



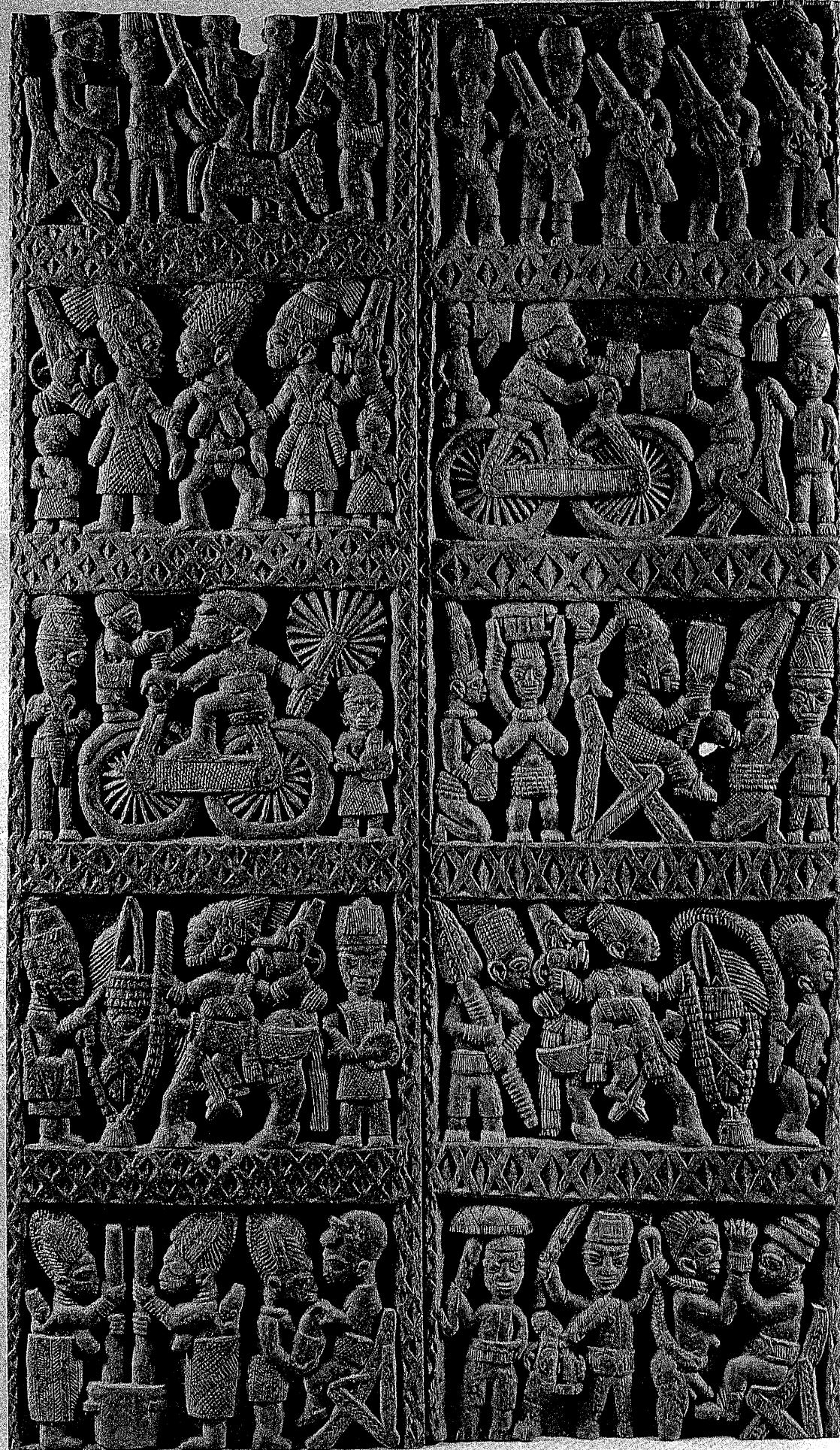
Yoruba and Dahomey: Divine Authority and the Arts of Royal History

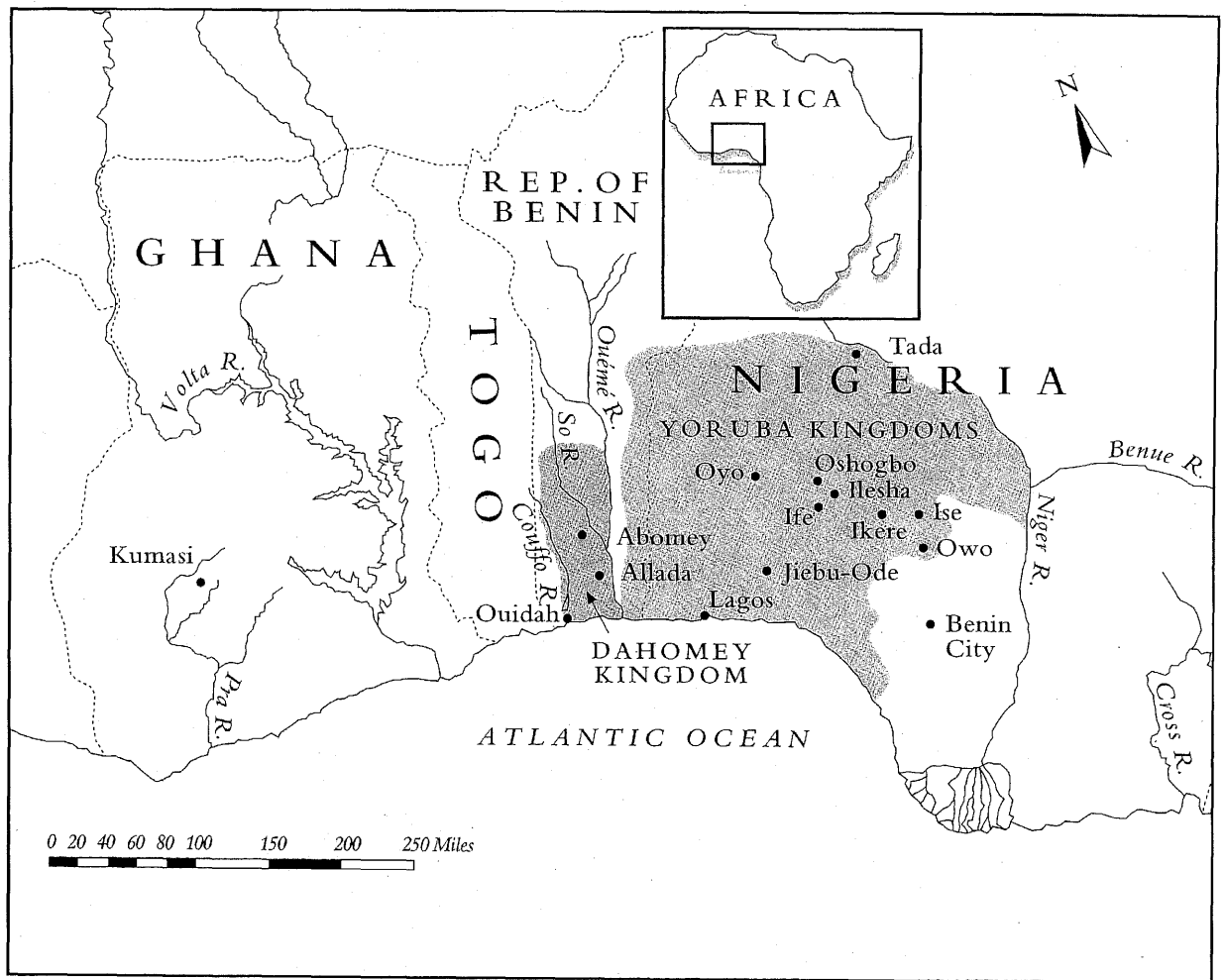
More than eleven million Yoruba live in southwestern Nigeria and the neighboring Benin Republic (formerly Dahomey), an area historically ruled by kings whose authority was legitimized by the sacred ruler of Ife, the Yoruba holy city where, according to myth, the world was first created. Archeological evidence at Ife indicates that by the twelfth century this city was a flourishing artistic and political center. The nearby Dahomey (Danhomè) Kingdom of the Fon people, west of Nigeria, which came into prominence in the late seventeenth century, had frequent, often clashing contact with its Yoruba neighbors. While these two kingdoms share important cultural and artistic forms, there are striking differences. In this chapter we shall look first at Yoruba royal arts, examining themes of ritual authority, then at Fon (Dahomey) royal traditions and the impact of history on changing visual forms, in each case through the arts of powerful rulers.

