, or swelling up." It became the holy city of the Yoruba-speaking peoples.²⁶

The genealogical emphasis of the tale recommends that we view it as we would the unfolding of a genealogy, with each sequential generation revealing its own significant content. Those generations and members of generations insignificant to the intent of an oral history will tend toward extinction. The key qualities of Yemoja's ancestry be, first, the relative non-differentiation and, then, the relatively harmonious union of structurally opposite principles. Recall that Olodumare is the primordial stuff of all being. His creation of the world, symbolized in the primordial union of the structurally complementary Obatala and Odudua, who are coeval creations of Olodumare. They are simply husband and wife. Their marriage begins the multiplex process of differentiation and hierarchalization that eventually constitutes the human world.

The next generation in this cosmic genealogy conjoins a more complex and less opposed pair of agents--brother and husband with sister and wife. By alternate formulations,

they may represent respectively water and land, or moist and dry soils (see footnotes). As implied by their common parentage, they share significant constituting elements. They co-exist amid recognizably earthly geography, and they may both be types of soil, distinguished only by their relative wetness.

The following generation witnesses the conjunction of two of the most consubstantial categories in Yoruba society--mother and son. Not only are they biologically close but the social relationship is notoriously close and mutually dependent. The mutual loyalty of Yemoja and her sons is a central detail in some of the royal bride myths (see Appendix). Moreover, mother and son are also wife and husband, aunt and nephew (egbon and aburo--in this case closely related collateral kin). The compression of so many emphatic structural oppositions in a single copulation proves quite productive. However, Yemoja in the "Birth of the Gods" myth finds the prospect of their ultimate reconjunction repulsive, but when it happens, the consequence is literally explosive. Two versions of the tale claim that Yemoja has only one parent. So, relative to the uroboric, or undifferentiated, state of the original cosmos in the tale, the result is rapid differentiation and unprecedented vesselization.

The key processes of union and differentiation, in each generation, have been conjugation and birth. We might chart the sequence of unions as follows:

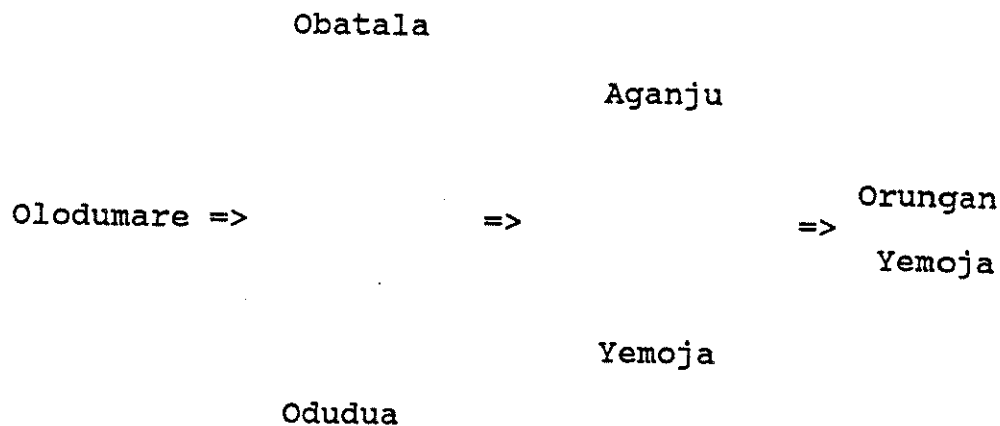


Diagram III. The sequence of procreative unions in "The Birth of the Gods."²⁷

Dynamically, this tale traces the funneling of power from overarching uroboric sources, into particular socially constituted and progressively more socially intensive contexts, and then, explosively, back out again. The first generation, Olodumare, is the essence of everything and every event. The last is the unleashing of vast and chaotic differentiation of orisa, who are ultimately to be vesselized in the complexity of cult life.

The preoccupation of the anthropological literature with the incest tabu forbids us to overlook Yemoja's horrified flight from her son. Yet, incest per se does not seem to be the fear to which she responds. Many version narrate a guiltless enough marriage to her brother. The salient distinguishing qualities of Orungan's rape are

coercion and the fact that mother and son rather than generational co-equals, have mated. It is for the son naturally to flow outward from his mother, but Orungan has reversed the flow by reinjecting himself. The consequences are, for her destructive: she bursts. For him, they are bounteous: she has produced his children. Not incest alone but the most extreme involution of the flow of power seems to benefit the structurally male agent at the expense of the structurally female. The corollary normative issue in the final procreative union is the secrecy of the union. Indeed, secrecy is a potent value in Yoruba society, where invisible collusion is feared because it is the critical means of mastering and monopolizing power. Since cult, occupation, and political membership are generally prescribed according to patrilineal descent, such secrets are usually the property of families. As the reader will recall, the cults of the orisa are known as awo, which also means "secret." In fact, the knowledge of secrets about the god and the means to invoke him or her are key to the personal power of the worshiper; but keeping those secrets within the circle of the loyal is crucial to the survival and power of the god himself. In the "Birth of the Gods" tale, the very origin of most of the orisa cults hinges on a secret and extremely involuted union. The ambivalent normative value the event is connected to the implicit contradiction in the diffusion of power in Yorubaland: everyone wants and needs power, but power is by definition

based on exclusion, represented in this tale by progressively more extreme forms of endogamy--the likes of which, significantly, contemporary priests in the Federal Republic of Nigeria find virtually impossible. Kingship and cult create their power by excluding structurally female others. However, when held in too tight a circle, such power wreaks destruction on the structurally female but must, after it explodes, be delegated to new vessels. Power must circulate in order to exist and in order to function properly. Despotism and malevolent witchcraft are the typically evil consequences of an over-developed secrecy misdirections of flow. Indeed, the despotic kings Ogun, Sango, and Sonponnon are products of one of Yemoja's acts of incest; the witches are another, resulting from her rape by her son Ogun.

Though contemporary priests tell me they doubt the possibility of Orungan's having raped his mother, much of the surrounding detail is quite consistent with the contemporary mythic and ritual iconography of power. The ultimate event of the tale depicts Yemoja's bursting forth with those things identified directly in Yoruba cosmology with the human appropriation of intrinsically God-created and therefore supra-social forces. The site of that bursting forth is, appropriately, the holy city of the Yoruba and the founding place of the human world. It is equally the center of all the kingdoms' contact with divine power, ase, which differs neither semantically nor

conceptually from "political" power. The right and might to rule are a form of spiritual authority. Recall that kings are constitutionally "Heads of All Priests"; the gods are their forefathers and the source of their ase, or command. At Ife, therefore, the structurally female vessel has burst and the power it had contained eventually takes form no less in the creation of a score of tributary kingships than in the birth of tributary gods. We detect the outlines of the same event in the tale of Oyo's being founded where Oranyan's horse slipped--messily detaching power from its singular "vessel."

In relation to Yemoja's body, liquid is iconic of those supra-social forces. From her breasts issue streams of water. Her abdomen "swells" and "distends" before "bursting," evoking repeated images of the liquid within her. In Section IVC, I discussed a multiplicity of images of water and its structurally female vessels. For example, in Yemoja's yearly festival the filling of the shrine pot with water is iconic of the goddess' filling the priestess' head and other vessels of her body with divine power. Indeed, one version of this tale, the goddess struck her head when she stumbled, implying that not only her abdomen but her head bursts and is somehow related to the critical event--the unleashing of power from its vessel. When she possesses a priestess, Yemoja gives the power to think and act effectively and to command, but, more often than

anything else she allows barren women to bear and suckle children.

The "Birth of the Gods" myth reconfirms the significance of water, or liquid, and its vessels in the circulation of power in the Yoruba cosmos. Water in vessels is a key icon, but it differentiates into subsidiary symbols of power as well. While Ellis enumerates the gods not delivered by Yemoja, Gleason (1973) presents the view that she must have mothered all the gods because "nothing can exist without water." As we consider the identities of those children specifically listed in the present tale, we will recognize alternative views of the supra-social events and powers associated with water.

Seniority is a persistent issue in Yoruba kinship and government. Thus, the children's birth order seemed an issue of contention at the time Ellis and others collected this tale. The axis of variation in the two alternatives he notes relates to the relative primacy of different uses of power in the primordial unfolding of the cosmos. I have narrated the version in which themes of kingship appear first (represented by Dada, Sango, and Ogun--all kings or would-be kings), followed by themes of ocean, lagoon, and river water (Olookun, Oloosa, and Oya), and then farming (Orisa Oko), hunting (Osoosi), wealth through trade (Aje, whose name differs in tone from the term for witches), military defense (Oke--the Hill God), and finally disease (Sonponnon). In the alternate version priests list first

themes of ocean and lagoon water, then kingship, river water, war and kingship, and then agriculture, hunting, military defense, wealth through trade, and disease. Given the multifarious symbolism and attributes of each god, we cannot infer precisely the phenomenal referent of each god listed, but if their referents are ever clearly distinguished, they would be so distinguished in a discourse comparing them.

The broadest patterns distinguishing these alternative birth orders contrast the primacy of female-associated power, connected to coastal and riverine sources of wealth through import-export, with the primacy of male-associated forms of power connected to the kingship, which historically had monopolized certain forms of trade but legitimated itself principally through identification with orisa power. In the Oyo Empire the types of trade most crucial to the kingship were, in fact, overland rather than water-borne. During the late 19th-century and in southern Yorubaland, where these tales were collected, riverine and trans-oceanic trade had assumed overwhelming importance. The royal monopolies in trade were being challenged by a growing cash economy, the declining independence of Yoruba kings from European power and the rising prominence of women in long-distance trade under the British Pax. Concomitantly, cowry shells, which had been used for some centuries as currency, were especially prominent in the iconography of the riverine goddesses. By the 20th century, most Yoruba traders were

women. Thus, in cult and market, access to power had devolved to agents more plebeian, female, aquatic, and chthonic than the king. In the birth order the identification of power with progressively interior waterways (ocean--Olookun, lagoon--Oloosa, and a river--Oya) may not be fortuitous. Buying European goods at the coast and selling them inland brought great wealth to many women and men. I assert not simply that rivers are female or, incorrectly, that trade wealth was an exclusively female province. Rather, I infer that one of the birth orders allots seniority and therefore preeminence to relatively supernal, royal, dry, male, and husbandly agents of power, while the other allots seniority and preeminence to relatively chthonic, plebeian, local, autochthonous, aquatic, female, and uxorial agents of power. Indeed, the river goddesses themselves are chthonic relative to the male orisa--like the god of lightning Sango; and, insofar as wealthy marketwomen are often suspected witches (explicitly chthonic spirits), the rising agents of power stood symbolically far apart from its traditional agents. As the reader will recall from Section III², instead of seeking their chief protection from the supernal spirits, contemporary politicians and wealthy businessmen are alleged to have secured the patronage of "old women" who are implicitly witches. The watery symbolism of Yemoja, apart from contentions about the birth order of her children, is in itself telling. Water, in the mythic idiom, and the

manipulation of certain foreign relations, especially trade, are undoubtedly the sources of royal power. However, implicit in a sub-theme of the tale, various agents vied for those forms of power in the 19th century. By the twentieth century, the plebeian businessmen and businesswomen had surely prevailed, but royal and supernal agents of power still possessed the symbolic means to assert themselves strongly.

The funneling of power from overarching uroboric sources, into particular socially constituted and progressively more socially intensive contexts, and then back out again might be represented in terms of the pot image:

outside => inside => outside

Diagram IV. Reflecting the relation of supernal power to its vessels and, especially in the "royal bride" myth, the relation of the protagonist, iconic of power, to the groups that incorporate her.

As elsewhere in Yoruba symbolism, the ultimate source of power is foreign, where it is yet unsocialized and unspecialized in its effects. Thus, power is first free then captive, and then free. The male life career proceeds through similar transformations. A boy is peripheral to his father's household. As he approaches seniority, he becomes

central to the patrilineal household, and, as a father, he projects his power into the structurally peripheral vessels represented by his children. Females' lives proceed through complementary transformations. As a potential vessel of her future husband's power, she is relatively unpressured in her natal home. Then, as a wife, she is both a servant and an instrument of power's envesselment. Finally, as an autonomous mother, she is no longer subordinate to any specific agent of power, and she is free to grasp power in her own name as she will. As I have noted, elder women among the Yoruba are often quite independent of their husbands; they travel widely for purposes of trade and thus escape the bounds of the patriarchal household while the husband and lord is occupied with his fertile younger wives. Such women are often identified as witches, whose freedom from institutional and social constraints associates them graphically with free, wild-animal familiars like birds.²⁸

The "outside => inside => outside" pattern also structures the Oyo-associated "royal bride" myth (see Appendix). The foreign bride from the northeast marries in, and, constrained by injunctions, she returns to her origin, leaving the in-group, the kingdom and the family, from whose perspective the tale is told. In both myths the water inside the fecund woman goes outside its vessel. In most versions of the Oyo-associated myth, the uxorial Yemoja thus comes from the northeast, conforms temporarily to the strictures of her husband, household, and then returns to

the northeast. However, a minority version does have her return to the home of her mother Olookun, lord of the ocean to the south, expressing a contention nearing the transformation integrally encoded in the "Birth of the Gods" scenario. Likewise, this minority version stresses the importance of relatively female agency. Mother-daughter cooperation in the exercise of power, also evident in the devolution of witchcraft and potting skills, antithesizes the ideological hegemony of male, patriarchal, and supernal authority.²⁹ Yet, in the end, it becomes an instrument of that authority. Pots socialize the structurally male power represented by the contained water, while the witches and priestesses edify the power of the male king. Alternatively, in the southern myth, Yemoja comes from the sky, but the quintessence of her power "returns" unambiguously to the south. Though its paradigm remains "outside => inside => outside," the geographical axis of movement has shifted distinctly. Yet, finally, the birth order of her children always lists the water goddesses in the order of increasing insideness--from Olookun, to Oloosa, to the various river goddesses. Thus we must add a fourth stage to the structural process of the "Birth of the Gods" myth.

outside => inside => outside => inside

Diagram V

Power circulates and its vessels inevitably change. Even its sources are vessels, ultimately, of Olodumare's power: they change too. As implied by the joining at the lagoon of the two streams, that lagoon is a key site of mediation and, in fact, separates the new symbolic locus of the relatively divine, from the new and complementary symbolic locus of its vessels. The sky(orun)/earth(ile) divide is no longer the iconic distinction between power and its vessels in human life. Thus, furthermore, the foremost mediators of power are no longer kings and royal male orisa, like Sango. Instead, the principal distinction between power and its vessels becomes the sea(okun)/land(ile) divide, of which river goddesses, coastal traders, and southern politicians become the foremost mediators. In Lagos and to contemporary informants generally, the ara-oke, or "up-country people" from the inland, are considered unsophisticated and relatively powerless provincials. We may also note, that even with the geographical directional shift notwithstanding, that the agencies now linked in complementary opposition are of the same order as the procreative link between Aganju and Yemoja, Land and Water or Dry and Moist Lands. The myth has recognized this potential division from the start but, in this case, has rendered the sea/land conjunction undoubtedly subsequent in the genealogy to the conjunction of Obatala and Odudua, a sky god and king wedded to a goddess of the earth (ile). In

either case, we might predict that the "funneling" pattern, or the tendency toward diminishingly opposed partners in a sequence of procreative conjunctions, will recur among Yemoja's children after her explosive parturition. As implied in the birth order, power that goes outside comes back inside when structurally opposite forces are conjoined.

