

IFÁ

**AN EXPOSITION
OF IFÁ
LITERARY CORPUS**



WANDE ABIMBOLA

IFÁ

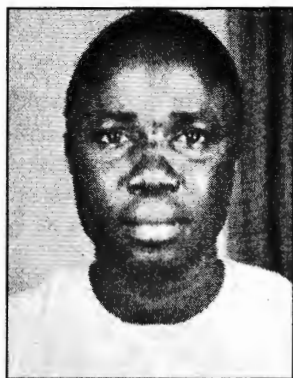
An Exposition of
Ifá Literary Corpus

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The family of Professor Wande Abimbola is acclaimed to be one of the authorities on Yoruba traditional life and beliefs in the old city of Oyo, in the heartland of the Yoruba-speaking people of Nigeria. His childhood apprenticeship to traditional institutions provided a rich background on which his later academic studies, particularly his exposition of the IFÁ literary corpus, were based.

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Preface

This work, which is based on the Ph.D. thesis which I submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Lagos in 1969, is divided into three parts. The first part which is sub-divided into two chapters deals with the cultural background to the texts. The first chapter explains the nature of Ifá as a Yoruba divinity, focussing attention on his place in the Yoruba belief system and his paraphernalia of divination. The second chapter, which deals with Ifá priests and their system of divination, embraces an exposition of the structure and functions of the Ifá cult, the training of Ifá priests, the process of divination as well as the place of sacrifice in Ifá divination.

The second part of the work is also divided into two chapters. The first chapter in this part (which is the third chapter of the book) attempts an analysis of *ẹsẹ Ifá* into eight structural parts. After a presentation of the utterances which are usually encountered in each structural division, representative examples of *ẹsẹ Ifá* are presented to exemplify the maximum of eight structural parts into which *ẹsẹ Ifá* has been divided. The fourth chapter is an analysis of the language of *ẹsẹ Ifá* featuring, among other things, discussion of the rhythm of Ifá poetry as well as the various stylistic features found in this type of poetry notably repetition, word play and personification.

The third part of the book which deals with the content of *ẹsẹ Ifá* is subdivided into three chapters (i.e. chapters five, six and seven). In chapter five, the theme of Orí and the concept of predestination in Yoruba belief are discussed and exemplified with textual materials. Chapter six provides a discussion of the Yoruba cosmos. This chapter explains that the Yoruba universe is divided into two opposing camps: the benevolent supernatural powers and the malevolent supernatural powers. These two opposing groups of supernatural forces are in control of the universe as they strive to dominate and regulate the affairs of man. Conflict is the result of this process, which generates

friction and uncertainty in the sphere of human beings. This then necessitates the presence of an impartial mediator in the person of Èṣù who is the neutral force of the universe without whom there would have been neither order nor peace. The last chapter discusses the Yoruba view of their environment as found in Ifá literary corpus. Detailed description about plants, animals, birds, insects etc. are to be found in *ẹsẹ Ifá* which underlines the fact that nature and its appreciation plays a prominent role in traditional African literature which invariably takes a total view of human society and the environment in which it develops. Man is seen as part of a well-ordered universe of which insects, birds, plants and animals are co-inhabitants. But man is the centre of this universe which he controls as long as he acts in accordance with the values which have been laid down for him by his fore-fathers with the sanction of the divinities.

Ifá divination literature is perhaps the most accomplished product of Yoruba traditional culture. Ifá is indeed the Yoruba traditional body of knowledge embodying the deep wisdom of our fore-fathers. It is a complete system by itself in which all that the Yoruba consider valuable to them throughout the whole range of their experience from the very ancient times can always be found. No one who has studied Ifá in detail will fail to see the fact that the peoples of traditional African societies were not as ignorant as we have often been told. The peoples of traditional Africa were largely illiterates to be sure. But they were no fools. Among them were elite classes such as the *babaláwo* who have preserved all the ingredients of their own culture in an almost completely oral form but in such a way that knowledge is codified and transmitted orally with care, patience and perseverance. Ifá is the Yoruba traditional thought system *par excellence*.

It is the hope of the author in presenting these materials that they would extend the bounds of our knowledge on traditional African literature. It is particularly hoped that this work will be a useful introduction to the vast literature of Ifá and thereby prepare the way for further in-depth research into other areas of Ifá which this essentially general exposition cannot cover.

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Scanned for the first time
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I wish also to record my gratitude to all my informants for their co-operation and support during the long years of my research into Ifá literary corpus.

PART ONE

Cultural Background

Ifá, the Yoruba God of Wisdom

THE NAMES IFÁ AND ÒRÚNMÌLÀ

IN this work, the connotation of the term 'Ifá' is deliberately restricted to the Ifá divination system and its literary corpus as it exists among the Yoruba people of Nigeria. It is important to establish this from the outset because similar systems of divination exist among the Igbo, the Nupe, the Gwari and the Jukun¹ of Nigeria as well as among the Yoruba people of Togo, Dahomey, Cuba and Brazil.

The Yoruba god of wisdom is mostly called by either of two names, Ifá and Òrúnmìlà, both of which are the centre of controversy. A number of writers hold the mistaken view that the name 'Òrúnmìlà' refers to the deity himself while the name Ifá refers only to his divination system. Thus the Rev. E. M. Lijàdù calls Ifá 'The word of divination which issue from the mouth of Òrúnmìlà'.² Rev. D. Epega confirms the same view when he says: 'The received instructions from Òrúnmìlà are called Ifá...Ifás are so many and varied that none can know them all'.³ J. D. Clarke⁴ holds a similar view.

The fact borne out of my own research, however, is that the two names, Ifá and Òrúnmìlà, refer to the same deity. But while the name 'Òrúnmìlà' refers exclusively to the deity himself, the name 'Ifá' refers both to the deity and his divination system. Most Ifá priests interviewed by me maintain this point. This point is corroborated by Bascom when he says: 'The word Ifá is used to mean both the system of divination and the deity who controls it; and this deity is known also as Òrúnmìlà'.⁵ A close examination of the Ifá literary corpus also shows that the two names, Ifá and Òrúnmìlà, are used to refer to the deity while the name Ifá is used also for the system of divination.⁶

In view of the fact that in Yoruba custom most personal names have meanings, the possible meaning of the name

Ifá has also led some writers to much speculation sometimes tending towards folk etymology. Some writers say that the word Ifá comes from the root 'fá' which means 'to scrape' or, in an idiomatic sense, 'to embrace, to contain'. Some Ifá priests themselves do not seem to be much informed on the question of the etymology of the word Ifá. Thus Chief Fágbèmi Àjà-nàkú, the high priest of the Ifá cult in Lagos, writes: 'Nítorí pé kò sí ohun tí ọ̀rọ̀ Ọ̀lọ̀run kò fá tán, ní wọn ẹ̀ pè é ní Ifá.' (It is because there is nothing that the word of God (i.e. Ifá) does not embrace that it is called Ifá). There is nothing either in the Ifá myths or in the Ifá corpus itself to support this view.

Certain writers⁸ have also attempted to trace the etymology of the name 'Ọ̀rúnmilà'. One popular interpretation of this name is *Ọ̀run-l'ó-mọ-ẹni-tí-o-là*. (Heaven (God) alone knows those who will be saved.) This interpretation is defective because it is not based on any logical analysis and it is strange that some scholars have accepted it without question.

The view is that it is not possible to trace the etymology of such ancient names as Ifá and Ọ̀rúnmilà, especially since the structure of the words does not permit a straightforward analysis.

MYTHS ABOUT IFÁ

Several myths about Ifá say that Ifá in the company of other major deities came to earth from heaven and first landed at Ifẹ̀, which the Yoruba people believe to be the cradle of mankind. The gods were sent from heaven to Ifẹ̀ mainly to establish order on the young earth. Ifá played a major role in this divine ordering because of his great wisdom. At this period of the sojourn of Ifá at Ifẹ̀, he lived in a place known as Ọ̀kẹ̀ Ìgẹ̀tí. That is why one of his praise names is *Ọ̀kúnrin kúkúrú Ọ̀kẹ̀ Ìgẹ̀tí* (The small man of Ìgẹ̀tí Hill).

Fẹ́lá Sówándé warns us that we are not to think that the Ifẹ̀ mentioned in this myth is the present one. He writes:

... Because we have an Ilé-Ifẹ̀ in Western Nigeria today, it is quite understandable that people naturally think that this is the Ilé-Ifẹ̀ which figures in the oral traditions concerning Yorubaland... Opinion is still divided on the location of Ifẹ̀ but one is certain now that it is more than likely that the Ilé-Ifẹ̀ of tradition was anywhere but where the present one is.⁹

NOTES

PLATE 1. Ifá sacred palm-nuts (*ikin Ifá*) are sixteen in number and are the most important ritual symbol of Ifá. According to the myth contained in *Ìwòrì Méjì*, *Òrúnmìlà* replaced himself with the *ikin* when he finally left the Earth. Since then, *ikin* became the most important medium of communication between human beings and *Òrúnmìlà*. On the extreme right of the sixteen *ikin* could be seen a carved head-part known as *olóri-ikin* which constitutes the seventeenth *ikin*. It is believed that this head stands for *Èṣù*. But the name *olóri-ikin* signifies that it is the essence of the personality of *ikin*. It means that just as an individual has *Orí*, the *ikin* like other divinities, also have their own *Orí*.

Also in this figure could be seen cowry shells, sea-shells, a piece of bone, beads and stones. Two cowry shells tied together constitute the affirmative part of *ibò* while the piece of bone stands for the negative aspect. The stones are used to signify good health while the beads stand for wealth when the *ibò* is used in finding solutions to any specific problems asked from Ifá.

PLATE 2. The divining chain (*Òpèlè*) is next in rank to *ikin* in importance as an ancient and ritual Ifá material. As could be seen from the photograph, the chain has two equal halves. Each half has four half-nuts of the *òpèlè* fruit attached to it. Each half-nut has a smooth as well as a rough surface. The 256 probable presentations of the divining chain are based on the two basic probabilities of a rough surface or a smooth surface presentation of each of the four half-nuts on each side of the divining chain. If the basic probabilities (i.e. rough versus smooth surface) are represented with the number 2, it means that the possible number of presentations on one side of the divining chain is 24. When this is duplicated, we will have the following equation:

$$(24)^2 = 256$$

Note the decoration of beads on the strings of the divining chain especially on the bottom part which also has cowry shell decoration. *Òpèlè* could be made of metal, for example, brass.

PLATE 3. *Ìròkè* is used in tapping the Ifá divination tray during the process of divination. The tapping is an invocation of Ifá to be present during the process of divination. The tapper is held in the stuck bottom part while the pointed head part is used to strike the divining tray. *Ìròkè* can be carved in ivory or wood. It is carried by the Ifá priest as a symbol of the high status he enjoys in the community.

Note the elongated and conical head part which resembles the conical shape of the *orí* instrument (Plate 11). This emphasizes the importance of *Orí* (spiritual or inner head) in Ifá divination.

Note also the figure of the kneeling woman which is characteristic of Yoruba ritual art. This familiar posture stands for *ikúnlẹ abiyamọ* (the kneeling posture of a woman during labour). This position is a pleading, begging posture, calling on Ifá to give the correct answer to the supplicant's request. Till today, the greatest symbol of pleading among the Yoruba is that of a nude woman kneeling down. When a woman says '*Mọ fi ikúnlẹ abiyamọ bẹ yín o*' (I beg you with the kneeling posture of a woman in labour), only the hard-hearted Yoruba person will fail to grant her request.

lid is the big instrument on the left) to show the two parts of this instrument. The small *ilé orí* in the middle has less cowries than the big one. Orí itself which is put inside this case, is shaped in almost exactly the same way as its case, but it is a smaller instrument. Note the pointed, conical shape of the *ilé orí* which resembles the shape of *iróké* (Ifá tapper).

When a man goes to an Ifá priest for divination, he is simply trying to find out through Ifá the wishes of his own Orí who is his personal divinity who regulates the affairs of his own life. Whatever has not been sanctioned by a man's Orí cannot be approved by the divinities.



PLATE 1



PLATE 2



PLATE 3



PLATE 4



PLATE 5



PLATE 6



PLATE 7



PLATE 8



PLATE 9





PLATE 11

Ifá verse refers to seven Ifẹ. The first, and possibly the original one is Ifẹ-Oòdáyé. Others are Ifẹ-Ñlẹrẹ, Ifẹ-Oòyèlagbòmóró, Ifẹ-Wàrà, Òtù-Ifẹ, Ifẹ-Oòrè and Ifẹ-Oòjó.

The myths say that after a long stay at Ifẹ, Ifá moved to Adó. Ifá is believed to have spent the greater part of his life on earth at Adó. That is probably why there is the saying 'Adó n'ilé Ifá' (Adó is the home of Ifá). But it is not known which one of the two most prominent Adó in Yoruba oral literature—Adó-Èkìtì¹⁰ and Adó-Àwáyè¹¹—this myth refers to. Ifá literary corpus is, however, so full of names of places from Èkìtì area that one is inclined to think that Adó-Èkìtì is the more probable one.

We also learn in these myths that Ifá had eight children and a number of disciples, all of whom he taught the secrets of divination. Six of the eight children bear personal names similar to the titular names of Èkìtì kings: *Alará*, *Ajerò*, *Oñtaji*, *Olóyẹ-moyin*, *Elẹjẹlú-mòpé* and *Alákegi*. The other two are *Olówò* (similar to the title of the king of Òwò) and *Qwàràngún* (similar to the title *Qràngún*, king of Ilá and to the title *Qwá*, king of Ilẹ̀sà). All the eight children were born while Ifá was at Ifẹ. They all grew up to be important people and they later dispersed to various parts of Yorubaland.

According to the myths, there were occasions when, there being no physical barrier between heaven and earth at that time, Ifá was summoned by Olódùmarè (God Almighty) to heaven to use his great wisdom to solve problems for Him. Ifá finally returned to heaven in annoyance due to an insult given to him by one of his children. Shortly after this, the earth was thrown into great confusion. Famine and pestilence raged throughout the earth. So great was the calamity that the fertility cycle in human beings was disrupted.

Aboyún kò bí mọ;

Àgàn kò t'q̄wó àlà b'osùn.¹²

(Pregnant women no longer delivered;

Barren women remained barren.)

After some time, the people of the earth decided to seek remedy for the hardship by sending the eight children of Qrúnmílà to heaven to go and beg their father to return to

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earth. The children went accordingly. When they reached heaven, they found Ifá 'at the foot of the much-climbed palm-tree which branched this way and that until it had sixteen hut-like branches.'¹³ They begged Ifá to come back to the earth, but he refused.

Ifá, however, gave each of his eight children sixteen palm-nuts and said:

B'ẹ ẹ bá délé,
 B'ẹ ẹ bá f'ówó ó ní,
 Ẹni t'ẹ ẹ máa bi nù-un.
 B'ẹ ẹ bá délé,
 B'ẹ ẹ bá f'áyáá ní,
 Ẹni t'ẹ ẹ máa bi nù-un.
 B'ẹ ẹ bá délé,
 B'ẹ ẹ bá f'òmọ ọ bí,
 Ẹni t'ẹ ẹ máa bi nù-un.
 Ilé l'ẹ bá fẹẹ kọ láyé,
 Ẹni t'ẹ ẹ máa bi nù-un.
 Aṣọ l'ẹ bá fẹẹ ní láyé,
 Ẹni t'ẹ ẹ máa bi nù-un.
 Ire gbogbo t'ẹ ẹ bá fẹẹ ní láyé,
 Ẹni t'ẹ ẹ máa bi nù-un.¹⁴

(When you are back home,
 If you want to have money,
 That is the person you are to consult.
 When you are back home,
 If you want to have wives,
 That is the person you are to consult.
 When you are back home,
 If you want to have children,
 That is the person you are to consult.
 If you want to build houses on earth,
 That is the person you are to consult.
 If you want to have clothes on earth,
 That is the person you are to consult.
 All good things you want to have on earth,
 That is the person you are to consult.)

When the children of Ifá returned to earth, they started to use the sixteen palm-nuts for divination. The sixteen palm-nuts were the symbol of the authority by Ifá to his children

to continue making divination in his absence. The sixteen palm-nuts known as *ikin* (Plate 1) have been used as an important part of the Ifá divination system from that time till today. The absence of Ifá from the earth no longer mattered, since his children and disciples could communicate with him through *ikin* and the other instruments of divination.

It must be mentioned that the myths from which the above information has been extracted are not the only existing myths about Ifá. There are a number of other myths which are essentially different from these, and it is to these that attention must now be drawn.

According to one myth, quoted by Dennett,¹⁵

Ifá was born at Ifẹ, the cradle of the Yoruba people. He was a skilful medical man . . . and was an eminently successful diviner. After he had become famous, he founded a town called *Ìpetu* and became king of the place and was styled *Aláketu*. He was very popular and was regarded . . . as a true prophet. People from every part of the Yoruba country flocked to him. . . His fame was so great that hundreds of persons . . . begged him to admit them as disciples and apprentices under him. Out of these . . . he chose only sixteen men. . . The names of these apprentices are said to be identical with the sixteen divinatory signs called *Odu*s.

Another myth about the origin of Ifa is mentioned in Johnson's *History of the Yoruba*.¹⁶ Johnson describes Ifá as 'the great consulting oracle in the Yoruba country.'¹⁷ He said that the Ifá cult was introduced into Yorubaland by one Şetilu who was a Nupe man. Şetilu was born blind, and at first, his parents wanted to kill him. But Şetilu grew up to be a peculiar child and his parents were astonished at his powers of divination. At the early age of five, he started to use his powers, to tell his parents who would visit them in the course of the day and with what object.

As Şetilu advanced in age, he started to practise sorcery and medicine. At the beginning of his practice he used sixteen small pebbles for his divination. He 'imposed successfully upon the credulity of those who flocked to him in their distress and anguish for consultation. From this source, he earned a comfortable livelihood.'¹⁸ But the Muslims were

jealous of Şetilu's achievements and they expelled him from the country. He crossed the Niger southwards and went into Benin City. From Benin, he wandered into Ọwọ and Adó and finally settled at Ilé-Ifẹ. He found Ifẹ to be quite suitable for his practice of divination, and made it his permanent abode. He became so famous and popular that he persuaded the people of Ifẹ to give up the Yoruba tradition of having facial marks.

Şetilu initiated several of his followers into the mysteries of Ifá divination, and Ifá gradually became the 'consulting oracle of the whole Yoruba nation'. Odùduwà¹⁹ found Şetilu at Ifẹ and it was during the reign of Ọfínrà̀n²⁰ on the throne of Ọyọ that official recognition was given to the Ifá cult.

THE PLACE OF IFÁ IN THE YORUBÁ PANTHEON

It is pertinent to inquire whether or not Ifá is the most important Yoruba deity. Ifá priests claim that Ifá is the most important Yoruba god. Several parts of the Ifá literary corpus also support this view²¹. Furthermore, Dr. Farrow says, 'Ifá may be regarded as the most important. . . ọ̀rìṣà'²² of the Yoruba people. But Professor E. Bólájí Ọ̀dòwú holds the view that Ọ̀rìṣàńlá, the Yoruba god of creation, is the most important Yoruba god. He says, 'Ọ̀rìṣàńlá is the supreme divinity of Yorubaland. As his name implies, he is the great arch-divinity.'²³ Professor Ọ̀dòwú adduces evidence from Yoruba oral literature to support his view.

It must be realised, however, that it is not possible to prove either of these two claims conclusively. If one asks the worshippers of each of the other Yoruba major deities, one finds that each group claims that its own god is the most important one. What is more, to the best of my knowledge, there is no common saying among the Yoruba which designates a particular god as the most important deity. There are, of course, certain Yoruba deities which are generally acclaimed as more important than the others and these might be called major deities. Unfortunately, however, the order of seniority among these major deities is not clear. Therefore, one can only say that Ifá is one of the most important Yoruba deities.

As mentioned above, Ifá is believed to have been sent by

Olódùmarè, the Almighty God, to use his profound wisdom to put the earth in order. The belief of the Yoruba concerning the great wisdom of Ifá is manifested in some of the praise names they give to him. Two of such praise names are *Akéré-f'inú-şogbón* (The small person with a mind full of wisdom) and *Akóni-lóràn-bí-íyekan-ẹni* (He who gives one wise advice like one's relative).

It is this great wisdom of Ifá which gives him a high position among the other Yoruba gods.

Without Ifá, the importance of the other Yoruba gods would diminish. If a man is being punished by the other gods, he can only know this by consulting Ifá. If a community is to make sacrifice to one of its gods, it can only know this by consulting Ifá. So that in this way, Ifá is the only active mouthpiece of Yoruba traditional religion taken as a whole. As a mouthpiece, Ifá serves to popularize the other Yoruba gods; he serves to immortalize them.²⁴

With his great wisdom, knowledge and understanding, Ifá co-ordinates the work of all the gods in the Yoruba pantheon. He serves as a 'middleman' between the other gods and the people, and between the people and their ancestors. 'He is the mouthpiece and the public relations officer of all the other Yoruba gods.'²⁵

The relationship between Ifá and another major god of the Yoruba pantheon, Èlẹgbára, the Yoruba trickster god, demands some close scrutiny. One sometimes sees the image of Èlẹgbára, otherwise known as Èşù (Plate 10), in the home of Ifá priests, and when one asks them why they keep such an image, they answer that Ifá and Èşù are friends.