Yoruba Beadworking Arts: Dressing the King

Yoruba kings (or *oba*; see FIG. 1) when dressed for important ceremonies in royal beaded regalia convey an image of majesty, power, wealth, and beauty. Tradition maintained that originally there were sixteen sacred crowns, each identified with one of

60. Yoruba (Nigeria).
A palace door panel from
Osi-Ilorin by Arowogun
(1880–1954), early
twentieth century. Wood,
height 5'11½" (1.82 m).
Fowler Museum of Cultural
History, University of
California, Los Angeles
(see FIG. 67).





KINGDOMS OF YORUBA AND DAHOMEY

the original city states that traced its heritage back to Ife. Other rulers politically linked to the Yoruba sometimes also wore crowns of this type (FIG. 61). The tall conical shapes of the royal beaded crowns give visual prominence to the head, in accordance with the central place of the head in Yoruba ideas of destiny (*ori*), spiritual power (*ase*), character (*iwa*), and beauty (*ewa*).

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when Yoruba royal authority was much diminished as a result of the growing Western colonial presence, the number of Yoruba rulers who wore beaded crowns increased considerably, along with the amount and complexity of related beaded attire. This development closely coincided with a general loss of traditional authority. Today the royal beaded regalia includes not only crowns and scepters, but also gowns, leggings, boots (see FIG. 1), and the large cushions on which the ruler could elevate his feet while sitting. Beadwork of this sort was made by a specialized guild of itinerant artists who worked under royal and priestly patronage over much of the Yoruba area.



61. Dahomey (Republic of Benin). Yoruba-style beaded crown, nineteenth century. Beads and mixed media, height 17 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (45 cm). Musée de l'Homme, Paris.

This beaded crown, which is said to have once belonged to Dahomey king Glele (1858–89), conforms closely to the model of Yoruba beaded crowns (see FIG. 1). A special family of royal beadworkers lived outside of Abomey near the homes of the area's first rulers, suggesting the importance of this tradition from the time of the kingdom's foundation. Because of the prominence of beads in the construction of local shrines, the crown also underscores the sacrosanct identity of the ruler. Despite the ritual importance of these beaded crowns to the Dahomey monarchs, rulers there rarely if ever wore them in public, preferring a variety of other headgear, especially caps decorated with applied dynastic symbols.

The front and sometimes sides of these beaded crowns display stylized human faces, identified variously as the kingdom's first ruler (and Ife's founders, Odudua or Obalufon). These faces also allude to destiny (*ori*) in relation to Yoruba kingly authority.

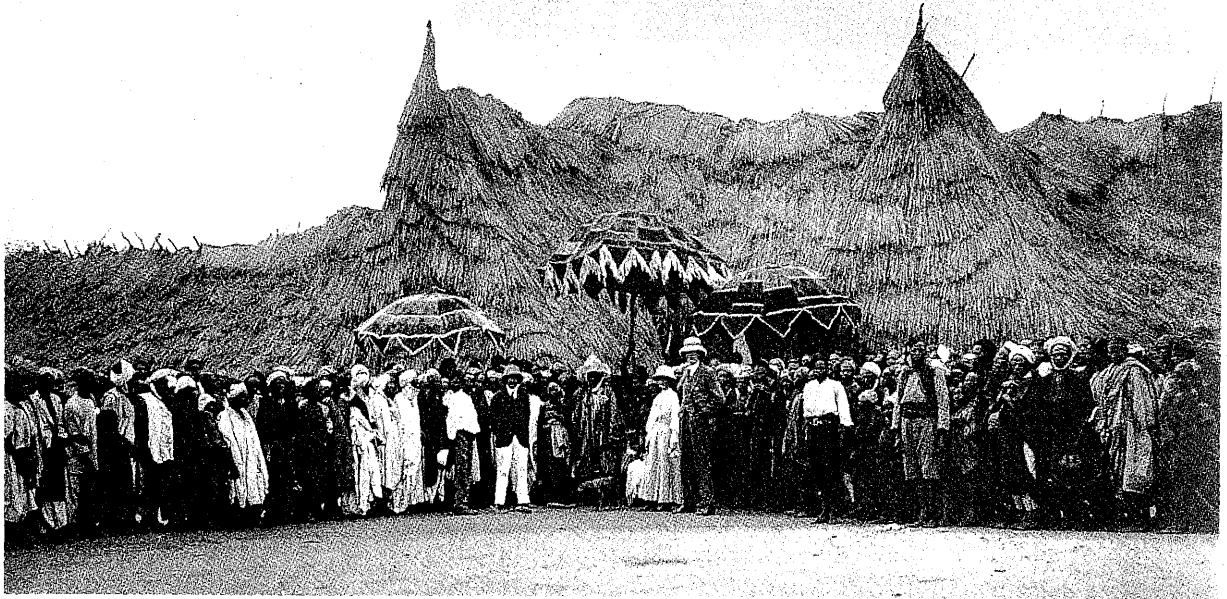
Linked sometimes with the god Obalufon (god of beadworking, weaving, and coronations) and sometimes Olokun (god of the sea), beads carry ritual potency in royal Yoruba art. Bright colors add to their ritual significance and visual appeal, each color (or combination of colors) being associated with a different empowering god (*orisha*). A packet of potent medicinal plants and other materials (*oogun ase*) is placed inside the crown's peak by a diviner, to empower both the crown and the king. A prominent Yoruba saying, "the king's power resembles that of the gods," reflects the divinity granted the king through this crown.



62. Yoruba (Nigeria). A bead composition entitled *Osun Goddess and the Children* by Jimoh Buraimoh, 1994. Beads and mixed media on canvas, 48 x 24" (121.3 x 60.4 cm).

Buraimoh (b. 1943) is one of a group of Yoruba artists working in the city of Oshugbo, who has translated traditional religious and mythological themes into new artistic genres. Working in mosaics, paintings, prints, etchings, embroidery, batik, and theatrical productions, these artists transformed the area into an international art center. The catalyst for this movement was an Austrian artist named Susanne Wenger whose reconstruction of area shrines brought local artists into contact with the new art and patronage.

An annual festival is dedicated to Oshugbo's patron deity, Osun (Oshun), the subject of this composition. The city's founder (and first king) is said to have once met the river goddess at the river's edge where they made a pact of mutual aid. The Oshugbo king still bears the title *Ataoja*, "born with a fish in his hands," in commemoration of the role Osun played in founding the city. Near the river are found a number of flat, pitted rocks said to be her indigo-blue dyeing pots – perhaps indicated here at the edge of the canvas. Osun is also known to help women bear children and Buraimoh portrays her as a youthful mother of two.