Amid the various differentiations yielded by Yemoja's parturition, the emergence of two streams from her breasts and their convergence at Lagos recasts the thematic conjunction of opposites repeated earlier in the tale. First, the direction of Yemoja's flight and of the river's flow apprehend the historical movement of the power source from the 18th-century inland Oyo Empire, to the various southern kingdoms that rose in the 19th century, and finally to the 20th-century preeminence of Lagos, the federal capital. We cannot dismiss this detail simply as a natural fact of geography, for as we witness in the mythology of Yemoja as royal bride (see Appendix), the priests within the historical domain of Oyo and those whose prestige still rests on identification with royal power orient Yemoja's origin to the northeast of the Oyo Empire and describe her final flight as northeastward--in the direction of the powerful Nupe kingdom and of Mecca, where the first kings of Oyo and of all the Yoruba, respectively, are alleged to have originated.³⁰ Finally, the convergence of Yemoja's two streams at the brackish lagoon in Lagos suggests a mediation as powerful in its consequences as any other. Lagos and the

lagoon are the site of the most explosive contact between Europe and Yorubaland. It has brought wealth, power, ethnic and cultural variety, and internecine violence. The fertility of this social chaos and foreign penetration was apparent in the late 19th century, when the tale was collected, and its symbolic apprehension lay within the ready grasp of Yoruba thinkers and myth-makers. The concluding section will illustrate how the largest and most conspicuously Western-looking feature of contemporary Yoruba material culture manifests an evolving but indigenous symbolic idiom.

SECTION VI: HISTORICAL PROCESS AND THE PROGRESS OF AN IDIOM

A) Houses of Power: Changing Architectural Style in Yorubaland. The aesthetic features of Yoruba architecture have suffered neglect under the dual assumptions that, first, traditional architecture is little more than a technological response to the need for shelter and, second, that the 20th-century accomplishments of Yoruba architects and contractors consist solely in the imitation of Western models (see, for example, King 1984:223). Transcending such contradictory reasoning, evolving patterns of architecture and urban planning encode another dimension of the last two centuries' cultural transformations. The distinctly Yoruba symbolic idiom has not dissolved even in the most thoroughly "acculturated" and "modernized" quarters of society. Yet, the architectural example illustrates the amendment of an idiom as its bearers encounter a radically different ideology of power.

Yoruba compounds traditionally consist of a rectangular grouping of laterite-walled rooms surrounding a courtyard with a single exit to the outside (see Illustration I). Less often reduced to the functional are the ornate and decoratively plastered houses described as "Brazilian" (see Illustration II). Built by 19th-century Yoruba repatriates from Brazil and Sierra Leone, these buildings generally feature multiple stories, porches, colonnades, and sometimes

courtyards. Finally, the elite housing of the late 20th century reflects considerably the technological influence of British builders and their adaptation of the south Asian "bungalow" (see King 1984). These buildings of painted cinderblock are usually square or rectangular and multi-storied. In them, as in the "Brazilian" houses, sleeping quarters, eating and cooking spaces, and storage spaces exit onto hallways and, occasionally, onto foyers. Moreover, as detached dwellings, both are better suited to the autonomy of nuclear families than is the traditional compound. Both "Brazilian" and bungalow-style architecture tend to use cement or fired brick, after foreign models, and roofs of British-introduced corrugated iron are now evident in all types of residential architecture. Nonetheless, profound structural variations among these building styles and their contexts are obvious to any observer.

Prefigured in the synchronic variations among socio-politically diverse regions of pre-19th century Yorubaland, the structural vocabulary of 19th- and 20th-century residential transformations will express the political, economic, and religious dimensions of a progressive decentralization.

Elite Architecture in the 20th Century. Yoruba have long lived in large towns and cities, ranging up to 120,000 by one estimate in 1858 (Clarke 1972). With the exception of royal palaces, Yoruba dwellings are typically built close together and in densely populated areas. The most

fashionable developments nowadays look quite different. As of the late 20th century, elite housing tends to appear in uncrowded areas at the periphery of the old town, featuring multi-story buildings with high walls topped with glass shards or metal spikes (see Illustration III). Within the walls is a great space surrounding the house, much like that surrounding the traditional palace. A single gate is usually staffed by armed foreign guards, and foreign automobiles are prominently displayed within. The houses themselves have numerous windows, typically barred with wrought iron. They contain sizeable and extensively furnished reception rooms, but access to more interior spaces, near family sleeping quarters, is restricted by various gates that can be locked at night to bar the entry of armed robbers.

To the familiar eye, this schematic description reveals features of both British and African sensibilities. The houses manifest the British colonial preference for homes beyond the area of earlier settlement and surrounded by open yards. In fact, Lugard, the mastermind of British West African colonialism, prescribed that the yards of Europeans' houses be enclosed by hedge, wall, or sturdy fence (Ibid.: 215). Glass windows, wrought iron window bars, and multiple stories seem to be innovations of distinctly foreign origin. In the Yoruba architectural idiom, building height expresses the status of the occupant, while for the British the distance between floor and ground, as well as the height of

the ceiling, are matters of medical import (Ibid.: 199ff.). Thus, the prominence of the walled and guarded yard, the restriction of access to more interior spaces, and the very emphasis on outstanding height resonate with earlier Yoruba patterns of royal architecture. Yet, the Yoruba adoption of foreign technology may not follow its originators' intents. Some of these patterns have long been evident in royal compounds, but foreign technology and overrule have frustrated royal exclusivism. Let us outline the features of an earlier architecture and determine the context of the most recent change.

The palace represents and effects the incorporation of various orders of foreign power. The palace chambers and, more importantly, its courtyards (kara) and open spaces contain shrines devoted to the orisa and therefore to the incorporation of the ideologically foremost category of foreign power (see Illustration XIV). Quarters for foreign guards, foreign slaves, foreign laborers, and retainers are typically located in the front courtyard of the palace, and only to this most external courtyard is the public admitted. Here, the king holds court under his verandah (kobi), another architectural marker of royal and chiefly abodes. Clearly, the number of the king's dependents and subjects is higher than that of any other individual in the state, and the verandah is associated with the public and collective nature of his authority. The stables housing the imported horses, on which imperial might once depended, lie in more

inward courtyards. The innermost courtyards, like the innermost spaces of modern elite homes, are the province of the lord's wives and children--all others but the king are forbidden to enter. Verandahs, in particular, are a common feature of European-built houses in Yorubaland, as well, but contemporary Yoruba homes have widely abandoned this feature, as the symbolism of individual entrepreneurial wealth has superceded that of ascribed and collectively negotiated authority.

I would suggest that both the central location of the palace in the town, the unparalleled number of courtyards within the palace, and the towering height of the king's residence reiterate architecturally his constitutional control over the incorporation of foreign and supernal power. An aerial view of the innumerable royal courtyards recalls the vessel imagery of Yoruba ritual and myth generally. As we might expect, descending orders of chiefs each possess fewer courtyards per compound, and plebeian compounds usually have only one--an architectural indication of the descending magnitude of ase (power) invested in each and the metaphor of its progressive funneling from higher to lower vessels. In added confirmation, just as the chiefly compounds in the imperial north face the palace, so do the compounds of his subordinates face the chief's.

In a number of details, architecture and urban proxemics differ in the less politically centralized areas of Yorubaland. Synchronically and interregionally, the

settlement patterns of the oldest Yoruba towns contrast between what we might call "radial" and "grid" schemata, which Lloyd correlates with regionally distinct patterns of descent and inheritance--principally agnatic in the north and more strongly cognatic in the south (1962). Though this regional distinction in descent ideology has been subject to considerable debate among Yorubanists (see Eades 1980: 37ff), it corresponds suggestively to regional residential patterns. The main roads of the traditional northern towns, like Oyo-Ile and Ado-Ekiti, radiate from the palace like the spokes of a wheel, linking the town with subordinate neighboring settlements and with foreign centers (see Illustrations XXIV and VI). Along these roads, festival celebrants of various orisa cults proceed to the marketplace in front of the palace, where they come closest to the central shrines of these sky gods. The king's deputies regulate and tax traders proceeding from the town gates to the king's market. In these monarchically and patrilineally organized polities, the king is the spatial and ideological hub of the state. He controls the influx of people and the outflux of power. By contrast, the metropolitan towns of the federally and cognatically organized southern kingdoms are sub-divided into more numerous quarters (see Illustrations XIII and XXIV). Each of these has a chief who reports to the king, but these chiefs also possess greater sanctions and exercise power more autonomously than their northern counterparts. Appropriately, instead of radiating

outward from the palace center, the quarters in towns like Ondo and Ijebu-Ode form a "grid" pattern, divided by intersecting and approximately rectilinear streets.

In most compounds rooms face inward onto a common roofed verandah, which, in turn surrounds a single open courtyard. The outer wall of laterite generally has one main gate leading into the compound. The compound, and the concentric extensions that arise over time, center on the apartment of the bale ("father of the house") and house the expanding network of the patriarch's wives, sons, daughters-in-law, grandsons, and their sons and daughters-in-law. The southern compound houses a shallower, cognatically related kin group. In the southern "grid" type of town, the individual buildings are much smaller, not only containing fewer courtyards on average but often substituting a small impluvium for the open courtyard of the north. On the other hand, the northern courtyard is as much a hub of the household as the northern palace is the hub of the state. That courtyard may contain shrines and sacred animals, and the fact that its space alone opens upward onto the sky suggests its structural maleness relative to the dark apartments that house principally the wives and children of the patriarch. Indeed, the patriarch's apartment commands the central position in relation to the courtyard. The courtyard itself is also associated with hospitality, and thus with the incorporation of outsiders. That space, symbolizing the incorporation of structurally male, foreign,

and supernal forces, has in the south been diminished in size and importance. Moreover, in the south fewer ideological factors militate against the segmentation of the household, whereas the northern sub-groups accommodate lineage growth simply by extending the existing quarters beyond the town walls. Because southern compounds are bound within a "grid"-like arrangement, only the development of entirely new quarters on the outskirts of towns like Ondo and Ijebu-Ode has accommodated new housing needs (see Illustration XXIV).

The orientation of traditional compounds in relation to the palace also varies interregionally. In the south, compounds line the street, some facing it, while others are grouped in subsidiary culs-de-sac. Pathways running at their backs, rather than the streets themselves, separate one compound from another. Thus, not even the compound is really a centered unit. In the north, compound entrances face each other and the quarter of which those compounds are constituent parts often surrounds a road leading to the palace. In such cases, most compounds are oriented toward the dwelling of the quarter-chief, much as the town as a whole is oriented toward the palace. Though smaller than the royal palace, the homes of quarter-chiefs are generally larger than those of ordinary men, having at least two courtyards. In the northern towns, unlike the southern ones, motifs of concentricity, number of courtyards, and descending residence size mark a clear hierarchy in the

funneling of power from the center. The uncenteredness of the southern towns and compounds suggests an uncenteredness of mystical and political authority.

The contrasting use of courtyards, building orientation, and street lay-out corresponds in north and south to the relative centralization of authority in the palace, and to the relative dominance of patrilineal social formations generally. The most centralized and patrilineal socio-political forms occur in the north, where courtyards are larger and more plentiful, increasingly so in the higher echelons of the state hierarchy. Each compound in the north is oriented toward the compound housing the next highest official in the state hierarchy--son's and wives' apartments oriented toward the patriarch's, the compound toward the quarter-chief's residence, and his toward the palace. In the north, the hierarchy always culminates in the abode of the king, whose numerous courtyards mark it as the central point of power incorporation in the state.

Thus, the other key synchronic distinction is that between royal and plebeian dwellings. Not only do the traditional palaces comprise a great compound with multiple courtyards outnumbering those in any other compound, but they boast a large area of surrounding land walled off within the walled metropolitan town. The palace grounds traditionally cover between 0.9 and 8.3 per cent of the area of the walled metropolitan town (Ojo 1966: Chap. 6). They usually contain a portion of bushland, itself

frequently containing shrines, burial places, and arable land.

Moreover, whereas traditional plebeian dwellings comprise numerous rooms surrounding a courtyard open to outsiders, the palaces are relatively closed units. The orderly operation of the state relied on royal wisdom in regulating the most potent foreign forces. Plebeian architecture invites the outsider straight into its center, fearlessly and generously, for its inmates feel their relative kinship to those who would most often enter. The kingship had a more fearsome outsider to manage--people of different religions, kindreds, and nationalities. Though restricting foreigners extensively, the kingship literally allowed great space for the selective incorporation of their power and for the mobilization of defenses against them, including the royal cavalry and guard. The principal entrance of the palace is typically a huge porticoed gate opening from the king's market onto the public courtyard. The front gate of the Ife palace is said to have been 300-foot-long, 60-foot-wide, and 24-foot-high. That front gate and the high-gabled roofs of many palace traditionally tower high above the surrounding plebeian edifices. Architecturally, his great privilege and power are marked out by the outstanding height of his dwelling, as well as the number and size of the courtyards in his abode, the verandah, and the centrality of the palace in the town.

A number of motifs in this synchronic variation reappear as architectural and political standards change over time, the large courtyards and palace-centered layout of the northern towns being associated with the 300-year rule of the highly centralized Oyo Empire and the heavily sky-oriented state cult of the orisa Sango. By contrast, the groups to the south were never fully subject to Oyo because Oyo's imported cavalry was vulnerable to the southern tsetse strains. In their internal organization, therefore, the southern kingdoms, like Ijebu-Ode, not only remained more federal by constitution but featured a much stronger Earth goddess cult, whose authority balances that of the king. Finally, under the Pax Britannica and after independence, the entrepreneurs, Western-trained professionals, and politicians have gained primacy among Yoruba political actors. The power of royals seems but residual. Likewise, the powers of witchcraft, representing antisocial individual interest, are said to have reached their apogee.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, "Brazilian" architectural influence became popular amid the new patterns of power distribution. Soon after Yoruba descendants began returning from Brazil and Sierra Leone in the early 19th century, the inland kings adopted "Brazilian" technology and style to build multi-story dwellings (ile petesi). Yet, as long as they could, they forbade their subjects to do the same. Until 1948, no one in the vicinity of the palace at

Ado-Ekiti dared build a multi-story house. This injunction was, no doubt, connected to the traditional preeminence in height of the palaces. Though first introduced in the southern cities of Lagos and Abeokuta, Brazilian architecture spread inland, following the prosperous revenues of cocoa production there. In the north, the Brazilian-style house may belong to the bale ("father of the house") and generally forms a structurally integrated part of the larger compound. On the other hand, the farther south we look, and the more recent our time frame, the more likely we are to encounter Brazilian-style houses structurally distinct from any larger compound. They may be segregated by distance and orientation from the family compound. Most recently and in the south, the wealthiest citizens tend to dwell in a new quarter all their own, in which fashionable two-story houses all face grid-iron roads, rather than facing the abodes of ascriptive political leaders. In the new "Brazilian" dwellings we tend to find distinct inner courtyards or impluvia, suggesting symbolically their owners' autonomy from the hierarchies of power incorporation that dominate northern traditions and older corporate architectural forms throughout Yorubaland. Yet, those courtyards are smaller than those centering the traditional northern compounds. Moreover, "Brazilian" houses tend to feature verandahs but of dimensions much smaller than the older royal and chiefly verandahs, suggesting a de-emphasis of the public and collective nature

of the occupant's power. Like the diminution of the courtyard, this implicit individualization of power suggests the emergence of a structurally chthonic agency, that no longer seeks its power acknowledges the structurally supernal intermediaries associated with the imperial devolution of power from the center.