A close examination of the Ifá literary corpus reveals that Èşù sometimes acts as a friend of Ifá²⁶ and sometimes as a tempter.²⁷ It would also appear that Ifá sometimes makes use of the powers of Èşù when he wants to do wonderful things.²⁸ Ellis says that Ifá obtained the powers of divination from Èşù upon promising to give him the first portion of all offerings.²⁹

There is certainly a very close relationship between Ifá and Èşù. A good portion of all the sacrifices made through Ifá to any of the Yoruba gods is given to Èşù. Èşù may, there-

fore, be regarded as the closest god to Ifá in the Yoruba pantheon.

Ifá is, of course, famous as a divination god although he is not the only Yoruba god connected with divination.³⁰ The wisdom and understanding of Ifá is believed to cover not only the past but also the present, and the future. By consulting Ifá, the Yoruba find meaning and purpose in the past, the present and the future.

The belief of the Yoruba people concerning the importance of Ifá divination in their daily life is revealed in the following Ifá poem:

Ifá ló l'òní,
Ifá ló l'òla,
Ifá ló l'òtunla pèlú è.
Òrúnmilà ló n'ijò méreèrín Òòsà d'ááyé.³¹

(Ifá is the master of today,
Ifá is the master of tomorrow;
Ifá is the master of the day after tomorrow.
To Ifá belongs all the four days³²
Established by Òòsà³³ on earth.)

In traditional Yoruba society, the Yoruba consult Ifá before they do anything important. At the birth of a new child, Ifá is usually consulted to find out what would be the fortunes and problems of the new child on earth. As J.D. Clarke testifies, Ifá priests 'name the *òrìṣà* which the child will worship and it is they who are consulted in all the major affairs of life'.³⁴ In sickness, in contemplating a journey, in considering the choice of a life partner and at any other important turn in their lives, the Yoruba usually consult Ifá for guidance and advice.

THE PARAPHERNALIA OF IFÁ DIVINATION

As a divination god, Ifá has his own paraphernalia of divination. The first and the most ancient of these divination instruments is *ikin*, the sixteen sacred palm-nuts of divination (Plate 1). The myth about how *ikin* was given to the children of Ifá has been narrated above. Priests of Ifá keep *ikin* inside ornamented

bowls (Plate 6). Every fifth day,³⁵ when an Ifá priest makes sacrifices to his god, he opens the bowl and takes out the sacred palm-nuts. Holding the palm-nuts in his hands, he prays to them in the belief that they are the physical representation of Ifá on earth.

The sacred palm-nuts are also used for divination. For purposes of divination, the priest of Ifá puts the sixteen palm-nuts in one of his hands and tries to take all of them out at once with the other hand. If one palm-nut is left in his hand, he makes two marks in the yellow powder of divination but if two palm-nuts are left in his hand, he makes one mark. If none of the palm-nuts is left, or if more than two palm-nuts are left, he makes no marks at all. This process is repeated until an *Odù* signature is obtained.³⁶ However, Ifá priests seldom use *ikin* for divination. This is probably due to the considerable trouble and the rather long time that the process of divination entails. They mostly use *ikin* when consulting Ifá in their own homes for members of their families or for themselves.

As mentioned above, Ifá priests seldom use *ikin* when consulting Ifá for their clients. Instead, they use *òpèlè*, the sacred chain of divination (Plate 2). The divining chain is shaped like a tuning fork. Tied at regular intervals to the chain are eight half-nuts of the *òpèlè* tree (*Schrebera golungensis*). Four half-nuts are tied to each arm of the chain. At each end of the chain, the Ifá priest ties a number of objects such as small beads, coins and cowries. The Ifá priest holds the chain in the middle which is left bare.

The usual material of which the *òpèlè* chain is made is tough leather, but sometimes cotton string is used and likewise brass. The most valuable *òpèlè* chains are the brass type, some of which have small brass plates in place of the *òpèlè* half-nut.

Each of the half-nuts tied to the string has a concave and a convex surface. When the Ifá priest casts the chain on the ground, some of the half-nuts would naturally present their concave side while some would present their convex side. Every combination of the four concave and the four convex surfaces of the half-nuts gives an *Odù* signature.³⁷

The divining chain is the most popular instrument of Ifá divination. It is used much more than any of the other instru-

ments of divination probably because it is easier and quicker to get the signature of an *Odù* signature by using it and because it is less cumbersome to carry about.

Another important instrument of Ifá divination is the *ibò*, the sacred cowry and the sacred bone used in casting lots. The cowry shell stands for 'yes' while the bone stands for 'no'. There is also a special type of *ibò* which makes use of five objects: a stone, a cowry, a sea-shell, a bone, and a piece of chain. The five objects are believed to represent the five kinds of good, the five kinds of evil and the five kinds of supernatural forces which exist in human life.

The *ibò* is used to select quickly the probable 'stories' in the corpus that could apply to the client. It is believed that it is the client's *Orí* or divine guardian (Plate 11), who finally selects one of the countless 'stories' in the corpus for him.³⁸

The yellow powder of divination has been mentioned above. It is known as *iyèròsùn* and it is obtained from the *iròsùn* tree (*Baphia nitida*). When the Ifá priest uses his *ikin* (the sacred palm-nuts) for divination, he makes marks upon the yellow powder. The yellow powder of divination is kept in a carved bowl. These bowls (Plate 6) and trays (Plate 4) are usually made of wood but there are some which are made of brass. Ifá trays and bowls are precious symbols of the great ability of the Yoruba people as carvers. They are very prominent among the Yoruba carvings that have been preserved in museums all over the world.

Another important instrument of Ifá divination is *iróké* or *irófá* (Plate 3). These are carved club-like objects used by Ifá priests to invoke the spirit of Ifá during the process of divination. The Ifá priest performs the invocation by knocking the ornamented tray with *iróké* to produce a sonorous sound while he simultaneously chants the praise of Ifá. Most *iróké* are made of wood but some are made of ivory, and these are very attractive indeed, and precious instruments of the Ifá divination system.

Ifá Priests and Their System of Divination

THE IFA CULT¹

THE paraphernalia of the Ifá divination system have been discussed in the previous chapter. The custodians of this paraphernalia are priests and diviners known as *babaláwo* (fathers in the divination cult). They wear light-blue dresses and adorn themselves profusely with beads, prominent among which is *idè* which they tie to the wrists and the neck. Another distinguishing mark of Ifá priests is the *jèrùgbé*, a bag made of cloth which most of them hang on their shoulders (Plate 7). It is because of this habit of carrying a bag that the term *akápò* (bag-carrier) is used to connote an Ifá priest. A senior Ifá priest sometimes carries about with him as a walking stick, a decorated staff made of wood or of wrought iron called *òsùn*² (Plate 8); it is always held carefully for, according to a certain taboo, it must never fall flat on the bare ground. It is also usual for an Ifá priest to carry on his person a carved club-like object known as *iróké*³ (Plate 3) which is used to invoke Ifá during the process of divination.

There are five classes of Ifá priests. The first and most important class is made up of priests known as *Babaláwo Olódù*. These are full Ifá priests who have been initiated into the secrets of *Odu*,⁴ the mythical wife of Ifá. They are the most qualified Ifá priests being at once both diviners and healers. The second class of Ifá priests consists of priests who have not been initiated into the secrets of *Odu* and who have all the paraphernalia of Ifá divination and are fully authorized to practise the art of divination. The third class of Ifá priests is made up of people who have all the paraphernalia of Ifá divination but who are forbidden to use them to divine for people outside their own households. To the fourth class are consigned those Ifá priests who are healers; they are full Ifá priests but they divine solely for healing purposes. The fifth class is made up

of trained Ifá priests who are neither diviners nor healers but who have been trained as Ifá priests. They have all the paraphernalia of Ifá but they do not use them. Each of them is usually in some full time gainful employment but he attends the regular assemblies of Ifá priests and he maintains a disciplined attitude to life which is characteristic of Ifá priests.

In ancient times, the Ifá cult was centrally controlled by the king of each Yoruba kingdom through an officer who acted as a contact man between the cult members and the government. In Òyó, for example, the Ifá cult was under the control of a chief styled *Ọ̀nàilémọ̀lẹ̀*, who was the political head of the Ifá cult in Òyó. Government control on the cult was however only of political nature. The cult retained the full freedom to choose its own chiefs and regulate its affairs so long as it did nothing contrary to the government's civic orders. Nowadays, the control of kings over the Ifá cult has almost completely disappeared.

The Ifá cult is not a secret cult although some of its deliberations are held as secrets which the un-initiated must not know. The opportunity for training as an Ifá priest is available to all male children and adults throughout Yorubaland. There are some female diviners who are sometimes called Ifá priests but they do not belong to the inner core of cult members. It may, therefore, be said that the Ifá cult is essentially a cult of male adherents.

The Ifá cult is one of the best organized cults among the Yoruba. At the head of the cult is the *Àràbà*, who is the supreme high priest of a very large area which sometimes covers an entire district with many towns and villages. After the *Àràbà* comes the *Olúwo*, who is the Ifá high priest for a particular city or community. From the *Araba* downwards there are altogether sixteen major chiefs of Ifá. The following are the sixteen most important Ifá priests in Òyó area.⁵

- | | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| 1 <i>Àràbà</i> | 7 <i>Àrànsàn</i> | 13 <i>Ajerò</i> |
| 2 <i>Olúwo</i> | 8 <i>Balésín</i> | 14 <i>Qwàràngún</i> |
| 3 <i>Ojùgbònà</i> | 9 <i>Qtún Awo</i> | 15 <i>Qbaléyó</i> |
| 4 <i>Akódá</i> | 10 <i>Òsì Awo</i> | 16 <i>Àgbọngbọ̀n</i> |
| 5 <i>Asẹ̀dà</i> | 11 <i>Èkejọ Awo</i> | |
| 6 <i>Erìnmì</i> | 12 <i>Alárá</i> | |

There are, however, many other minor chiefs responsible for the Ifá cult in very small communities. Furthermore, every *Olúwo* has his own retinue of sixteen chiefs who assist him in administering the cult in his own area. Sometimes a chief subsidiary to the *Olúwo* also has under himself a number of chiefs responsible for minor duties such as settling disputes among cult members.

As already mentioned in the preceeding chapter, the first day of the Yoruba four-day week is devoted by Ifá priests to the worship of Ifá. The day is known as *ọjọ awo* (the day of Ifá divination). On this day, Ifá priests assemble at the house of their local chief priest. There, they eat, drink and make sacrifices to Ifá. Chanting of excerpts from the Ifá literary corpus is not unusual at such congregations. As they chant, some of them produce special dance music on the traditional Ifá drum⁶ and to this they dance merrily around the house.

In most communities Ifá priests also meet regularly once every month and once every year. The yearly meeting is observed as a festival which is known as *Mọlẹ*. The annual *Mọlẹ* festival is very elaborate and it is usually held in honour of the king. Most of the important activities of the festival therefore take place in the palace of the king. These activities include offerings, chanting of Ifá verse and dancing. In some communities, Ifá priests dance round the town during the annual *Mọlẹ* festival.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the annual *Mọlẹ* festival and the other congregational assemblies of Ifá priests is the chanting of Ifá texts which is referred to as *iyẹrẹ*. The chanting of *iyẹrẹ* is a well-developed art among Ifá priests and it is usually done in choral form, led by someone who is a good chanter. To every complete sentence chanted correctly by the leader of the chant, the other Ifá priests chant *han-in*, meaning 'Yes, that is right.' However, if the leader has chanted a sentence wrongly, the other priests inform him of this and tell him to correct his mistake. If he makes another mistake, he might be shouted down and another priest who is sure of himself immediately takes over from him. Where a priest makes serious mistakes while chanting and refuses to stop chanting in defiance of the expressed wishes of the congregation, he might even be thrown out of the meeting in shame. By this

rigid insistence on the correct recital of Ifá texts, Ifá priests, have made it almost impossible for spurious passages to appear in the Ifá literary corpus.

To illustrate *iyèrè* chanting, the following *ẹsẹ* is quoted from the Ifá literary corpus in the manner that it will be delivered at an *iyèrè* session with the *han-in* refrain chorally chanted in response to every correct sentence. The last few lines of the *ẹsẹ* contain the chorus proper which is chanted together by the leader of the chant and the other priests. This chorus proper is sometimes repeated several times by the priests as they dance to the music of their drums and gongs.

- LEADER: Igbó gbọrọrọ ni mo lè é sákẹ.
 GROUP: Han-in.
 LEADER: Ọdàn gbọrọrọ ni mo lè é hòkùn.
 GROUP: Han-in.
 LEADER: Kí n tóó dé,
 Wọn joyè lẹyin mi.
 GROUP: Han-in.
 LEADER: Mo dé, mo bá mọ̀rìwò ọ̀pẹ̀ yẹẹ-yẹẹ-yẹẹ
 Lálàdèè mi.
 GROUP: Han-in.
 LEADER: A díá fún Olóógundúdú,
 Èyí tí nìlọ lèè j'Àjànà n'Ífẹ.
 GROUP: Han-in.
 LEADER: Olónímoró j'Àjànà n'Ífẹ.
 GROUP: Han-in.
 LEADER: Baraapetú j'Àjànà n'Ífẹ.
 GROUP: Han-in.
 LEADER: A ò kú mọ.
 GROUP: Han-in.
 LEADER: Àjẹpẹ̀ loyè awó jẹ.
 GROUP: Han-in.
 LEADER: Àjẹpẹ̀ loyè awó jẹ o.
 GROUP: Àjẹpẹ̀ loyè awó jẹ.
 Olónímoró j'Àjànà n'Ífẹ.
 A ò kú mọ
 Àjẹpẹ̀ loyè awó jẹ.⁷

- LEADER: I went into the vast forest
 To fetch building poles.
 GROUP: That is right.

- LEADER: I went into the vast savannah
To fetch building ropes.
- GROUP: That is right.
- LEADER: Before I returned,
They installed a chief in my absence.
- GROUP: That is right.
- LEADER: I returned to find plenty of palm fronds
In my abode.
- GROUP: That is right.
- LEADER: Ifá divination was performed for
Olóógundúdú⁸
Who was going to be installed as the *Àjànà*⁹ of Ifè.
- GROUP: That is right.
- LEADER: Olónl moró¹⁰ was installed as the *Àjànà* of Ifè.
- GROUP: That is right.
- LEADER: Baraapetú¹¹ was installed as the *Àjànà* of Ifè.
- GROUP: That is right.
- LEADER: We will not die.
- GROUP: That is right.
- LEADER: Ifá priest is installed into a long lasting title.
- GROUP: That is right.
- LEADER: Ifá priest is certainly installed into a long lasting title.
- GROUP: Ifá priest is installed into a long lasting title.
Olónl moró was installed as the *Àjànà* of Ifè.
We will not die.
Ifá priest is installed into a long lasting title.

In ancient times in Yorubaland, Ifá priests were usually very poor. This was because they were not paid directly for the services they rendered to the community. For their livelihood they had to depend entirely on certain parts of the offerings given to Ifá and sometimes on gifts from clients.

No *babalawo* should use his position to enrich himself in any way; he must not refuse anybody his service on account of money—if any person is too poor to pay the customary pittance for divination, the *babalawo* must divine for him free of charge; or if the person cannot afford the prescribed sacrifice, the *babalawo* must take whatever he can afford and translate the will for the deed. It seems, in fact, that the *babalawo* is under a vow of poverty, to spend himself in the service of the community, making just enough to keep himself, his real reward being in the service of Ọ̀rúnmìlà.¹²

One important attribute of all Ifá priests, whatever their status in the cult, is humility. Humility is manifest both in their appearance and their manners. This, as will be shown below, is an outcome of the great discipline and perseverance involved in their training. It can hardly be gainsaid that the Ifá cult, comprising as it does properly disciplined, humble and well-informed priests, is one of the most important and most useful cults of the Yoruba people.

THE TRAINING OF IFÁ PRIESTS

The training of Ifá priests is a supreme example of sacrifice in human endeavour. It demonstrates that human memory can be stretched to an almost limitless extent for the retention of knowledge. The aim of the training is to give the would-be priests a disciplined attitude to many problems in life. In ancient times, Ifá priests were the guardians, counsellors, philosophers and physicians of their various communities. It was therefore, the primary aim of the training to prepare the would-be priests adequately to meet the grave responsibilities of important positions in the community. Most people start their training as Ifá priests between the ages of seven and twelve. If the training goes well without a hitch, and if the trainee has a retentive memory, the training lasts not more than ten to twelve years.

There are usually many drop-outs during the training with only a small percentage of those who start the training completing it successfully. This is due to several factors of which the most important are firstly the mental rigour and secondly the extremely hard conditions of living involved in the training.

Throughout the period of training, the master-priest and his trainees live together as brothers. Age and seniority are respected and given priority among trainees in certain matters. The trainees do household work for the master-priest. This is especially the case with master-priests who have no wives. Such people depend on their trainees for carrying out all the menial jobs of their households. It is also not uncommon for the master-priest to have a small farm near the town or village in which he lives. In such a case, a number of his trainees are sent to the farm regularly to do all the necessary work ranging

from weed clearing and planting to the harvesting of the crops. The master-priest only goes to the farm once in a while to supervise the activities of the trainees.

The training starts by teaching the would-be priest how to use the paraphernalia of the divination system. This includes learning how to use the divining chain and the sacred palmnuts of divination to find out the appropriate *Odù* and *ẹsẹ* relating to particular clients. This part of the training is known as *dídá-owó* (learning how to use the divining chain for divination) and *ètítẹ-alẹ* (learning how to use the sacred palmnuts for divination).

The divining chain is one of the first instruments in the paraphernalia of Ifá to be introduced to the would-be priest. He is taught how to recognize the various combinations of the half-nuts of the divining chain that make up each *Odù*. The trainee learns one *Odù* every other day, or in the case of very dull boys, one *Odù* every week. Each trainee's progress depends entirely on his own memory and intelligence.

This part of the training of the would-be priest does not end until the trainee is able to use the divining chain to recognize the respective signatures of the two hundred and fifty-six *Odù* in the Ifá divination corpus.

After the student Ifá priest has mastered the use of the divining chain, he is introduced to the sacred palm-nuts, that is, *ikin*. This part of the training is known as *ètítẹ-alẹ*, and it consists of teaching the would-be priest to be able to use the sacred palm-nuts to find out the appropriate *Odù* by making marks on the yellow powder of divination. As the sacred palm-nuts are used less frequently by the Ifá priest than the divining chain, less time is devoted to this part of the training.

By far the most important part of the work of the student Ifá priests is learning by heart of a number of *ẹsẹ* from each of the two hundred and fifty-six *Odù*. Particular attention is paid to the principal sixteen *Odù* which are also the first sixteen *Odù* in the corpus. There seems to be no fixed number of *ẹsẹ* which each trainee must learn before he qualifies for initiation, but most of my informants confirm that in ancient times, nobody would be respected as a good Ifá priest unless he has learnt by heart at least sixteen *ẹsẹ* in each of the two hundred

and fifty-six *Odù*. Nowadays, however, it seems that most Ifá priests know less than sixteen *ẹsẹ* in each *Odù*.

The *ẹsẹ* are memorized at the steady rate of one per day. In the case of very long ones, the master-priest could divide the *ẹsẹ* into two or three parts and devote one day's tuition to each part. It is a common sight to see many trainees queuing up to take their turns while learning their *ẹsẹ Ifá*.

Each *ẹsẹ* is learnt in the form of recitation in the first instance. The master-priest says one complete sentence at a time and the trainee parrots the words after him several times until he is able to retain the whole sentence in his memory. This is done for each sentence until the whole *ẹsẹ* has been covered. Thereafter, the onus is on the student to find time to repeat the whole *ẹsẹ* to himself several times. This process is termed *rírán Ifá* (reiteration of Ifá verse).

According to many of my informants, after a trainee has properly memorized the first sixteen *ẹsẹ*, the task of learning Ifá verse by heart becomes relatively easy for him. It is widely believed that many of the trainees are greatly aided by a medicinal preparation known as *ìsọyè* (memory-aid) which they take with their food three times a day. This medicine is supposed to make it impossible for any Ifá priest to forget any *ẹsẹ* which he has already painstakingly learnt by heart.

Learning how to chant the *ẹsẹ* is reserved for a much later part of the training. A clever trainee, however, acquires the art of chanting Ifá verse by imitating his master when chanting *ẹsẹ Ifá* everyday during the process of performing Ifá divination. A trainee could also learn the art of chanting Ifá verse by attending the regular assemblies of Ifá priests. Ifá priests could, however, specialize in chanting as part of their post-initiation training.