64. Yoruba (Nigeria). The palace at Oyo in front of which stand the king's son and palace officials, early twentieth century.

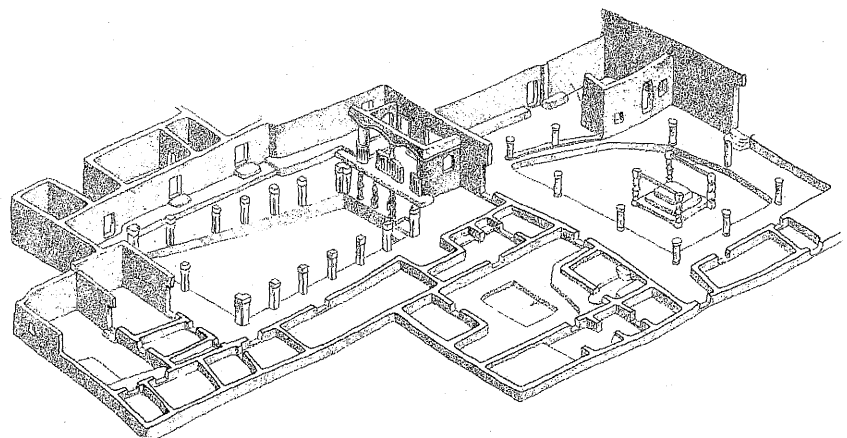
While the palace was occupied by successive kings, during the investiture ceremonies a new entry was usually cut for the new king's use; at his death the door was closed. Earth (mixed with palm oil for durability) historically was used for these buildings, but today cement, zinc roofs, and European architectural elements are a far more frequent sight.

ramparts once circumscribed the city and safeguarded its power. Like the universe, which according to local belief takes the form of a closed calabash, Yoruba cities were encircled by a protective barrier.

Tall cone-shaped entry turrets capped with a thick thatch of palm leaves historically framed the palace entry (FIG. 64), these visually complementing both the royal crowns and umbrellas. Yoruba palaces were largely focused inward with open "impluvial" courts and rectilinear buildings around the perimeter as in the palace of Ikere, some 20 miles (32 km) southeast of Ilesha, in the northern Yoruba (Ekiti) area (FIG. 65). Here a magnificent group of veranda posts was carved in 1910-14 by the man who is considered to be one of the greatest Yoruba artists of this century, Olowe of Ise (d. 1938). A similar grouping of architectural supports was created by Olowe for the palace at Ise, 18 miles

65. Yoruba (Nigeria). A partial isometric drawing of three courtyards in the palace at Ikere.

The most important palace courtyards often displayed carved roof supports.



(c. 30 km) away. Monumentality, polychrome surfaces, and elongated figures carved in high relief characterize Olowe's oeuvre, as do the sharply contrasting scale of his figures and the intricate detailing of features such as coiffure. The Yoruba aesthetic values of clarity, straightness, balance, youthfulness, luminosity, and character all appear in these sculptures.

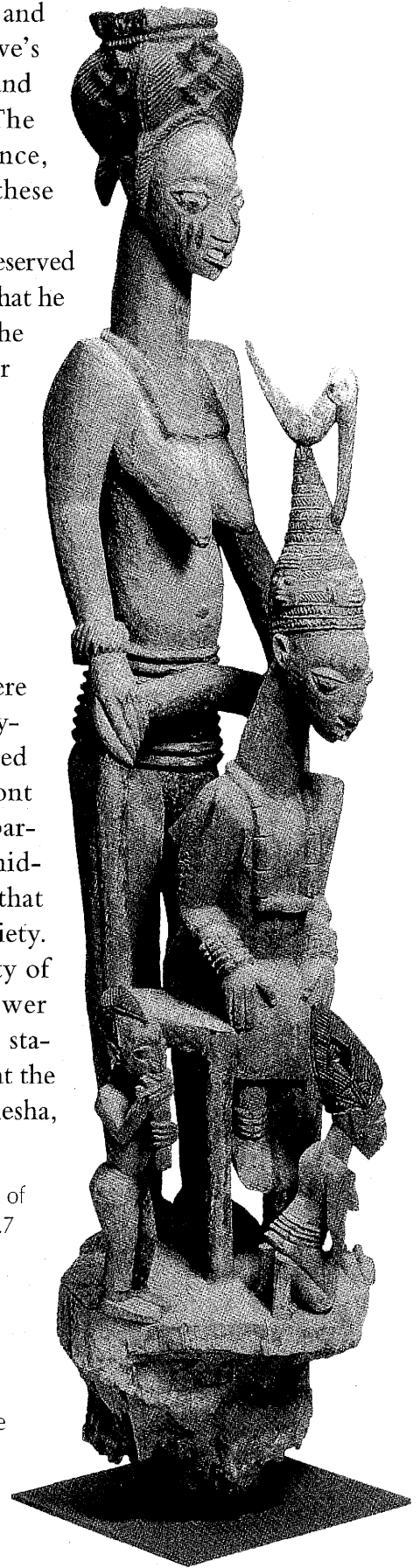
Working with as many as fifteen assistants in a room reserved for him in the palace, Olowe became such a royal fixture that he was given the title of royal *emese* (messenger). One of the *oriki* (praise poems) created by his wives in his honor identifies him as:

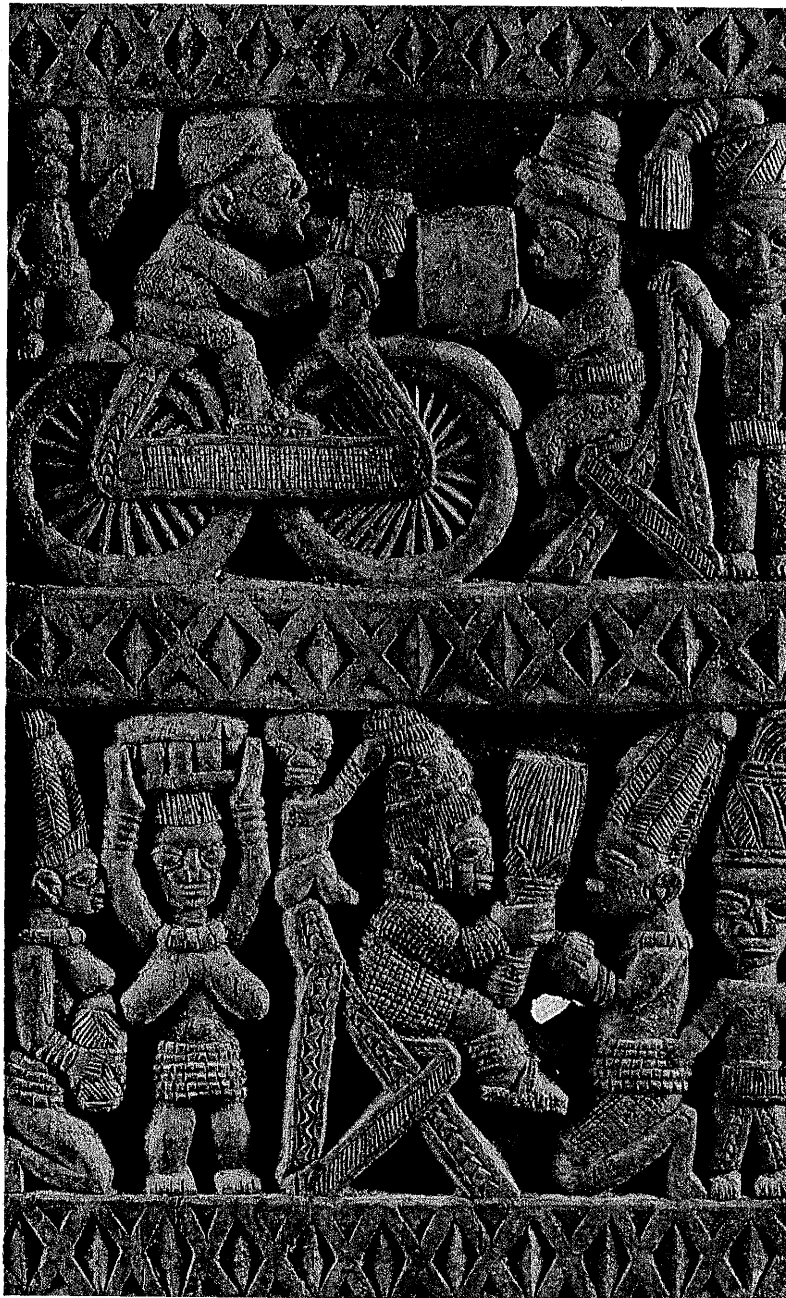
Handsome among his friends.
Outstanding among his peers.
One who carves the hard wood of the iroko
tree as though it were as soft as a calabash.
One who achieves fame with the proceeds of his carving.

