

RITUALS, SYMBOLISM AND SYMBOLS IN YORUBA TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

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Introduction

This paper is motivated by the need to correct the erroneous observations, notions, assertions and pontifications of some foreign armchair investigators about religious situations, facts and values in Africa as a whole. Examples of such observations, notions and so on can be multiplied in this regard.

Baudin, for example, moved by his pre-conceived notions and possibly moved by cultural pride and prejudice declares:

The idea they (Africans) have of God is most unworthy of His Divine majesty. They represent that God, after having commenced the organisation of the world, charged Obatala with the completion and government of it, retired and entered into an eternal rest, occupying himself only with His own happiness; too great to interest Himself in the affairs of His world. He remains like a negro king, in a sleep of idleness.¹

This is purely a definite reading in of the Western deistic philosophy into pure African belief.

Another foreign investigator, Diedrich Westermann, wrote on African belief system when he probably had little access to the proper sources of African beliefs and practices or when he had little more than a chance opportunity of a cursory glimpse of a gargantuan continent. Thus in connection with the African concept of God, he declares:

The high-god is, as a rule, not the object of a religious cult and is of small or almost no significance in practical religion. People acknowledge him but neither fear nor love nor serve him.²

It is to be noted that a good number of such scholars had, over the years, taken appearance for reality, symbol for the symbolised, means for the end with regard to the religious situation in Africa. Reasons for this step are not far-fetched. A lot of them were staying behind the garden and at the same time trying to pontificate on the items in the garden. Some had not even touched the African soil. Rather, they relied on the reports of traders and missionaries in dishing out information on the religious situation in Africa.

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Thus, the need is felt to present the topic — rituals, symbolism and symbols which are sure sources of African beliefs and practices — as a means to intimate the cursory observers about what, in fact, constitutes the actual religious situations in Africa and in Yorubaland in particular.

Rituals and Rites: An Issue of Functionality

Rituals and rites are a means of bringing into the limelight the religious experience of a group of people. Rituals and rites thus constitute some kind of religious expression. They are a means of concretising one's belief system. They are a means of expressing one's experience of the supersensible world and the supernatural beings. In short and simple terms, they are acts of forms of worship or communion and communication between one and one's objects of worship.

Before we begin an analysis of the types of rituals and rites, let us have a look at the following basic items:

Ritual Leaders

Rituals in Yoruba traditional religion are not usually administered by the uninitiated or the untrained (Yoruba: *ògbèrì*). Rituals are usually administered by the priests known as *àwòrò* or *ìwòrò*. They are specialists in leading the others in worship. They are devotees of *òrìsà*; that is, there is something of the divinity in them and it belongs to their position not only that they should offer worship to the *orisa*, but also that they should absorb the *òrìsà* into their being and manifest it. Traditionally, specialists in ritual administration followed the craft from father to son, through several or even many generations, handing down their techniques and forms of training, their quintessential experience and habitual shrines where application could be made to the gods and spirits.

It is to be noted that it was an attempt to resolve the need for an adequate *link* between the object of worship and man that the idea of ritual leaders emerged in Yoruba religious thought. And since man felt that he had to deal not with a vague abstraction but a Reality with the attributes of *person*, he naturally thought of a *means* which would be a person — a person sufficiently “human” to make intimate contact with man and not harm him. In short, the need for a personal mediator, a priest, a ritual leader, a specialist in ritual administration, arose.⁴

In the cultic activities of a town the Oba is usually the head of the ritual leaders. He is the priest-king. In Ile-Ife, for example, the Ooni of Ife, *Aláse Ekeji Orisà* is usually the *Pointifex Maximus*, He is the *Olórí Awon Iwòrò* — the head of all the priests. He assumes this office in consequence of his sceptre (*arè*) which is derived from the divinity to whom he is vicegerent. The office still stands even though the Ooni does not now officiate directly at any particular shrine and only performs certain customary rituals as tradition decrees.

Ritual Power

The Ooni of Ife or any head of Yoruba town is mentioned above as the head of all priests. This is in consequence of the ritual power believed to be possessed by the kings or rulers. Yoruba kings are believed to be derivatively divine — They are held to be second-in-command to the Divinity — *Aláse Ekeji Orisà*. That is, Kings in

Yorubaland are divine. But according to Basil Davidson, 'ritual'⁵ would be a better adjective. Kings in Yorubaland are first and foremost repositories of ritual power. Their authority rests mainly and consistently upon its place in their people's beliefs about themselves and the world. Yoruba kings are ritual specialists who have accumulated power in societies which have passed beyond the early subsistence level and had developed whether in isolation or by the stimulus of migrant — resident accommodation, the need as well as the possibility of centralising institutions.