The *ẹsẹ* is memorized with such a great reverence that not a single word is missed. It is considered extremely sacrilegious for anybody to add or subtract anything from the corpus. The *ẹsẹ* must always be learnt in the very form in which it has been preserved and disseminated from ancient times. It is believed that in this way the texts in the Ifá literary corpus have been kept free from errors. The corpus, therefore, remains till today one of the most reliable genres of Yoruba oral literature.

Another important part of the trainee's work is the learning of the appropriate sacrifices that a client must be asked to offer if a particular *ẹsẹ Ifá* turns out as the solution to his problem. The name given to the section of the corpus in which detailed instructions are provided about various sacrifices is *òkarara-ẹbọ*. It is a very difficult and confusing part of the corpus since every *ẹsẹ Ifá* has its own appropriate sacrifice. The would-be priest therefore has to learn a number of items required for sacrifice among which usually occur clothes, money, cooked food, fresh fruit and drinks. In addition, he has to learn the proper process of using these things for sacrifice. For example, one *ẹsẹ Ifá* may stipulate that a piece of cloth used for sacrifice should be burnt while another stipulates that it should be cut into pieces. Another *ẹsẹ Ifá* may name six things to be offered as sacrifice and furthermore prescribe that the various items should be arranged in a particular order and deposited in the bush or placed on the shrine of a particular god.

In addition to learning by heart the things required for sacrifice and learning how to use them for sacrifice, the would-be priest has to learn certain poems that are meant to be chanted whenever certain sacrifices are being performed. These chants are not actually in the main stream of the literary corpus known as *ẹsẹ*. They are special chants meant only for sacrifice.

INITIATION AND POST-INITIATION TRAINING

When the master-priest is satisfied with the trainee's ability in the different branches of Ifá mentioned above, he allows him to present himself for initiation. Of the numerous stages in the initiation ceremony the four principal ones are described below.

The first stage is the ceremony marking what is known as *ṣṣṣl ọpẹlẹ já* (ceremony marking the mastery of the *Odù* by using the divining chain). This is a very important ceremony involving the offering of sacrifice to *Ọrúnmílá* and the giving of a feast for all Ifa priests in the community concerned. The ceremony which lasts for only one day involves the use of the following food for both the sacrifice and the feast: (i) *Ẹkọ* (solid maize gruel), (ii) *Abo Adiẹ* (hen), (iii) *Eku* (rat), (iv) *Ẹja* (fish), (v) *Iyán* (pounded yam), (vi) *Ọkà* (solid food made from yam flour), and (vii) *Ọtí* (drinks).

The second stage of the initiation rituals involves the propitiation of Èṣù.¹³ This ceremony is referred to as *gígún Èṣù* (the making of the paraphernalia of Èṣù for the would-be priest). During this ceremony the image and the other paraphernalia of Èṣù (Plate 10) are presented to the would-be priest. Sacrifices are also made to Èṣù and to Ọrúnmilà.

The third stage is known as *fífojú kan Odù* (initiation into the secrets of *Odù*). During the ceremony, the would-be priest feasts many Ifá priests from far and near, after which the sacred pot believed to be the abode of *Odù*, the mythical wife of Ifá, is ceremoniously opened for him to see. In turns the Ifá priests present look inside the sacred pot. The actual contents of this pot are not revealed to the un-initiated, information about them is treated as a major secret of the Ifá cult.

There is a lot of drumming, dancing and chanting at appropriate intervals during the *Odù* initiation ceremony. Two of the *ẹṣẹ ifá* usually chanted during the ceremony are given below.

Ọmọdé ò f'ojú b'Odù lásán;
 Àgbà ò f'ojú b'Odù ní ọfẹ;
 Ẹni t'ó bá f'ojú b'Odù yóó sì d'awo.
 A díá fún Ọràngún, Ilé Ilà,
 Tí ó gbàlejò láti òde Ịdan.
 Wọn ní b'ó bá f'ojú b'àlejò,
 Orin ni kí ó máa kọ.
 A f'ojú b'Odù,
 A ríre ò.
 A f'ojú b'Odù,
 A ríre.
 Àwá mà mà kúkú f'ojú b'Odù,
 A ò kú mọ.
 A f'ojú b'Odù,
 A ríre.¹⁴

Little children do not see *Odù* free of charge;
 Old people do not see *Odù* without paying a fee;
 He who sees *Odù* will become an Ifá priest.
 Ifá divination was performed for Ọràngún of Ilà,¹⁵
 Who would receive a visitor from the city of Ịdan.¹⁶
 He was told that when he saw the visitor,
 He should start singing.

We have seen *Odù*,
 We have found good fortune.
 We have seen *Odù*,
 We have found good fortune.
 We have certainly seen *Odù*,
 We shall not die.
 We have seen *Odù*,
 We have found good fortune.

B'ójà bá tú tán,
 A ku olórii pàtẹpàtẹ;
 A ku àgbààgbà sà̀nkò sà̀nkò lójà;
 B'Ífá bá pẹ́dí tán,
 Ìwòh̀wò a dide. 5
 A díá fún Ọ̀rúnmilà,
 Ifá nìlọ̀ lẹ́ é f'ojú b'Odù
 L'ókè Ìkẹfun.
 A f'ojú b'Odù,
 A ríre ò; 10
 A f'ojú b'Odù,
 A ríre.
 Àwá mà mà kúkú f'ojú b'Odù,
 A ò kú mọ́.
 A f'ojú b'Odù, 15
 A ríre.¹⁷

When the market session ends,
 The chief of market women remains;
 Some important elders also remain;
 When Ifá becomes difficult,
 The less qualified priests rise up and leave. 5
 Ifá divination was performed for Ọ̀rúnmilà
 When Ifá was going to see *Odù*
 On the hill of Ìkẹfun.¹⁸
 We have seen *Odù*,
 We have found good fortune. 10
 We have seen *Odù*,
 We have found good fortune.
 We have certainly seen *Odù*,
 We shall not die.
 We have seen *Odù*, 15
 We have found good fortune.

The fourth and last stage of the initiation is known as *wíwọ ıgbó Ifá* (entering the sacred grove of Ifá). This is the most elaborate of all the principal stages of Ifá initiation ceremony. More than two hundred different items including food, drinks, clothes, beads and many other materials are required for the ceremony. The most important of these things are:

(i) *Yanrın òkun* (sand taken from sea shore), (ii) *Yanrın ọsà* (sand taken from shore of lagoon), (iii) *Èèbà epo* (small gourd of palm oil), (iv) *Ọpọlọpọ iyọ* (plenty of salt), (v) *Àgò adıe* (coop full of fowls), (vi) *Igi ọnà* (a wooden sculpture), (vii) *Aşọ funfun ọpá márún* (five yards of white cloth), and (viii) *Ọpọlọpọ owó-eyọ* (plenty of cowries).

The ceremony involves feasting, dancing and chanting of *ẹşẹ Ifá* for several days. Sacrifices are made to several gods including *Ọrúnmilà* and *Èşù*. Four or five chief priests of the cult lead the would-be priest into the sacred grove where they thoroughly examine him on different aspects of the Ifá literary corpus. Throughout his sojourn in the forest, the would-be priest ties a piece of white cloth round his neck and waist. He emerges from the sacred grove at the head of a long procession of cult members dancing and singing. Here is one of the chants of the occasion.

Àwá tẹ ọ nífá o,
K'ó o túnra ẹ tẹ;
Títẹ la t'Èjì Ogbè
T'ó fi m'órí wọ'gbó.
Àwá tẹ ọ nífá o,
K'ó o túnra ẹ tẹ,
B'ó o d'órí ọpẹ,
Má şe jọwọ sí.¹⁹

We have initiated you into the secrets of Ifá.
You should re-initiate yourself.
This was how Èjì Ogbè²⁰ was initiated
But he plunged himself into the forest.²¹
We have initiated you into the secrets of Ifá.
You should re-initiate yourself.
If you get to the top of the palm tree
Do not let your hands loose.

It must be noted that the training of Ifá priests does not end with the initiation ceremonies. A good Ifá priest regards his training as a continuing, life-long process and realizes that the post-initiation part of his training is very crucial. No Ifá priest can excel in his work without undertaking post-initiation training.

During his training, it has been strongly impressed on him that it is his duty to help all clients with all problems, and where he fails to know the immediate answers to any problem, he should be able to know where and how to get useful and appropriate information to help his clients. Therefore, when a client comes up with a problem the solution to which a particular Ifá priest does not know, he asks his client to come back later. Before the client returns, the Ifá priest goes round to his colleagues for information. It is quite common for Ifá priests to go lamp in hand, to see their fellow priests especially when they are faced with an apparently intractable problem. In this way, the successful Ifá priest learns more and more day by day and improves himself steadily as he continues in practice.

The training of Ifá priest up to the time of initiation is essentially broad and general, but after initiation the training becomes specialized. Among the most important areas in which a priest of Ifá may specialize, the most important are healing, chanting of Ifá texts, and knowledge of rare texts in the literary corpus.

Specialization in a particular field sometimes takes the priest of Ifá to distant places. It may happen, for example, that the only Ifá priest who is a renowned specialist in healing is, at a certain time, in a particular part of Yorubaland. In such a case, all Ifá priests who want to specialize in healing will have to go to that particular specialist for training. In this way, all successful Ifá priests usually travel a great deal throughout Yorubaland acquiring more knowledge and broadening their outlook on life as they mix with different kinds of people.

Specialist training is usually very short and intensive. In the humorous words of one Ifá priest who is a specialist in healing 'no Ifá priest desirous of becoming a renowned specialist in healing will ever feel contented with his ability until he can cure the lame, the dwarf and the hunchback.'²²

THE ODÙ AND THE ÈSÈ OF IFÁ

The Ifá literary corpus consists of two parts, namely, *Odù* and *èšè*. The corpus is divided into 256 distinct volumes which are called *Odù* and each *Odù* is sub-divided into numerous chapters which are called *èšè*. While the number of the *Odù* is known, the number of *èšè* in each *Odù* is unknown. This is due to the constant growth in the content of *èšè Ifá*, a growth which certainly does not affect the form of the text.

There are two categories of the *Odù*. The first category consists of the *Ojú Odù* (The principal *Odù*), sixteen in number. The second category consists of the *Ọmọ Odù* or *Amúlù Odù* (Minor *Odù*), two hundred and forty in number.

The *Odù* are regarded as divinities in their own right. Ifá divination myths tell us that before the final return of Ọ̀rúnmilà to heaven, he promised his children and his followers that he would send to them certain divinities who would perform some of the functions he used to perform when he was on earth. He promised that these divinities would be known as *Odù* and they would come down from the sky. When Ọ̀rúnmilà finally returned to heaven, his children and his followers began to make preparations for the coming of the *Odù* from heaven. For the sixteen principal *Odù* they made sixteen thrones one of which was well decorated and placed in an open place while the other fifteen thrones were arranged around it in the form of a circle. The people then started to watch the sky for the coming of the *Odù*.

When the sixteen principal *Odù* were coming down from heaven, Ọ̀fún Méjì, also known as Ọ̀ràngún Méjì, was their leader.²³ The ranks of the principal sixteen *Odù* in heaven was as follows:

1 Ọ̀fún Méjì (Ọ̀ràngún Méjì)	6 Ìká Méjì	12 Ìrosùn Méjì
2 Ọ̀sẹ́ Méjì	7 Ọ̀sá Méjì	13 Ọ̀dí Méjì
3 Ìrẹ̀tẹ́ Méjì	8 Ọ̀gúndá Méjì	14 Ìwòrì Méjì
4 Ọ̀túá Méjì	9 Ọ̀kànràn Méjì	15 Ọ̀yẹ̀kú Méjì
5 Ọ̀túúrúpọ̀n Méjì	10 Ọ̀bàrà Méjì	16 Èjì Ogbè
	11 Ọ̀wọ̀nrín Méjì	

But when the principal sixteen *Odù* came to the frontier gate separating heaven from earth, they reversed their order of

procession so that the 16th and the most junior *Odù*, Èjì Ogbè, went through the frontier gate first. He was followed by the 15th *Odù* and the 15th was followed by the 14th and so on until the first *Odù* came last.

Immediately Èjì Ogbè went through the frontier gate he entered into space and descended into earth. When the large gathering of expectant people saw him, they hailed him as the king of the *Odù*. They carried him shoulder-high and placed him on the big throne prepared for the leader of the *Odù*, thinking that he was the most senior of all. The second *Odù* to descend from the sky was also hailed as the deputy of the king of the *Odù*. In this way, the ranking of sixteen principal *Odù* was completely reversed, giving the following new order:

1 Èjì Ogbè	7 Ọ̀bàrà Méjì	13 Ọ̀túá Méjì
2 Ọ̀yẹ̀kú Méjì	8 Ọ̀kànràn Méjì	14 Ịrẹ̀tẹ̀ Méjì
3 Ịwòrì Méjì	9 Ọ̀gúndá Méjì	15 Ọ̀sẹ̀ Méjì
4 Ọ̀dí Méjì	10 Ọ̀sá Méjì	16 Ọ̀fún Méjì
5 Ịrosùn Méjì	11 Ịká Méjì	
6 Ọ̀wọ̀nrín Méjì	12 Ọ̀túúrúpọ̀n Méjì	

The order of seniority of the sixteen principal *Odù* has since remained thus till today.²⁴ Èjì Ogbè is regarded as the most senior *Odù*, but whenever Ifá priests cast Ọ̀fún Méjì, they hail him as king, saying *héèpà* (We hail you)!

As mentioned above, the sixteen principal *Odù* are more important than the minor *Odù*. The sixteen principal *Odù* contain the most important *ẹ̀sẹ Ifá* and it is considered a duty by all Ifá priests to know as many *ẹ̀sẹ* as possible from this part of the *Odù* corpus. As a result of the greater attention paid by Ifá priest to the sixteen principal *Odù*, most of the extant *ẹ̀sẹ Ifá* belong to this part of the *Odù* corpus.

The *Ọmọ Odù* are also regarded as divinities. As their name implies, they are regarded as the children of the sixteen principal *Odù*. They are also known as *Àmúlù Odù* because each of them bears the names of two principal *Odù*. For example, the first and most important *Ọmọ Odù* is known as *Ogbèyẹ̀kú*. This name is a combination of the names of two *Odù*, namely, *Ogbè*, the first *Odù*, and *Ọ̀yẹ̀kú*, the second *Odù*. The two hundred and forty minor *Odù* are arranged in twelve groups.

Each group is known as *Àpólà* (Section). The twelve groups bear the names of twelve of the sixteen principal *Odù*. They are arranged as follows:

1 Àpólà Ogbè	5 Àpólà Ìrosùn	9 Àpólà Ògúndá
2 Àpólà Ọyèkú	6 Àpólà Ọwónrín	10 Àpólà Ìkà
3 Àpólà Ìwòrì	7 Àpólà Ọbàrà	11 Àpólà Òtúúrúpòn
4 Àpólà Òdí	8 Àpólà Ọkànràn	12 Àpólà Ọsẹ

Each *Àpólà* consists of a number of *Odù*. The first section contains thirty *Odù* while the second section contains twenty-eight. The number of *Odù* in each section decreases in an irregular pattern, giving a total of two hundred and forty. The names of the thirty *Omọ Odù* in the first section, *Àpólà Ogbè*, are given in full below in their order of seniority.

1 Ogbèyèkú	11 Ogbèbàrà	21 Ogbètómopòn
2 Ọyèkúlogbè	12 Ọbàràbogbè	22 Òtúúrúpogbè
3 Ogbèwèyìn	13 Ogbèkànràn	23 Ogbèalára
4 Ìwòrìbogbè	14 Ọkànrànsodé	24 Òtúáoríkò
5 Ogbèdí	15 Ogbèègùn	25 Ogbèatẹ
6 Ìdingbè	16 Ògúndábèdè	26 Ìrẹ̀ntẹ̀gbè
7 Ogbèrosùn	17 Ogbèríkúsá	27 Ogbèsẹ
8 Ìrosùnọkánjúá	18 Ọsálùfógbèjọ	28 Ọsẹogbè
9 Ogbèhúnlé	19 Ogbèká	29 Ogbèfohunfólóhun
10 Ọwónrínsogbè	20 Ìkágbèmí	30 Òfúnnagbè

Each one of the two hundred and fifty six *Odù* has its own specific divination signature. Both the sacred palm-nuts and the divining chain are used alternatively by Ifá priests to arrive at the signature of each *Odù*. The sacred palm-nuts are used in the following manner. The Ifá priest puts the sixteen palm-nuts in one of his palms and tries to take all of them out at once with his other hand. If two palm-nuts remain in his hand, he makes one mark on the divination board containing the sacred yellow powder of divination. If one palm-nut remains, he makes two marks, but if nothing remains or if more than two palm-nuts remain in his hand, he makes no mark at all. Each mark or pair of marks is made, one below the other, four times. When four marks or pair of marks have been made, the whole pattern thus formed is the signature of a particular

Odù. The following are the signatures that may be obtained by using the sacred palm-nuts.

1	<i>Ogbè</i>	2	<i>Ọyèkú</i>	3	<i>Ìwòrì</i>	4	<i>Òdì</i>
	1		11		11		1
	1		11		1		11
	1		11		1		11
	1		11		11		1
5	<i>Ìrosùn</i>	6	<i>Ọwónrín</i>	7	<i>Ọbàrà</i>	8	<i>Ọkànràn</i>
	1		11		1		11
	1		11		11		11
	11		1		11		11
	11		1		11		1
9	<i>Ògúndá</i>	10	<i>Ọsẹ</i>	11	<i>Ìká</i>	12	<i>Òtúúrúpòn</i>
	1		11		11		11
	1		11		1		1
	1		1		11		1
	11		11		11		1
13	<i>Òtúá</i>	14	<i>Ìrètẹ</i>	15	<i>Ọsẹ</i>	16	<i>Ọfún</i>
	1		1		1		11
	11		1		11		1
	1		11		1		11
	1		1		11		1

When the divining chain is used, the Ifá priest holds the chain in the middle and throws it before himself. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the divining chain has four half-nuts of the *ọpẹlẹ* tree tied to each side of it. Each one of these half-nuts has a concave and convex surface. When the divining chain is thrown forward as described above, all or some or none of the half-nuts may come to rest with their concave or convex surfaces facing upwards. The pattern so formed on each occasion by the half-nuts on the chain is regarded as an *Odù*. For example, when all the *ọpẹlẹ* half-nuts present their concave surfaces, the pattern is regarded as the signature of the first *Odù* (Èjì Ògbè). When all the half-nuts present their convex surfaces, the pattern is interpreted as the signature of the second

Odù (*Oyèkú Méjì*). When the middle two half-nuts on each side of the divining chain present their concave surfaces and all the other half-nuts present their convex surfaces, the pattern is taken to be the signature of the third *Odù* (*Ìwòrì Méjì*).

Each of the two hundred and fifty-six *Odù* has its own character. Broadly speaking, one *Odù* may denote evil while another one denotes good. The same *Odù* may also stand for both good and evil. One *Odù* may stand for prosperity while another one stands for disease and death. When an Ifá priest performs Ifá divination and arrives at the signature of an *Odù*, he recalls to mind the character of that particular *Odù* and pronounces whether it is good or evil. If a good *Odù* appears in the process of divination for a client, it means that the client can expect a good omen on the subject of his enquiry to Ifá, and if an evil *Odù* appears, it means that the client should expect evil. If an *Odù* which signifies disease and death appears to the client, it means that he should expect these two evils.

The characters of the sixteen principal *Odù* are paraphrased below:

- 1 *Èjì Ogbè*: This *Odù* denotes plenty of good and plenty of evil.
- 2 *Oyèkú Méjì*: This *Odù* denotes that death and all other evil will disappear. Red cloth²⁵ should be used for sacrifice.
- 3 *Ìwòrì Méjì*: Enemies are around. This client's heritage is about to be taken away from him.
- 4 *Òdí Méjì*: Evil is close to this client. He will have many wives including a princess.
- 5 *Ìrosùn Méjì*: This *Odù* belongs to *Şàngó*.²⁶
This client should heed his wife's advice.
- 6 *Òwónrin Méjì*: This person will be victorious over his enemies. People will try to injure this client by saying untrue things about him.
This client's friends in heaven²⁷ want to take him away from earth.
- 7 *Òbàrà Méjì*: This *Odù* denotes poverty and want but at last prosperity and happiness.
- 8 *Òkànràn Méjì*: This *Odù* denotes good fortune.
This person should beware of enemies.
- 9 *Ògúndá Méjì*: This *Odù* denotes victory.
This *Odù* relates to *Ògún*.²⁸

All of this client's good fortune is with his Orí.²⁹ There is a certain barren woman close to this client.