Olowe's center-most carving in a triad for the Ikere palace roof supports (in this case a non-supporting caryatid; FIG. 66) figures the king in a traditional cone-shaped beaded crown surmounted by birds; he is seated in front of his senior wife. The striking scale of this woman (particularly with regard to the king) may allude to the hidden, and indeed sometimes sorcery-related, attributes that powerful women are believed to assume in Yoruba society. The height differences, along with the strong verticality of the king's beaded crown, reinforce ideas of royal power and sacred authority. Appropriate to its vision of royal status and courtly composure, the corresponding sculpture at the palace in Osi, some thirty miles (48 km) northeast of Ilesha,

66. Yoruba (Nigeria). A sculpture from the palace of Ikere by Olowe of Ise (d. 1938), 1910–14. Wood and pigment, 60 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 13 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (154.9 x 33.7 cm). The Art Institute of Chicago.

The king's senior wife, who is shown standing, displays the characteristic Yoruba scarification marks of parallel cheek lines. The towering size of this woman indicates her great status as the king's senior wife, someone who not only had responsibility for placing the crown on the new king's head at the coronation, but also oversaw the state treasury, royal insignia, and the harem. In front of the king, a diminutive woman kneels in the posture of respect and obeisance. At the king's side, an equally small court messenger plays a flute.





67. Yoruba (Nigeria). A palace door panel from Osi-Ilorin by Arowogun (1880–1954), early twentieth century (detail, see FIG. 60). Wood, whole door height 5'11½" (1.82 m). Fowler Museum of Cultural History, University of California, Los Angeles.

The right frame of Arowogun's door is dominated by the figure of a king seated in profile, his crown and fly whisk marking his royal

status. Kneeling in front of this ruler is a woman who presents him with a gift. Another woman stands behind the king carrying a drum, while a third kneels with a vessel. Together this grouping suggests the preparatory arrangements for a royal ceremony. The small figure seated behind the king, who is depicted in the highly unusual (and exceedingly unlikely) gesture of grasping the royal crown, probably personifies the child-resembling

deity Eshu, a trickster and messenger god who is said to be on hand to receive a part of every offering. The portrayal of Eshu in this pose suggests not only Arowogun's playfulness, but also his enormous sense of self, for in this scene he is publicly portraying (on a palace door, no less) the precarious nature of royal authority. By a mere flick of the hand (and trick of fate), Eshu could remove the king's crown, bringing on an unexpected calamity.

The two panels which frame this scene show, below, a mounted warrior advancing with a bound prisoner, followed by a man on foot who carries the warrior's spear (see FIG. 60). In the panel immediately above the king, we see a seated man in a colonial helmet holding out a book toward a pipe-smoking cyclist. Whereas the seated man probably represents a government official (and the book, a code of laws), the rider suggests at once a modern city traveler and the trickster Eshu, who is often shown with a pipe. At the far right stands a court messenger; at the far left is a school child with an open book. Together these two panels suggest the sources of traditional and modern authority, war below and written law above. The top and bottom frames of the door allude to the force that is needed to promote a stable society (see FIG. 60). At the top is a group of rifle-bearing policemen accompanied by the ever-present Eshu, here playing a flute. At the bottom, a seated judge rules on the guilt of a bound and naked prisoner. An armed guard with a royal umbrella completes the scene.

served as a backdrop for important court ceremonies, when the king positioned himself directly in front of it.

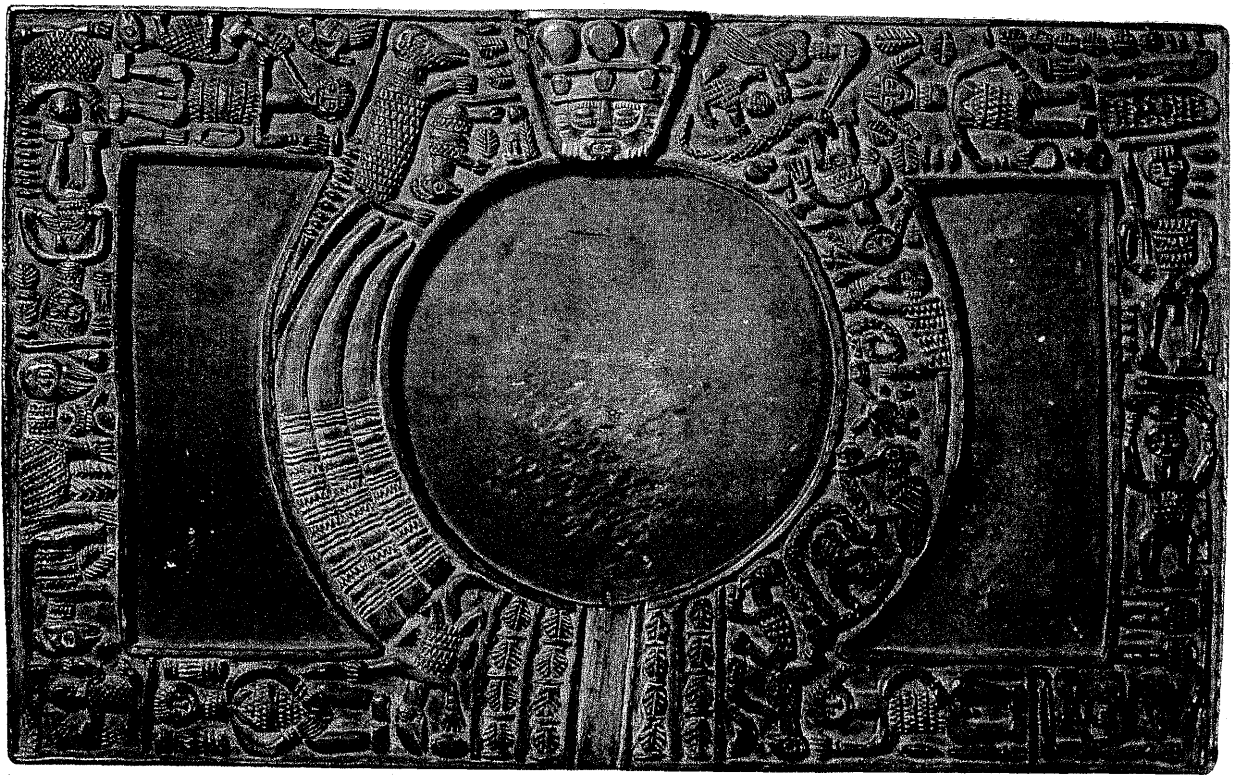
Some of the most extraordinary of the Yoruba royal arts are solid wooden doors which once ushered visitors into the main courtyards inside the palace (FIG. 67; see FIG. 60). A prolific artist from Osi-Ilorin named Arowogun (or Areogun; 1880–1954) created some of the most handsome of these doors in the Ekiti area northeast of Ife. His name, which means “he who gains money in the service of Ogun” (god of iron), suggests his expertise in the traditional iron tools of his profession (see FIG. 10). As was common for doors of the sort shown here, they are generally divided into registers separated by textile-like patterns. Inside each frame were displayed one or more scenes relating to rulership, contemporary life, and the history of the dynasty. Arowogun’s style is characterized by condensed, story-like compositions filled to capacity with ebullient figures in flat relief. While not intended to be read as narratives, palace doors of this sort often conform to an internal hierarchy of centrality and distance, the most important scenes being carved in or near the middle. As a grouping, the five panels on this door point to the importance of law, order, and royal ritual in maintaining social well-being.