Thus the original nature of Yoruba kings is to be sought in ritual specialism associated with the guardianship of ancestral charters.

It is to be noted that Yoruba kings, then, were not 'divine' in the sense of being regarded as gods. They are political and therefore earthly people as well as ritual and hence spiritual ones.

Hence the accent on 'divinity'. For the king's existence as a political figure or military leader is a secondary thing. Over and beyond these secular functions, a Yoruba Oba has to maintain harmony and concord between society and its natural environment by means of ritual action of a regular kind which he alone could take. His functions in this realm are three-fold: to perform the daily rites⁶ for which he is uniquely qualified by office; to provide for and direct the activities of other cults; and to sustain and control his own spiritual potency. These words about the kingship of the Nigerian Jukun have a wide application and are relevant to the picture given above. Block of medieval Western Europe writes:

The king ... (had) three fundamental duties and scarcely any other to ensure the spiritual welfare of his people by acts of piety and the protection given by acts of piety and the protection given by the true faith; to defend his people against outside enemies ..., and at home, to safeguard justice and peace.

Other priests, Yoruba *Iwòrò*, *Awòrò*, *Aborè* have ritual power in consequence of the power bestowed on the priest — king, *Olórí Iwòrò*. Thus the ritual power of priests is subsumed in the power of the priest-king, a priest never functions in connection with the central cult and culture without the knowledge and courtesy of the priest-king.

Ritual Sanctity

This has to do with the various taboo in connection with the administration of the various rituals and rites that constitute Yoruba traditional religion. This can also be called ritual holiness. The taboo are what the Yoruba call *èwò*, *a kíí seé*, *òhun*. Each ritual has its *taboo* that should be avoided by the priest-king, *Olórí àwon Iwòrò*, other priests, *Iwòrò* or *Aborè*, and the worshippers. For examples the priests and devotees of the god called *Èsù* should avoid having any contact with palmnut oil (Yoruba: *adi*) in order not to incur the wrath of *Èsù*. Moreover, the priests and devotees of the arch-divinity of Yoruba pantheon, *Obàtálá*⁷ should avoid palmwine completely in order to maintain ritual sanctity with regard to the worship of *Obàtálá*. They should also promote anything white and avoid black items in order to keep the ritual sanctity in connection with the worship of the divinity. White is a symbol of purity, holiness and peace. So, priests and devotees of *Obàtálá* should, during ritual activities, present themselves as pure and holy.

The point here is that ritual items should be done according to the prescriptions of the object of worship in order to have the desired result. In this connection the Yoruba declare:

*E jé ká seé,
Bí wón ti i seé,
K'ó lè baà rí,
Bí se é rí.*

Let us do it,
The way it is usually done,
So that we may have the usual result.

*Rituals and Rites in Yoruba Religion:
Some Examples*

Rituals and rites abound in Yoruba traditional religion. A brief survey would be attempted here.

Let us start with the ritual in connection with the worship of God — Olodumare and gods — *Orisà*. There is a specific cult of Olodumare in Yorubaland. This may baffle those foreign arm-chair investigators who hold the thesis that Olodumare is not an object of worship in Yoruba religion. The point here is because Olódùmarè cannot be confined into space (the Yoruba described Him as *A-té-rere-K'áyé* — One who occupies the whole extent of the world); the ritualistic worship offered to Him takes place in the open and not in building like temples and mosques. The worshipper makes a circle of ashes (Yoruba: *eérú*) or white chalk (Yoruba: *efun*); within the circle, which is a symbol of eternity, he pours a libation of cold water, and in the centre he places his kolanut (Yoruba: *obì* on cotton wool — Yoruba: *owu ètùtu*). He then takes the kolanut, splits it and holding the valves within the circle. Often, a white fowl (Yoruba: *adié funfun*) is offered in the same way. In Ile-Ife, the ancestral home of the Yoruba, there is a priest-chief whose duty is to offer this ritual every morning in the name of the Ooni and of all the people. However, it is unfortunate to note that the direct ritualistic worship of Olódùmarè, as a regular aspect of cultic activities in Yorubaland, is dying out. In some places, according to Bolaji Idowu, it is no longer known; in some, it has become the cult of women.⁸