- 10 *Ọsá Méjì*: This *Odù* relates to Ọòṣàálá³⁰ and the witches. It denotes prospect of many children and plenty of riches.
- 11 *Ìká Méjì*: This client will live long. People will always think of harming this client but they will not be able to do so.
- 12 *Ọtúúrúpòn Méjì*: This *Odù* denotes prospect of twin babies. It relates to Egúngún.³¹ It also denotes that attack of witches is imminent.
- 13 *Ọtùá Méjì*: This *Odù* relates to Ifá and deserters from his cause. It denotes victory over enemies and prospect of many children.
- 14 *Ìrètẹ Méjì*: This *Odù* relates to Ẓànpònná.³² It denotes death, enemies and evil.
- 15 *Ọsẹ Méjì*: This *Odù* denotes plenty of children, victory over enemies and plenty of good fortune.
- 16 *Ọfún Méjì*: This client will be great. The people of his household should not mock strangers. Enemies will not be able to do this person any harm.

What has emerged so far is that the two hundred and fifty six *Odù* are very important in the Ifá divination system. The whole of the literary corpus known as *ẹsẹ Ifá* is based on the *Odù*. What a priest of Ifá tells his client is therefore taken directly from the *Odù* corpus. This is contrary to an opinion popularly held that Ifá priests are clever psychologists who read the problems of each client from his general appearance.

We must now turn our attention to the second category of the Ifá literary corpus, the *ẹsẹ Ifá*. As mentioned above, each *Odù* contains an unspecified number of *ẹsẹ*. While the *Odù* are important for the divination aspect of Ifá, the *ẹsẹ* form the main bulk of chants in the Ifá literary corpus. At the same time, the *ẹsẹ* are quite important for the divination aspect of Ifá because the pronouncements and predictions of the Ifá priest are based on the content of *ẹsẹ Ifá*. '*Ẹsẹ Ifá* is the central and most important part of Ifá divination system'.³³

The form of *ẹsẹ Ifá* is predominantly poetic. The poems of *ẹsẹ Ifá* are of varying lengths, some being as short as only

four lines while others are as long as six hundred lines. It is the long poems of *Ifá* greatly treasured by *Ifá* priests that are referred to as *Ifá Nláńlá*. *Èsẹ Ifá*, whether long or short, make use of very interesting poetic devices e.g. personification, play upon words and repetition.³⁴

Èsẹ Ifá pervades the whole range of Yoruba thought and action throughout history.³⁵

Èsẹ Ifá deals with all subjects. It deals with history, geography, religion, music and philosophy. *Èsẹ Ifá* may be a simple story about a man going on a journey and asking for advice on how to make the journey successful. It may be a highly philosophical story showing the merits and demerits of monogamy. It may deal with the foundation of a particular town. There is certainly no limit to the subject matter which *esẹ Ifá* may deal with.³⁶

THE PROCESS OF IFÁ DIVINATION

The two categories of the *Ifá* literary corpus, the *Odù* and the *esẹ* have been discussed above but the process by which the priest of *Ifá* uses both the *Odù* and the *esẹ* to solve the problem of his client is yet to be described. The long and complicated process of *Ifá* divination begins when the client confides his secret problem to *Ifá*. This is done in several ways. The most popular way is for the client to whisper his secret problem to a coin and then throw the coin inside the paraphernalia of *Ifá* divination laid out before him by the priest of *Ifá*. Another method is for the client to take up the paraphernalia of *Ifá* divination in his hands and unfold his mind to it in a whisper. The *Ifá* priest is not allowed to hear any part of the client's whisper at this stage.

The next stage of the divination process begins when the priest of *Ifá* takes up the divination instruments and starts chanting certain poems to them. These chants usually include a salute of the Almighty God, a salute to *Ọ̀rúnmilà* and sometimes salutes to certain other authorities. A typical introductory chant is quoted below:

Ifá o gbọ.
 Ọmọ Ẹnìrẹ;
 Ọmọ Ẹnìrẹ.
 Ọmọ ejò méjì

Tí í sáré ganranganran lóri eréwé.
 Akéré f'inú ʃogbón;
 Akónilóràn bí iyekan ẹnì.
 Ìbà Akódá,
 Ìbà Aṣẹdà.
 Ọlójó òní ibàà rẹ o.³⁷

Listen, O! Ifá.
 You, the son of Ẹnìrẹ,
 The son of Ẹnìrẹ.
 You the son of two snakes
 That dart about over the leaves.
 You, the small person
 With a mind full of wisdom.
 You are the giver of wise and brotherly counsel.
 By your leave, *Akódá*.³⁸
 By your permission, *Aṣẹdà*.³⁹
 The owner of this day,⁴⁰
 I seek your authority.

The proper performance of the divination follows the introductory chants. If, for example, the Ifá priest chooses to use the divining chain, he takes it firmly in the middle and casts it on the ground before himself and reads the signature of the *Oḍù* that appears. He then chants the *ẹṣẹ* which he considers to be most representative of the character of this *Oḍù*. He could also give his client further details by chanting more *ẹṣẹ*. The amount of detailed explanation that the Ifá priest gives his client at this stage depends on the number of different kinds of *ẹṣẹ* that he knows from the particular *Oḍù* which has appeared. At this stage, however, the Ifá priest usually prefers to make a broad and general statement. He relies on the use of the *ibò* to spell out further details.

The *ibò* are used by the *Ifá* priest to translate his broad pronouncement into concrete details. As mentioned in the preceeding chapter, the *ibò* are mere lots based on the two opposite alternatives of 'yes' and 'no'. It is the belief of the Ifá priest and his client that the client's *Orí* will make the right choice of alternatives for him when lots are cast. The commonest and simplest form of *ibo* is a pair of cowry shells tied together and a piece of animal bone. Generally speaking,

the cowry shell stands for 'yes' while the piece of bone stands for 'no'.

After chanting the most representative *ẹsẹ* in the *Odù* that appears, the Ifá priest gives the set of *ibò* to his client and asks him to put to it a question requiring the answer 'yes' or 'no'. If, for example, after the first performance of divination, the Ifá priest has made the general statement that Ifá says that someone is in danger of death, the client may use the set of *ibò* to find out exactly who is in danger of death. Is it one of his children, one of his friends or one of his relations? Is it he himself? The client may then whisper a statement like this to the set of *ibo*: 'Ifá, you say someone is in danger of death, is the person my mother?' As usual the Ifá priest is not allowed to hear this whisper. The client then drops the set of *ibò* on the paraphernalia of divination while the Ifá priest picks it up immediately and gives it back to the client after using it to touch the paraphernalia and saying: 'The cowries mean 'yes' and the bone means 'no' '. The client then picks up the *ibò* and keeps the cowries in one of his hands and the bone in the other.

The priest of Ifá then takes up the divining chain again and casts it on the ground twice. If the *Odù* obtained during the first casting of the divining chain is senior to the *Odù* obtained during the second casting, the Ifá priest asks his client to produce the piece of *ibò* in his right hand. But, if the *Odù* obtained during the first casting of the divining chain is junior to the one obtained during the second casting, he asks his client to produce the piece of *ibò* in his left hand. If the piece of *ibò* kept in the right hand turns out to be the piece of bone, it means that the answer to the client's question is 'no'. but if it turns out to be the pair of cowries, it means the answer is 'yes'. If the answer to the client's question is 'no', it means, of course, that the person who is in danger of death is not the mother of the client. In this case, the client uses the set of *ibò* to put another question, substituting someone else's name for that of his mother.

The *ibò* are thus used as a means to amplify the first prediction of Ifá which, as mentioned above, is usually very broad and general. If, for example, after the first casting of the divining chain, the Ifá priest says that Ifá sees good fortune, the

Ifá priest and his client may want to know what kind of good fortune it is, when the good fortune will come, and to whom it is likely to come. Whatever the nature of the amplification desired, the process described above is usually followed until all answers are obtained. Therefore, the Ifá priest may have to cast the divining chain many times when using the *ibò* to find out a specific point.

When the client is satisfied that all his questions are answered, he tells the Ifá priest the actual problem he has brought before Ifá. The client's problem is then discussed and the Ifá priest helps further by analysing the different *esẹ* he has chanted. In this way, the client is made to understand the prediction of Ifá about his own problem. If the divination is a successful one, both the Ifá priest and his client feel quite satisfied at the end of the long process of divination. But it is not unusual for the client to feel that he is not quite satisfied at the end of the divination process. If he tells his Ifá priest that he is not satisfied, the divination process is repeated all over again, and, if at the end, he is still not satisfied, the Ifá priest may ask him to come back to repeat the process the next day. In this way, some divination processes may take several hours or days to complete.

IFÁ DIVINATION SACRIFICE

To every complete divination process there is always a prescribed sacrifice. Whether the prediction of Ifá is good or evil, the client must always offer sacrifice. It is the belief of the Yoruba that if the prediction of Ifá is good, a sacrifice will help further to make it come to pass, and that, if the prediction is evil, a sacrifice will help the client to dispel the evil. Therefore, after the completion of the long process of divination, the Ifá priest will tell his client the sacrifice that goes with the prediction. The client then goes home to buy the articles required for the sacrifice and he brings them to the Ifá priest.

It is part of the training of Ifá priest to learn by heart the sacrifice that goes with every *esẹ*. The sacrifice does not form part of the literary corpus although there are a number of instances where Ifá divination sacrifice known as *ẹbọ Ifá* is

included in the literary corpus. Although each cannot be put in water-tight compartment, it is quite accurate to say that Ifá divination sacrifice forms a separate corpus.

It is not unusual for the client to be unable to supply all the materials stipulated for the sacrifice. The Ifá priest must accept whatever fraction of the sacrifice his client brings to him. Neglect of due sacrifice is, sternly condemned by Ifá.⁴¹

Different kind. of materials are usually required for sacrifice by Ifá priests. These materials include cooked food and raw foodstuffs, cloths, live animals including goats, rams and rats, fishes, birds, plants, leaves and roots of plants, sand and stones etc. Below are two different lists of materials required for two distinct sacrifices. These sacrifices are mentioned in connection with two *ese Ifá* taken from *Òkànràn Méjì*.⁴²

- (a) *Ẹbọ ni ọ̀sùnwọ̀n àgbàdọ, àkúfọ̀ igbá àti ọ̀wá. A ó kẹ̀ ọ̀wá náà kéékèkèké, a ó kọ̀ ọ̀ròmọ̀dìẹ̀ méjì lé e lóri, a ó kọ̀ ẹ̀gbọ̀kànlá lé e lóri pẹ̀lú ẹ̀kọ̀ mẹ̀rín, ọ̀bì gidì mẹ̀sǎn àti epo pupa. Wọ̀n ó lọ̀ rẹ̀é gbé ẹ̀bọ̀ náà sí ojútò.*

(This client's sacrifice is one measuring container for maize, broken calabash and a palm branch. The palm branch will be cut into two parts and a chick will be placed on each one together with eleven times two hundred cowries, four lumps of maize gruel, nine real kola-nuts and some palm-oil. The sacrifice should be placed in an open place in this person's compound.)

- (b) *Ẹbọ ni gọgọwú kan àti àkàrà mẹfà. A ó jẹ ọkan lóde, a ó fi ọkan lérí odi. A ó jẹ ọkan ní ìdì Ẹ̀ṣù, a ó fi ọkan lérí Ẹ̀ṣù náà. A ó jẹ ọkan ní ìdì Ẹ̀ṣù kejì, a ó fi ọkan lérí Ẹ̀ṣù náà.*

(This client's sacrifice is one big white wrapper and six bean cakes. The client will eat one of the cakes outside the town wall and place one on the town wall. He will eat one of the cakes at the shrine of Ẹ̀ṣù and place one on that shrine. He will eat another cake at the second shrine of Ẹ̀ṣù and place another one on that shrine of Ẹ̀ṣù.)

A good part of any sacrifice made by Ifá priests usually goes to Ẹ̀ṣù whose mythical wife is known as Agbèrù (the receiver

of sacrifices). As mentioned in the previous chapter, Ifá priests usually have a shrine of Èṣù near their homes. The mysterious relationship between Ifá and Èṣù has also been discussed in the same chapter. As negotiator between the other gods and Òrúnmìlà, Èṣù carries the sacrifice offered through Òrúnmìlà to the particular gods for whom the sacrifices are meant.

Most of the sacrifices that Ifá priests ask their clients to offer are usually offered to particular gods. A man may be asked to offer sacrifice to Ṣàngó so that he may have victory over his enemies. Another person may be asked to offer sacrifice to Òḡṣànlá so that his wife may have children. In this way Ifá helps to immortalize the other gods.

The psychological function of sacrifice in the community is rated very high by Ifá priests. They maintain that sacrifice helps to unite all the forces both natural and supernatural that operate in Yoruba society. Broadly speaking, these forces are four in number namely, the gods, the ancestors, witches and other supernatural powers, and human beings. The function of sacrifice is to enlist the support of these four forces for whatever one may want to do so that none of them may work against one's purpose. The part played by human beings in making sacrifices successful is not underrated in Ifá texts. That is why during the offering of any sacrifice, people are invited to the shrine of the god to whom sacrifice is being made to watch the offering of the sacrifice and to eat part of the food used for the sacrifice.

The *ẹṣẹ Ifá* given in full below emphasizes the importance of the human factor in the success of a sacrifice. The story is that of a farmer who wanted to go and take possession of a piece of farmland. He was warned to make sacrifice to Orí (Head), Earth, Eégún (Ancestor god) and Òḡṣànlá (Creation god). He offered the sacrifice but he did not call his neighbours to take part in the sacrifice. He discovered later on that things were not all right for him on his farm. He then went back to his Ifá priests and told them his plight. His Ifá priests asked him whether he offered all the required sacrifice and he answered in the affirmative. But when they asked him whether he made sacrifice to *Olúbòbòtìribò*, *baba ẹbọ*, he said that he did not know what was so called. Then, his Ifá priests told him that people's mouths are meant by the term *Olúbòbòtìribò*, *baba ẹbọ*. The Ifá priests then said:

What is it that we worship at Ifẹ?
 Their mouths.
 It is their mouths that we worship at Ifẹ.
 Their mouths.

Agbóngbọn, awoo wọn l'óde Ilorèè;	1
Àgbàyàngìdì, awo òde Ìjẹsà;	
Ọkùnrin yàngìdì yangìdì	
Ní wọn-ón dì ní àtúpá.	
A díá fún Olóòyímẹfún,	5
Yóó bu'lẹ Olówu roko.	
Wọn ní ó bọ́gún ilé,	
Ó bọ́gun ilé,	
Ẹbọọ rẹ ò fín.	
Wọn ní ó bọ́sà ọjà,	10
Ó bọ́sà ọjà,	
Ẹbọọ rẹ ò dà.	
Òdàsà ọjà ò gbà.	
Wọn ní ó bọ́rí,	
Ó bọ́rí,	15
Orí pá.	
Wọn ní ó bọ́lẹ,	
Ó bọ́lẹ,	
Ilẹ lu.	
Wọn ní ó bọ Olúbọ̀bọ̀tiribọ̀, baba ẹbọ.	20
Ó ní òun mò pé baba ẹni leégún ilé.	
Òun mò pé iyà ẹni lòdàsà ọjà.	
Ó ní òun m'orí lórí o,	
Òun mò'lẹ nílẹ.	
Ó ní òun ò mò ohun tí í jẹ	25
Olúbọ̀bọ̀tiribọ̀, baba ẹbọ.	
Wọn ní ẹnu,	
Ẹnu ní í jẹ Olúbọ̀bọ̀tiribọ̀, baba ẹbọ.	
Ìjẹ kín là mbọ n'Ífẹ?	
Ẹnuu wọn.	30
Ẹnuu wọn là mbọ n'Ífẹ.	
Ẹnuu wọn.	
Mo fún 'gbá,	
Mo f'áwo.	
Ẹnuu wọn,	35
Ẹnuu wọn kò mò lẹ rí mi bá jà.	
Ẹnuu wọn.	
Mo wálẹ,	

Mo wánà.

Ẹnuu wọn,

Ẹnuu wọn kò mò lè rí mi bájà.

Ẹnuu wọn.⁴³

40

Agbóngbón, their Ifá priest at Ilorè⁴⁴

Àgbàyàngdì, Ifá priest of Ìjèsà;⁴⁵

The hefty man

Who was always tied hands and feet.

Ifá divination was performed for Olóòyímẹfún⁴⁶

When he would take the land of *Olówu*⁴⁷ to farm upon.

He was asked to make sacrifice to the Egúngún⁴⁸ of his household.

He made sacrifice to the Egúngún of his household,

But his sacrifice was not accepted.

He was asked to make sacrifice to the god of the market.⁴⁹

He made sacrifice to the god of the market,

But his sacrifice was not accepted.

The market god refused his sacrifice.

He was asked to make sacrifice to his Orí,

He made sacrifice to his Orí repeatedly

Until his head became bald.

He was asked to make sacrifice to Earth.

He made sacrifice to Earth repeatedly

Until he created a hole in the earth.

He was asked to make sacrifice

To *Olúbòbòtìribò*, the father of sacrifices.

He said that he knew that one's father

Is the Egúngún of one's household.

He said that he knew that one's mother

Is the goddess of the market.

He said that he knew Orí to be one's head,

And he knew Ilẹ̀ to be the earth.

But he said that he did not know

What was called *Olúbòbòtìribò*, the father of sacrifices.

They told him that people's mouths,

People's mouths were referred to as *Olúbòbòtìribò*,

The father of sacrifices.

What is it that we worship at Ifẹ̀?

People's mouths.

It is their mouths that we worship at Ifẹ̀.

Their mouths.

I have given to those overhere,

1

5

10

15

20

25

30

35

I have given to those overthere. 40
Their mouths.
Their mouths can no longer fight against me.
Their mouths cannot.
I have given to those in my household, 45
I have given to passers-by.
Their mouths cannot.
Their mouths can no longer fight against me.
Their mouths cannot.

PART TWO

The Form of Ẹṣẹ Ifá

CHAPTER III

The Structure of *Ẹṣẹ Ifá*

ANALYSIS OF THE EIGHT-PART STRUCTURE OF *ẸṢẸ IFÁ*

Ẹṣẹ Ifá has a structural pattern which distinguishes it from other forms of Yoruba oral literature. Since *ẹṣẹ Ifá* is historical in content¹, its structure is also based on its historical nature.

Nearly all *ẹṣẹ Ifá* have a maximum of eight main parts. The first part states the name(s) of the Ifá priest(s) involved in a past divination. The second part states the name(s) of the client(s) for whom the divination was performed. The third part states the reason for the divination while the fourth part contains the instructions of the Ifá priest(s) to the client(s) after the divination. The fifth part then tells whether or not the client complied with the instructions. The sixth part narrates what happened to the client(s) after he carried out or refused to carry out the instructions. The seventh part contains the reactions of the client(s) to the joy or sorrow that resulted from the process of divination while the eighth part draws a fitting moral from the story as a whole. At the end of the seventh part, in some *ẹṣẹ Ifá*, there is a repetition of either Parts I-VII or Parts I-IV before the Ifá priest returns to the eighth part.

It must be stressed also that not all *ẹṣẹ Ifá* make use of the eight-part structure analysed above. There are some *ẹṣẹ Ifá* known as *Ifá Kéékèkèké* (small poems of Ifá) which make use of Parts I-III and also Part VIII but in which Parts IV-VII are absent. Such *ẹṣẹ* are usually shortened versions of the normal eight-part type.

As mentioned above, the first of the eight parts of *ẹṣẹ Ifá* contains the name(s) of the Ifá priest(s) involved in the past divination that the *ẹṣẹ* alludes to. The names usually mentioned in this part are of three categories. The largest category consists of names of human beings. Such names may be actual names (*orúkọ*) or nicknames (*inagijẹ*) but, since it is the latter that Ifá priests have a predilection for, nicknames are more prominent

in this part of *ẹsẹ Ifá* than any other type of name. Examples of actual names are: *Aridegbájú*², *Aládélówò*³, *Láyíká*⁴ and *Ọlá-timogún*⁵. The following are examples of cognomens: *Gbogbo-orí-àfín-ewu*⁶ (The albinos'-head-is-covered-with-grey-hair), *A-tan-iná-roro-dífá*⁷ (He-who-performs-Ifá-divination-under-a-brightly-burning-lamp), *Ìşé-ò-şohun-àmúşeré-iyà-ò-şohun-àmú-şàwàdà*⁸ (Poverty-is-not-a-thing-to-play-with-suffering-is-not-a-thing-to-trifle-with).

Some of these nicknames are, unlike most Yoruba personal names, obscure in meaning. This is due to the fact that most Yoruba nicknames are borne out of local slang which may not be understandable to people living outside the locality concerned. Furthermore, since only people of the same age-group call each other by nicknames, it usually requires some explanation before people outside the age group concerned are able to understand why certain nicknames are given to certain people. If such difficulty is encountered by people of one age-group in trying to understand the meaning of nicknames used within another age-group in the same generation, how much greater would be the difficulty for posterity in trying to understand the various nicknames used in the past.

Apart from names of human beings, names of animals and plants are also mentioned in this part. The following are some of the names of animals mentioned in this part of *ẹsẹ Ifá*: *ẹínlá*⁹ (short-horned cow), *erin*¹⁰ (elephant), and *ẹfòn*¹¹ (bush-cow). The following are examples of names of plants mentioned: *èèsún*¹², (elephant grass) and *èrùwà*¹³ (giant grass).