SYMBOL OF OGUN WORSHIPPER

Arts of Divination and the Fate of Kings and Commoners

Themes of power, authority, and ritual participation are played out in the divination arts identified with the god of wisdom, Orunmila, the agent of divination, Ifa, and the messenger-trickster god, Eshu. In the course of divination, a diviner (*babalawo*) at the behest of a client seeks information from Ifa to help resolve specific problems or questions – personal, medical, social, political, and religious – through the agency of Ifa. The centerpiece of divinations is a rectilinear or round board (*opon ifa*) on which the diviner marks the response. The small figures carved around the raised border portray subjects of importance to divination practice and life in general (FIG. 68). The board from the Yoruba-influenced Ayizo town of Allada in Benin Republic is dated around 1650 and has an unusually rich iconography, which suggests to me that the artist and patron were seeking to produce a didactic text that would help to clarify the Ifa divinatory system to an unfamiliar audience. (This finds support in nearby Dahomey traditions that maintain that Ifa divination, though practiced here earlier, was officially recognized only later in the area during the reign of Dahomey’s King Agaja (1708–40)).



In the Ifa divination process, the diviner passes the sixteen palm nuts (16 as a multiple of 4 is a critical number in Yoruba numerology) from one hand to the other, after which he notes the number retained within his hand (always 1 or 2). This number is then noted on the powdered surface of the Ifa board for eight "passes" in succession. The patterning of marks delimited in this rather complicated process results in the selection of a specific *odu* (sign), one of 256 such signs, each with a unique story, and several proverbs, phrases, or songs about the lives of gods, humans, and animals. Ifa divination plays a critical role in Yoruba and related societies in determining not only which royal candidate will come to the throne (and what actions should be taken in the course of his reign) but also what life holds in store for the many subjects. Many of the *odu* signs themselves refer to royalty, reminding rulers how they should act with respect to their subjects, and how non-royal individuals should proceed when in the presence of those with greater power. The specific *odu* sign which emerges during the divination session is said to be revealed to the diviner through the medium of the ubiquitous Eshu (FIG. 69), whose face is shown at the top of the board. As the bearer of divination messages between the worlds of gods and humans, Eshu represents human fate as being always in balance. In key decisions, the diviner might position himself toward the east, the direction most closely associated with Eshu. Other important arts associated with Ifa

68. Ayizo (Republic of Benin). Ifa divination board (*opon ifa*), collected in the Ayizo town of Allada, under Yoruba control, c. 1650. Wood, 13½ x 21½" (34.7 x 55.5 cm). Weickmann Collection, Ulmer Museum, Ulm.

Eshu's face is centrally positioned at the top as messenger god, trickster, and symbol of life's diverse consequences. Powder-filled gourds (*oogun ase*) in his hair refer to his mystical power. At the bottom are carved the palm nuts used in divination. The small tusk-like forms to the right of the central circle represent the wood and ivory tappers employed to get the god's attention before divination begins.

69. Yoruba (Nigeria). A figure of Eshu, collected in 1958. Wood, cowries, and mixed media, height 20" (50.7 cm). Indiana University Art Museum, Bloomington.

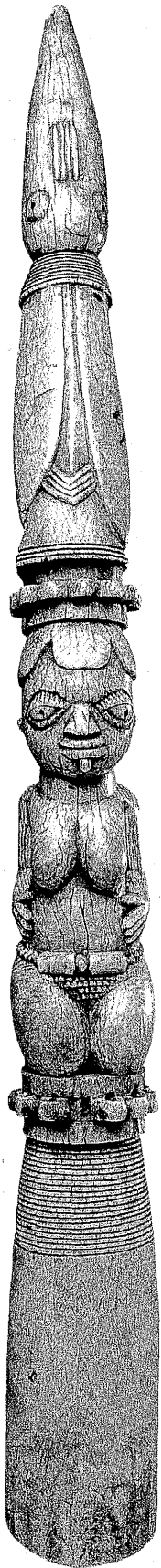
A row of calabash gourds, representing the powder-filled calabash vessels used by Eshu to help to alter events for personal or family benefit, are positioned along the top of Eshu's head. Long braids of cowries (the traditional currency) attached to the figure's neck recall Eshu's prominent place in human exchange and the location of his principal shrine at the city market, because of its association with the uncertainties of social and monetary interchange.

Eshu, as with royal messengers (*emese*), is often shown in sculptural form with a long headdress or coiffure (one side of the latter sometimes being shaved) which extends down the back. Eshu's head, often terminates in a gourd, knife, or braid. Two other and interrelated attributes comprise a whistle (or flute, both signify communication with the spirit world) and the infantile gesture of sucking the thumb, since Eshu is the youngest god, a deity whose acts are often mischievous. In Eshu's links to the royal *emese*, the sometimes difficult relationships of rulers, court officials, and subjects are embodied.