In both their regard for residential height and for the courtyard, the new elites apparently retain aspects of the skywardly-oriented symbolism of power. In their use of walls and open spaces, as in the use to which they put foreign guards and other emblems of foreign power, the homes of the new elites resemble the ancient palaces. The absence of courtyards notwithstanding, they feature sizeable and reception rooms richly arrayed with foreign-associated decor. Thus, in the architectural idiom, every successful man has become a king. He does not, however, seek that power through traditionally central royal institutions but, more often, through commerce, European-style government, or church concerns.

Thus, in tendencies originally apparent in the southern kingdoms, the 20th-century cities and towns generally are no longer oriented toward the palaces. The newly hegemonic entrepreneurs have, after the southern pattern, grown less subject to patrilineal and monarchical norms in their socio-political behavior. The structurally concentric and male-oriented architectural symbolism of the courtyard has diminished, and, as in the southern kingdoms, streets of new

elite neighborhoods now follow a grid pattern. The individualist has usurped the prerogative of collectively and patrilineally constituted intermediaries.

The big men of the 20th century have generally made their fortunes in export-import or in the exercise and brokerage of foreign skills and resources. The literally palatial height, design, and arrangement of their homes--especially their lack of orientation toward the residence of any superordinate member of the state--, affirms symbolically the diffusion of access to such political and economic power. The diminution of the courtyard and the loss of the verandah suggest the relatively chthonic or individualist identity of the new agents of power. On the other hand, their adoption of an outwardly Western-looking architectural style bespeaks their view of an alternative but more distant source of ase.

Foreseeing the shift in center-epicenter relations, their mothers probably sent them for initiation in Christian or Muslim schools. According to certain Yoruba criteria of efficacy in achieving wealth and power, the Christians have made the wisest choice in an era of European empire and neo-colonialism. Mothers go to great lengths--especially through earnings in trade--to assure that their children imbibe from the proper sources of foreign power. The wealthy contemplate the choice of American or English schools for their children. More and more parents are aware of the shifts in an international balance of power that is

inseparably symbolic and politico-economic. In some cities and towns, like Ibadan, Islam retains the greatest prestige among religions, but the mastery of English remains a necessary prestige-marker and economic skill. Everywhere the pilgrimage to Mecca, a great foreign center and a source of ase, entails a status elevation worth debts running into thousands of naira. Travel agencies now promote pilgrimages to Jerusalem for Christians and have recommended the initials "J.P." to amend the names of so-called Jerusalem Pilgrims. These agencies follow and promote a tradition well-established in post-colonial Nigeria. Other prestigious and foreign-associated titles are "Alhaji," "Alhaja," "Doctor," "Professor," "Barrister," and "Engineer." The older royal and chiefly titles and the English word "chief" still hold considerable prestige. Its bearers are often criticized for having bought their titles, the newer, imported titles gained precipitously in prestige. The titles are all alike in having been bought in some sense and in marking authority. Newer and older titles differ principally in regard to the intermediary source of the power their bearers contain. Traditional royal titles are usually identified with a relatively foreign forebear, from Ile-Ife, Oyo, or the East. Contemporarily, a titled man's prestige, like his receipt of a title, may reflect closely his financial solvency, the preeminent type of symbolic power in the post-modern West, and his ability to mediate successfully between his followers and relatively

foreign structures of political and economic power. He or she likely dons "lace," a highly expensive and machine-made open-weave ideally of European make, and drives a Mercedes sedan.

The post-colonial forms of elite consumption and material production in Yorubaland are easily enough seen as imitations of Western standards, for the British and Luso-Afro-Brazilian influences on Yoruba life are visible and acknowledged. But the fact is that Britons and "Brazilian" repatriates are no longer designing or building houses in Yorubaland. How, then, are we to account for the retention, adaptation, elaboration, or abandonment of particular forms of residential environment? I have argued that many features of the new architecture and urban morphology that look Western are also precedented in Yoruba culture. The Yoruba symbolic idiom has never been pristine. Foreign forms have been accommodated selectively within a changing but preconditioned Yoruba context; the introduction of foreign technologies and standards over the centuries has not, by itself, conditioned the transformation of Yoruba architecture or society generally. No less in "modern" than in ancient Yoruba architecture, an aesthetic and metaphysical sensibility supercedes both "utility" and imitation and informs every sphere of Yoruba endeavor.

The Symbolic Idiom and the Constitution of Historical Change. Contrary to the hopeful predictions of Christian

writers on Yoruba tradition, like Idowu and Awolalu, some orisa may die, but others are nowhere near death. The cult of Ogun, for example, has proliferated in the 20th century. The orisa will persist as long as the experience of collective loyalties and of collective power persists among the Yorubaland Yoruba-influenced peoples. However, as loyalties and sources of power have changed (and they have always been changing, temporally and spatially), so the characterization of particular orisa has changed. The points of emphasis within the array of divine personae, the social units they image and constitute, and all manner of ritual practices in relation to them have also changed. These alterations are dimensions of historical and cross-situational variations in geographical, political, economic, and personal relations.

From the 14th-century founding of Ile-Ife and the spread of sacred monarchy, through the 16th-century rise of Oyo, the 19th-century wars, British colonialism, political independence, "Nigerianization" of federal personnel and Nigerian corporate subsidiaries, and a series of shifts between military rule and multi-party democracy, the Yoruba experience of power has remained in motion. Even equestrian symbolism--however long it has been prominent in government, worship, and proverbial wisdom on relations of power throughout society--is not primordial. Horses are imported, and the trade networks for their importation have not always been in place. Nor can we assume that patriarchy has always

been the dominant mode of social organization. Idowu and Beier, for example, adduce theological evidence for original matriarchy in Yorubaland (see Beier 1955, cited in Idowu; Idowu 1963: 25). Symbols and patterns within the social order are continuously changing.

In the last two centuries of written documentation on Yoruba culture, certain dynamics seem to have persisted in the Yoruba apperception of social and spiritual relations. First, both protection and the realization of affirmative power (ase) are the necessary processes at every moment in human life. Second, the sources of symbolic power are typically regarded as relatively foreign and male, while, in their capacity as repositories, things are regarded as relatively indigenous and female. Competing sets of agents vie for access to supernal power, however. Relatively plebeian and often female businesspeople and politicians have challenged the relatively royal and patrilineally constituted agents of Oyo-based government and worship. Whoever its agents may be, the theory of power in Yoruba society seems to be constructed around the dialectical terms of penetration and active containment, of which possession is iconic. Possession concerns the invasion--by relatively external spiritual forces--of the body, person, or group. I mean not to imply that the experience is always or entirely passive but that the source of spiritual and symbolic power is always relatively foreign. Third, the choice of conduits through which to seek power, and of the repositories into

which it is projected, determines and is determined by judgments of where the greatest centers and epicenters of symbolic power lie in any given situation. Fourth, the predominance, at any given moment, of either penetration or active containment depends on the actor's perspective. Is the ritual actor presently at the center facing outward, or at the epicenter facing inward--like the central bird in the royal crown, or like those surrounding it? Every political, ritual, and procreative process can be viewed as a negotiation for the empowerment of the self and the in-group. And that negotiation consists in manipulating various circuits in the flow of power--soliciting, stopping, or reversing its movement. Witches, who can control the flow of women's life fluids are the greatest individual manipulators of that flow. Finally, the Yoruba conception of the head in familial and cultic spiritual descent furnishes a key metaphor in a range of these negotiations.

The devolution of power within the state, as well as the active containment and regulation of power in functioning social units, operates according to an idiom of spirit-vessel relations with a considerable relativity of scale. The vessel, may simply be a physical body, but when filled with certain spirit entities, it becomes a person. The vessel may be a person, but when filled with other spirit entities, it becomes an embodied god or a king. Each operation entails that person or body's being actively

contained in other vessels as well. Contained in a body, ori becomes a person. Contained in a particular office within the state, a person becomes a king. In some fundamental ways he has been transformed into a different being. One active containment or possession redefines the identity of a being and may conflict with other such possessions or active containments. To each order of being and to each of its intents, the imaging and relative definition of the currently active forces will differ. But current modes of that imaging and definition may teach us much about common and divergent features of Yoruba people's experience of the world.

Contrary to appearances, a deliberate minimalism inspires the foregoing model of spirit and society in the Yoruba representation of experience. Amid a tremendously varied set of cultic ideologies and historical circumstances, I have observed a simple but remarkably persistent image--the pot. The absence of any such observation in the earlier literature should come as no surprize, for pots, bowls, and containers are such commonplace items in West African society that they escape the conscious attention of both indigenous informants and the builders of grand cosmological hierarchies. Hierarchies are, in Yoruba liturgy--"traditional," Muslim, and Christian--objects of disagreement and multiplication, while unacknowledged images live on gracefully. Olodumare (as power itself) and the vessel endure like a backdrop to our

longest and broadest view of Yoruba life. The foreground of variation among theological and social-structural forms, however, demonstrates the historical and cross-regional movement of relations between power and its vessels. What I have described, then, as icons are not fixed, richly detailed, and cult-specific relics but widespread and evocative things and events. Over time, literal pots and acts of possession have declined as representations of authority (i.e., the containment of ase, or power) in Yorubaland. Given the least of empiricist assumptions, we are not surprised to see the representation of experience changing as a global system of production, exchange, and rule in 20th-century Nigeria. Post_Kuhnians will not be shocked, either, to see a considerable degree of persistence in the cognitive "structures" through which Yoruba view and act on their experience. A bedeviling question awaits future research. Why, in a context apparently more vastly different from imperial Oyo than is contemporary Yorubaland, would both sacred pots and spirit possession become more important than anywhere else in the Yoruba-related world? In Brazilian Candomble and Cuban-Boricuan Santeria, possession and ceramic shrine vessels are more elaborate and popular than they have ever been east of the Atlantic. It is true, as Sahlins (1981) brilliantly argues, that history must be apprehended culturally, but culture must also be apprehended historically. The cultural practices, texts, and metatexts we perceive in the field encounter are variable. So, the

patterns we observe in them are not to be frozen or reified. The anthropologist's retrospective and totalizing assessments render neither action nor the cognitive appropriation of experience predictable.

For analytic purposes, power, vessels, and spirit possession furnish a worthy point of entry into Yoruba praxis by virtue of their breadth of semantic, ritual, and historical allusion. However, even a minimalist paradigm of Yoruba social processes must be used circumspectly, for any model strips experience of infinite associative detail. The more grievous crime against understanding is to ignore experience once the model has been extracted. Our mode of interpellation must be as dialectical as the spiritual process itself. From our point of entry, the contexts we scan reveal tendencies that we look for in further contexts, which, in turn, contain different forms of the tendency we are expecting to find until, eventually, our next find resists the terms in which we had defined the original tendency. Then we must alter our terms of analysis.

Therefore, having summarized my chief assertions about the changing investment of power (ase) in Yoruba society, I must acknowledge the transitory nature of their validity. So, let this project be judged not for the schemata it constructs but for the processual quality of its observation and analysis. If we can at time³ uphold the structure of things and events, we must be able to abandon it as we apprehend the flow of experience.

SECTION VII: APPENDIX--YEMOJA AS BRIDE

In Oyo North, Ibadan, and Abeokuta I have recorded a set of myths of varied narrative complexity, relates the less extraordinary occasion of Yemoja's quarrel with her husband. Whereas the southern tales above explored themes of motherhood and women's relations to a nexus of parents and offspring, the present cycle elaborates her relations with her husband. Such tales are absent from the oldest accounts of Yoruba mythology and are sparse even in the early twentieth-century sources. In the basic form of the narrative presented below, it is now found everywhere in Oyo and Egba regions where Yemoja is worshiped. For the reader's benefit, the annotations illustrate the variation among specific versions and their sources.

Long ago³¹, Yemoja was a trader³² from Bida, to the north of the Oyo Empire in Nupe country.³³ She had spent some time in Yorubaland but had remained unmarried, for she was a very powerful woman with such enormous breasts that men feared her.³⁴ They were so large that she could throw them over her shoulders. One day as she walked home from the market, she lamented her loneliness. "How sad it is to return to a childless house, to have no husband to cook for."³⁵ That day, Ogun overheard her complaint, seized her, and said, "Do not be afraid. I know I look fierce and all the world fears me. But I will do you no harm."³⁶ "I'll look after you and protect you."³⁷ They agreed to marry, but in order to insure harmony, each enumerated his tabus, likes, and dislikes, that the other might respect them.³⁸ Yemoja asked that Ogun never mention the size of her breasts or touch them.³⁹ He in turn asked that she never mention his large and bloodshot eyeballs.⁴⁰ They lived happily for some time⁴¹, until one day Ogun entered the kitchen to prepare some food for his bride as she rested. Unaccustomed to women's work, he dropped a cooking pot, broke it, and spilled

food all over the floor. The clamor woke Yemoja abruptly from her slumber. Enraged and unaware of his generous intents, she charged into the kitchen shouting, "What are you doing in my kitchen, you with your bloodshot eyes." The indignant Ogun struck her down but immediately regretted his violence. He kneeled and began to stroke her breasts, whereupon she flew into a frenzy and decided to leave him.^{42 43} She stormed off⁴⁴ carrying only her baby on her back and her water pot on her head.⁴⁵ She ran far, the servants and messengers pursuing her all the way from Saki to Igboho,⁴⁶ but Yemoja flatly refused to return until her husband had apologized.⁴⁷ As the royal party gained on her, she fell down, and the pot tumbled.⁴⁸ Her pursuers saw her disappear as a river gushed forth from the pot on the ground. Beside the pot she left two of the instruments and emblems of her worship--a dane gun and a set of sixteen cowries. That is the origin of the O'gu'n, the same river that one meets all the way down in Abeokuta, although it becomes much stronger there.⁴⁹ Thenceforth, the people worshiped her. For his part, Yemoja's husband O'gu'n concluded that gentleness and domesticity were not his lot in life. He left the house to go and fight many wars as he had done before marrying.⁵⁰

Out of jealousy, Yemoja's co-wife Osun also decided to become a river,⁵¹ and she set a great boulder in Yemoja's path to prevent her flowing any farther. Angered by the act of aggression against his mother, Sango broke the boulder in half with a bolt of lightning. To this day, the a split boulder stands at Idamesan, marking Sango's act of loyalty.⁵² Because he is Yemoja's son, Sango is just that powerful.⁵³

SECTION VIII: ILLUSTRATIONS



Ekiti Yoruba, Nigeria.
Wooden Epa mask of
an equestrian warrior.
H. 47". The University
Museum, AF2002.