Next is daily worship of the gods. The daily morning worship is simple and usually private in that it is usually the activity of one person. For this simple worship, the worshipper provides himself with water and kolanuts. The worshipper stands before the shrine (Yoruba: *ojubo orisa*) and begins the worship with the invocation wherein he calls the *òrìsà* by his names and appellations and invites him to give attention to his “child”.⁹ During the invocation a rattle may be sounded to attract the attention of the divinity, and the libation (Yoruba: *ètùtù*) is poured either on the ground or on the shrine. The worshipper then gives the reason for invoking the *Orisà*: After this, the kolanut¹⁰ is split, and now comes an anxious moment, for the worshipper expects by the omen¹¹ of the kolanut to know whether his worship has been accepted (Yoruba: *ebo fún, ebo gbà*) or rejected.

Others, are on sacred days of the orisa and on annual festivals in honour of the tutelary divinities. On the sacred day of the *òrìsà*, worship is more elaborate and usually involves a community of worshippers. The actual ritual follows practically

the same pattern as the daily one, but there are important details which give it its distinction. Worshippers are dressed up for the occasion, and there are gifts of food and drink and payment of vows (Yoruba: *èjé sísan*) taken to the *òrìsà*. There must be as many kola nuts as there are worshippers, and even additional ones for those who for some reason are not presented. Worshippers are presented severally to *òrìsà*.

Then we have the ritual during the annual festivals. The main difference between worship on the sacred day and worship during the annual festival is the more elaborate programme connected with annual celebrations.

This is usually an occasion for jocundity and thanksgiving; people appear in their best and give of their best. The offerings are mostly thank-offerings, and the meals constitute an opportunity of communion between the divinity and his "children" on the one hand, and then among the "children themselves on the other. It is a period for special renewal of covenant relationships. On such occasion, the head of the community, the priest-king, the *Pontifex Maximus*, is usually involved. It is he who is ultimately responsible for all that happens during the festival. He also has a special ritual, which, personally or by proxy, he must perform during each festival.

Next are rituals and rites in connection with the various sacrifices.¹² Here, only a few examples would be considered. According to Bolaji Idowu, sacrifice is of the essence of Yoruba religion as it is of every religion the world has ever known.¹³ In sacrifice, the Yoruba offers almost all kinds of foods and drinks and all kinds of living things. In theory, all sacrifices belong entirely to the divinities. But in practice, worshippers often partake of them, particularly of things which can be eaten.

The highest type of sacrifice among the Yoruba used to be human sacrifice. The victim of human sacrifice was usually made to bless the people in some prescribed way which bore upon the occasion of sacrifice. He was then given a special message which he was to deliver on arrival in the presence of the Deity or the divinities. In certain cases, a human who was sacrificed was more than just a victim offered to appease the divinities. He was believed to be going to represent the people before, and convey the petitions to, the higher power. The basic point here is that somebody or something must be given out so that others may live and be blessed.¹⁴ Others, given to either God or gods, include meal and drink offerings which usually begin with the customary libations, Gift or Thank-offering, offered to *òrìsà* in appreciation of some success, Votive offering (Yoruba: *ebo èjé*) given to fulfil the promise made when one begs for certain favours that are eventually effected. Next is Propitiation (Yoruba: *Ebo Ètùd*) — sacrifice of appeasement. This is usually prescribed by the oracle or an *òrìsà* in reply to an inquiry as to what can be done to save the situation during a crisis like epidemic, drought, famine, serious ailment and so on. Then we have Substitutionary (Yoruba: *A-yè-ìpín-ohùn*) — "That which alters an agreement". This is usually given to foil an agreement among the *emèrè* children (wandering spirits of children given to the prank of entering into pregnant women on being born only to die for the sheer relish of mischief). There is the one called Preventive — (Yoruba: *Ogunkòjà*) — The offering here which may be meal or drinks wards off evil. At times the oracles or the priests may prescribe, for example, that each person in the community should rub his body all over with an article — a Nigerian kobo or a head of maize for example — and drop it at a given place for which all will be collected and disposed of according to the particular ritual for the occasion.