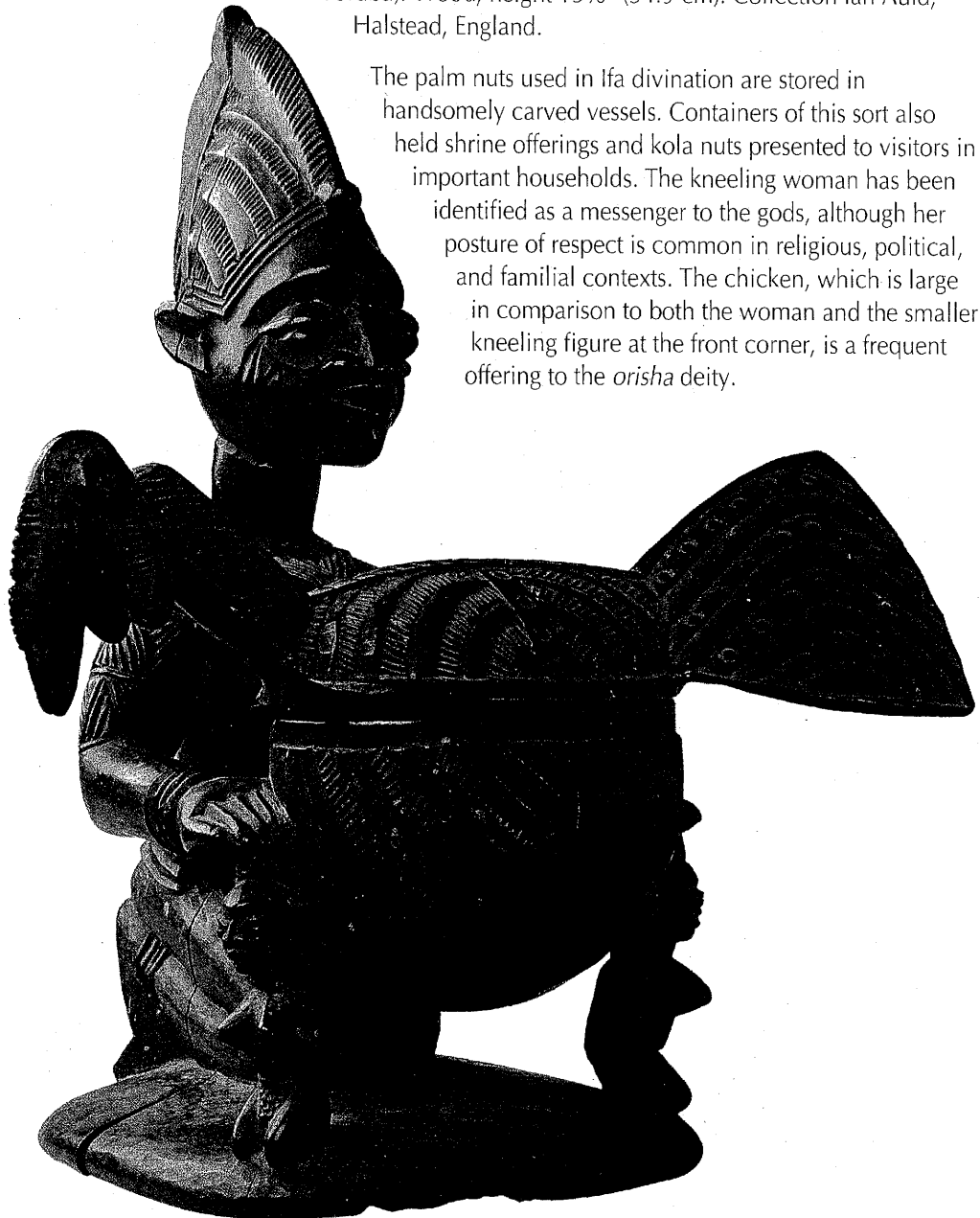
70. Yoruba (Nigeria). An ivory tapper in Owo style, eighteenth century. Height 17¾" (45 cm). Musée de l'Homme, Paris.

The tapper, used in Ifa divination, was collected in the Dahomey (now Republic of Benin) capital of Abomey by General Dodds during the French conquest of 1890–92. Dahomey monarchs commissioned important Ifa divination arts from their Yoruba neighbors. This work portrays a kneeling woman surmounted by a hornbill. Since the hornbill was said in Dahomey to be one of nature's best diviners, the tapper signifies revelatory knowledge in both its use and imagery.



71. Yoruba (Nigeria). A vessel by Agbonbiofe (d. 1945) or another member of the Adesina family, from Efon-Alaye, Ekiti (northern Yoruba). Wood, height 13⅝" (34.9 cm). Collection Ian Auld, Halstead, England.

The palm nuts used in Ifa divination are stored in handsomely carved vessels. Containers of this sort also held shrine offerings and kola nuts presented to visitors in important households. The kneeling woman has been identified as a messenger to the gods, although her posture of respect is common in religious, political, and familial contexts. The chicken, which is large in comparison to both the woman and the smaller kneeling figure at the front corner, is a frequent offering to the *orisha* deity.



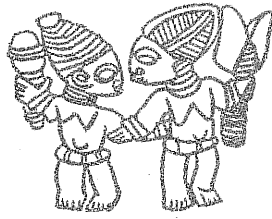
divination include special ivory tappers (FIG. 70) to call the attention of the gods, and beautifully carved vessels (FIG. 71) where the palm nuts are stored.

The diviners' vast knowledge of nature (human, animal, and plant-related) and the secret restorative and protective powers which the forests hold are used in their ancillary role as specialists in pharmacology and healing, for which they employed iron staffs known as *opa osanyin* (Osanyin, god of health, sculptures; FIG. 72). Like miniature trees, the staffs are surmounted by birds which allude both to the forests as a source of medicines, and to the negative forces of witchcraft (viewed as the "gathering of birds"), which diviners are committed to counteracting through both divination and ritual healing.



72. Yoruba (Nigeria). An iron staff for Osanyin, collected before 1970. Height 22½" (57 cm). Fowler Museum of Cultural History, University of California, Los Angeles.

The gathering birds motif also characterizes many Yoruba beaded crowns. Messengers associated with the Yoruba court at Oyo also were identified with bird-surmounted iron staffs, these serving as important markers of their status.



SYMBOL OF SHANGO
WORSHIPPERS

Gods of Thunder and Twins

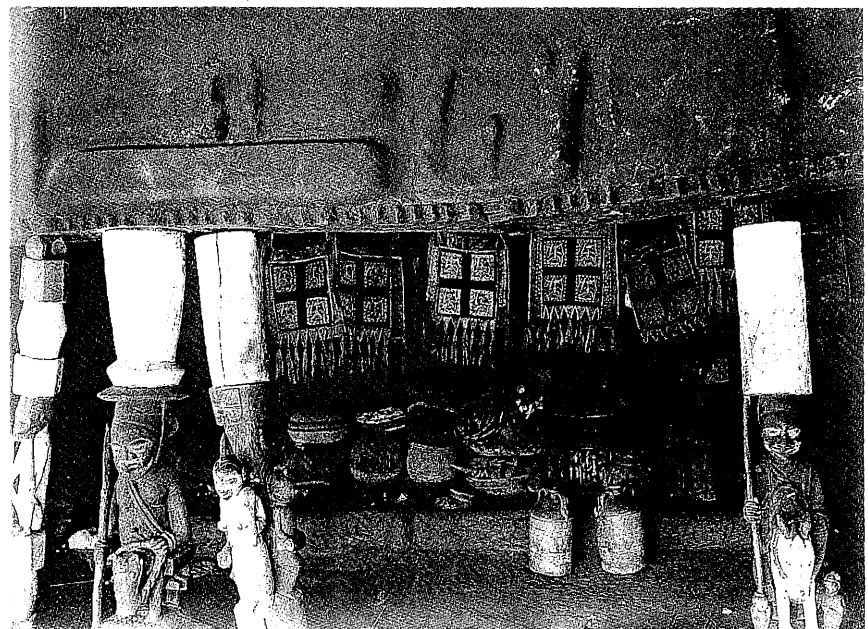
Shango, the Yoruba god of thunder, lightning, and the heavy storms which bring seasonal rains, is linked to royal prerogative, Shango himself having once been a ruler in the northern Yoruba kingdom of Oyo. His thunder and lightning have their conceptual complements in the booming sounds and fire of rifles. By nature quick to anger and quick to cool (devotees of Shango often wear red and white beads), the god's temperament is said to have been shared by Oyo's King Shango. The god Shango's ability to take or mark human life and property by lightning also suggests parallels between him and royalty; traditionally, Oyo kings were crowned at the Shango temple.

Shango temples complement Yoruba palaces in their elaborately carved doors, figured roof supports, and impluvial courtyards. A temple interior (FIG. 73) with several equestrian roof supports, displays a group of covered vessels against the back wall. These hold the neolithic stone axes – or meteorites, as they are identified locally – sacred to Shango, which purportedly fall to earth whenever lightning strikes. Elegantly carved dance staffs (*oshe shango*) dedicated to Shango usually depict female devotees kneeling in respect and homage to address both gods and kings (FIG. 74). The dark blue-black indigo surface – a royal color – indicates Shango's link with royalty.