ILLUSTRATION I

ILLUSTRATION II

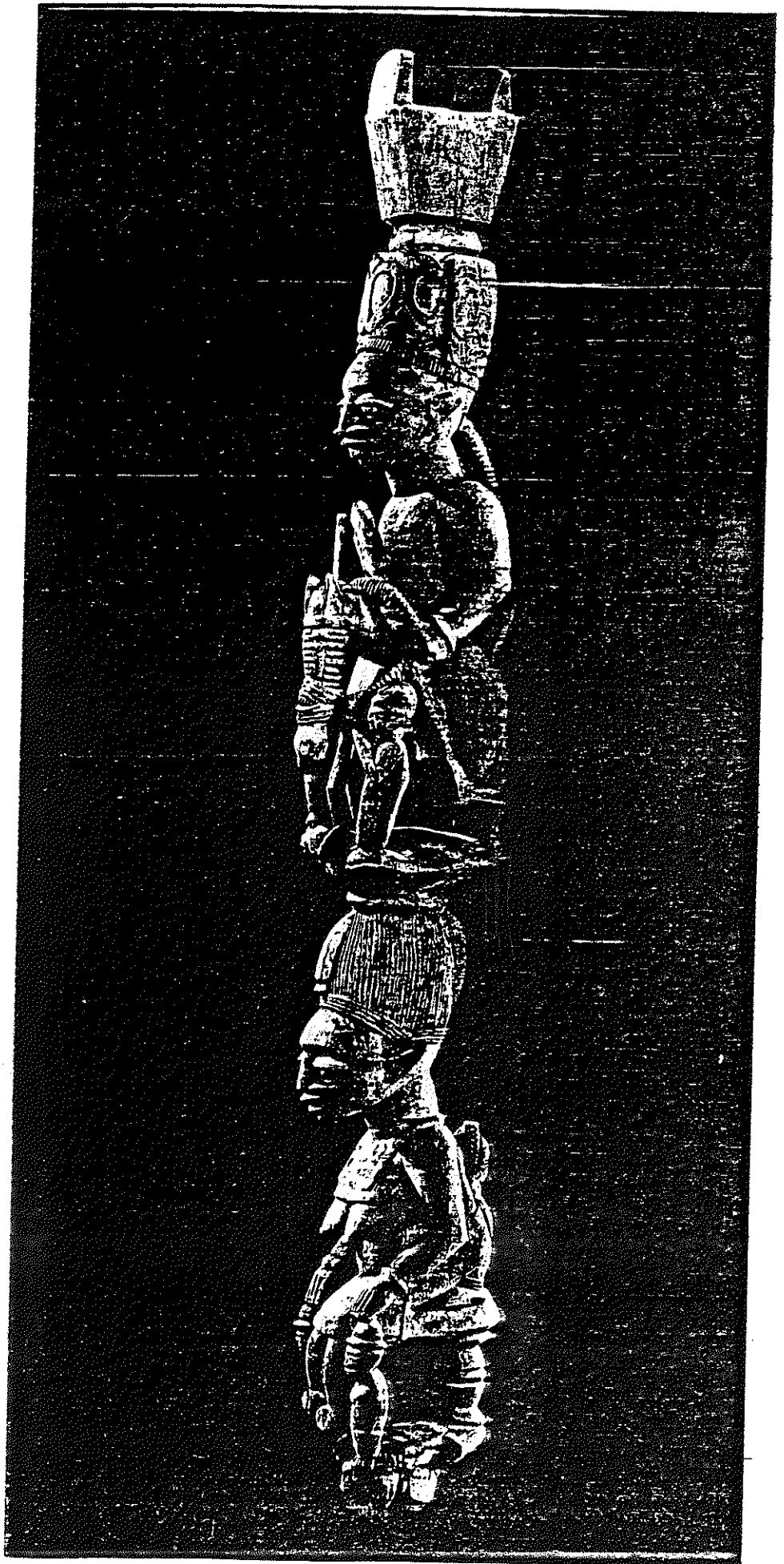




ILLUSTRATION III



Awo ota eyinle (16") by Abatan. Period I. Owner alleges that the vessel was made between 1916 and 1921. The lid has been removed, revealing about 43 fluvial stones (*ota*) in fresh water collected from a stream. The figure is embellished with a gold necklace and an iron chain. The kola bowl contains Nigerian coins. The object has been set upon a mat of indigenous making. Nigeria, Aworri Yoruba.



The figure wears a form of cicatrization known as *abaja meje* ("seven abaja"), consisting of four horizontal strokes surmounted by three shorter vertical strokes, the latter group set over the half of the former which is closest to the nose.

ILLUSTRATIONS IV AND V



Nigeria, Yoruba, "gelede" mask,
wood, 33 1/4"

ILLUSTRATION VI

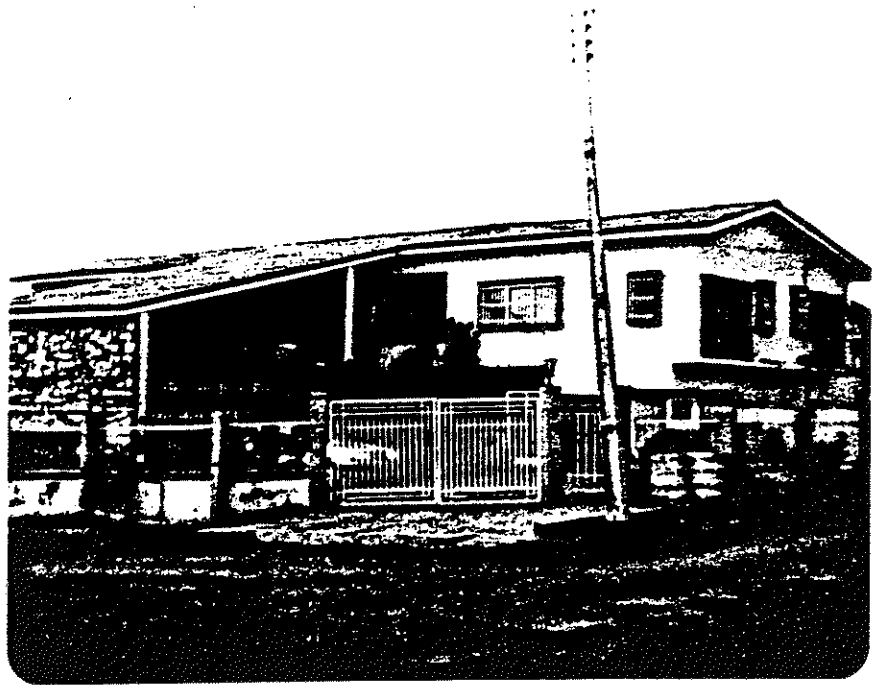


ILLUSTRATION VII



ILLUSTRATION VIII



ILLUSTRATION IX



ILLUSTRATION IX



An Qbatala shrine showing the pot containing ritual water.

ILLUSTRATION X

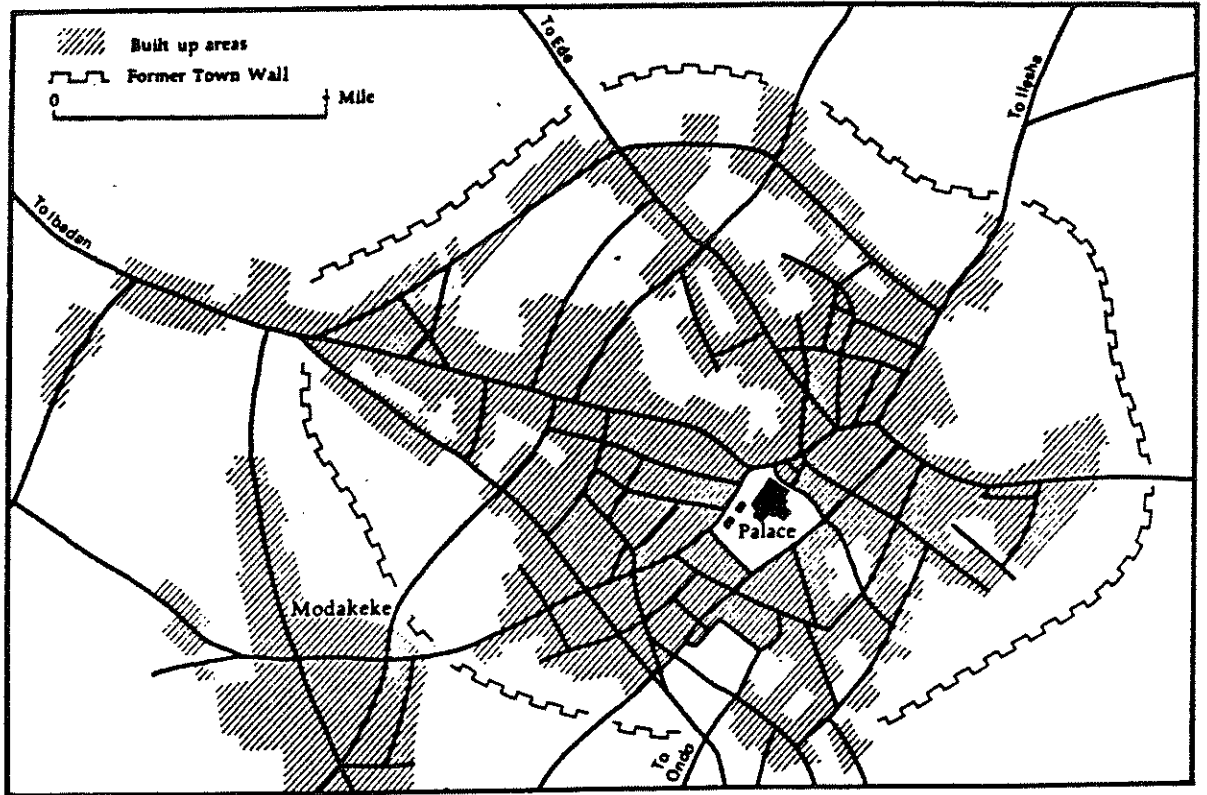


ILLUSTRATION XI



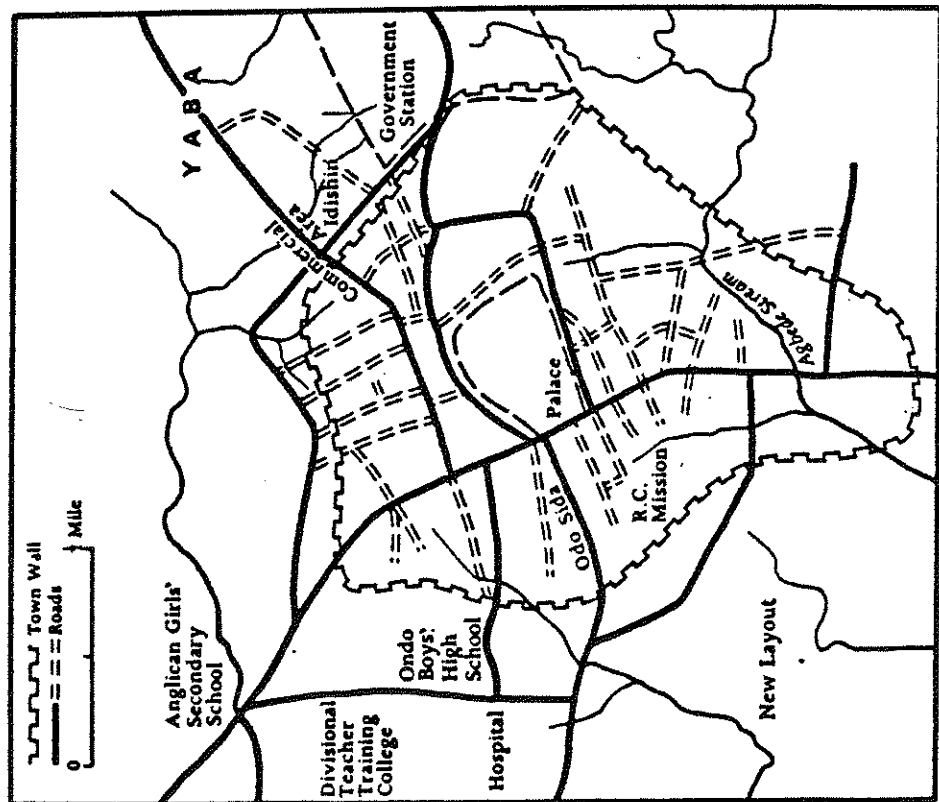
ILLUSTRATION XII

ILLUSTRATION XIII



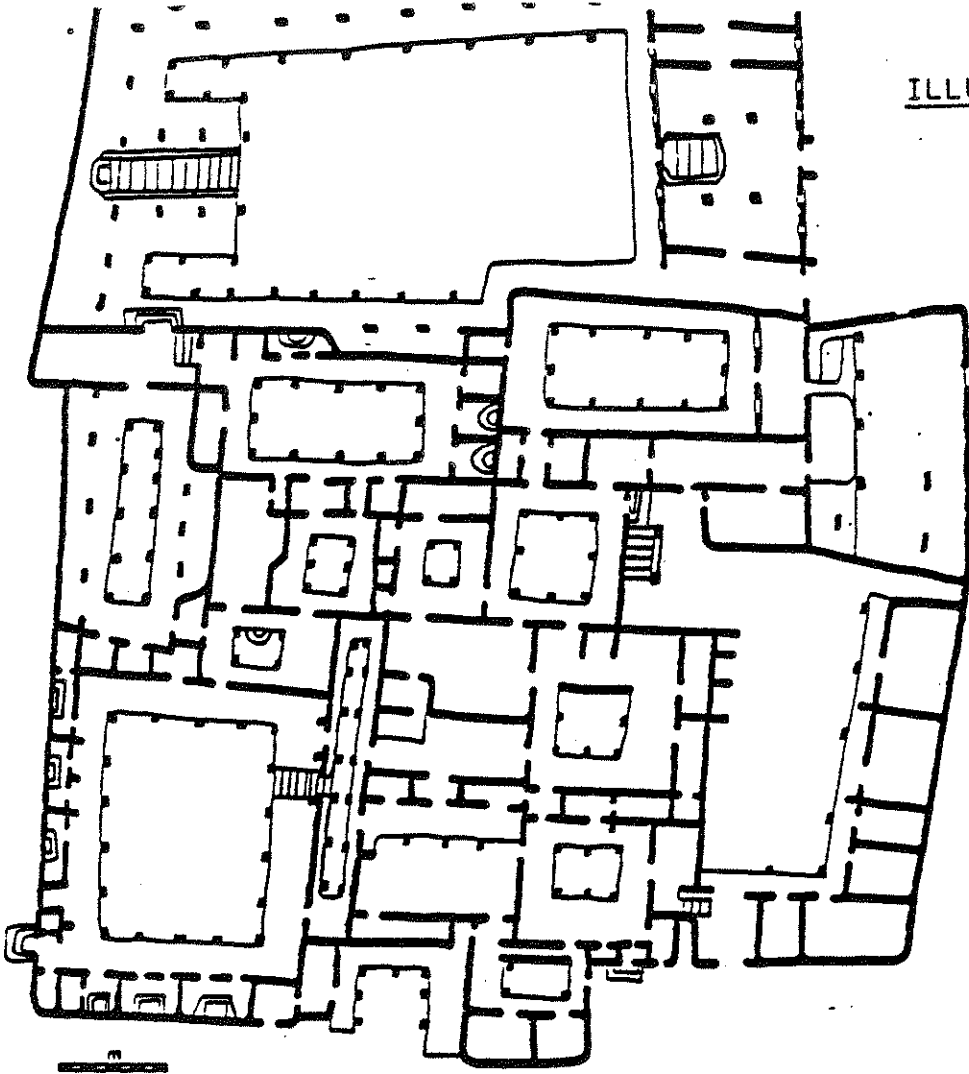
TOWN PLAN . Town plan of Ife (from MABOGUNJE: Yoruba Towns)