Non-humans mentioned in Part I and in Part II are usually personified in order to build up around them a story told in the characteristic Ifá style. Sometimes when the names of personified non-humans are mentioned in Part I as names of Ifá priests, such names are usually closely related to the names mentioned in Part III as the names of the client for whom divination was performed. For example, *èèsún* (elephant grass) is mentioned as the Ifá priest of *ìgbó* (forest) because *èèsún* thrives best in the forest belt. *Èrùwà* (giant grass) is mentioned as the Ifá priest of *òdàn* (savannah) because it thrives best in the savannah tracts.

The second part of *ẹsẹ Ifá* usually contains the name(s) of the client(s) for whom Ifá divination was performed. This

part is preceded by either the phrase: '*A díá¹⁴ fún. . .*' (*Ifá* divination was performed for. . .), or '*Ló díá fún. . .*' (Was the person who performed *Ifá* divination for . . .). These two phrases are of great significance in the structure of *èsè Ifá*. Nearly all *èsè Ifá* make use of them and so one can be very certain that a given passage of Yoruba oral literature is an excerpt from *èsè Ifá* immediately one sees either of these two phrases.

After the phrase '*A díá fún*', the name(s) of the client(s) for whom divination was performed would be mentioned. Sometimes the name is followed by a short introduction of the person who bore the name. This introduction may take the form of giving his residential address or his *oríkì* (praise-name) or describing him as tall or short, dark or light in complexion.

Names of human beings are found in this section as well but unlike those in part one (i), most of the names found in this part are not nicknames. The example below features the name of a man along with a little hint about the occupation of his family.

A díá fún Šóoróyè,
Qmọ ašaworoko.¹⁵

Ifá divination was performed for Šóoróyè,
Offspring of a family of Ifá priests and hunters.

In the following example, the phrase '*Ló díá fún*' precedes a short *oríkì* (a verbal salute to the client and his family).

Ló díá fún Qwá, Ògá,
Ogílì gbèdu,
Qmọ oko susuusu léyìn àmù.¹⁶

Was the one who performed Ifá divination for Qwá, the
master,
The great gbèdu drum;¹⁷
Offspring of a family in whose dwelling plenty of weeds grow
Behind the water pot.

The example below gives the name of the client, a short description of him, and his residential address.

A díá fún Ońdẹ̀sẹ̀ pupa,
T'òkè Àpà.¹⁸

Ifá divination was performed for Ońdẹ̀sẹ̀,
The light-complexioned one
Who dwelt on Àpà Hill.

Sometimes the client is not just one or two persons but a whole community. This happens when the people of a community have a common problem like lack of rain, invasion by locusts or outbreak of plague. The necessary divination is performed by the king or some other leader on behalf of all the people concerned but *ẹsẹ Ifá* records the name of the community as well. For example:

A díá fún kékéé Ìpàpó,
A bù f'ágba ibẹ.¹⁹

Ifá divination was performed for the young people of Ìpàpó;²⁰
Ifá divination was also performed for their elders.

Names of non-humans (gods, animals, birds, reptiles, insects) are also mentioned in this part of *ẹsẹ Ifá*. Sufficient illustration) is given in the quotations below.

Names of gods

- i. A díá f'Áwóyẹmí,²¹
Ọmọ̀bínrín Òró.²²

Ifá divination was performed for Awóyẹmí,
A girl from Òró.²³

- ii. A díá fún Àrìrà gágààgà,
Èyí tí í ẹ̀mọ Ọ̀rńńyàn lÓkò.²⁴

Ifá divination was performed for Àrìrà,²⁵ the very tall one
Who was the son of Ọ̀rńńyàn in the city of Òkò.²⁶

Names of Animals

- i. A díá f'Éèkán,
Aláwọ̀ọ̀ mìnjọ.²⁷

Ifá divination was performed for glossy-skinned Lion.

- ii. A díá f'Ẹ̀kùn²⁸

Ifá divination was performed for Leopard.

Reptiles and Insects

A díá f'Òkà,
 Ọmọ ilú Ìlóró.
 A bù fún Erè,
 Ọmọ Ìlábàtà.
 A díá fún Àkekèé,
 Ọmọ Ìlèèpo.²⁹

Ifá divination was performed for Gaboon Viper,
 Citizen of the city of poison.

Ifá divination was also performed for Python,
 Offspring of Marshland.

Ifá divination was performed for Scorpion,
 Of the realm of numerous trees.

Plants

- i. A díá f'Eèsún.³⁰
 Ifá divination was performed for Èèsún.³¹
- ii. A díá fún Irínmọdò.³²
 Ifá divination was performed for Irínmọdò.

Birds

- i. A díá fún Atọka,
 Èyí tí í ẹ̀'làrí Olódùmarè.³³
 Ifá divination was performed for Atọka³⁴
 Who was the slave-messenger of the Almighty God.
- ii. A díá fún Ìgbò
 Tí í ẹ̀'olúwo Isálọrun.³⁵
 Ifá divination was performed for Ìgbò³⁶
 Who was the Ifá high priest in heaven.
- iii. Ló díá fún 'Gúnugún,
 Ọmọ Olójògbòdòlóró.³⁷
 Was the person who performed Ifá divination for Vulture,
 The son of Olójògbòdòlóró.

In the third part of *esè Ifá*, we have the reason why divination was performed. There are multifarious reasons mentioned as compelling different clients to consult Ifá. The most prominent of these relate to illness, fear of death, fear of enemies, lack of a wife, lack of children and lack of money.

These various reasons are given either in the form of a simple statement or in the form of a question or in the form of a narrative. The following are examples of these various forms:

(a) *Statement*

- i. Ó jí ní kùtù,
Ó níjẹ nírógbun òtá.³⁸

He woke up early in the morning
And found himself surrounded by enemies.

- ii. Èkún ọmọ ní í sun.³⁹

He was always lamenting his lack of children

- iii. Ojú ní nípón Oníjùmu Nàkí,
Ọkàn rẹ ò sì balẹ,
Bẹẹ ní ó níṣe àbíkú ọmọ.⁴⁰

Oníjùmu Nàkí⁴¹ was in dire want.
His mind was not at rest,
And he was begetting àbíkú⁴² children.

- iv. Wọ̀n ní àrùn tí níṣe'fá lẹ́ṣìn tún dé.⁴³

They said that the disease which worried Ifá the previous
year
Had come again.

(b) *Question*

- i. Ọ̀un lẹ̀ níyí báylí?
Ní Èèkán dáfá sí.⁴⁴

Could he possibly have honour and respect?
That was the reason why Leopard performed Ifá divination.

- ii. Ọ̀un lẹ̀ níre ọ̀lẹ̀ báylí?
Ní Èjìl Ọ̀sá dífá sí.⁴⁵

Could he possibly have riches?
That was the reason why Èjìl Ọ̀sá performed Ifá divination.

(c) *Narrative*

- i. Nígba tí nílooko àlerò ọ̀dún.⁴⁶

When he was going on his yearly visit to his farm.

- ii. Níjọ́ tí níf'omi ojúú ọ̀dgbéré ọ̀mọ.⁴⁷

On the day he was shedding tears because of lack of children.

- iii. Èyí tí ó gb'ègbèédógún ọdún láyè.

Who would live for three thousand years on earth.

- iv. Tí ó t'oko là wálé.⁴⁸

Who would take riches home from the farm.

- v. Yóó f'irinwó sòwò,
Yóó jèrè ẹgbẹrin ọkẹ.⁴⁹

Who would trade with four hundred cowries
And make a gain of sixteen million cowries.

- vi. Tí ńregbó 'je,
Èlùjù 'je.⁵⁰

Who was going to seven forests and seven wildernesses.

The fourth part of *ese Ifá* contains the pronouncement made by the Ifá priests after divination had been performed. An important part of this pronouncement is a specific instruction from the Ifá priests about the sacrifice that client(s) should perform. The client may be asked to make a sacrifice on account of illness, death, good health or money. This part usually takes any of the following patterns:

- (a) The client is asked to take care of Ifá and to perform sacrifice.

Wọn ní ó káakí Mọlẹ,
Ó jàrẹ,
Ẹbọ ní ó ẹ.⁵¹

He was asked to take care of Mọlẹ (Ifá),
He was told that he would do well to perform a sacrifice.

- (b) The client is asked to perform a sacrifice in order to avert death.

Wọn ní ó f'odidi ẹran pààrọ ara ẹ
Nítórí ikú.⁵²

He was told to use an animal
In place of himself
In order to avert death.

- (c) The client is asked to perform sacrifice so that he may have children.

Wón ní ó rúbọ nítorí ọmọ.⁵³

He was asked to perform sacrifice in order to have children.

- (d) The client is simply asked to perform sacrifice but the reason is not given.

Wón ní ẹbọ ní ó wáà rú.⁵⁴

They told him that he should perform sacrifice.

The fifth part of *ẹsẹ Ifá* is that which tells whether or not the client carried out the instructions given to him by his Ifá priest(s) in part four. This is expressed in any of the following forms:

- (a) The client complied with the instructions of his Ifá priests and performed sacrifice.

Ó sì rú u.⁵⁵

And he performed the sacrifice.

- (b) The client refused to perform the sacrifice.

Ó p'awo lékě,

Ó p'Èṣù lólè,

Ó w'ọrun yàn yàn yàn

Bí ẹnì tí ọ ní í kú mọ láyẹ.

Ó wáá kọtí ọgbọin s'ẹbọ.⁵⁶

He took his Ifá priests to be liars.

He took Èṣù for a thief.

He looked scornfully towards heaven

As if he would never die.

He turned deaf ears

To his Ifá priests' instruction about sacrifice.

The sixth part tells what happened to the client after he had either complied or refused to comply with the instructions of

his Ifá priests to perform sacrifice. This part usually takes one of the following forms:

(a) *What happened after the client complied*

- i. They made the medicine of Ifá for him.

Ó rúbọ tán,
Wọn ẹ'fá fún un.⁵⁷

He performed the prescribed sacrifice
And they made the medicine of Ifá for him.

- ii. After he performed the prescribed sacrifice,

Ìgbà t'ó rúbọ tán,
L'ó bá bèrẹ sí í lájé.⁵⁸

After performing the prescribed sacrifice,
He was having money.

(b) *What happened after the client refused to comply with the instructions of his Ifá priests*

Èṣù is usually mentioned here as an agent of discipline who punishes the client for refusing to perform the stipulated sacrifice. Èṣù may either kill the client or rain curses on him or deprive him of his property.

- i The client refused to perform the stipulated sacrifice and Èṣù intervened to rob him of his riches after his death.

Èṣù ní ó di àgbòò mi àfàkàn,
Òkuuru ọpọn ọnà sún.
Wọn ní ta ló sún kàn?
Wọn ní ó sún k'olówó àt'ọlọrọ àt'ọlọmọ.
Wọn ní ta ló ha rúbọ?
Wọn ní ọlọmọ nikan ló rú.
Níjọ olówó kú,
Èṣù ní kí wọn ó máa lọ pín dúkíáa rẹ.⁵⁹

Èṣù said: 'It is time, let us go to the next person.
The ornamented bowl of sacrifice was already on the move.'
The question followed: 'To whom has it moved?'

The answer was: 'It has moved towards the rich man,⁶⁰
the wealthy man and the parent.'

Next came the question, 'Who among them performed sacrifice?'

The reply was: 'Only the parent performed sacrifice.'

On the day the rich man died,

Èṣù ordered all and sundry to go and share his belongings.

- ii. Èṣù used his charm to curse a disobedient client so that the load he was carrying got stuck to his head.

Èṣù ló di àgbó,

Mo ló di àfàkàn,

Òkuuru ọpọ̀n ọ̀nà sún.

Ó ní ta ló rú,

Ta ni ò rú?

Wọ̀n ní Àgbìgbò nìkan ni ò rúbọ.

Bí Àgbìgbò tí gbé ẹgbààwá nàà karí tán,

Ní Èṣù bá na àdó àsúbi sí i.

Ní ẹ̀rù owó nàà bá tìrán mọ ọ̀n lórí,

Ó sì di ọ̀ta síbẹ.⁶¹

Èṣù said: 'It is time, let us go to the next person.'

The declaration was: 'The ornamented bowl of sacrifice was already on the move.'

The question followed: 'Who performed sacrifice And who did not?'

The answer was: 'Only Àgbìgbò⁶² did not perform sacrifice.'

As soon as Àgbìgbò put the load of twenty thousand cowries on his head,

Èṣù pointed his evil charm at him,

And the load of money got stuck on his head

And became a piece of lead there.

(c) *Combination of Parts IV, V and VI*

Sometimes these three parts are combined in one statement saying that the client was asked to perform a sacrifice, he complied, and as a result, his sacrifice was accepted by the gods.

Ó gbọ́ rírú ẹ̀bọ,

Ó rú.

Ó gbọ́ ẹ̀rù àtùkẹ̀ṣù,

Ó tù,

Ó gbọ́ ìkarara ẹ̀bọ́ ha fún un.⁶³

He was asked to perform a sacrifice,
 He performed it.
 He was asked to make a sacrifice to Èṣù,
 He did so.
 His sacrifice was immediately accepted.

The seventh part contains the reactions of the client to the result of the divination. Here the client expresses his joy at having carried out the instructions of his Ifá priests or his regret at his failure to carry out the instructions. The joy is usually expressed in the form given below in which the client is said to have danced for joy at his party for the occasion.

Ijó ní ñjó,
 Ayò ní ñyò;
 Ó ñyin àwọn awoo rẹ,
 Àwọn awoo rẹ ñyin 'Fá.
 Ó ya ẹnu kótó,
 Orin awo ló bọ sí i lẹnu.
 Èṣẹ tí ó nà,
 Ijó fà á.
 Agogo ní Ìpóró,
 Àràn ní Ìkijà,
 Ọpá kugúkugù lójúde Ìṣẹrimogbe.⁶⁴

He started to dance,
 He started to rejoice.
 He started to praise his Ifá priests
 While his Ifá priests praised Ifá.
 As he opened his mouth,
 The song of Ifá priests was what he uttered forth.
 As he stretched his legs,
 Dance caught them.
 Gongs were beaten in Ìpóró.⁶⁵
 Àràn drum was beaten at Ìkijà,
 Drumsticks were used in making melody at Ìṣẹrimogbe.

Sometimes the expression of jubilation is given in a shortened form which usually takes the following patterns:

- i. Ó wáà ñyin àwọn awoo rẹ,
 Àwọn awoo rẹ ñyin 'Fá.⁶⁶

He then started to praise his Ifá priests
while his Ifá priests praised Ifá.

- ii. Ó wàà nín àwọn awoò rẹ,
Àwọn awoò rẹ nín 'Fá.
Ó ya ẹnu kótó,
Orin awo ní ńkọ.⁶⁷

He started to praise his Ifá priests
While his Ifá priests praised Ifá.
He opened his mouth,
And started to sing the song of Ifá.

- iii. Ijó ní ńjó,
Ayò ní ńyò.⁶⁸

He started to dance,
He started to rejoice.

- iv. Ijó ní ńjó,
Ayò ní ńyò;
Ó nín àwọn awoò rẹ,
Àwọn awoò rẹ nín 'Fá.⁶⁹

He started to dance,
He started to rejoice.
He started to praise his Ifá priests
While his Ifá priests praised Ifá.

If the client refused to make sacrifice and as a result he failed to get what he desired, the usual reaction is one of regret. This is expressed in this form:

Àyìn-ódì ní nín àwọn awoò rẹ.⁷⁰
It was with regret that he praised his Ifá priests.

At the end of the seventh part, the Ifá priest may choose to repeat Parts I-VII or Parts I-IV and if he likes, he may move on to the eighth part without repeating the preceding parts. If he chooses to repeat all or part of Parts I-VII, he has to prefix the repetition with one of the following statements:

- i. Ó ní...⁷¹
He said...

- ii. Ó ní bèè gégé
Ní àwọn awo òún wí.⁷²

He said that was exactly
What his *Ifá* priests predicted.

- iii. Ó ní bèè gégé
Ní àwọn awo òún ñṣenu rereé pefá.⁷³

He said that was exactly
How his *Ifá* priests employed their good voices in praise of *Ifá*.

After this prefix, the *Ifá* priest then proceeds to the repetition. Up to this stage, the *Ifá* priest recites the ẹsẹ but after the prefix, he usually begins to chant. After he has chanted Parts I-IV or Parts I-VII, he moves on to the eighth part.

The eighth part contains the moral of the story. This takes several forms. One form emphasizes the importance of sacrifice.

Rírú ẹbọ ní í gbe ni,
Àrú kí í gb'èèyàn.
Ẹ wáá bá ni ní wòwọ ọmọ.⁷⁴

It is the making of a sacrifice that brings blessing,
Neglect of sacrifice pays no man.
Come and join us where there are plenty of children.

A slightly different version from the one above calls the attention of everyone to the abundance of good fortune which the obedient client usually has after performing all the prescribed sacrifices.

Èrò Ìpo,
Èrò Ọfà,
Ẹ wáá bá ni ní jẹbútú ire.⁷⁵

Travellers to Ìpo,
Travellers to Ọfà,
Come and join us where there's plenty of good fortune.

Another version stresses that it does not take long for the obedient client to get all his heart's desires.

Kèè pé o,
 Kèè jinnà,
 È tètè wáá bá wa ní jẹbútú ajé suuru.⁷⁶

Very soon,
 At no distant date,
 Come and join us where there's plenty of money.

The version below emphasizes that Ifá, the great authority, acts quickly when the obedient client consults him and performs all the sacrifices required of him.

Kèè pé o,
 Kèè jinnà,
 È wáá wo'fá awó kì,
 B'ó tí ñşę.
 Ifá dé, aláşę,
 Òpẹ, abíşę wàrà.⁷⁷

Very soon,
 At no distant date,
 Come and see the Ifá priest's prediction
 Coming to pass.
 Ifá has come, the great authority,
 Palm-tree, whose predictions come true speedily.

Another way in which the moral is drawn is that a prayer is put into the client's mouth. In this prayer for example, the client assumes that he has got what he wanted from Ifá.

Mo yanrí ọlá dandan,
 Mo yanrí ọlà dandan.
 Èjì Ọsá, b'ó o bá là,
 O là mí;
 Mo yanrí ọlà dandan.⁷⁸

I am certainly destined to be rich,
 I am certainly destined to be rich.
 Èjì Ọsá, if you become rich,
 Make me rich as well.
 I am certainly destined to be rich,

The moral is also drawn by repetition of the central theme of the story and stressing that the obedient client got what he wished for in the story. For example:

Ẹ w'omọ Abítulà wẹrẹrẹ ò,
 Ẹ w'omọ Abítulà wẹrẹrẹ.
 Èèyàn è é r'ágàn Èèsún,
 Ẹ w'omọ Abítulà wẹrẹrẹ.⁷⁹

O! See how numerous the children of Abítulà are.
 See how numerous the children of Abítulà are.
 No one sees a barren èèsún plant.
 See how numerous the children of Abítulà are.

REPRESENTATIVE EXAMPLES

The following ẹsẹ Ifá are presented to illustrate the structure of ẹsẹ Ifá as explained above. The first example below shows the eight parts of the ẹsẹ Ifá

- Part I:* Òrẹ ò gb'ẹlẹta,
 Elèjì lọrẹ gbà;
Part II: A díá fún Šóoróyè,
 Omọ ašaworoko.
Part III: Wọn ní ó rúbọ nítorí ajé.
Part IV: Wọn ní ó r'ẹku méjì olùwéré,
 K'ó r'ẹja méjì abiwẹgbàdà,
 Obídìẹ méjì ab'ẹdò lùkẹlùkẹ,
 Ewúré méjì ab'ámú rẹderẹde.
Part V: Gbogbo rẹ náà ló rú.
 Ìgbà t'ó rúbọ tán,
Part VI: T'áyé yẹ é tán,
Part VII: Q wáá bèrẹ sí í yin àwọn awoo rẹ,
 Àwọn awoo rẹ òyìn 'Fá.
 Ó ya ẹnu kótó,
 Orin awo ló bọ sí i lẹnu.
 Ẹsẹ t'ó nà,
 Ijọ fà á.
Part VIII: Ó ní:
 Ó wáá tó gégé
 K'Ífá ó sọ'lé d'ọjà f'áwo.
 Èmí šawo,

Mo şàgbè,
 Tèmi ó san.
 O wáá tó gégé
 K'áyé ó yẹ mí wàyí o.
 Èmí şawo,
 Mo şàgbè,
 Tèmi ó san.⁸⁰

- Part I:* Friendship does not bind three,
 Friendship binds only two;
- Part II:* Ifá divination was performed for Şóoróyè.⁸¹
 The son of those who practised Ifá divination and
 farming.
- Part III:* He was asked to perform a sacrifice
 So that he might have money.
- Part IV:* He was asked to offer as a sacrifice
 Two fast-moving rats,
 Two fish that swim with grace,
 Two hens with big livers,
 Two goats heavy with foetus.
- Part V:* He offered all these as a sacrifice.
 After he offered the sacrifice.
- Part VI:* He became prosperous.
- Part VII:* He started to praise his Ifá priests
 While his Ifá priests praised Ifá.
 As he opened his mouth,
 He uttered forth the song of Ifá.
 As he stretched his legs,
 Dance caught them.
- Part VIII:* He said:
 It is now time for Ifá
 To turn my house into a market place.
 I practised Ifá divination,
 And I practised farming.
 My lot must be better.
 It is now time
 For me to be prosperous.
 I practised Ifá divination,
 And I practised farming,
 My lot must be better.