Then we have rites in connection with the enthronement or coronation of a king. Here the coronation of the Aláàfin of Oyo would be discussed. Rituals in connection with the coronation include the following:

- i) partaking of the dish prepared from the heart of the late king which has been extracted and preserved. After partaking of this, he is told he has "eaten the king". Hence the origin of the phrase *je oba*, to become a king (*lit* to eat a king)
- ii) At a place called 'Bàrà', he worships at the tombs of his fathers; a horse, a cow and a ram are being offered at each tomb.
- iii) On the fifth day, he goes to Kòso, the shrine of *Sàngó*, the third Aláàfin of Oyo and the god of thunder and lightning, for actual crowning.
- iv) After another interval of five days, he goes to the shrine of Oranyan. Here the Great Sword (Yoruba: *Idà Nlá*) or Sword of Justice (Yoruba: *Idà Idájó Ododo*) brought from Ile-Ife is placed in his hands, without which he can have no authority to order an execution.

After another interval of five days, he goes to the shrine of *Ogún*, god of iron and war, and there offers a propitiatory sacrifice for a peaceful tenure. The offerings consist of a cow, a ram, and a dog; dog being indispensable in any sacrifice to the god of war.¹⁶

From the shrine of *Ogún*, the procession goes straight on to the palace, entering now for the first time by the main gate opened for him. Thus he enters the palace proper as the king after the necessary rituals had been completed.

There are also rituals which belong to the secret societies such as the *Egúngún* and *Orò* (*Osùgbó*) guilds, and the *Ogboni* cults. The members of these groups make an exclusive claim for the possession of knowledge of the mysteries of their cults and for the right to perform the ceremonies which are jealously guarded from the view of the uninitiated. The members are initiated into the cult through certain rituals which are administered surreptitiously. Thus the name "secret societies". It is insiders, and not otherwise, that can know details about the rituals of these groups. One important point that should be noted here is that the societies are both religious and political in some cases. In this connection, J.O. Lucas, in connection with *Orò* guild, remarks:

The guild possesses great political power. In the days of the independence of Abeokuta, members of the guild formed the majority in the political council known as the *Ogboni* council.¹⁷

The important point to note here is the synthesis of religion and politics in traditional Yorubaland.

Lots and lots of death and funeral rites and rituals abound in Yorubaland. Some of these rites and rituals are ordinary while some are special.

In Yoruba traditional practice, immediately a person dies, the first rite is to slay a fowl known as *adie iràndà*¹⁸ — "The fare fowl". This is meant to make the road easy for the deceased.

Next is food for the deceased. In the Yoruba traditional system, when the corpse is laid in state, a yam meal is prepared and portion of it is placed at the foot of the

bier. The following are given special burial rites in Yoruba: king (Yoruba: *Oba*),¹⁹ albino (Yoruba: *àfín*), leper (Yoruba: *adétè*), one with hunched back (Yoruba: *abuké*), pregnant mother (Yoruba: *aboyún, abara méji*), one who hangs himself (Yoruba: *eni tí ó pa okùn so*), and born-to-die-children (Yoruba: *àbíkú, emèrè*).

There are some funeral rituals that are peculiar only to Yoruba religion. For example, in Yoruba funeral practice, when the corpse is lowered to the grave, the survivors draw near it, each according to the status of his family and each bringing an animal victim, usually a goat; he offers his gift through the officiating minister, asking that the deceased should accept it, and praying not to sleep in the world beyond, but to open his eyes wide and always look after his children. The point here has to do with the belief of the Yoruba that death is not the end of life. It is only a medium whereby the present earthly existence is changed for another.

Other peculiar items include *Bíbá òkú ya 'hùn* — “Entering into a covenant with the deceased” and *fífa Eégún òkú iuo' lé* — “Bringing the spirit of the deceased into the house. By this, it is believed, the surviving children and relations will be able to have close connection with the deceased. The ritual usually takes place at night when all lights have been put out. In this connection, a shrine is made in one corner or at the bottom of the control wall of the house; this is a specific meeting place between the deceased and the children.

Symbolism and Symbols

Symbolism, symbology and symbols have to do with a study in representational arts in Fine Art and Religion. Symbols could be regarded as signs, marks or objects looked upon as representing something or relaying certain message about one thing or the other.

The Yoruba, to avoid casting their minds on abstract entities during worship, resort to using symbols or emblems with a view to concretising their worship.