ILLUSTRATION XIII

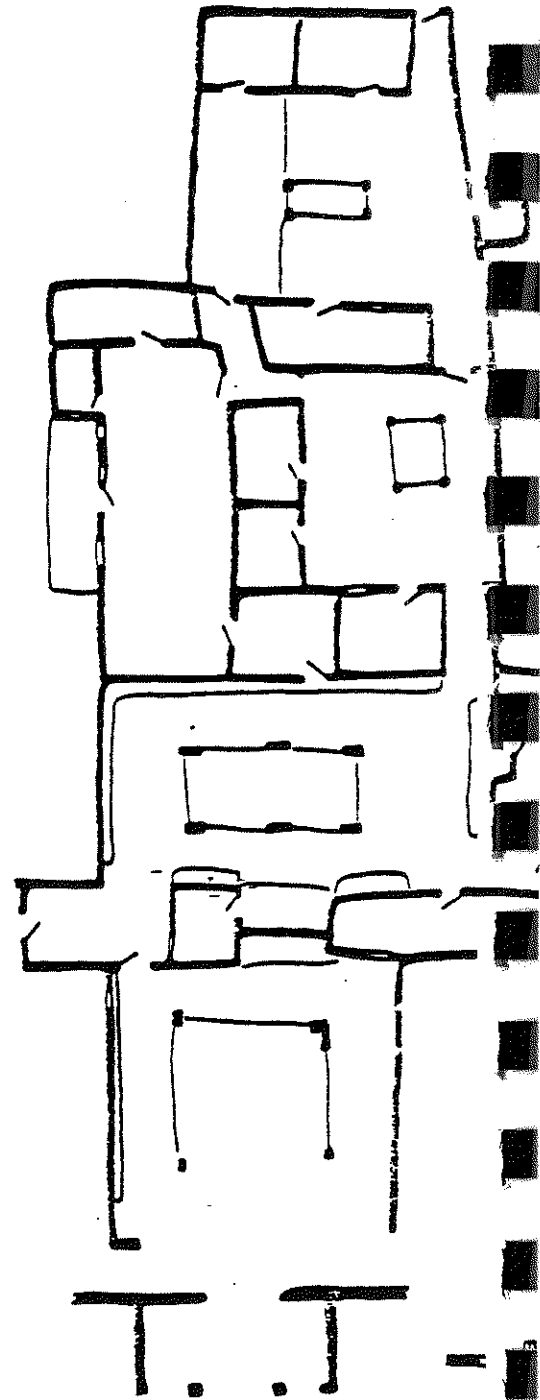


TOWN PLAN . Town plan of Ondo (from LLOYD: Yoruba Land Law)

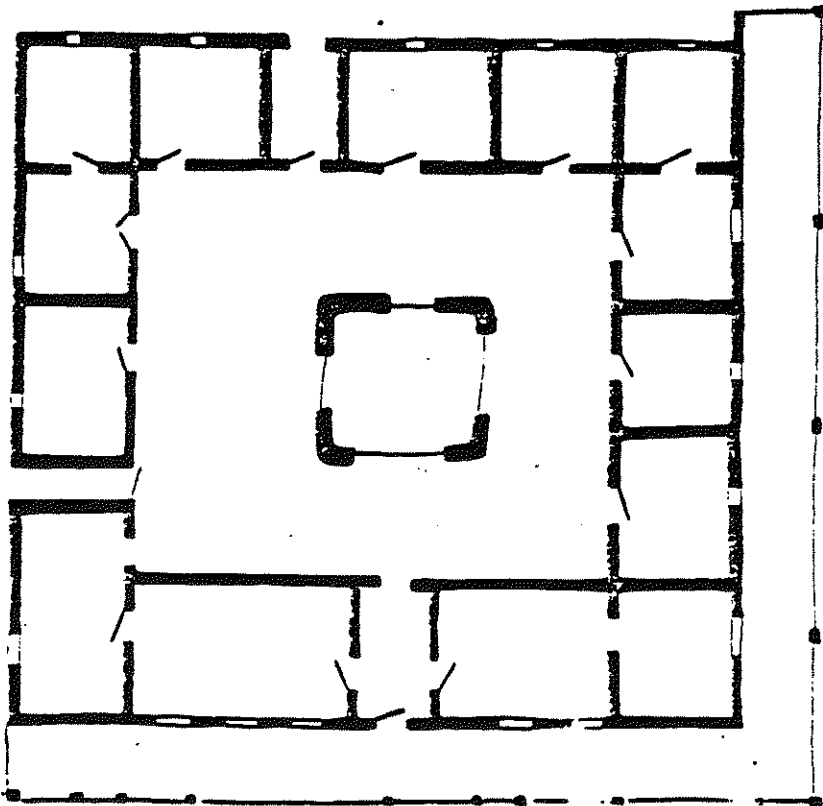
ILLUSTRATION XIV



2. PLAN OF A YORUBA PALACE, AFTER YORUBA PALACES, FIG. 10 (SCALE IN METERS).

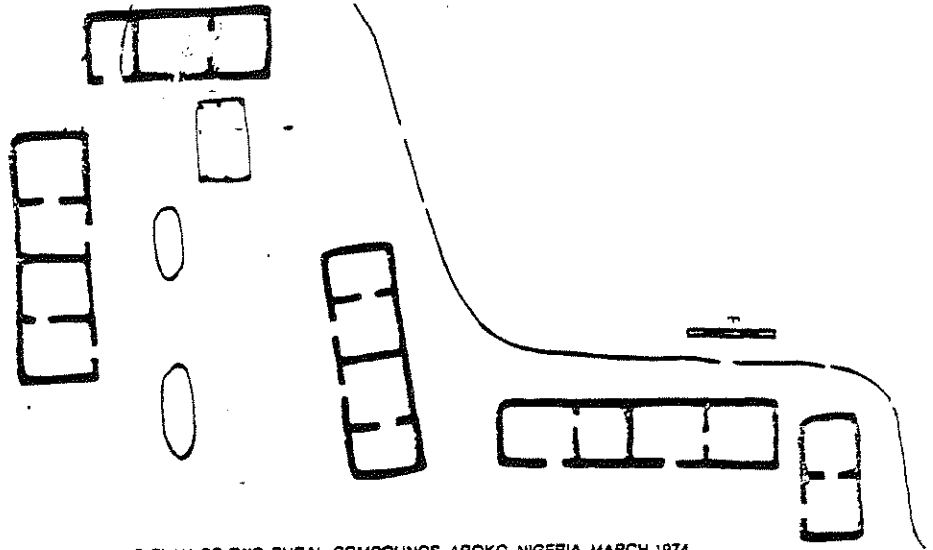


3. PLAN OF THE RESIDENCE OF CHIEF FAWOLE ON
OBALORUN, ILE-IFE, NIGERIA FEBRUARY 1974

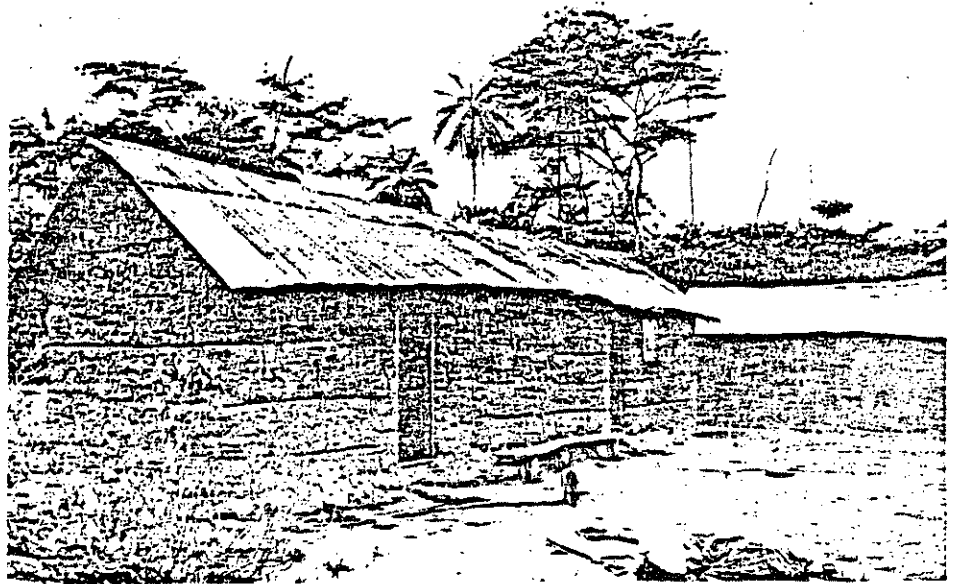


4. PLAN OF THE RESIDENCE OF THE ARONMAYE FAMILY
ILE-IFE, NIGERIA FEBRUARY 1974

ILLUSTRATION XV



7. PLAN OF TWO RURAL COMPOUNDS, AROKO, NIGERIA, MARCH 1974.



DOUBLE-MODULE HOUSE BUILT BY AMUSA OLAOSEJI (SECOND HOUSE FROM RIGHT IN FIGURE 7).

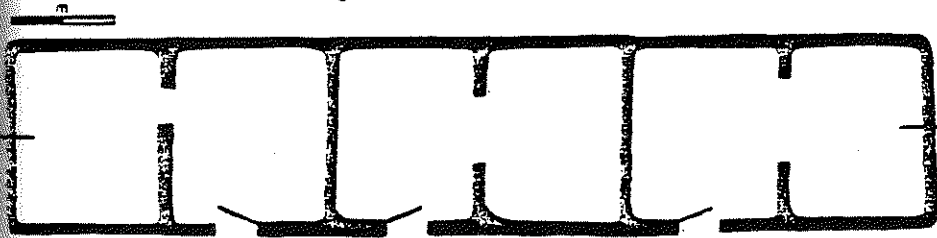
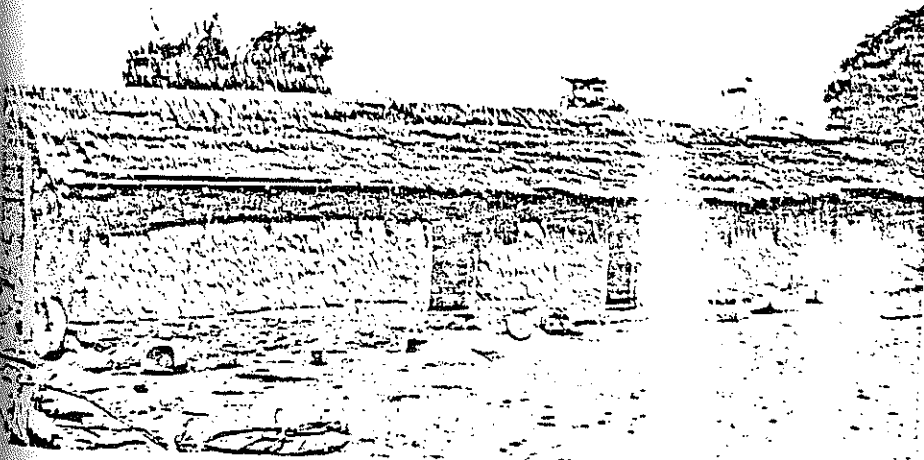


ILLUSTRATION XV



PLAN AND FRONT VIEW OF TRIPLE-MODULE HOUSE, ATIBA, NIGERIA, FEBRUARY 1974.