Twins (*ibeji*), known metaphorically as children of Shango, are the subjects of special memorial carvings when they die. Sometimes they are given garments elaborately decorated with beads or

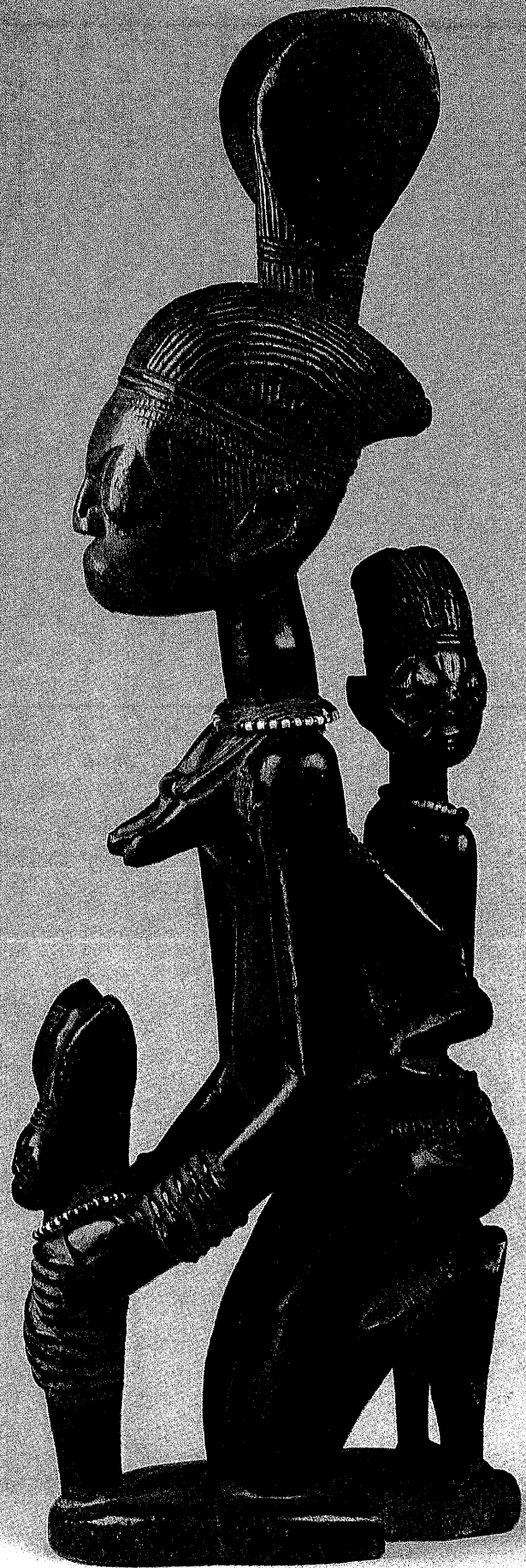
73. Yoruba (Nigeria). A Shango temple in the city of Ibadan, 1910.

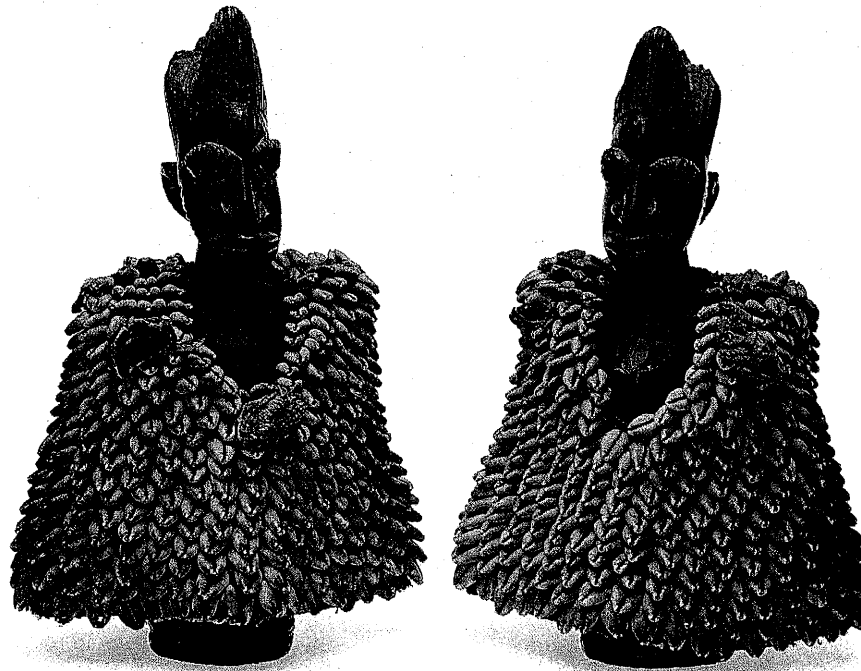
The decorated leather bags (*laba shango*) hanging from the roof were used to carry the sacred stones, thought to be meteorites brought to earth by lightning. The mounted horsemen roof supports recall the powerful cavalry which once was victorious over competing royal centers as far away as Dahomey. Shango dance staffs decorate the earthen bas-reliefs of this temple.



74. Yoruba (Nigeria). A Shango shrine figure holding a dance staff (*oshe shango*), by Abogunde of Ede, nineteenth century. Wood and beads, height 21½" (54.6 cm). Collection Ian Auld, Halstead, England.

On her head the devotee balances a double axe to suggest the act in Shango initiation in which the initiate balances a vessel of fire on top of her head, to demonstrate Shango calmness in the face of danger. The devotee's nudity alludes to ritual purity. In her hands she holds her own *oshe shango* staff. The triangular forms at the top of the staff represent the stones sacred to Shango. The red and white beads suggest Shango's hot fire and cooling rain.





75. Yoruba (Nigeria). Twin figures, early twentieth century. Wood, cowries, and mixed media, height 10¼ and 10½" (26.2 and 26.5 cm). Fowler Museum of Cultural History, University of California, Los Angeles.

Figures memorializing deceased twins are fed, clothed, carried, and cared for as if they were still living.

cowries (FIG. 75) to mark their association with Shango or royalty. The richness of the attire complements the belief that twins promote plenty as part of their doubling identity. Important twin ceremonials take place in the main market opposite the palace.

Masked Personifications of Royal Authority

Evoking the shared power and pageantry of kingship and religion through a quite different visual icon in the northeastern Yoruba area of Ekiti are complex masks known as *Epa* (FIG. 76). The dances for which the masks are worn are tests of physical endurance since the masks sometimes weigh 60 to 80 pounds (about 25 to 35 kg). As a group, these masks are dedicated to the great Ekiti carver Oleko, who created the first such objects. Worn in processions to honor important Ekiti ancestors, the compositions of the masks thus can be appreciated in the round. At other times, the masks are displayed inside temples where they are the focus of a more quiet and intimate engagement. *Epa* compositions are remarkable for their iconic richness, usually portraying either female chiefs – the powerful women who represent the interests of women in dealings with the king and the senior chief's council – or the great warrior kings who established monarchy in the northern Yoruba region of Ekiti.

Other important regional masking traditions include Gelede (FIG. 77). Members of the Gelede society, which was particularly



Left 76. Yoruba (Nigeria). An *Epa* mask headdress portrays a warrior king, by Bamgboye (d. 1978), from Odo-Owa, in Ekiti. Wood, height 3'11 $\frac{7}{8}$ " (1.22 m). Detroit Institute of Arts.