The Yoruba symbolise a lot of items in their expression of their religious experience. Let us start by examining the representations they have given to their tutelary deities and ancestors.

The Yoruba used wood²⁰ and metal²¹ carvings, plants and animals as symbols of gods and ancestral spirits. Before we go further, it is important to note that, as said earlier, these symbols are not ends in themselves but means to certain ends. Thus those who are out to conduct a genuine research into the religious situation in Yorubaland should not take appearance for reality, means for an end, symbol for the symbolised and reality for shadow.

Divinities and ancestors are sure objects of worship and reverence among the Yoruba. However, it is to be noted that they are a means to get to Olodumare — God, the ultimate End of everything. The Yoruba have never made the mistake of putting God, Olodumare, on the same pedestal with the divinities (*òrìsà*) and the ancestors. In their belief, Olódùmarè is unique, incomparable. The uniqueness of Olodumare is one reason why there are no images-graven or in drawing or in painting — of Him in Yorubaland. Symbols there are copious, but no images of Him. Symbols or images of deities or divinities abound in Yorubaland. *Orìsà'nlá*, the arch-divinity of Yoruba pantheon is usually pictured as an ancient figure in white and bedecked with white

ornaments. His temple, especially the inside, is washed white, his emblems are to be kept in white containers and consists, among other things, of white chalk and white beads. His priests and priestesses are robed in white and wear white ornaments. Those who do not understand the religion of the Yoruba might think that the items are the things that matter here. This is patently wrong. The message here is that all those white items point to *Orisà-’nlá* as presenting, to the Yoruba, the idea of ritual and ethical purity, and therefore the demands and sanctions of high moral pattern. The white items are mere symbols symbolising purity, holiness, cleanliness on the part of the ritual leaders and the worshippers of *Orisà-’nlá*.

Ifá, as a system of divination, is a symbol of wisdom in connection with the oracle divinity called *Orúnmilà*.

In this connection Wande Abimbola says:

Ifá, otherwise known as Orunmila is the Yoruba god of wisdom; one of the praise-names of *Orúnmilà* is *akéré-finúsogbón* (the small one with a mind full of wisdom).²²

The concrete items such as *òpèlè* (16 beads), *ikin* (16 nuts), *iróke* (the tapper), *opón ifá* (*Ifá* tray or bowl which is used in divining is only a symbol symbolising *Orúnmilà*, the god of divination, the god of wisdom and omniscience, as a wise god.

Lucas is of the opinion that cosmological ideas are associated with the heads carved on *Ifá* trays. They represent, according to the traditional beliefs, and confirmed by my informants,²³ the four divinities presiding over the four corners of the world and whose domains are the four chief *Odù* of *Ifá* viz:

Ogbé, Oyékú, Iwòrì and Odí

The *Odus* are generally arranged to form the four points of the compass.²⁴ The orientation is as follows:

Odíméjì

Oyékú Méjì

Ejì Ogbè

Iwòrì Mejì

The points of the compass represented and the gods presiding over the respective corners are as follows:

- | | | |
|---------------|-------|---------|
| 1. Ejì-Ogbì | East | Esù |
| 2. Oyékú Méjì | West | Sàngó |
| 3. Iwòrì Mejì | South | Obàtálá |
| 4. OdíMéjì | North | Ogún. |

Here we see the *Odù* as symbols of compass direction and particular divinities. *Ogún*, god of war, god of iron, is usually represented by iron. Among the Yoruba, there exists a traditional connection between Sango — the god of thunder and lightning, and *Ogún*; the thunder-axe is used in the cult worship of *Sàngó* as well as

of *Ogún*. The point here is that the iron-axe, which is usually a tough instrument, points to Sango and Ogun as gods of war, gods that should be feared and respected.

Among the Yoruba, wrought-iron staffs are used in a number of cults, with particular motifs associated with particular cults. For example, the iron staffs for *Osanyin*, the god associated with traditional medicine, have sixteen birds in a circle around a central bird. The sixteen birds represent the sixteen basic signs of the *Ifá* oracle²⁵ which provide a system of classification for all medicinal ingredients.

Edan, a pair of figures, one male and one female, is a symbol of initiation into the *Ogbóni* fraternity. The pair of figure is usually joined by a chain. They are used in *Ogbóni* ritual, and every member of the *Ogbóni* society has a pair of these figures, made for his initiation into the society.