ILLUSTRATION XVI

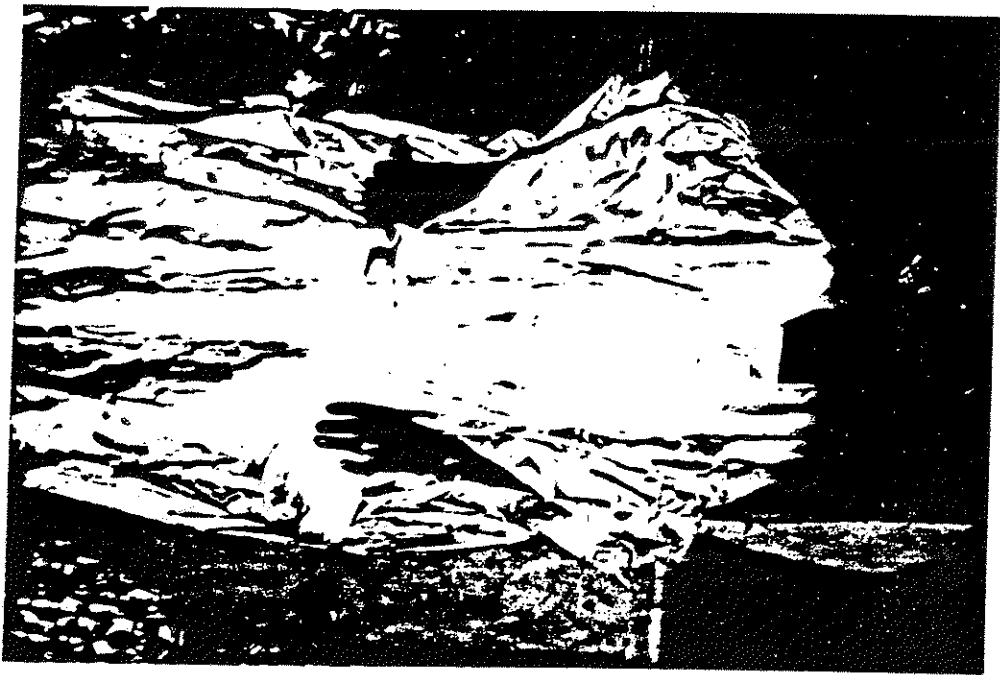


ILLUSTRATION XVII

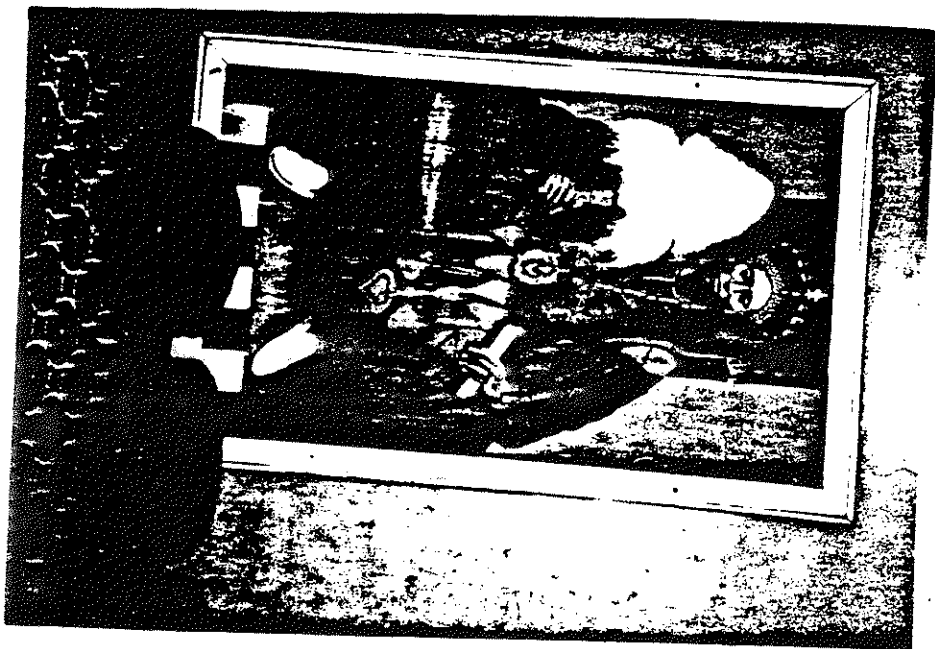
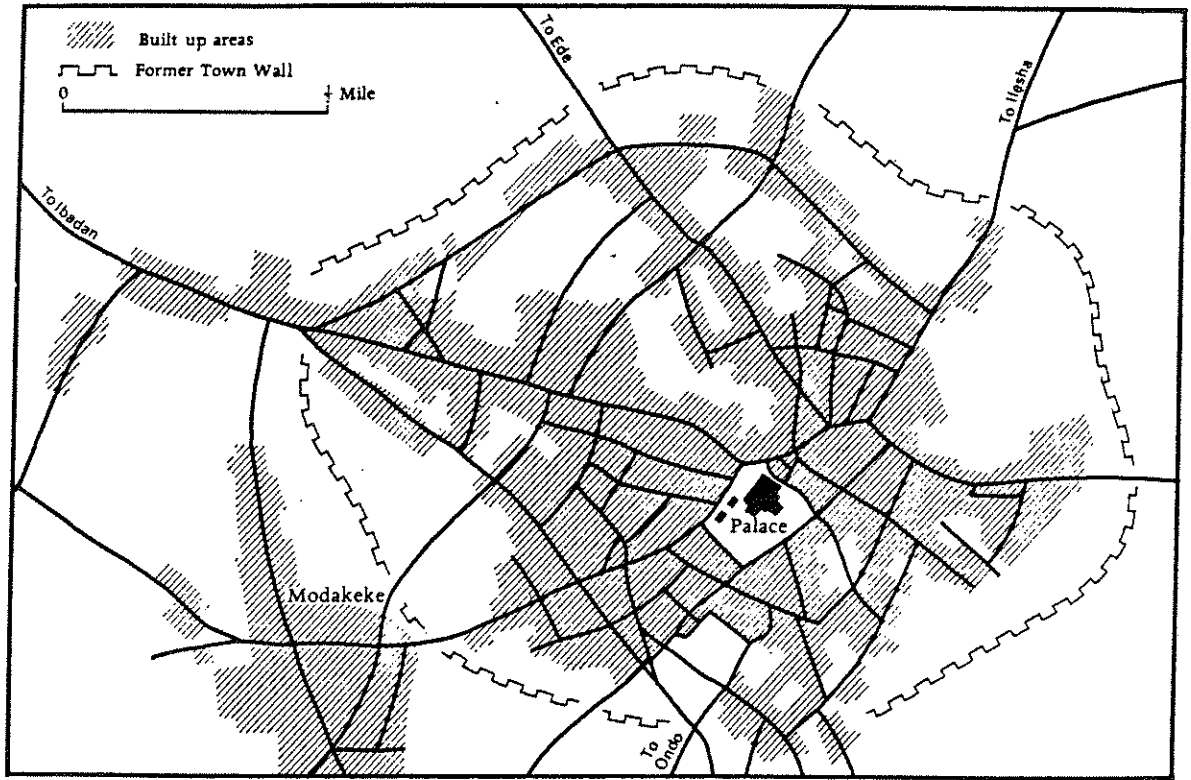
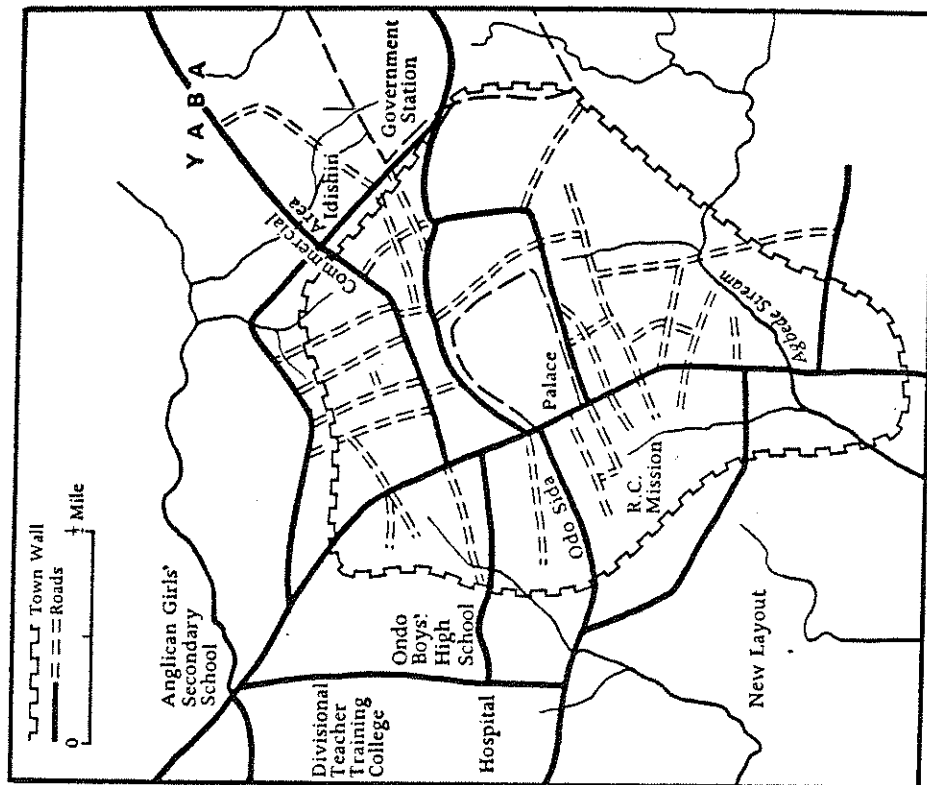


ILLUSTRATION XIII



TOWN PLAN . Town plan of Ife (from MABOGUNJE: Yoruba Towns)

ILLUSTRATION XIII



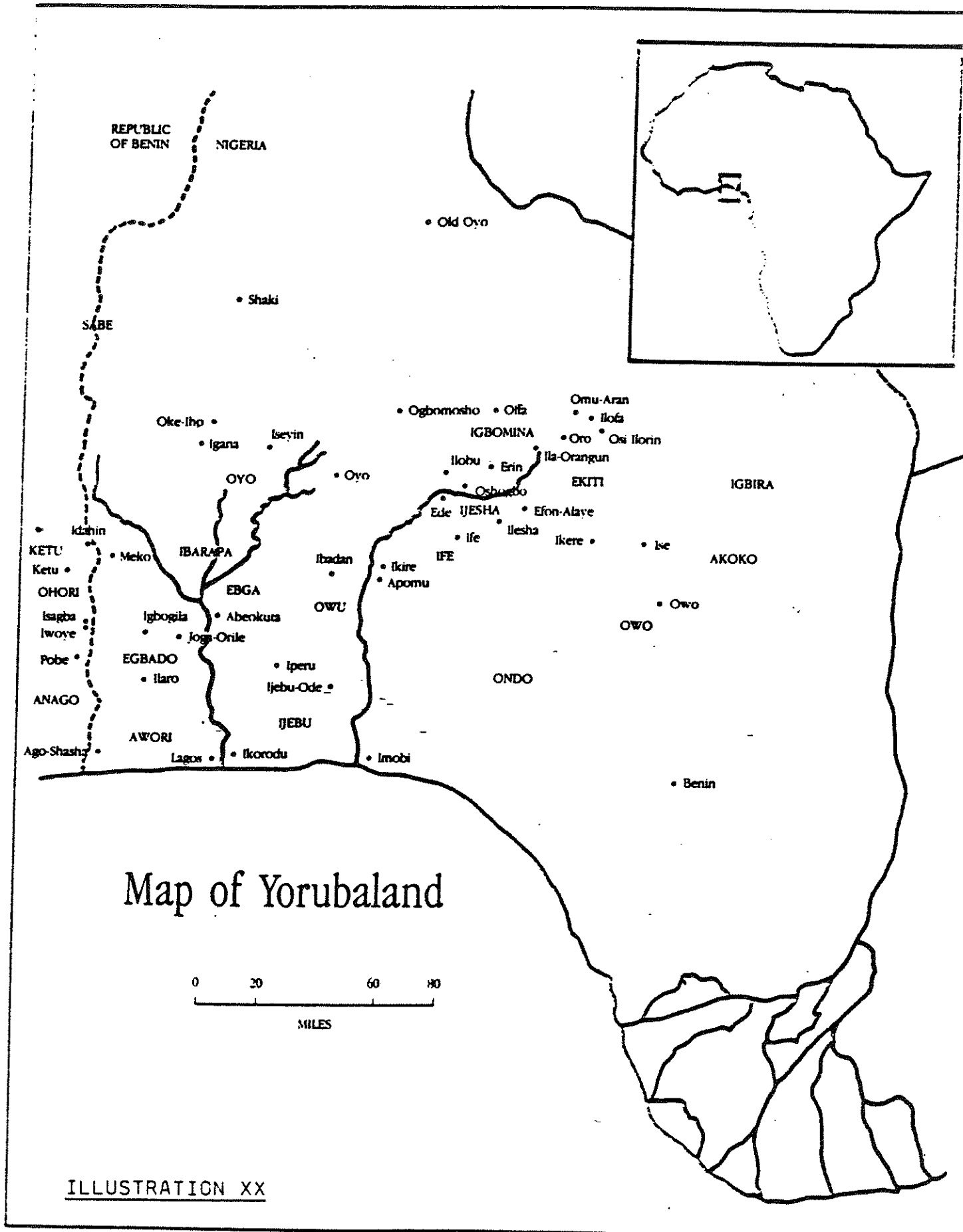
TOWN PLAN . Town plan of Ondo (from LLOYD: Yoruba Land Law)

ILLUSTRATION XVIII



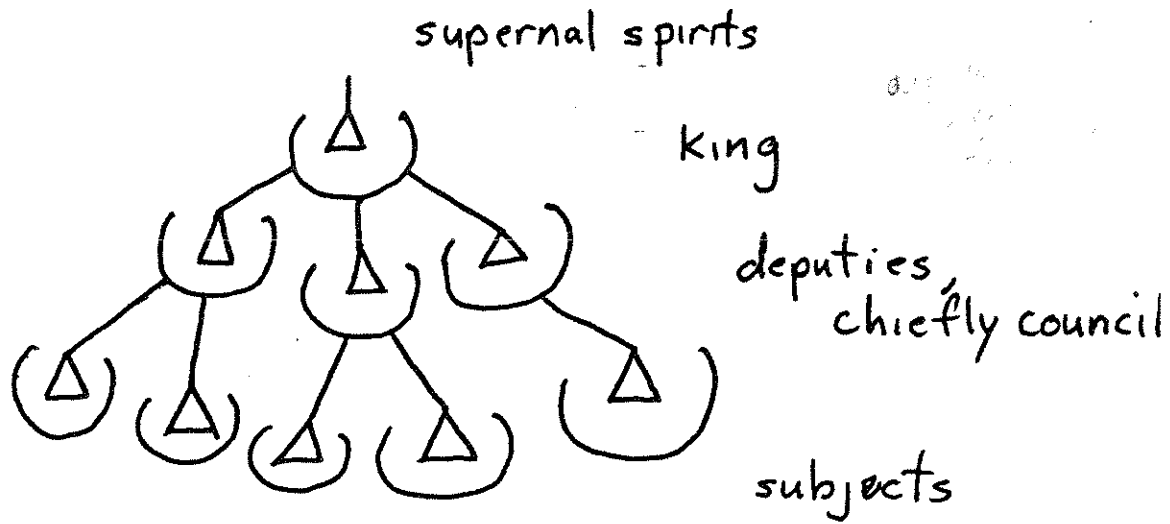
Yemoo sits on her chair in front of the palace, waiting for the appearance of the Oni's messengers

ILLUSTRATION XIX

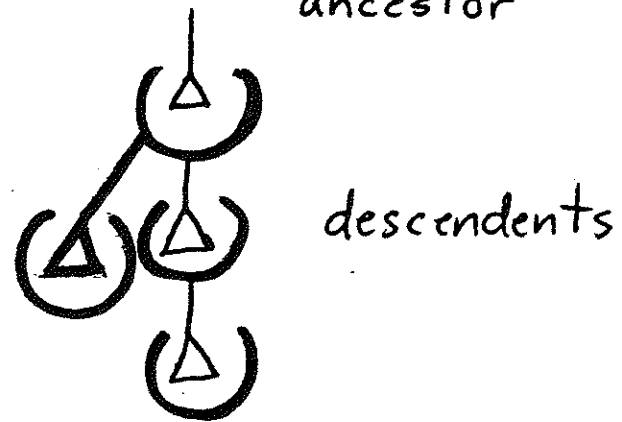
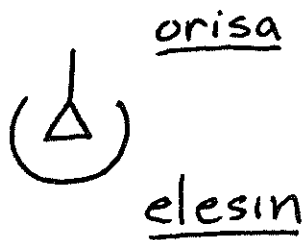


Schematic relationships among vessels and their contents in Yoruba religion and polity. Triangles represent the relatively male, while circles and semi-circles represent the relatively female.

The Palace

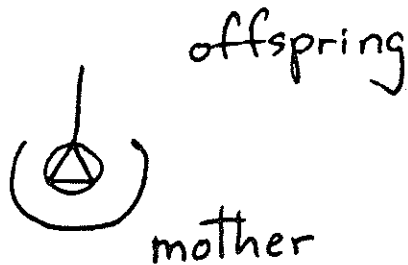


Descent and Ancestral Guardianship



Possession

Motherhood



Witchcraft





INITIATION OF AN AFRICAN FETICH-PRIEST.

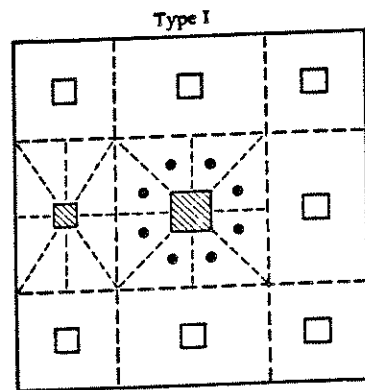
ILLUSTRATION XXII



Shango worship appliances. 1. Lid of sacrificial urn. 2—4. Large sacrificial vessels.
5—6. Wooden stands. For size, see index of illustrations.