The *ẹşẹ* presented below shows the normal eight parts of *ẹşẹ Ifá* as well as the optional part which repeats Parts I-IV.

Part I: Ifá nlánlá là á fí í gba'Fá nlánlá;
 Òògùn nlánlá là á fí í gb'òògùn nlánlá;
 Egbàá seere là á fí í tán'ràn seere;
 Ìgbà t'á à rí seere mọ,
 Ọràn kín la á f'egbàá tán.

Part II: A díá fún Olókun.

Part III: Níjọ tí ẹri gbogbo mbá Olókun sọtá.

Part IV: Wọ̀n ní ó káakí Mọ̀lẹ̀,
 Ó jàre,
 Ẹ̀bọ̀ ní ó ẹ.

Part V: Ìgbà t'ó rúbọ̀ tán,

Part VI: Ní Ẹ̀sù bá gbá gbogbo ẹnu ẹri pọ,
 Ó taarij wọ̀n s'ilé Olókun.

Part VII: Ijọ̀ ní nájọ̀,
 Ayọ̀ ní nýọ̀;
 Ó nýin àwọ̀n awoo rẹ̀,
 Awọ̀n awoo rẹ̀ nýin 'Fá.
 Ó ya ẹnu kótó,
 Orin awo ló bọ̀ sí i lẹnu.

Repetition of

Part I-IV: Ó ní:
 Ifá nlánlá là á fí í gba'Fá nlánlá;
 Òògùn nlánlá là á fí í gb'òògùn nlánlá;
 Egbàá seere là á fí í tán'ràn seere;
 Ìgbà t'á à rí seere mọ,
 Ọràn kín la á f'egbàá tán.
 A díá fún Olókun

Níjọ̀ tí ẹri gbogbo mbá Olókun sọtá.

Part VIII: Olókun mà làgbà o o ò,
 Olókun mà làgbà.
 Ẹ̀ri gbogbo, ẹ f'àgbà f'Olókun ò,
 Olókun mà làgbà.⁸²

Part I: A great poem of Ifá
 Is usually exchanged for another great poem of Ifá;
 An important herbal prescription
 Is usually exchanged for another important one;
 A gift of two thousand cowries
 Is usually given in appreciation of a good deed.

Part II: Ifá divination was performed for Olókun⁸³

Part III: On the day all bodies of water
 Bore enmity towards Olókun.

- Part IV:* He was asked to take care of Mọlẹ,
He was told that he would do well
To perform a sacrifice.
- Part V:* After he had performed the prescribed sacrifice,
- Part VI:* Èṣù put the mouths of all bodies of water together
And pushed them towards the home of Olókun.
- Part VII:* He started to dance,
He started to rejoice.
He started to praise his Ifá priests
While his Ifá priests praised Ifá.
He opened his mouth,
He uttered forth the song of Ifá.

Repetition of

- Parts I-IV:* He said:
A great poem of Ifá
Is usually exchanged for another great poem of Ifá;
An important herbal formula
Is usually exchanged for another;
A gift of two thousand cowries
Is usually given in appreciation of a good deed.
Ifá divination was performed for Olókun
On the day all bodies of water
Bore enmity towards Olókun.
He was asked to take care of Mọlẹ,
He was told that he would do well
To perform sacrifice.

- Part VIII:* Olókun is your superior.
Olókun is your superior.
All bodies of water,
Give pride of place to Olókun.
Olókun is your superior.

The *ẹsẹ* presented below shows the normal eight parts as well as the optional part which repeats Parts I-VII.

- Part I:* Oníkẹkẹ logún;
Alábàjà lẹgbọn;
Oníkolo làádọta;
- Part II:* A díá fún Ọdúnmbákú
Tí í ẹ ọmọ bíbí inú Agbọnnirẹgún.
- Part III:* Wọn ní ó rúbọ nítorí Ikú.

Part IV: Wọn ní ó f'adiẹ iràná kan rúbọ.

Part V: Ó ẹe é,

Part VI: Ikú ò pa á.

Part VIII: Ijó ní ñjó,
Ayò ní ñyò;
Ó ñyin àwọn awoo rẹ,
Àwọn awoo rẹ ñyin 'Fá.
Ó ya ẹnu kótó,
Orin awo ló bọ sí i lẹnu.
Èsẹ tí ó nà,
Ijó fà á.

Repetition of

Parts I-VII: Ó ní:
Oníkẹkẹ logún;
Alágbàjà lẹgbọn;
Oníkolo làádọta;
A díá fún Qdúnmbákú
Tí í sọmọ bíbí inú Àgbọnnirẹgún.
Wọn ní ó rúbọ nítorí Ikú.
Ó ẹe é,
Ikú ò pa á.

Part VIII: Qdún mbá kú,
Ejiẹ ti gb'adiẹẹ mi lọ.
Adiẹẹ mi,
Adiẹẹràná,
Tí mo fi'ilẹ
Lejiẹ gbé lọ.⁸⁴

Part I: He who has *kẹkẹ*⁸⁵ facial marks has twenty marks;
He who has *àbàjà*⁸⁶ facial marks has thirty markings;
He who has *kolo*⁸⁷ facial marks has fifty markings;

Part II: Ifá divination was performed for Qdúnmbákú⁸⁸
Who was the son of Àgbọnnirẹgún.⁸⁹

Part III: He was asked to perform a sacrifice
In order to avert imminent death.

Part IV: He was asked to offer a sacrifice of one *iràná* hen.⁹⁰

Part V: He did so.

Part VI: He did not die.

Part VII: He started to dance,
He started to rejoice.
He started to praise his Ifá priests
While his Ifá priests praised Ifá.

As he opened his mouth,
 He uttered forth the song of Ifá.
 As he stretched his legs,
 Dance caught them.

Repetition of

Parts I-VII: He said:

He who has *kéké* facial marks has twenty markings;
 He who has *àbàjà* facial marks has thirty markings;
 He who has *kolo* facial marks has fifty markings.
 Ifá divination was performed for Ọdúnmbàkú
 Who was the son of Àgbònṣìrègún.
 He was asked to perform a sacrifice
 In order to avert imminent death.
 He did so,
 He did not die.

Part VIII: The year I would have died,
 Death carried away my hen.
 My hen,
 My *irànà* hen,
 Which I left to wander about
 Was carried away by Death.

The *ẹsẹ Ifá* presented below is an example of *Ifá kéékèkèké* (small poems of Ifá) which have a four-part structure.

Part I: Kèngbè so bí àdó dàgbà;

Part II: A díá fún Ajowúgbọkọ

Part III: Tí ńmẹnuú ẹ̀ráhùn ọmọ.

Part VIII: Kèè pé o,
 Kèè jinnà,
 Àtàrí ní wọn bọ m̀bẹ,
 B'ó bá bí ní.⁹¹

Part I: It is the big gourd which resembles the *àdó*⁹² when young;

Part II: Ifá divination was performed for Ajowúgbọkọ⁹³

Part III: Who was crying for lack of children.

Part VIII: Very soon,
 At no distant date,
 It is Orí
 That one worships if one's origin is traced to that god.

CHAPTER IV

Language and Style in *Ẹṣẹ Ifá*

PROSE OR POETRY

ALL the eight parts of *ẹṣẹ Ifá*, discussed in the previous chapter are rendered in poetic form¹. Parts I-III and VII-VIII are usually chanted by the Ifá priest who usually memorized them during his years of training. But the Ifá priest does not commit Part IV-VI to memory, for in the course of his training the prospective Ifá priest is not made to commit these parts (IV-VI) to memory; he only learns the main points of the plot of the relevant story. This is probably due to the great length of these three parts (IV-VI) as compared with the other parts. In the long poems of Ifá (*Ifá Nláńlá*)² for example, Parts IV-VI could cover several pages. The Ifá priest therefore has full freedom to employ his own language to tell the story in Parts IV-VI. The result is that in most cases the Ifá priest recites Parts IV-VI instead of chanting them.

It would appear however that every Ifá priest aspires to a stage in which he is able to chant all parts of *ẹṣẹ Ifá*. For chanting purposes poetic language is employed throughout but when Parts IV-VI are rendered in recitative form the poetic language that emerges is a freer form of poetry which resembles prose. The language of *ẹṣẹ Ifá* is therefore not static at all the Ifá priest has some freedom to innovate.

RHYTHM

The rhythm of *ẹṣẹ Ifá* is very complex. This is true, to some extent, of almost every aspect of African oral literature. The study of the rhythm of Yoruba oral poetry has been very badly neglected. Apart from the work of Babalọlá,⁴ there is hardly any literature on this subject.

Equally neglected is the study of stress and tone and their influence on Yoruba speech including poetic language. Siertsema⁵ has, however, pointed out the importance of the high

tone in determining stressed syllables. Babalólá has mentioned, among several other factors, the influence of consonants on stress.

The present writer is of the opinion that while the high tone is acoustically more intense and more prominent than the other two phonemic tones, other factors have got to be taken into consideration in determining stress. A syllable is not stressed only because it carries a high tone. For example, certain Yoruba consonants are more tense than others and thus influence the acoustic intensity of the syllable to which they belong. Generally speaking, bilabial, labio-dental and labio-velar plosive and implosive consonants tend to be more tense than other consonants.⁶

Babalólá has analysed the rhythm of everyday Yoruba speech in terms of rhythm units. He points out that every rhythm unit features one stressed syllable. He also points out the importance of meaning and syntax in determining rhythm.

The stress that can be heard in Yoruba is not inherent in particular words or syllables but is a function of the rhythm-unit, whether this rhythm-unit is a sentence in itself or combines with one or more rhythm-units to form a sentence. By the term rhythm-unit, I mean a sense group characterized in speech by its rolling together off the speakers' tongue, as a distinct combination of words. As a general rule, every rhythm-unit must have one stressed syllable; rhythm-units without stress do not occur and examples of rhythm-units with more than one stress are rare.⁷

It is the view that while for everyday speech, rhythm may bear close relation to the sentence, in oral poetry, especially *ẹsẹ Ifá*, rhythm bears little or no relation to the sentence. Indeed, as Hans Wolf has pointed out, the basic syntactic unit of chant may not necessarily be the sentence.

While the basic syntactic unit of prose may be assumed to be the sentence . . . *ràrà* is characterized by the juxtaposition of phrases and occasional clauses interspersed by pause junctures . . . In other words, *ràrà* tells no story (unless it can be said to tell fragments of stories); there is no connecting thread, and there are, in fact, few if any connecting morphemes. This disconnectedness, a syntax of bits and pieces, so to speak, I should like to call disjointed discourse.⁸

The syntax of ẹṣẹ Ifá is very close to, but not as disjointed as, the syntax of *ràrà*; Parts IV-VI therefore approach the syntax of ordinary speech and this is one reason why these three parts of ẹṣẹ Ifá resemble prose.

However, the basic rhythm-unit of ẹṣẹ Ifá is not the sentence but the line⁹. This, as Hrushovski points out, is the case with nearly all poetic forms. 'The differentia of poetry is the verse line; it is hard to overestimate its importance in creating the poetic rhythm and the very being of the poem.'¹⁰

Each line of ẹṣẹ Ifá forms a distinct rhythm-unit consisting of not more than six stressed syllables. There are usually more unstressed syllables to the line than stressed syllable. Stressed and unstressed syllables usually follow each other in quick succession.

Parts I, II, III, VII and VIII are usually chanted very fast. This is probably why the number of stressed syllables in these parts is less than those in Parts IV-VI which are usually recited. The listener can easily perceive a sudden lessening of tension accompanied by a noticeable reduction in speed when the Ifá priest moves from Part III to Part IV. The tension and high speed of chanting is resumed when the Ifá priest moves from Part VI to Part VII and it is maintained throughout until the end of Part VIII.

Therefore, whether Parts IV-VI are chanted or recited their rhythm and syntax are closer to prose than to poetry. But all the parts of the ẹṣẹ Ifá so far collected by the author cannot be classified as prose because, as mentioned above, their lines form definite rhythm-units with tonal contrast¹¹ and balance-ment at the end of each line, a phenomenon characteristic of poetry. All the poetic devices found in the other parts of ẹṣẹ Ifá e.g. word-play and repetition can also be found in Parts IV-VI.

The rhythm of ẹṣẹ Ifá is a 'free rhythm'¹² (freer in Parts IV-VI) based on line units. Each line as a rhythm-unit consists of unstressed and/or stressed syllables. There are, usually not more than six stressed syllables per line in all parts. The line unit is not very difficult to establish in ẹṣẹ Ifá. Each line has a significant breath pause at its end. The pause can be primary or secondary depending on its position in the syntactic unit concerned. Usually, a secondary pause exists before the end

of the syntactic unit while the primary pause is at the very end of the syntactic unit whether this syntactic unit be a sentence, a phrase or a clause.

Rhythm units in *ẹsẹ Ifá* (i.e. the lines) are usually in balanced relationship. Balancement of sense is indeed a significant feature of Yoruba oral, poetry as a whole.¹³ The rhythm of *ẹsẹ Ifá* is clearly describable as an antiphonal rhythm featuring occurrence of lines in pairs or trios as far as meaning is concerned. Paralellism is the resultant stylistic feature. A brief illustration will clarify this point.

Ayááyá mọ ní fùú,
Àfọn balẹ ró ki.

A díá f'Áwóyemí,
Ọmọbínrin Òró.

Wọn ní ó rúbọ
Nítorí ọmọ.

5

Ó gbọ rírú ẹbọ,
Ó rú.

Ó gbọ èrù àtùkèsù,
Ó tù.

10

Ó gbọ íkarara,
Ẹbọ ha fún un.

Ijó ní nǎjọ,
Ayò ní nǎyò

Ó nǎyin àwọn awoo rẹ,
Àwọn awoo rẹ nǎyin 'Fá.

15

Ó ní ilé Ọṣun ò gbàyè o o ò.
Ilé Ọṣun ò gbàyè.

Òòró la bá Ọṣun o,
Ilé Ọṣun ò gbàyè.

20

To do something very fast a man rises to his feet
quickly and forcefully.

When *àfọn*¹⁴ fruit falls down it makes a forceful sound.

Ifá divination was performed for Awóyemí,¹⁵
The girl of Òró¹⁶ town.

She was asked to perform a sacrifice
In order to have children.

She listened to the prescribed sacrifice,
And performed the sacrifice.

She listened to the order to make a sacrifice to Èṣù.
And offered a sacrifice accordingly.

She heard the immediate response by the gods
To the acceptance of her sacrifice.

She started to dance,
She started to rejoice.

She praised her Ifá priests
While her Ifá priests praised Ifá.

She said that the home of Òṣun is certainly over-
crowded.
The home of Òṣun is overcrowded.

Òṣun was always found standing.¹⁷
The home of Òṣun is overcrowded.

The following excerpts from two Ifá priests illustrate stress and rhythm units as analysed above. Primary pause is marked by (//) at the end of the line while secondary pause is marked by (/). Stress is marked by (—) below the stressed syllable.

(a) Abojú ganngan /

Part I: Náà ní í mọ̀ran òkèèrèé wò //

Part II: A dífá f'Òrúnmílà //

Part III: Ifá m̀bẹ́ láàrín ọ̀tá //

Part IV Èbọ̀ ní wọ̀n ní k'ò ẹ̀se //

Òrúnmílà sì rúbọ̀ //

Kín l'èsí ẹ̀bọ̀ //

Wọ̀n lákùkọ̀ adìẹ̀ m̀ẹ̀ta lẹ̀bọ̀ //

- Kùmò mēta lẹbọ //*
Òkẹ mēta lẹbọ // 10
- Part V: Òrúnmílà rúbọ //*
Ó rúbọ //
- Part VI: Ló bá sẹgun àwọn ọ́tá wọnwọnyí //*
Ó ní bẹẹ gẹgẹ /
- Repetition of*
- Parts I-III: Ní àwọn babaláwo òun /* 15
N̄sẹnuu reé kifá //
Ó ní abojú ganngan /
Náà ní í mọran òkèèrèè wò //
A difá f'Òrúnmílà //
Ifá m̄bẹ láàrin ọ́tá // 20
- Part VIII: Yọ́ọ wàá fi ọ̀bọ rú //*
Yọ́ọ wàá fi ọ̀bọ yè //
Ifá wàá fi ọ̀bọ sẹgun ẹranko¹⁸ //
- Part I: He who has protruding eye-balls*
Can best see things at a distance.
- Part II: Ifá divination was performed for Òrúnmílà*
- Part III: When Ifá was in the midst of enemies.*
- Part IV: He was asked to perform a sacrifice.* 5
And Òrúnmílà performed it.
What is the prescribed sacrifice?
He was told to offer three cocks,
Three clubs,
And three times twenty thousand cowries. 10
- Part V: Òrúnmílà performed the sacrifice.*
He performed the sacrifice,
- Part VI: And he conquered all his enemies.*
He said that was exactly
How his Ifá priests 15
- Repetition of*
- Parts I-III: Employed their good voices in praise of Ifá.*
He said that he who has protruding eye-balls
Can best see things at a distance.
Ifá divination was performed for Òrúnmílà, 20
Ifá was in the midst of enemies.

Part VIII: He offered a monkey as a sacrifice.
 He offered a monkey as a sacrifice in order to
 survive.
 Ifá used the monkey to conquer all other ani-
 mals.

(b) Won ní a à f'epo s'ésín /

Part I: T'ésín fì pon //
A a f'iyò s'ògèdè /
T'ògèdè e dùn //

Part II: Dífá fún Àpàpànyàkí /

Part III: Njò tí ntòrun bò wá s'ilé ayé //

Part IV: Won ní kí Àpàpànyàkí ò rúbò //

Óde ayé t'òun nìlò yì /

Ó le yè'un báibái nùbè //

Òun ò lè jagun àjàtì //

Won lèbò ní k'Àpàpànyàkí ó rú //

Won ní ò ní í jagun àjàtì //

Kín loun ò ha se báylí //

Won sì k'èbò fún Àpàpànyàkí //

Ó sì rúbò //

Part V: K'Àpàpànyàkí ó d'òde ayé nì //

Ó di pé b'ó bá bọ síhìn /

B'ó bá jagun nùbè //

Ó nímólú ní //

B'ó bá bọ síhìn /

B'ó bá jagun nùbè //

Ó nímólú ní //

Part VII: Àwon awoo rè l'ó bèrè sí í yìn //

Àwon awoo rè nýin 'Fá //

Repetition of

Parts I-III: N ló ní bèè gégé /

Ní àwon babaláwo /

T'àwón nşenu rereé kifá //

Ó lá à f'epo s'ésín /

T'ésín fì pon //

	A à f'iyò s'ògèdè /	30
	T'ògèdè e dùn //	
	A dífá fún Àpàpànyàkí /	
	Níjò tí ntòrun bọ wá s'ilé ayé //	
Part VIII:	Gúngún /	
	O gúnmo lánà //	35
	O gúnmoq re //	
	Àpàpànyàkí ò /	
	O gúnmoq reè //	
	Ifá pe :	
	'A á se mo Àpàpànyàkí' /	45
	Òun náà ni oókọ /	
	Tí à á pe okó //	
	Ifá wí pé: /	
	'Èyin náà /	
	Ò wa rí i bẹ̀ẹ' //	50
Part I:	Nobody added palm-oil to <i>esfn</i> ¹⁹ Before it is yellow. Nobody added salt to plantain Before it is sweet.	
Part II:	Ifá divination was performed for Àpàpànyàkí	5
Part III:	When he was coming from heaven to earth.	
Part IV:	Àpàpànyàkí was asked to perform a sacrifice. He asked whether the earth to where he was going Could be comfortable for him. Could he conquer any time he went to war?	10
	Sacrifice was prescribed for Àpàpànyàkí. He was assured of constant victory at war. What would he offer for sacrifice? Sacrifice was prescribed for Àpàpànyàkí And he performed it.	15
Part V:	As soon as Àpàpànyàkí got to earth, If he went this way, And waged war there, He conquered. If he went that way, And waged war there, He was always victorious.	20

- Part VII:* He started to praise his Ifá priests
 While his Ifá priests praised Ifá.
 He said that was exactly 25
 How his Ifá priests
 Employed their good voices in praise of Ifá.

Repetition of

- Parts I-III:* Nobody added palm-oil to *esín*
 Before *esín* is yellow.
 Nobody added salt to plantain 30
 Before it is sweet.
 Ifá divination was performed for Àpàpànyàkí
 On the day he was coming from heaven to earth.