Some symbols are made to identify one divinity or the other. For use in traditional religion, Yoruba sculptors made human and animals figures, ornamental bowls, drinks, stools, spears, masks and so on. The god for whom the object is made can be identified by the symbols or emblems and motifs used. *Sàngó*, the god of thunder and lightning, priest of the rainmakers of Yorubaland and identified as one of the earliest kings of the Oyo kingdom, has been mentioned in connection with ritual pottery, but his shrines also contain a good number of wood carvings. They are variable art galleries containing a good variety of wooden dance staffs, *esé Sàngó*, decorated with the double headed axe²⁶ emblem and human figures, inverted mortars, *odo Sango*, decorated with devotees and the emblems of the god and carved figures holding a bowl, *arugbá*, the last two storing the thunder — bolts; (*edun ààrá* — instruments to effect justice).

The Yoruba holds the global record for twin births. Visits to a diviner and special rites are necessary when twins are born. Wooden figures, *èrè ibejì*, are carved as substitutes for the twins if one or both of them should die, to ensure the continued fertility of the mother and the health of any surviving twin. The *èrè ibejì* are ritually washed, dressed, decorated and fed, and the mother would keep the carving at home on the family twin altar, in her sleeping room where the carving is often wrapped for sleep, or in a container.

There are certain actions of the Yoruba that are usually religiously symbolic. Burning of the born-to-die children symbolises displeasure with that type of children. It is also a way of dissuading such children from repeating their terrible itinerary.

In Yoruba traditional medicine, symbols occupy a very significant place. The traditional herbalists make use of plants, roots, and animal species in the preparation of medicine for healing purposes, and such materials, have, by oral tradition, been studied and believed to be effectual.

Symbolism is taken into serious consideration in the collection, preparation and application of the prepared medicine. The herbalist is supposed to know the best time to collect leaves and plants, or bark of stems and may have to recite some incantations²⁷ before or after collecting them. Mircea Eliade calls such enactments 'symbolism of mythical precedents'.²⁸ E.G. Parrinder rightly observes that:

It is not easy to find out why certain remedies are used — they may have some fancied resemblance to the symptoms of the disease.²⁹

Another category of symbols I would like to bring to your notice is in connection with some deities that point to some of the attributes of God — Olódùmarè. *Sàngó* and *Sònpònná* for example are conceptualisations of the wrath of God while *Orisà'nlá* or *Obàtálá* is described by some of Yoruba elders as the image or symbol of Olódùmarè on earth. Yoruba theology also refers to *Orisànl'n* as the offspring of Olódùmarè in the sense that he derived immediately from Him and that the attributes of Olodumare are revealed through him.

Concluding Remarks

So far we have been able to give a broad survey of rituals, symbols and their implications in Yoruba traditional religion. It is seen in the paper that the idea of the supreme Being, called Olódùmarè in Yoruba religion, is central in and crucial to Yoruba belief system. We have seen that rituals, symbolism and symbols have ultimate reference to Olodumare who is believed to be the Maker, the Creator, the Owner of Life.

It is also made clear in the paper that the Yoruba are not worshippers of woods, plants, animals and so on as erroneously conceived by some foreign researchers. Rather, they employ those items to give some kind of concrete and objective reality to their religious dreams and aspirations. Thus all items in their religious thought, apart from the supreme Being, are a means to an end, the end itself being the supreme Being known as *Olódùmarè*, *Olúwa*, *Olórun*, *Olófin Orun*, *Elédàá*.

Those who do not know but are ready to learn and know should realise that in all things the Yoruba are religious. The focal point of their religious aspiration is God. It would be proper then for those who want to conduct a genuine research into the traditional religious thought of the Yoruba to avoid prejudice and preconceived notion and show extra caution, openness and sympathy by calling the Yoruba what they *actually* call themselves. There is no point pontificating on items that are alien to one. Such would lead one to commit academic fallacy that does not augur well for true scholarship.