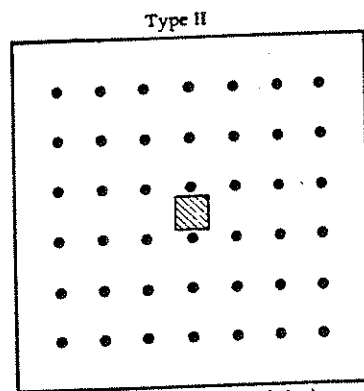
(Drawn by Carl Arriens.)

ILLUSTRATION XXIII

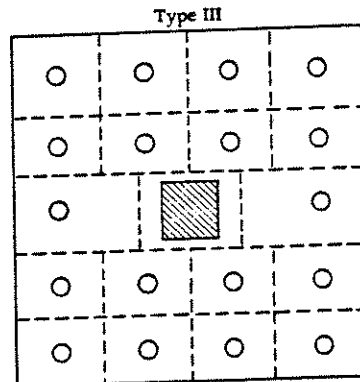


- Metropolitan town
- Subordinate town
- Village
- Hamlet

Exemplified by Ado-Ekiti
Dotted lines indicate boundaries of lineage lands



Exemplified by Abeokuta and Ibadan



Exemplified by Ijebu
Dotted lines indicate boundaries of village lands

DIAGRAM 1. Types of settlement pattern (schematic representation)
(from LLOYD: *Yoruba Land Law*)



ILLUSTRATION XXV



SHRINE OF THE GODDESS YEMAJA.

facing p. 46.

ILLUSTRATION XXVI

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FOOTNOTES

^{divinities}
 1 I have glossed the term orisa as "gods," but this particular category of spirits, as distinct from sprites and witches, for example, is associated typically with origins ultimately in the sky. Orisa are explicitly opposed to chthonic divinities like Onile, or Goddess of the Earth. I have chosen the term "supernal" to refer to the structural status of the orisa both because it avoids the Judeo-Christian implications of words like "celestial" and because it is best suited to describe the relativity of certain distinctions I will point out below.

2 This formulation has been subject to lengthy debate (see Eades 1980: 37ff), in which I shall not enter here. Nonetheless, the debated observation has proved a suggestive hypothesis in this analysis.

3 Note that in some situations, especially when referred to as Olodumare, the Supreme God cast non-anthropomorphically; his character is uroboric. In other contexts, usually when described as Olorun ("Lord of Heaven"), God is specifically male and is praised as a king and a lord.

4 With these terms I invoke a seismological metaphor, the "center" of an earthquake being its focus deep in the earth's crust and an "epicenter" being the point on the earth's surface directly above it. In turn, that point is the center of a wider circle of surface disturbance. Thus, in the context of Yoruba geopolitics, a center is metropolitan relative to its subordinate or peripheral epicenters. Though the seismological terms imply the radiation of force only from center to epicenter, I wish to imply that both central and epicentral units play active roles in constituting authority relations.

5 See Besmer, Fremont (1983). Horses, Musicians, and Gods. South Hadley, MA: Bergin and Garvey.

6 There are two exceptional cases: some scholars describe the egungun maskers as instances of possession. Indeed, the spirit speaks through the mask and deliver politically relevant orders, but Yoruba describe the masker not as a person or as a body possessed by a spirit. Instead, it is maintained that no person at all is inside the mask. Those in the cult know there is, but the non-cult members, particularly the women, are said not to know. Second, the herbalist cults--Ifa, Osain, Sonponnon--also worship orisa but most have always maintained corporations distinct from

the palace and connected directly to feminine means of power).

⁷Note that alafia is an Arabic-derived word, suggesting the breadth of Arab and Muslim influence on this region and its belief systems.

⁸Note that the up-down directional opposition between the good place and the bad does not prevail in Yoruba conceptions of the afterlife. Both salient locales are in the sky, but the state of reward or punishment rests on whether the disembodied spirit will or will not continue to cycle through the world.

⁹Epega describes the vessel constructions used in various cults to contain the god's ase and labels each "the object of worship." For Obatala, the Lord of Whiteness, the construction is "a large and flat calabash filled with some cowries (owo-ero) and placed over a pot--both the calabash and pot being thoroughly white-washed" (1931: 21). Osun's consists of "a small pot filled with small smooth stones 'ota' and water" (Ibid: 30). Sango's objects of worship (the Edun-ara, or thunder-axe, the Ose Sango, or Sango club, and the Aganju, or Sango's knife) are placed in "a large flat calabash," adorned with Efun (chalk) and osun (camwood) and "placed over a pot (Odu Orisa)" (Ibid.: 34). Epega reports that the igba iwa, or "calabash of existence," is an "object of reverence" representing Odudua. In it are placed "great charms," and it is meant to be opened only when its owner wishes to end his life (Ibid.: 18). According to reports by Parrinder, the shrine of Orisa Oke, or Iya Mapo, as titular deity of Ibadan, consists of nothing more than "two pots at the foot of a tree, and some brick-like stones" in the open (1972: 13). The prominence of stones, too, in orisa worship is undoubtedly worthy of further analysis.

¹⁰In Ibadan, she is praised as the "owner of breasts like oru pots" (Olomu oru) (Parrinder 1972: 43). Oru are pots of the same sort as those used in the worship of the river goddesses.

¹¹Perforated earthenware vessels are used to roast meat. Beyond the aforementioned "eye" symbolism, what might it mean, then, that the king is compared to such a pot? (see Section III¹)

¹²Some orisa, like Sango, Ogun, and Sonponnon are considered "hot," because they grow particularly angry and violent when crossed. This violence is intrinsic to their personalities, but when relations with the god are normal they treat their followers coolly.

¹³Typically, males use calabashes only in the tapping of palm wine.

¹⁴Both women and men prostrate themselves to show respect in some cults. Female prostration particularly raises questions that cannot be ignored, but it is fair to attribute greater importance to kneeling, or ikunle, in the cults generally.

¹⁵In Yoruba, "Bi a ba pe nnkan ni 'awo' ti ko si ni ohun ti i fi i pa ogberi laya, e je a ye peru won lawo; nigbon bokuuta ba wonu agbe tan taa si feewo meji ti yiyoju wo re nidii, o to dawo." Though the statement was not collected originally from a believer, the ethnographer found that worshipers agreed.

¹⁶Such force is thought to be able to render a fertile woman barren, further justifying conventional male/female role distinctions within the cult.

¹⁷(1)The sources of Frobenius (1968(1913)), Daramola and Jeje (1975(1967)), and Gleason (1971) attribute Yemoja's parentage to no one in particular. (2)Abraham (1962 (1946)) notes versions in which no parentage is specified and versions in which Obatala and Odudua are Yemoja's parents. Among those contemporary priests who offer any partial corroboration of the 19th-century southern (3)Priests in Ibadan agree that Yemoja has parents but cannot recall their names. Obatala, or Orisa Olufon is not her father but her husband. (4)In contemporary Abeokuta, Obatala alone is acknowledged as Yemoja's parent, for he is the father of all the orisa. (5)In Igboho, Yemoja is said to have no parent but Olorun himself, who created her at the time he created the earth. (6)In Sepeteri too, Yemoja is understood never to have been begotten. She was created at the beginning of time when Olorun created the sea. On the other hand, under some circumstances, Sepeteri priests say that Obatala is Yemoja's father. Here, Odudua is never regarded as her mother.

On an additional issue of divergent of opinion, (1)Ellis (1894) understands Obatala to symbolize heaven, while Odudua symbolizes earth. (2)Frobenius (1968(1913)) specifically notes that the Odudua of the inland Yoruba-speaking peoples is male, rendering impossible the orisa's marriage to Obatala.

¹⁸ (1)Gleason(1971) and Frobenius(1968(1913)) call Yemoja's brother "Aginju."

While (1)for Ellis (1894), Yemoja's name represents water and Aganju's land or wilderness, (2)Frobenius reports that Yemoja represents the moist soil and Aginju the dry. Both

authors imply their use of etymological inference and native informant exegesis.

¹⁹ (1) Abraham (1962) records a tale in which Yemoja's husband is Oranyan, founder of Oyo. (2) As earlier mentioned, priests in Ibadan consider Orisa Olufon, or Obatala, to be Yemoja's husband. She is the second of three wives, among whom Osun is the senior and Yemowo the junior and favorite. (3) In contemporary Abeokuta, Ogun is alleged to be both brother and husband to Yemoja. (4) In Igboho and Sepeteri, the issue of Yemoja's marriage to the non-orisa king of Saki arises only in the context of the "Yemoja as Bride" tales.

²⁰ Etymologically, Ellis deconstructs the name "Orungan" as "In the Height of the Sky," meaning "Air" (1894: 44-5).

²¹ (1) All of the older sources are agreed, but none of the contemporary northern priests corroborate the rape theme. (2) Priest in Ibadan find the rape incident "unlikely." (3) The 20th-century writers Daramola and Jeje (1975(1967)), whose reports focus on the Egba sub-group, note that Orungan pursued his mother continually "for the lack of anything else to do." (4) Some contemporary Ifa oracular texts describe Ogun as the son who raped his mother Yemoja (Gleason 1973).

²² Only Ellis (1894) and Farrow (1898), who appears to have copied Ellis directly, report this detail.

²³ (1) Ellis (1894), Farrow (1898), and Gleason (1973) agree that she fell down in exhaustion. (2) Daramola and Jeje report that she fell down and died before bursting. (3) Gleason adds that Yemoja struck her head on a stone.

⁸ (1) Gleason (1973) and Frobenius (1968(1913)) omit the theme of streams flowing from Yemoja's breasts. (2) Daramola and Jeje (1975(1967)) report simply that water flowed from Yemoja's body, not specifically from her breasts, and that the two streams come together at the lagoon in Lagos. Others do not mention this geographical detail.

²⁵ The precise birth order is debated. (1) According to some, the order is as follows: Olookun, Oloosa, Sango, Oya, Osun, Oba, Ogun, Dada, and the remainder as listed above (Ellis 1894: 45). Dada is known also as Eda or Ida (Ibid.: 76).

(1) Frobenius (1968(1913)) and Gleason (1973) make no mention of the bursting of her abdomen. (2) Nor do Daramola and Jeje, who do not mention the consequent birth of orisa children either.

(1) Gleason (1973) and Frobenius (1968(1913)) number the orisa children at 16, (2) as distinct from the 13 orisa, the Sun, and the Moon listed by Ellis (1894) and Farrow (1898).

In another detail Ellis specifically excludes a number of orisa from Yemoja's brood--Ifa (god of divination), Aroni ("the Forest god"), Elegba (the trickster; God of Fate and Communication between Gods and Men), Oye ("the Harmattan Wind"), Osumare (the Rainbow), Olarosa ("tutelary divinity of households"), Osain (an herbalist god), and Sigidi ("the personified nightmare"). (3) But Gleason presents the view that all the orisa must have been born to Yemoja, for "nothing can exist without water." Many of the names appearing in the southern myth are unknown to contemporary priests and priestesses. (5) One of Abraham's (1962) sources lists Dada, Sonponnon, and Sango as Yemoja's children by her husband Oranyan. (6) Some Ifa oracular texts refer to the witches as Yemoja's children, the product of her rape by her son Ogun (Gleason 1973).

(7) Ellis reports that some sources include mankind among the issue of this birth. (8) Some specify that the first couple--Obalofun ("Lord of Speech") and Iya ("Mother") came out of Yemoja's belly at Ife and, by reproducing, populated the world (1966(1894): 89).

Contemporary northern priests enumerate a much-diminished list of Yemoja's orisa children. (9) Ibadan priests list Sango, Sonponnon, and Bayanni; (10) Abeokuta priests list only the animals of the water. They say that Yemoja herself never conceived children, though the children she gives to barren women belong, in some sense, to her. (11) Sometimes they call Sango her son but patch over the inconsistency with the provision that he is an adoptive son. (12) Like Gleason (1973), Igboho priests say that all the orisa are her children, (13) but, ironically, specify the five orisa children as her own. Yet they cannot name those five. (14) The Sepeteri priests credit Yemoja with no children.

²⁶ Ellis (1894) and Farrow (1898) alone claim that the site of this swelling and bursting became Ife and that the etymology of the town's name confirms their view.

Auxiliary sources of these tales have been Lucas (1948) and Dennett (1910).

²⁷ We might consider also Ellis' etymological interpretation of "Orungan" to determine degree to which and ways in which Yemoja's son is her structural opposite. Ellis alleges that the son's name means "Air." See footnotes to the "Birth of the Gods" myth.

²⁸ Remember that, in another example, the masks of the Gelede society, which aims to propitiate "our mothers the witches," associate them with wild animals like crocodiles, leopards, and snakes.

²⁹Witchcraft is allegedly a substance passed from mother to daughter upon the death of the former. Remember that potting too, an exclusively female domain, is taught by mothers to their daughters.

³⁰The significance of Mecca to the people of this region is probably as ancient as the 800-year-old influence of Islam on the western Sudan. Deference to Mecca may contain less a religious "piety" in the Western sense than an indication of the power associated with Muslim traders and the political importance of relatively local Muslim rulers, like the Hausa emirs and the Borgu/Nupe kings.

Secondly, those informants who claim a northeastern origin for all the Yoruba often claim that those original immigrants conquered a group of non-Yoruba autochthons.

³¹(1)The tales in Oyo North (Saki, Sepeteri, and Igboho) generally place the events during the reign of the first Okere, or King of Saki, named Akingbeku. At that time, says the present Okere, only the original, pre-jihad capital of the Oyo Kingdom existed. The contemporary metropolises of Jos and Igboho and the surrounding towns were "just bush."
 (2)Tales in Ibadan and Abeokuta do not situate the events historically, although the oracular poetry of the southern Ifa priests still records Yemoja's relation to the Okere.
 (3)The Okere himself calls the wife of his great-great grandfather by the name Ekusomi and casts her character in the light of a very contemporary, human plausibility structure. Only after telling the story does the king reveal that Ekusomi is Yemoja herself. (4)In another account, from Sepeteri, the couple is said to live under the sea, indicating a very different sort of time frame and plausibility structure.

³²(1)In some accounts, Yemoja has no particular trade. She is but the wife of a king. She bears children, cooks, and tries to serve her husband however she can. (2)In some cases she has been sent as a sort of emissary by her father--the king of a foreign state, like Nupe in one version--to wed another king. (3)In still another version, told by informants in Abeokuta (specifically Reverend Popoola (1979)), Yemoja is a cloth dyer and seller. (4)In another case, recorded in Beier (1980) she is a market woman.

³³(1)Alternatively, she may come to Saki from Igboho, as alleged in Igboho or (2)from the sea, as alleged in Sepeteri and in Verger's (1981) account. (3)Even when she is not specified as a foreigner to the town where she marries, she is depicted as alone, lonely, and alienated due to her physical peculiarity, her self-consciousness, and her lack of family.