Bamgboye was an artist known for his exceptional carving skills, tight compositions, and imaginative integration of figural elements. Here the mounted king is surrounded by a large retinue of followers, among them a wife and child, a drummer, and warriors. Shaded by a wide-brimmed hat based on the attire of Muslim Fulani kings to the north, *Epa* mask depictions of Yoruba rulers, many of whom converted early to Islam, epitomize regal authority and equanimity.



Right 77. Yoruba (Nigeria/Republic of Benin). A Gelede mask, twentieth century. Wood and pigment, c.17 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (6.8 cm).

When seen together during the performance, the Gelede masked pair suggests an image of four-eyed, spiritually charged vision. Gelede mask compositions are diverse. The rich market women who controlled much of the trade in this area are a common theme of Gelede masks. Contemporary scenes also appear, as in this grouping of figures inside a car. Such motifs point up not only artistic interest in contemporary themes, but also in this case, perhaps, the potential threat to society of persons of disproportionate wealth and power.

prevalent in the southwestern Yoruba area, performed in masked pairs during festivals aimed at countering malevolence by appeasing the spiritual force of elderly women and other powerful members of the society. As leaders who are imbued with *ase* (spiritual charge), kings also were believed to have this power, which they could use for the benefit (or detriment) of themselves or their people. This force, which was equated to some degree with sorcery, was often referred to by the idiom of four eyes – two worldly and two spiritual – an image which is reinforced when the king wears his crown.

Badges of Counter-Royal Authority

Looking at the larger corpus of royal arts, it is difficult to imagine that Yoruba rulers did not have near absolute autonomy. Far from it. Specially designated kingmakers selected the ruler from a long list of candidates, choosing the monarch from one of several royal families (affirmed by divination), who met physical and moral standards but also was willing to listen to and address their people's concerns. This check on royal authority was maintained by a yearly Ifa divination consultation to determine if the *orisha* still supported the king. The powerful society of elders known as Ogboni (Oshugbo) also played a critical role as a counterweight to the king. Reflecting their power in the city of Ilesha, the Ogboni compound was prominently positioned opposite the palace entrance. The society, which represented both the native inhabitants and the gods who oversaw their land, was dedicated to the earth deity Odudua, for whom the spilling of blood on the earth's surface was a sacrilege. Ogboni drums and royal drums (see FIG. 16) have key features in common.

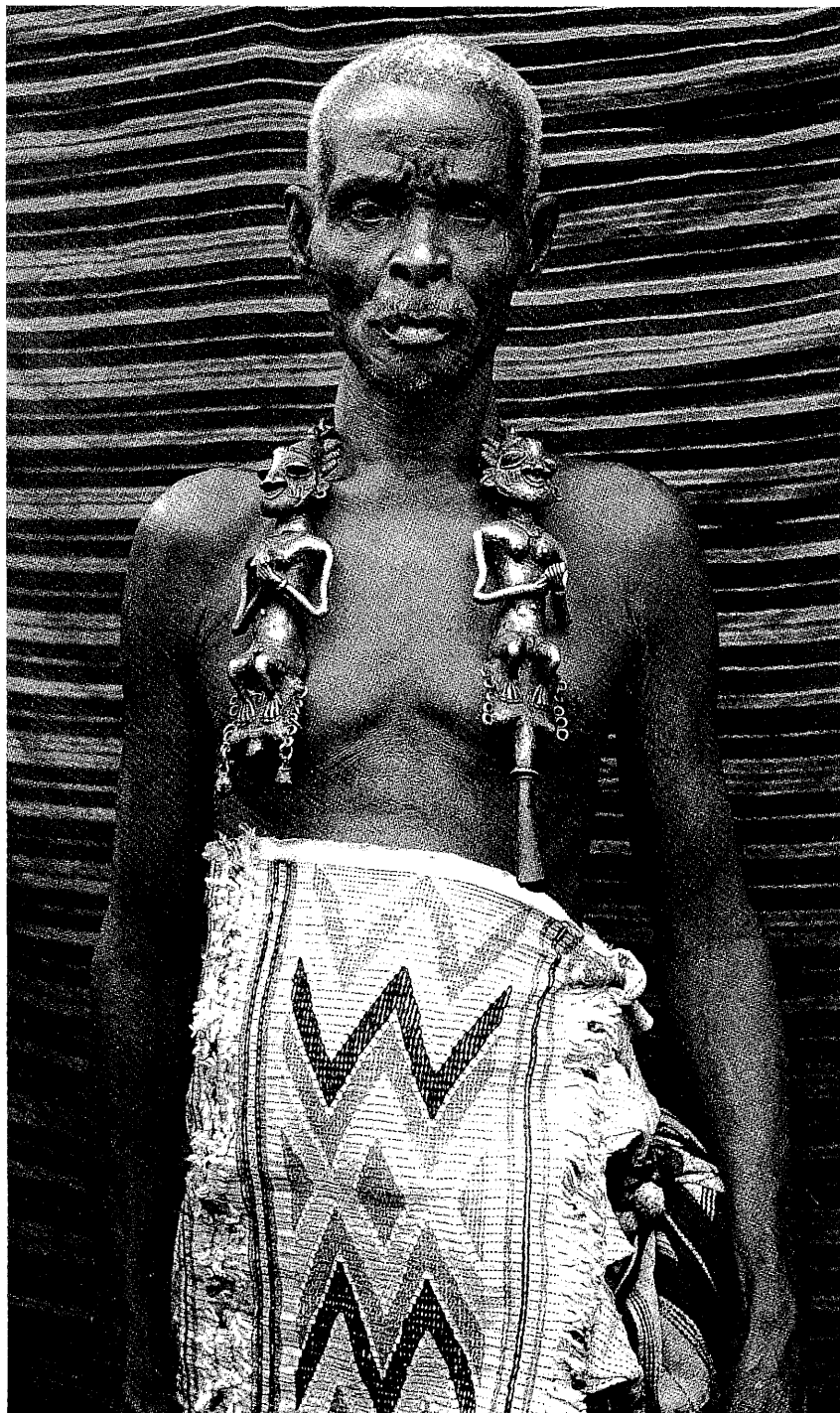
The name Ogboni (meaning “thirty” or “wisdom”) refers to the thirty wise members of the society who judged cases of moral infraction, royal and otherwise. Various badges mark Ogboni membership at different levels, among them rings, bracelets, and crowns. By far the best-known emblems, however, are paired brass sculptures called *edan* (FIG. 78; see FIG. 18), which portray male and female figures joined together by a chain. They allude to the shared importance of men and women in Yoruba social governance, and may also point to Odudua's own double-faced image.

An unusual feature of these *edan ogboni* (or *oshugbo*) is the core of clay or earth that is retained in the interior after casting has been completed, another link to the earth. The curative and protective features of *edan ogboni* appear in part to stem from this source and from the small iron stakes in the base of the figures. These

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spikes, while suggesting the sacred potency of the earth's iron-rich interior, help to secure the figures in the ground. They were positioned on the spot where blood had been spilt as a sign that those involved should appear before the Ogboni. *Edan* figures were also placed on the earth during judgments, their contact with the ground legitimating the decisions.

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78. Yoruba (Nigeria). An Ogboni (Oshogbo) society elder with paired brass sculptures (*edan* Ogboni) over his shoulders, 1949–50.

When worn around the neck of the Ogboni member, the *edan* grouping constitutes a triad: three was an important number in Yoruba earth worship, calling to mind the three stones which are positioned on the earth to support cooking pots on the fire.

The Royal Arts
of Africa

The Majesty of Form

Suzanne Preston Blier



PERSPECTIVES
PRENTICE HALL, INC.,

To Rudy with love

Frontispiece Banga (Cameroon). Figure of a king, page 168 (detail)

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