Footnotes

1. See E.B. Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*, S.C.M., London, 1971, p. 144.
2. See *ibid.*,
3. See E. Bolaji Idowu, *Olódùmarè: God in Yoruba Belief*, Longman, London, 1962, p. 130. Interview with the devotees of *Sàngó* in Oyo, devotees of *Orinsanlá* at Ifon, devotees of *Ogun* in Ondo, December, 1986.
4. See *ibid.*, pp. 130ff; see also J.O. Awolau, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*, Longman, London, 1981, *passim*; J.O. Lucas, *The Religion of the Yoruba*, C.M.S., 1948, pp. 175ff.
5. See Basil Davison, *The Africans: An Entry to Cultural History*, Longmans, London, 1969, p. 190.
6. A Yoruba Oba is supposed to fulfil the three functions regardless of whether he is a Muslim or a Christian.

7. *Obátálá* is known by many names depending on the area of Yoruba and concerned: Such names include: *Orisànlá*, *Orisà Olúfón*, *Orisà Ogiyán* *Orisà Ijàyè*, *Orisà Owu*, and *Orisà Olóbà*.
8. See E.B. Idowu, *African Traditional Religion ... op. cit.*, p. 143
9. See E.B. Idowu, *Olódùmarè ... op. cit.*, p. 108. Interview with the devotees of *Orisà-nlá* in Obalufon, Ile-Ife, April, 1987.
10. The Kolanut here is usually the one with multi-sided lobes. It is called *obi gidi* in Yorubaland.
11. This is a reference to Yoruba system of divination called casting the kolanut *Obi dída*. For details about divination generally, see Wande Abimbola, "The Literature of Ifa Cult", in S.O. Biobakun ed., *Sources of Yoruba History*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1973, pp. 41ff, D. Forde, ed., *African Worlds*, Oxford University Press, London, 1970, pp. 24, 39-40, 40 passim.
12. See E.B. Idowu, *Olódùmarè ... op. cit.*, pp. 118ff, J.O. Awolalu, *op. cit., passim*, J.O. Lucas, *op. cit.*, pp. 201ff, B. Davidson, *op. cit.*, pp. 119-120
13. See E.B. Idowu, *ibid.*, p.118
14. It is to be noted that in consequence of colonial rule and modernity the practice of human sacrifice had stopped in most quarters in Yorubaland.
15. See Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, Lowe and Brydone, London, 1973, pp. 43ff.
16. The Ondo-Yoruba are noted for the worship of *Ogún*, the god of war, the god of iron.
17. See J.O. Lucas, *op. cit.*, p. 121.
18. The popular dictum of the Yoruba is that *adiè iràná kíì se ohun àjègbé* — giving us the idea that all would eventually die, no one can escape the phenomenon of death.
19. See Samuel Johnson, *op. cit.*, pp. 54ff. A deceased Yoruba Oba for example is usually buried in a special place called *Bara*. Rituals in connection with his burial are usually done in the night.
20. See S.O. Biobakun, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 165ff.
21. See *ibid.*, pp. 140ff
22. See *ibid.*, p. 41
23. Interview with Chief Fasogbon, Irepo, Ile-Ife and Chief Fabunmi, the Odole Atobase of Ife, in Ile-Ife, April, 1987.
24. See J.O. Lucas, *op. cit.*, p. 333
25. See S.O. Biobaku, ed., p. 41
26. The axe is a symbol of wrath and justice. This is in fact a representation of God's axe of wrath and justice. See E.B. Idowu, *African Traditional Religion, op. cit.*, p. 169

27. This is a reference to the power of the spoken word. A lot of symbolic items are usually involved here. Examples are as follows:

*Chun tí a bá wí fún ogbó,
 Ni ogbó gbó;
 Chun tí a bá wí fún ogbà,
 Ni ogbà gbà;
 Bí ekòlò bá júbà ilè,
 Ilè a lanu fún un;
 Asé tí okó bá pa fún òbò,
 Ni òbò gbó;
 Ase ekòlò bá pa fún ilè ni ilè gbó*

That which we say to *ogbó* (a kind of plant),
 Is that it accepts;
 That which we say to *ogbà* (a kind of plant),
 Is what it accepts;
 If the earthworm acknowledges the mother earth,
 The earth will open for it;
 It is the order that the penis gives the vagina,
 That it accepts;
 It is the order that the earthworm
 gives the mother earth that it takes.

(All the symbolic items here are a pointer to the efficacy of magic and medicine).
 This is an issue of symbolism in herbal preparation.

28. See J.O. Kayode and E. Dada Adelowo, "Religions in Nigeria" in R. Olaniyan, ed., *Nigerian History and Culture*. Longman, London, 1985, p. 240.
29. See *ibid.*, p. 240.