34(1) In those accounts in which Yemoja is a foreigner, her inability to find a husband is not emphasized. The implicit point of emphasis seems instead to be the agency of the father in sending her to her husband or of her mother in receiving her return, as in tales from Verger (1981) and in oracular poetry from Oyo (Bascom 1980). (2) In some cases, she fears ridicule on the grounds that her breasts are so large. According to the present Okere, Yemoja's breasts were so large that she could nurse "even if [the] child were far away." She could also "throw them over her shoulder to nurse a child (according to the accounts of Okere Saki and of the Sepeteri priesthood). (3) In other cases, potential mates feared her power, as evident in the size of her breasts (as explained in Sepeteri). (4) In Abeokuta, it is said that no one would marry her because she had but one breast or (5) because she had 21 breasts (Rev. Popoola and Beier's 1980).

35(1) In most tales by priests or recorded in the oracular literature, the occasion of Yemoja's introduction to her husband is unnarrated. (2) Some oracular texts from Oyo say that she was sent by her father, the King of Nupe. (3) Beier says that she laments on her way home from the market. Only this author specifically quotes her lament. (4) Popoola, an Anglican minister in Abeokuta, reports that she laments while ambling down the road. (5) Priests in Igboho assert that she has long been husbandless when the king of Saki fetches her from Igboho as his bride. (6) In the least conventional version, a Sepeteri priestess says that Okere stands by the sea and falls in love as he spies Yemoja under the water.

36 (1) Though the husband is not Ogun in every version, Beier and Rev. Popoola of Abeokuta are agreed in identifying him as the husband. (2) The husband is usually Okere, the King of Saki, (3) and is sometimes specified as the first Okere. This third set of reports comes from Igboho and from some oracular literature in Igana, Koso, Iseyin, and Abeokuta as well. (4) But priests in Abeokuta flatly deny that Yemoja was ever married to Okere. (5) Verger (1981) does not give the geographical source of an oracular verse that presents Yemoja as the bride of two successive husbands--Orunmila (God of Divination; also called Ifa) and Olofin (the Ooni, or King of Ile-Ife). For the latter she is said to have borne ten children, including Sango and Osumare. (6) Bascom attributes to an Ifa priest in Oyo a list of three successive husbands--Orisala (or Obatala), Oranmiyan (an Alaafin, or Emperor of Oyo, also known as Oranyan), and finally Okere, the King of Saki (from Bascom 1980). (7) The contemporary Ibadan priests identify Orisa Olufon, or Obatala, as her only husband.

37 Various reasons are given for her husband's appeal. (1) Sometimes the marriage is prompted by the arrangement of

another king and father of the bride, as in Ifa texts from Oyo and in the political history recorded by R.S. Smith (1969:112). (2)Okere's falling in love explains the liaison in Sepeteri. (3)Beier specifies his bloodshot eyes and his generally fearsome appearance as reasons for others' unwillingness to marry him, while (4)Rev. Popoola notes only Ogun's "large and bloodshot eyeballs." (5)Many tales mention no particular vulnerability that prompts the husband's proposal.

38 (1)In the greatest number of tales--from some Ifa verses (as in Oyo), from a priest of Sango at Koso, and from priests of Yemoja at Oyo and Sepeteri--there is no such explicit agreement between Yemoja and her spouse. (2)The Yemoja-worshippers at Iseyin and some Ifa priests (like those at Igana) narrate the negotiation explicitly. (3)Beier and Yemoja priests at Igboho and Abeokuta understand the agreement as a pre-condition of the couple's marriage, while (4)the present Okere, priests at Sepeteri, and some of Abraham's sources understand this agreement as subsequent to their marriage, usually having been initiated by the husband's order.

39 (1)Many sources specify no stipulation by Yemoja, but (2)some present her request that he never insult her large breasts, her one breast, or her 21 breasts, as the case may be. (3)In Beier's tale, she requests that he never touch her single breast.

40 (1)Among the preconditions for marriage, Ogun usually stipulates that Yemoja never criticize the size or redness of his eyeballs (Beier and Rev. Popoola). (2)Apparently after marriage, according to priests in Sepeteri, Okere makes the same request. (3)An Ifa priest at Igana says that Okere asks her never to mention the enormous size of his testicles. (4)The present Okere, some Ifa priests from Oyo, and Yemoja priests from Sepeteri and Igboho note Okere's post-nuptial dictate or warning that Yemoja never enter a particular room in the palace. The room is described variously as a storage room for Okere's magical poisonous arrows, a "medicine" room, a secret room, or simply a forbidden room.

41 (1)Priests from Igboho and the sources of Abraham and Beier explicitly note a long interval when Yemoja and her husband are happy and respectful of each other's prohibitions. (2)The circumstances of the couple's conflict, as described by Rev. Popoola of Abeokuta, Yemoja-worshippers in Iseyin, and the present Okere, imply that either Yemoja or her husband makes special efforts to ingratiate himself to the other by going beyond his traditional and expected marital duty. (3)In other tales still, Yemoja is bored with life in the palace (as in oracular verse explained by Verger(1981)) or (4)is

deliberately disrespectful of her agreements with Okere (according to a Yemoja priestess at Sepeteri).

42 A key problem in the Levi-Straussian methodology cannot be ignored here. The methodological recommendation that the analyst of myth break down variant tales into their shortest constituent sentences (in "The Story of Asdiwal" (1967) and "The Structural Study of Myth" (1979)) permits the obliteration of distinctive overall structural tendencies within each variant. Not only are terms substituted in each structural position, or "sentence," within a hypothetically standard tale, but structural rearrangements occur in larger units or sections within the tale. That we have been able to isolate heuristically 13 tales of similar overall structure, in the "birth of the gods" scenario, and 18 in the marital quarrel scenario strongly reflects our research methods and analytical assumptions. Narrative structures among the forty-one tales from which I have selected do indeed tend to cluster around certain scenarios: (1) "the birth of the gods," (2) the impetuous and disloyal bride, (3) the marital quarrel, and (4) the normal bride and mother. However, I cannot overlook the frequent coincidence of these scenarios within a single tale or the in-betweenness of many tales. In a cross-cutting mode of variation, some tales focus on the goddess' role as mother, others on her role as wife, and still others on Yemoja as a witch. But these categories too require cautious application. From each we exclude a whole range of variation beyond our analytic category boundaries. I simply caution the reader that the variation in mythic structures is objectively neither categorical nor continuous.

In this particular section of the myth, we encounter an integrated block of events, each of which would lose its significance outside the context of the surrounding events. The significant unit of variation is therefore much larger than the "sentence." To a degree less obvious because of the seeming integrity of the synthesized tale, we must conclude the same about the tale as a whole. The structure of each tale must be assumed to be unique, and each such structure must be assumed to contain a meaning and imply an intent distinct from those of another such structure. The synthesis of any "standard" form of a set of tales modifies important data.

43 The beginning of the conflict may be attributed to Yemoja or to her husband. Beier and Popoola record the husband's well-intentioned but clumsy efforts to help his wife in her absence. (1) Beier's version of the event appears in the above text. (2) Popoola reports that Yemoja, a cloth-dyer and -seller, is one day absent from the market, and on that day Esu (the trickster god) comes, pretending to be Yemoja's dye-supplier. Ogun purchases some dye on his wife's behalf

but pays more than she ordinarily does. Without thinking, Yemoja abuses Ogun's red eyes; he in turn abuses her bust. They fight, and Ogun chases her. Alternatively, in several tales, the husband's malice is to blame (3) Priests in Igboho say that Okere uttered the forbidden insult in the midst of a quarrel, while (4) an oracular priest at Igana specifies no occasion for Okere's inappropriate criticism. (5) According to some of Abraham's sources, the husband is drunk on palmwine at the time.

The conflict may result from Yemoja's efforts to help the husband in his absence. (6) The present Okere says that Yemoja's husband had admonished her never to enter the special medicine room where he stored his powerful, poisonous arrows. One day, however, the rain was about to fall on the arrows as they dried outdoors. Since her husband could not be found, she picked up the arrows and packed them into the medicine room. When Okere returned and asked who had done it, Yemoja spoke up. When the King, in his outrage, insulted her breasts, Yemoja too grew annoyed and she left. (7) Oracular texts from Oyo record similar events but do not note that Yemoja searched for Okere before taking matters into her own hands. The texts add that Yemoja replied to Okere's commentary on her "long, drooping breasts" by ridiculing his buck teeth. "Okere," after all, means "Squirrel." Yemoja then fled. (8) According to worshipers at Iseyin, Yemoja entered the forbidden room to get food for Okere's guests. After an exchange of insults about, first, her dangling breasts and, next, his huge testicles, Yemoja fled. (9) Yemoja may cause the controversy maliciously, by entering the room without good reason (according to a Sepeteri priestess), or (10) she may simply leave the palace out of boredom with her long stay (according to oracular texts explained by Verger (1981: 190)). (11) Finally, a number of sources offer no reason for or circumstances of her departure from the husband's company. (12) An oracular priest at Igana attributes no blame; "Yemoja and Okere fail to respect each others' tabus," he says. In this case, however, two unusual details arise. First, Okere threatens Yemoja with a knife, causing her to flee, and, second, Yemoja says Okere's testicles are "as big as calabashes" (Bascom 1980--emphasis mine) comparing them, significantly, to a type of vessel.

44 According to one oracular priest at Igana, Okere threatened Yemoja with a knife (Bascom 1980).

45 (1) In one version (Igboho priests) Yemoja is said to gather all her belongings, but (2) in the greatest number of tales Yemoja carries only a few things, specifically her offspring and "a pot" (oracular priest at Igana and priests at Sepeteri), several "pots" (Iseyin worshipers (Bascom 1980: 46)), "small pots" (Okere Saki), "a water pot" (Yemoja

worshippers at Oyo (Bascom 1980), "a glass of medicine" to be broken in case of emergency (oracular verse explained by Verger (1981:190)), or "the small earthenware pot from which she feeds her children" (Sepeteri priests). In one case she carries the "water pot" on her head (oracular priest at Igana, present Okere, worshippers at Iseyin, oracular verse cited by Verger (1981:190), Sepeteri Yemoja priesthood, and worshippers at Oyo (see Bascom 1980). All these formulations correspond to a familiar motif in the ritual and paraphernalia of the possession cults.

In some cases she takes her children--(1)sometimes five (Sango, Obatala, Orisa Oko, Ogun, and another whose name the Igboho priests tell me they have forgotten), (2)sometimes two (according to the Igboho priests on some occasions), (3)sometimes one unnamed child, and (4)sometimes an unspecified number. (5)In another tale, from the Ifa corpus, she is said to have borne ten children for Olofin, king of Ife, but she neglects to take any of them (Verger 1981:190) Likewise, according to the present Okere, she refuses altogether to take them (the present Okere's version). (6)In the Igboho tale, only two of her children--Sango and Obatala--remain continuously loyal and accompany her of their own accord. Indeed, omnipotence is the reward for their loyalty, suggesting an instance of the more general concept of power through participation in hierarchal authority.

In cases where Yemoja carries with her no vessels during her flight, her mouth (Popoola of Abeokuta), a "small hole in the ground" (Igboho priests), and , in the "birth of the gods" tales, her breasts appear as structural alternatives. Each, in the various tales, becomes the source of the River O'gu'n, and its spilling forth occasions the goddess' disappearance. (N.B., the name of the River Ogun is etymologically unrelated to the name of Yemoja's occasional husband, the god O'gu'n. Their tones differ.)

⁴⁶ She runs a great distance, and, when her destination is specified, it is usually her hometown or the abode of her mother. Her hometown of Igboho is to the northeast of Saki, while the home of her mother is the ocean, to the south. We may note that at one point Igboho was the capital of the Oyo Empire and is therefore traditionally metropolitan relative to Saki.

(1)In some cases, the servants and messengers of the palace pursue, begging her to return (Sepeteri priests), while (2)in others her husband pursues (worshippers in Oyo--according to Bascom 1980). (3)In one case, her followers are said to have criticized her for leaving her husband; so, they mock and turn their backs of her (Igboho priests). Yemoja's flight here recalls the Yoruba and pan-African mythic theme of the High God's departure from the world.

47 In most cases she offers no conditions for her return, for she intends never to return. Yet, we note that the ritual of her cult is devoted largely to soliciting her presence and periodic return, particularly through propitiatory sacrifice.

48 Compare to the tumbling of the calabash in the initiation/possession ritual described in Ibadan, where a calabash containing special herbs is placed on the initiand's head. When the vessel tumbles, the initiand is possessed by the god and, with a pot on her head, she proceeds to fetch water from the sacred river.

49 (1)In some tales she falls and the pot tumbles (Sepeteri priests), (2)in others the pot breaks and the river issues from it. (3)In another case, her husband Ogun touches her breast, she begins to tremble and then turns into the river. (4)According to some of Abraham's informants, she simply stomps her foot and becomes the river (1962:680). (5)She might spontaneously turn into the river, without being chased or touched (Bascom 1980: 46). (6)Priests in Abeokuta say that Yemoja falls down and that the river gushes from her mouth (Popoola 1979). (7)A Sango priest at Koso says that she goes to live in the river (Bascom 1980: 46), and (8)Igboho priests say that water gushes from "a small hole" in the ground where she falls and disappears. Beside the hole she leaves the 16 cowries and the dane gun, which are emblematic of her worship. That small hole as well still commemorates her disappearance. (9)In Sepeteri, it is said that Yemoja disappears, but the relation of the disappearance to the origin of the river is unspecified. (10)Finally, the oracular poetry cited by Verger (1981: 190) says that she breaks the glass vessel she has received from her mother Olookun for use in emergencies, whereupon a river appears and carries Yemoja back to Olookun's ocean abode.

50 This detail comes uniquely from Beier (1982), but the outcome is consistent with Ogun's character in a wide range of other tales.

Most tales in this genre end with Yemoja's transformation into a river, but some continue or even begin at this point. The subsequent themes tend to assume the knowledge of those prior, and those subsequent are sufficiently important to the structural representation of women in Yoruba mythology to justify these precedented amendments.

51 (1)The oracular literature from Oyo says that Yemoja's unnamed junior wife becomes the River Ofiki, a tributary of the Ogun (Bascom 1980: 46). (2)The head priest in an Ibadan domestic shrine adds that all co-wives are jealous of each other [spoken in the presence of his two wives and with them

in mind--a small illustration of the influence of context over text], and that the senior wife Osun, the goddess of the River Osun, becomes a river for that same reason.

52 (1) In Ibadan, Osun is said to have tried to block Yemoja's path with a great boulder at Idamesan in Iseyin. To let his mother pass, Sango splits the rock in half, leaving at Idamesan an extant monument to his love for Yemoja. Note that the theme of commemorative objects has recurred.

The theme of Sango's rescue persists in a number of versions elsewhere in Oyo North. (3) There, it is Okere, her husband, who blocks Yemoja's path. [One wonders why a wife would block the departure of her co-wife.] In both Iseyin and Oyo, Okere is said to have turned himself into Okere Hill, which Sango split with lightning so the river can flow through (Bascom 1980: 46). (4) Alternatively, informants in Oyo say that Sango "dashes against the hill" to open the way for the river (Ibid.: 46).

53 Priests in Igboho explain that the omnipotence of Yemoja's sons Sango and Obatala is a gift from their mother in gratitude for their loyalty during her flight from Okere.