- Part VIII:* Pricker,
 You pricked someone yesterday. 35
 You pricked the person well.
 Àpàpànyàkí, I hail you,
 You pricked the person well.
 Ifá said:
 'How shall we know Àpàpànyàkí?' 40
 That is another name
 By which the penis is known.
 Ifá said:
 'Doesn't everyone
 See that that is what it is?' 45

STYLISTIC FEATURES

The following are the most prominent stylistic features of *èsé Ifá*.

1. *Word-play*

Word-play is perhaps the most important distinguishing feature of literary style in *èsé Ifá*. It consists of two main parts, namely, word-play proper and tonal word-play. Both sometimes occur in combination.

The most recurrent type of word-play in *ẹsẹ Ifá* is that which makes use of the names of the *Odù*. This type of word-play which can be found in almost every *Odù* usually dwells upon names of the *Odù*. This is achieved by two methods. The first method constitutes one or two syllables out of the name of an *Odù* into a separate word (which may or may not have meaning) and makes use of the separate word so formed for word-play. The second method makes use of a word similar in form to the name or part of the name of an *Odù* for word-play. This type of word-play may or may not involve tonal change (i.e. the tones on all the syllables involved may be the same or may be different). The following representative examples taken from four *Odù* illustrate both types of word-play.

(a) The name of *Odù* is *Ọyẹkú Méjì*, and the syllables employed for word-play are *yẹ*, *ọyẹ*.

- i. *Bí o bá yẹ,*
Èmi ò yẹ.
Yangí ilé, wọn ò gbọdọ yẹlẹ;
Àtàrí, wọn ò gbọdọ yẹ èrò ọjà.²⁰

If you move away to one side,

I will not move.

The stone foundation of a house must not fail the house.

The head must not fail to support the market woman.

In the example above, the syllable *yẹ* in *Ọyẹkú* (the second major *Odù*) is employed for word-play. This syllable is constituted into a separate word meaning 'to move to one side' in lines 1 and 2, and 'to fail' in lines 3 and 4.

- ii. *Ó yẹ pẹẹ,*
Ó bọ pọró.
A díá fún Ọyẹlẹ Òkòkó,
Tí wọn ní pẹ ládíẹ.
Tí múbímọọ rẹ lálgbẹbí.

Ewé ọlọyẹérẹ kí í jẹ orúkọ mǐrán àfi ayùnrẹ.

Yíyẹ ní í ẹe tabo,

Ẹbọ ní í ẹe takọ.

Yẹdí pẹẹ o wáá bọ ọ.

Ọmọ tuntun lèrè àyèbò.

10

Àyèbò a ọmọ.

B'ọkan ò yè,

Ọkan ò leè rí bí.

Ládùn ládùn nlà á bá'lé oyin²¹.

It shifts to one side,

It drops suddenly.

Ifá divination was performed for Ọyèlẹ Ọkòkó,

Who is known as Hen,

Who bears her children without a midwife's aid.

5

The leaf of *olúyèrẹ* bears no other name except
*ayùnrẹ*²²

To consent to sexual intercourse is female's lot.

To cohabit is the role of male.

Shift your private part to one side and let sexual
intercourse take place.

A new child is the fruit of sexual intercourse.

10

Sexual intercourse leads to a new child.

If the wife does not allow sexual intercourse,

The couple cannot have a child.

We always find the house of a seller of honey in a
sweet condition.

In the example above, there is a play upon the syllable *yè* in Ọyèkú. This syllable is used as a separate word *yè*, meaning 'to shift to one side' in lines 1 and 12. In lines 3, 6, 7, 9, 10 and 11 several other words containing the syllable *yè* are brought in for word-play.

iii. Ẹwọ ò yè.

Èmi ò yè.

Ọyè sẹsẹ nlàá bọ lókè

Wọn se bójúmọ ní ńmọ.

A díá f'Éjì Ọyè

5

Tí ó t'ojú ọrun là wáyé bí ọbẹrẹkẹ.

Ẹjẹ owó ló bá ńwù mí ò,

Mo wí.

Èjì Ọyè,

Ifá ní ó yẹ're tẹmi f'ẹmi.²³

10

I do not move away,
 You do not move away,
 Twilight is just appearing in the skies,
 They thought it was daylight.

Ifá divination was performed for Èjl Ọyẹ²⁴ 5
 Who would dawn on earth like daylight.
 Well, if it is money I desire,
 I will certainly say so.
 Èjl Ọyẹ,
 Ifá will allot my own good fortune to me. 10

In the example above, there is a play upon the syllable *yẹ* (lines 1 and 2) where it is used as a separate word. In lines 3, 5 and 9, Ọyẹ the first two syllables of Ọyẹkú is employed for word-play. In line 10, the syllable *yẹ* is combined with another syllable to form the word *yẹ're*.

(b) The name of *Odù* is Ọdí Méjì, the syllable employed for word-play is *dí*.

- i. Ọdí kì í jẹ àdí,
 Awoo wọn n'ílẹ Ọlọfin.²⁵
 Ọdí does not eat palm-kernel oil,
 Their Ifá priest in the household of Ọlọfin.

In the example above, the syllable *dí* is employed for word-play by bringing together the words Ọdí and àdí containing this syllable.

- ii. Kí a dí ìdí k'ó kún bàmúbámú.
 A díá fún Ataare
 Tí kì í dí ẹrùu tiẹ lálkún ọkẹ.²⁶
 Let us fill up the sexual organ to the brim.
 Ifá divination was performed for Alligator Pepper
 Who never prepares a load
 That will not fill up ọkẹ.²⁷

In the example above, the syllable *dí* is employed for word-play by bringing in words similar in form (*dí* and *dí* in lines 1 and 3) and another word (*ìdí*) slightly different in form but containing the syllable *dí* (line 1).

- iii. *Òdí Méjì dímò ikú;*
Ó dímò àrùn;
*Ó dímòṣ kurukuru wéle.*²⁸

Òdí Méjì prevents death;
It prevents disease;
It prevents all other evils.

In the example above, the syllable *dí* in *Òdí Méjì* is employed for word-play by bringing together the words *Òdí* and *dímò* which contain this syllable.

(c) The name of *Odù* is *Òwónrín Méjì*; the syllables employed for word-play are *òwón*, *wón*, *rín*.

- i. *Òwón owó là nínáwó mini;*
Òwón onjẹ là nípè nnyàn;
Òwón omi là ndèsun.
A díá fún Ohùnyòwón,
*Omọ Qbaléyò Ajòrí.*²⁹

5

It is when money is scarce that we spend cowries;
It is scarcity of food that we call famine;
It is when water is scarce that we have to wait for
water to settle before we can draw it in the brook.
Ifá divination was performed for Ohùnyòwón
Offspring of the King of Òyọ who eats shea-butter.

5

In the example above, the words *òwón* and *wón* whose syllables are contained in *Òwónrín* are employed for word-play by bringing into the poem a word (*wón*) of similar form (lines 1, 2 and 3) and another word (*Ohùnyòwón*) slightly different in form but containing the syllable *wón* (line 4).

- ii. *Ènì ó rín nì là á rín;*
Èyàn tí ò rín nì,
A à gbọdọ rín in.
Èrín di méjì,
A dìjà.
A díá fún Èrínúndé,
*Omọ Èlérín Sàjéjé.*³⁰

5

One usually laughs at someone who laughs at one;
 If someone hasn't laughed at one,
 One shouldn't laugh at him.
 When two people laugh at each other,
 It may lead to a quarrel. 5
 Ifá divination was performed for Èrintúndé,
 Offspring of Èlérin, ruler of the city of Sàjéjé.

In the example above the syllable *rín* in Òwónrín is employed for word-play by bringing into the poem other words (*rín*, *èrín*, *Èlérin*) that contain that syllable.

- iii. Òwón irin ní í mú abèrèṣé wóná;
 Òwón omi ní í mú akèrèngbèé sònù;
 Òwón omọ ní í mú omọ jalè
 Tí wón fí í pé ebi ní ñpa á lóde Ìdó.
 Èní pò tí ò gbón,
 È jẹ á fi wón wé yún-ún-yun nínú oko.
 A díá fún Òwón,
 Tí wón ó fi joyè ilée babaa rẹ.³¹ 5

It is scarcity of iron which makes the blacksmith to
 melt needles in his fire.

It is scarcity of water that leads to the loss of calabash
 water container.

It is scarcity of children that makes people of Ìdó to
 overlook stealing on the part of a child

With the excuse that the stealing was caused by
 hunger.

People who are many but are unwise 5
 Are comparable only to yún-ún-yun weeds in the
 farm.

Ifá divination was performed for Òwón
 Who would be installed as a chief in his father's
 household.

The word-play in the example above involves *òwón*, the first two syllables in Òwónrín, and *rín*, the last syllable.

- (d) The name of *Odù* is Ìká Méjì, and the syllable employed for word-play is *ká*.

- i. B'á a p'á á dákàá,
 À dákàá.
 B'á à p'á á dákàá.
 À dákàá.
 Òòṣàálá m'áṣọ àká dákàá.¹ 5

If one wants to cast *Ìká*,
 One casts *Ìká*.
 If one does not want to cast *Ìká*,
 One casts *Ìká*.
 It was Òòṣàálá who used *àká* cloth to cast *Ìká*. 5

In the example above, *ká*, the last syllable of the name of the twelfth *Odù*, *Ìká Méjì*, is employed for word-play by suffixing it to the verb *dá* (to cast on the ground e.g. casting of the Ifá divining chain on the ground). This is achieved by the elision of the first syllable *Ì* leading to the assimilated low-tone *à*, of *dákàá*. In line 5, *àká* another word with a meaning unrelated to *Ìká* but containing the syllable *ká* is brought in for word-play.

- ii. Àró *Ìká* kì í j'ajá;
 Òdòfin *Ìká* kì í j'agbò;
 Ejemu *Ìká* kì í j'òrúkọ;
 Olórí *Ìká* ò gbọdọ j'orí ajá.
Káwọ fún mí, 5

Kí n *kásẹ* fún ọ;
Akáwùú ní í pààrọ ọrun, èèkàn,
Kálẹ-káákààkáká.
Ìyá l'*Akáagbọn*,
Baba l'*Akáagun*, 10

Àbúròò wọn l'*Akààkádgbasà*,
 Ègbọn-ọn wọn l'*Akáàkaàkákáwọ*.
Nígba èkíní,
 Mo wọlé *Oníkǎmògún*,
 Èmi ò bá *Oníkǎmògún* ní'lé... 15

Ó wáá kù dẹdẹ kí n wọ *káà* kẹrindínlógún,
 Mo wáá bá *Oníkǎmògún*,
 Ó *káwọ* Ifá,
 Ó fi lérí.
 Ó f'asọ *àká* bora. 20

Pààká mēta ló jókò ti Oníkǎmògún.
 Oníkǎmògún mọ àká mēta,
 Sààrin ita.
 Ó so ibaaka mēta.
 Mọ idí àká.

25

Ó pe Lákaá,
 Pé k'ó yanko fún ibaaka,
 Ní idí àká.
 Ibaaká ta Lákaá léjìkà.
 Lákaá, Lá, Akààkààgbasà,

30

Àti Sásioró
 Ló díá fún Sààbámọ,
 Nijọ tí wọn rílo lèè bèèrè ọrọ wò lówọ Oníkǎmògún.
 Wọn ní: 'È é ti jẹ,
 T'ẹ ẹ fi níjóókọ káakàa wònyí?

35

Tí iyá fí níjẹ Akáagbọn,
 Tí babá fí níjẹ Akáagun,
 Tí àbúrò fí níjẹ Akààkààgbasà,
 Tí ẹgbọn fí níjẹ Akáàkààkàwọ?
 Wọn ní nítorí pé o,

40

Apá àwọn ò k'áyé ní.
 Ọrúnmillà, afèdèfẹyò,
 Èlà Ìsòdè,
 Ifá, j'ápá akápò ó k'áyée rẹ.³²

The *Aró*³³ of the city of *Ìká*³⁴ does not eat dogs;
 The *Ọdọfin*³⁵ of the city of *Ìká* does not eat rams;
 The *Ejemu*³⁶ of the city of *Ìká* does not eat he-goats;
 The headman of *Ìká* does not eat the head of dogs.
 Lift your hand for me,

5

Then, I will lift my leg for you.
 It is a cotton spinner who changes spindles and knots.
 The person whose name is Kálẹ-káákààkàá.
 Mother's name is Akáagbọn.
 Father's name is Akáagun.

10

Their younger brother's name is Akààkààgbasà
 Their elder brother's name is Akáàkààkàwá.

On the first occasion,
I entered the house of Oníkǎmògún.
I did not find Oníkǎmògún at home. . . 15

As I was about to enter the sixteenth palace building,
I found Oníkǎmògún.
He put his hands, full of divination instruments,
On his own head.
He covered himself with àká cloth. 20

Three small masqueraders called *pààká* sat by
Oníkǎmògún.
Oníkǎmògún built three storage barns
In the middle of the open space in his compound.
He tied three mules
To the supporting poles of the storage barns. 25

He called upon Lákaá
To give food to the mules
At the foot of the storage barns.
The mules kicked Lákaá on the shoulders.
Lákaá, whose other names are Lá and Akààkààgbasà. 30

Together with another person named Sásíoró,
Were the people who performed Ifá divination for
Sáàbámò,
On the day they were going to ask a question from
Oníkǎmògún.
They asked, 'Why is it
That all of you are bearing names sounding káakàa? 35

Why does mother bear Akáagbòn;
Whilst father bears Akáagun;
And the younger brother bears Akààkààgbasà,
While the elder brother bears Akáàkaàkàwó?
They answered that it was because. 40

They were unable to control the forces of the world.
Ọ̀rúnmìlà, speaker of all languages,
Who is known as Èlà in the city of Ìsòdè,
Ifá, make it possible for Ifá priest to control the forces in
his own life.

The example above shows an *ese Ifá* composed mainly for the purpose of word-play. The *ese* plays upon *ká*, the second syllable of the name of the 12th *Odù*, *Ìkà*. This syllable is prefixed, suffixed, or infixed to other syllables or it may be reduplicated to form new words e.g. *Akáagbòṇ*, *Akádagun* (lines 9 and 10); *Kálẹ̀-káákààkádá* (line 8) and *káákàa* (line 35). Many words containing the syllable *ká* are brought into the poem for the purpose of word-play e.g. *Ìbaaka*, *Lákaá*, *èjìkà*, *akápò* (lines 24, 26, 29 and 44).

The example below is also an example of a poem composed almost entirely for purposes of word-play.

iii. *Kín ló fi aṣọ àká ẹ?*
Ó fi aṣọ àká bora.
Ó wáà nṣẹ àkàrà kájà.
Ó jẹ àkàrà kájà,
Ó lọ s'óde Ìláká. 5

Ó gbé alákágbá wálé.
Ó fi ìkarahun bomi mu.
Ó nṣọ s'ódòṣọ Lákaá.
Ó gbé alákágbá wálé.
Ó sọ ẹdùn kan kàṇkà sọjà. 10

Ó nṣìn káni kàni kàni í lọ l'óde Ìkà.
Wọ̀n ní è é ẹ
Tí o fi nṣìn káni,
Tí o fi nṣìn kàni;
È é ẹ tí o nṣìn káni kàni kàni kan í 15

Lọ lóde Ìkà?
Ó ní ìbòòsí apá òun ní ò káyé'.
Ó wá èyí tí ó ẹ, kò rí,
Ó kó ẹyẹlé pọ̀ mọ̀ adíẹ.
Ó wá èyí tí yóó ẹ, kò rí, 20

Ó gbé kára,
Ó fi bọ̀'lé ọkú.
Ó ní k'ára òun ò bá ọkú n'lé.
Ọbá ní kí ó máa kakọ,
Kí ó máa kakọ. 25

Ó ní kára òún ti gbé kàròkàrò wálé.

Ó kà kàkà kà,

Ó ka kàrò kàrò.

A díá fún Qlòfin, orí ogbó.

A díá fún Qlòfin, *kaakaa* wòó. . .

Ó f'ìgbòrí la ilé èké kààkàà.³⁷

30

What did he use *àká* cloth for?

He covered himself with *àká* cloth.

He ate bean cakes all over the market.

After eating bean cakes all over the market,

He went to the compound of Ìláká.

5

He brought home a big crab.

He used a snail shell to drink water.

He was going towards Lákáa.

He brought home a big crab.

He hurled one big stone-celt into the market.

10

He started to walk clumsily along in the city of Ìkà.

They asked why

He was walking clumsily,

Walking aimlessly,

Walking so slowly and purposelessly

15

In the city of Ìkà.

He answered with a loud cry that he could not control
the forces of the world.

He looked for something to do but found nothing.

So he gathered pigeons together with chickens in one
coop.

He looked for something to do but found nothing.

20

So he put *kára*³⁸

Inside a gaboon viper's burrow.

He complained that his *kára* did not find the gaboon
viper in the burrow.

The king commanded that he should tell the truth,

Tell the truth immediately.

25

He said that his *kára* had captured *kàròkàrò*.³⁹

He confessed for long

And confessed unnecessary things.

Ifá divination was performed for Qlôfin⁴⁰ the one destined to live long.

Ifá divination was performed for Qlôfin, the old and rugged one. 3

He used a big knife to split his enemies' house wide open.

Word-play in *ese Ifá* is by no means limited to the names of the *Odù*; there are numerous examples of word-play outside the names of the *Odù*. The following are two examples of word-play in *ese Ifá* which do not involve the names of the *Odù*.

(a) The following example is a play upon the words *àràbà* (kapok tree) and *baba* (father). *Ba*, the last syllable of these two words is prominent in the word-play.

Arábá ni *bàbá*;
Àràbà ni *baba*.
 Èni a *bá* *lábà* ni *bàbá*;
 Èni a *bá* *nínú* *ahéré* ni *baba*.
 A *diá* *fún* *bàbá* 'Mòlè *b'èwù* *gèrèjè*
 Tí *ní* *gbogbo* *ayé* *ṣòfè* *jẹ*.
 Ta ni *baba* *erinwo*?
Àràbà ni *baba* *erinwo*.⁴¹

Arábá is father;

The kapok tree is father.

Whoever we find in the farm-shack is father;

Whosoever we meet in the farm-hut is father.

Ifá divination was performed for the Muslim father with a big garment.

Who would get all things free of charge.

Who is father to the *erinwo* tree?

The kapok is father to the *erinwo*.

(b) In the following example, there is a play upon the last syllable of the word *òkun* (sea). The tone on this syllable (*kun*) is changed frequently in order to effect a change in meaning from one word to the next. Other words featuring the syllable *kun* are brought into the word-play in lines 7, 10 and 13.

Iwájú òkun,
 Òkun ni wọn-ón ẹ.
 Èyìn òkun,
 Òkun ni wọn-ón ẹ.
 Erin kò ẹ é yí padà kun. 5

Àbàtà kun kùn-ùn kun.
 Lókun lókun là á kí ọmọ ọlọjà méréndínlógún.
 A díá fún wọn lóde Ìdó. . .
 Ní ọjọ tí wọn jí ní kùtù,
 Wọn ńsunkun àwọn ò ní ọba. . . . 10

Wọn ní kí àwọn ará òde Ìdó ó rúbọ,
 Kí wọn ó lè baà lóba. . .
 Kí wọn ó gbé o lọ sí etíkun.
 Wọn sì ẹ bẹẹ. . .
 Wọn ní iwájú òkun. 15

Òkun ni,
 Èyìn òkun,
 Òkun ni.
 Èyààn t'ó m'òpin òkun ò sí.⁴²

The front of the ocean
 Is ocean.
 The back of the ocean
 Is ocean.
 The elephant's carcass cannot be turned over for
 carving. 5

The great marshland.
 The offspring of the land of sixteen kings⁴³ is hailed
 with the words *lókun, lókun*.
 Ifá divination was performed for them in the city of
 Ìdó. . .
 On the day they woke up early in the morning,
 Weeping for lack of a king. 10

The people of Ìdó were asked to perform sacrifice
 So that they might have a king. . .
 They were asked to carry the sacrifice to the sea-shore.
 And they did so.
 They said the front of the ocean 15

Is ocean.

The back of the ocean

Is ocean.

Nobody knows the end of the ocean.

2. *Tonal Word-play*⁴⁴

In some of the examples discussed above, tones play some role in the pattern of the word-play, so that tone changes cannot be completely ruled out of what has been described as word-play. But there are many other examples of word-play in *ẹsẹ Ifá* in which the tones play a more prominent role. Such words are usually phonaesthetic words, the meanings of which are conveyed by tones; therefore most of the words in this class have no meanings of their own outside the tonal group pattern to which they belong.⁴⁵ For example, in Pattern C below, the word *rúmú* has no meaning by itself but if it is combined with its counterparts to form *rúmú rùmù rúmú*, some kind of meaning can be ascribed to it within the whole pattern.

In tonal word-play, unlike the examples of word-play discussed above, there is no merging of two or more phonemically different syllables; all the words involved in tonal word-play have the same phonemic shape. Tonal word-play is therefore achieved merely by changing the tones on the syllables of each word as described below. Twelve of the most representative patterns of tonal word-play in *ẹsẹ Ifá* are discussed below.

Pattern A: (M) M M M M M (M) L L L L L (L)⁴⁶

- i. **Keesekeese** ẹ ti ní,
 MM M MM M
Kààsàkààsà mbò ẹyìn.⁴⁷
 LL L LL L

You have been seeing bad things.
 Worse things are yet to come.

- ii. Àrùn má ẹ'oníbùjé ẹ,
Aṣeniyanmọ,
 M M M M M
Aṣèniyànmọ,⁴⁸
 M L L L L

Disease, do not afflict the *bùjé* man,⁴⁹

You, who are bound to mistake the man for something else.

You, who henceforth must mistake the man for another being.

In the pattern above, tonal word-play is achieved by balancing a group of mid-tone syllables against a group of low-tone syllables. It will be noticed that (i) has six syllables while (ii) has five syllables and begins with a mid-tone syllable. The respective parts of a pattern are not necessarily equal in number of syllables but they are invariably nearly so (the difference in syllable number is not usually more than one or two). Furthermore, all the tones in a pattern may not be exactly of the same kind but invariably one particular tone is prominent.

Pattern B: (H)HM (L)LM (L)LL (M)ML

In this pattern there are four groups of tones. The first group presents a contrast between high-tone and mid-tone; the second group presents a contrast between low-tone and mid-tone; the third group consists entirely of low-tones while the fourth group presents a contrast between mid-tone and low-tone. The whole pattern thus represents a complex structure of contrast and similarity of tones arranged in four groups.

i. HH LM LL ML

Ìgbà tí n ó w'èyìn òkò ò, *Ifá?*

Ajé gbogbó wáà òtorókè bọ wá.

Ajé gbogbó rí wíndín wíndín wíndín wíndín.⁵⁰

H M L M L L M L

When I looked back, Ifá, what did I see?

Plenty of money was very tiny and numerous.

ii. HM LM LL ML

Ìgbà tí n ó w'èyìn òkò ò, *Ifá?*

Ọmọ gbogbó wáà òtorókè bọ wá.

Ọmọ gbogbó rí kùdì kùdì kùdì kùdì.⁵¹

H M L M L L M L

When I looked back Ifá, what did I see?

Many children were coming down from hill-top.

Many children were short, small and numerous.

iii. HHM LLM LLL MML

Ìgbà tí n ó w'ẹ̀yìn òkò ò, Ifá?

Aya gbogbó wáà òtorókè bọ́ wá.

Aya gbogbó rí gbàdàrà gbàdàrà gbàdàrà gbàdàrà.⁵²

HHM LLM LLL MML

When I looked back, Ifá, what did I see?

Many wives were coming down from hill-top.

They were tall and beautiful.

Pattern C: (H)(H)HH (L)(L)LL (H) (H)HH

In this pattern there are three groups of tones. In the first group, high tones are prominent while in the second group, low tones are prominent and in the third group, high tones are prominent again.

i. HHHH LLLL HHHH

Ewée kókò mejì ní í luraa wọn

Pẹ̀lẹ̀ngẹ̀ pẹ̀lẹ̀ngẹ̀ pẹ̀lẹ̀ngẹ̀.⁵³

H H H H L L L L H H H H

Two cocoyam leaves beat each other

Producing a fine and delicate sound.

ii. HH LL HH

Ọ́ pa bàtà m'ómọ̀ lẹ̀sẹ̀

Pẹ́ẹ̀ pẹ́ẹ̀ pẹ́ẹ̀.⁵⁴

HH LL HH

He who makes loud sounding sandals

For the feet of a child.

Pattern D: HHH HHH LLL LLL

In Pattern D the contrast is between two groups of high-tone syllables and two groups of low-tone syllables with at least three syllables in each group.

i. Wọ́rọ́kọ̀ wọ́rọ́kọ̀ ní wọ̀n-ọ̀n r'ọ́kọ̀;

H H H H H H

Wòròkò wòròkò là á r'ádá.⁵⁵

L L L L L L

The hoe is made in a crooked form;
The cutlass is made in a crooked form.

ii. Ó mú ọwọ epo,

Ó fi tọ mi lẹ̀ẹ̀kẹ̀ẹ̀ mi ọ̀tún itọ́rọ́rọ́ itọ́rọ́rọ́
M H H H M H H H

Ó mú ọwọ epo,

Ó fi tọ mi lẹ̀ẹ̀kẹ̀ẹ̀ mi ọ̀sì itọ́rọ́rọ́ itọ́rọ́rọ́.⁵⁶
M L L L M L L L

He used his oily hands
To make a long mark on my cheeks;
He used his oily hands
To make a very long mark on my cheeks.

Pattern E: (M)MMHH (M)MMHH (M)MMLL (M)MMLL

In Pattern E, tonal word-play is achieved by a contrast between two groups of MH tones and two groups of ML tones. This pattern is close to Pattern D above.

i. Bí ọmọdé bá jí,

Wọ́n a fa àràn-an bàbáa wọ́n lẹ́wọ́,
Wọ́n a ẹ́wọ́ fínríngíngín fínríngíngín.
M M M H H M M M H H

Bí ọmọdé bá jí,

Wọ́n a gbé àràn-an bàbáa wọ́n,
Wọ́n a ẹ́wọ́ fínríngíngín fínríngíngín
M M M L L M M M L L

When little children wake up,
They handle their fathers' àràn drum,
And make it sound fínríngíngín fínríngíngín
When little children wake up,
They take their fathers' àràn drum,
And make it sound fínríngíngín fínríngíngín

- ii. Igi abihò,
 Bí wọn bá lù ú,
 Wọn a dún **kinrinjínjín kinrinjínjín**
 M M H H M M H H

Igi abihò,
 Bí wọn bá lù ú,
 Wọn a dún **kinrinjínjín kinrinjínjín**.⁵⁷
 M M L L M M L L

A piece of wood with hole inside,
 When it is beaten,
 Sounds *kinrinjínjín kinrinjínjín*.
 A piece of wood with hole inside,
 When it is beaten,
 Sounds *kinrinjínjín kinrinjínjín*.

Pattern F: HHHH LLLL

In this pattern, tonal word-play is achieved by a contrast between four high-tone syllables and four low-tone syllables.

- i. K'òsǎn ó pón n k'àrán mi dì *gàgàdàgà*;
 H H H H

K'òsǎn ó pón n k'àrán mi dì *gàgàdàgà*;
 L L L L

Kí n mú lẹ s'ilé Ọlọfin lèè sẹbọ.⁵⁸

When it is noon, I will pack up my àrán drum tightly;
 When it is noon, I will pack up my àrán drum very tightly,
 And take it to the house of Ọlọfin to perform a sacrifice.

- ii. Bí *mọránmọrán* ti mò ọn wí,
 H H H H

Bẹ̀ẹ̀ nì *mọránmọrán* mò ọn rò.⁵⁹
 L L L L

Just as a clever person knows how to speak,
 An intelligent person knows how to state his case.

Pattern G: MHH (H) (H) MLL (L) (L).

In this pattern, tonal word-play is achieved by a group of MH and a group of ML tones.

- i. **Ayóóró** ɛnu;
M H H H

Ayòòrò ɛnu;
M L L L

Èbìtì ɛnu ò tàsé,
Ènu ofóró ní í **pofóró**;
M H H

Ènu ofòrò ní í **poforo**.⁶⁰
M L L

The mouth of the talkative;
The mouth of the talkative;
It is the mouth of *ofóró* which kills *ofóró*;
It is the mouth of *ofòrò* which kills *ofòrò*.

- ii. **Aròjòròjò**
M H H H H

Aròjòròjò imò.⁶¹
M L L L L

The very soft leaf;
The very soft palm leaf.

Pattern H: LMHH LMHH LMLL LMLL

In this pattern, tonal word-play is achieved by a contrast between four groups of tones. In the first two groups, there are four syllables of LMHH tones and in the last two groups, there are four syllables of LMLL tones.

- i. **Ìbabúró**,
L M H H

Awoo wọn lóde **Ìbabúró**.
L M H H

Ìbabùrù,
L M L L

Awoo wọn òde Ìbabúú.⁶²
L M L L

The Ifá priest named Ìbabúú
Is their Ifá priest in the city of Ìbabúú.
The Ifá priest named Ìbabùrù
Is their Ifá priest in the city of Ìbabùrù.

ii. Ìtarúkú,
L M H H

Awoo wọn lóde Ìtarùkù.
L M H H

Ìtarúkú,
L M L L

Awoo wọn lóde Ìtarùkù⁶³

The Ifá priest named Ìtarúkú
Is their Ifá priest in the city of Ìtarúkú.
The Ifá priest named Ìtarùkù
Is their Ifá priest in the city of Ìtarùkù.

Pattern I: (L) LL MMM (L) LL

In this pattern, tonal word-play is achieved by contrast between three groups of tones; in the first group, the low tone is prominent; in the second group, the mid-tone is prominent and in the third group, the low-tone is prominent again.

i. È w'àràn-an bàbàà mi b'ó ti lé gòò goo gò
LL MM LL
Bí eyin arawo.⁶⁴

See how my father's àràn drum sits gracefully
Like the egg of the arawo bird.

ii. Oba aládé jẹ'gèdè tán,
Ayé òtutùú bọ wá o.
j'ègèdè, j'egede, j'ègèdè.⁶⁵
L L L M M M L L L

Pattern J: MM LL MM

i. Baba dǎná ko ògùnbèrè yee yèè yee.⁶⁶
MM LL MM

Father burnt *ògùnbèrè* tree with a great fire.

ii. Ó f'àkekèè pa kèsé ijà m'èsé **dan-in** **dàn-in** **dan-in**.⁶⁷
MM LL MM

He used a scorpion as a horse-spur tightly fixed to his feet.

Pattern K: HMHM LMLM LLMM

In this pattern, tonal word-play is achieved by contrast between three groups of tones as shown above.

i. Kékeé òròrẹ wọn ò lágba,
 Bí wọn bá jí,
 Wọn a kó wèsewése
 H M H M
 Wọn a sì kó wèsèwèsè
 L M L M
 Wọn a sì kó wèsèwèsè pẹ̀lú.⁶⁸
 L L M M

Small are *òròré* birds, they have no big ones.
When they wake up,
They move about in good health.
They move about in very good health.
They move about in excellent health.

ii. Àjí kó wéṣewése.
H M H M

Àjì kó wèsèwèsè;
LMLM

Àjì kó wèsèwèsè òròré.⁶⁹
LLMM

To wake up and feel healthy,
To wake up and feel very healthy,
To wake up and feel very healthy like an òròré bird.

Pattern L: (M) (H) HHH MM LL MM (M) (M) HHH

This pattern involves a complex contrast between five groups of tones.

- i. HHHH MM LL MM MM HH
Olónlmoró tafà,
Ó pa'kú lóko.
Pómú pómú sigi sigi sigi pomup pómú.⁷⁰
H H H H M M L L M M M M H H

Olónlmoró shot an arrow
And killed death on the farm.
The result was a cry of joy.

- ii. MHHHMM LL MM MHHH
Atúpúrú yinpin yinpin yinpin atúpúrú
M H H H M M L L M M M H H H

A díá f'Òðsààkò
Tí wọn ñpè l'Àinà.⁷¹

An Ifá priest named *Atúpúrú-yinpin-yinpin-yinpin-atúpúrú*
Performed Ifá divination for Òðsààkò⁷²
Whose other name is Àinà.⁷³

3. *Onomatopoeia*

Sound imitation is an important feature of the style of *ẹsẹ Ifá*. Tonal word-play discussed above is relevant here since in this type of sound imitation, it is the tones that carry the meanings of words. Onomatopoeic words are used in *ẹsẹ Ifá* when the text makes mention of animals or objects with which particular sounds are associated. The rhythm and general

impact of the poem is enriched when on imitation of the sound associated with the particular creature or object of nature is chanted in the relevant portion of the *ēsē Ifá* concerned.

The following are the most prominent types of onomatopaea found in *ēsē Ifá*.

(a) Imitation of sound produced by breaking objects

- i. *Gbúrúgúdú ayé fọ,*
*Ayé fọ.*⁷⁴

The earth has broken into pieces sounding *gbúrúgúdú*
The earth breaks into pieces.

- ii. *Òkúta là pàá má sẹ̀jẹ̀.*⁷⁵

It is the stone which breaks suddenly without bleeding.

(b) Imitation of the sound produced when a tough object snaps

- i. *Gbẹ̀rẹ̀gẹ̀dẹ̀, ayé ya,*
*Ayé ya.*⁷⁶

The earth is torn wide open.
The earth is torn into pieces.

- ii. *Òkàràkàrà nìyagbá.*⁷⁷

When calabash collapses, it makes a cracking sound.

- iii. *Pá bí ọsán já,*
Ọsán já,
*Awoo wọn lóde Ìtóri.*⁷⁸

Sudden as the snapping of the leather-thong.
The leather-thong snaps,
Their Ifá priest in the city of *Ìtori*.

- iv. *Pàràrà l'ewée kókòó ya, pàràrà.*⁷⁹

When coco-yam leaf is torn it makes a hard and forceful sound.

(c) Imitation of animal sounds

- i. *Ifá ó sọ'lé d'ọjà f'áwo,*
Sẹ̀sẹ̀ ẹ̀gà,
*Ẹ̀gà sẹ̀sẹ̀.*⁸⁰

Ifá will turn his priest's abode into a market-place.
Pleasing sound like laughter is the weaver bird's cry.
The weaver bird makes a pleasing cry.

- ii. Ọkéré bímọ méjì,
 Ilé kún tètẹ́tẹ́'
 Gbogbo èrò ọ̀nà,
 Ẹ yà wáá wò ó,⁸¹

The squirrel bore two children,
 Her home is full of people.
 All passersby,
 Come and see.

- iii. Àkùkọ Ítá bí Ítá.
 Àkùkọ Írẹ̀lẹ̀ bí Írẹ̀lẹ̀.
 Ó fì apápá ídí méjèèjì nalẹ̀,
 Ó ró jagajlìgì hanranún.⁸²

The cock of *Ítá*⁸³ is like *Ítá*.
 The cock of *Írẹ̀lẹ̀*⁸⁴ is like *Írẹ̀lẹ̀*.
 It used its two tail feathers to strike the ground
 And they sounded *jagajlìgì hanranún*.

- iv. Bí erin ó wọ'dò,
 A kígbẹ bíi róro,
 Bí àjànà ó wọ'dò,
 A rìn ìkìtìmọ̀, ìkìtìmọ̀.⁸⁵

When the elephant is about to cross the river,
 It produces a loud and terrifying trumpet.
 When the elephant is about to cross the river,
 It treads heavily making a repeated and forceful sound.

(d) Imitation of the sound produced when objects drop on bare ground

- i. Àfọ̀n balẹ̀ ró kí.⁸⁶

When *àfọ̀n* fruit drops on the ground it makes a deep sound.

- ii. Agbádá balẹ̀,
 Ó ró kogó;
 Ẹwù balẹ̀ ẹ̀ ẹ̀.⁸⁷

When an *agbádá* garment drops on the floor
 It produces a loud sound.
 When a big garment drops on the floor,
 It makes a deep sound.

(e) Imitation of sound produced by musical instruments

- i. Ogbèyèkú ni babaa Àmúlù. . .
 Ágbá ọlọjà ní í ró dẹmùdẹmù.⁸⁸

Ogbèyèkú⁸⁹ is the father of the junior *Odù*
 The ágbá⁹⁰ drum of the king makes a low bass sound.

- ii. Ogbèyèkú ni baba Àmúlù
 Agogo ńlá ẹ'enu gbáa gbáa.⁹¹

Ogbèyèkú is the father of the junior *Odù*.
 The big gong makes a deep cracking sound.

- iii. Lónlì ní párikòkò ó t'enu dùndún wá.
 Lónlì ní párigìdì ó t'enu bàtá jáde.⁹²

It is today that the talking drum will sound *párikòkò*.
 It is today that the bàtá drum will sound párigìdì.

(f) Imitation of the sound produced by tools being used by workmen at work

- i. Ikú wáá pin nígbà yí ò.
 Ikú pin.
 Ikú pin l'àgbèdẹẹ sẹgún.⁹³

Death has become powerless at this time.
 Death has become powerless.
 Death has become powerless.
 That is what the blacksmith's hammer says when it is struck
 on the anvil.

- ii. Igi ńlá a bi fààfàà níhà.
 A díá fún Oyéníran.
 Wọn ní ò ní í le la'lé ayé ẹ já.
 Èmi ó la'lé ayèè mi já gbangba.
 Àlakan, àlakan l'òkòfọ laşo.⁹⁴

A big tree with a thick bark around its sides.
 Ifá divination was performed for Oyéníran
 Who was told that he would not complete a normal span of life.
 I will complete my own life span undoubtedly.
 When the shuttle cuts through cloth,
 It sounds *àlakan, àlakan*.

4. *Repetition*

Repetition is an important stylistic feature of *ẹsẹ Ifá* where it is used for emphasis and for tonal balancing. Repetition is also used in the long poems of Ifá for the development of the plots of long stories.

There are several types of repetition in *ẹsẹ Ifá*: but the following two are the most important: repetition of parts of the structure of *ẹsẹ Ifá*; and repetition of single lines or parts of single lines.

(a) *Repetition of parts of the structure of ẹsẹ Ifá*

As has been pointed out in the previous chapter, at the end of the seventh part of the structure of *ẹsẹ Ifá*, the Ifá priest can if he likes, repeat Parts I-VII or Parts I-IV or Parts I-III before he goes on to chant Part VIII. This type of repetition occurs in many *ẹsẹ Ifá*. Lines 28-33 of the example below show repetition of Parts I-III.

Repetition of Parts 1-III⁹⁵

- | | | |
|------------------|--|---------------------|
| <i>Part I:</i> | K'á f'ẹfun tólé ajé,
K'á f'osùn tólé ilèkẹ.
Àkódá orí kì í gbálẹ ọjà gbé sí. | |
| <i>Part II:</i> | A díá f'Éjì Ọbàrà | |
| <i>Part III:</i> | Níjọ tí wọn nílo lèé ẹ̀bọ suru suru
N'ílẹ Ọlọ́fin.
Èjì Ọbàrà ká orí.
Ó tẹ ẹ mọyẹ.
Ó ní òún lè ríre
N'ílẹ Ọlọ́fin báyii? | 5

10 |
| <i>Part IV:</i> | Wọn ní ọ̀pọ n'ire ọ̀là fún un
N'ílẹ Ọlọ́fin.
Wọn ní ẹ̀bọ ní kí ó wàà rú. | |
| <i>Part V:</i> | Ó sì rú u.
Ìgbà t'ó rúbọ tán. | 15 |
| <i>Part VI:</i> | Ó sì ní ọ̀pọ̀lọ̀pọ̀ ire
N'ílẹ Ọlọ́fin. | |
| <i>Part VII:</i> | Ijó ní nájó.
Ayọ ní nýọ.
Ó nýin àwọn awoo rẹ.
Àwọn awoo rẹ nýin 'Fá.
Ó ya ẹnu kótó.
Orin awo ló bọ sí i lẹnu. | 20 |

- Èsè tí ó nà,
 Ijó fà á. 25
 Ó ní bèè gégé
 Ni àwọn awo òun nṣenu rereé pe 'Fá.
Part I: K'á f'efun tólé ajé.
 K'á f'osun tólé ilèkè.
 Àkódá ori kì í gbálẹ̀ ọjà gbé sí. 30
Part II: A díá f'Èjì Ọ̀bàrà
Part III: Níjọ tí wọn nlo lèè ṣẹ̀bọ̀ suru suru
 N'ílẹ̀ Ọ̀lọ́fin.
Part VIII: Kín lo tà o,
 Kín lo tà, 35
 T'ó o fi d'alájé?
 Elégédé mere.
 Èjì Ọ̀bàrà, kín lo tà
 T'ó o fi d'alájé?
 Elégédé mere. 40
 Ọ̀pẹ̀, ó dàbí n má s'òkan nù?
- Part I:* If we use chalk to paint the house of money,
 And use cam-wood ointment to paint the house
 of beads.
 The head that was first created does not fail to
 prosper in the market.
- Part II:* Ifá divination was performed for Èjì Ọ̀bàrà
Part III: On the day he was going to perform sacrifice 5
 In the house of Ọ̀lọ́fin.
 Èjì Ọ̀bàrà touched his head with Ifá divination
 instruments
 And marked out the appropriate *Odù* on divina-
 tion powder.
 He asked from Ifá whether he could have fortune
 In the house of Ọ̀lọ́fin. 10
- Part IV:* He was told that he had much prospect of
 fortune
 In the house of Ọ̀lọ́fin.
 He was told to perform sacrifice.
 And he performed it.
 After he had performed sacrifice, 15
 He had plenty of fortune
 In the house of Ọ̀lọ́fin.
 He started to dance,
 He started to rejoice.

- He praised his Ifá priests 20
 While his Ifá priests praised Ifá.
 He opened his mouth a little
 And he uttered forth the song of Ifá,
 As he stretched his legs,
 Dance caught them. 25
 He said that was exactly
 How his Ifá priests employed their good voices
 in praise of Ifá.
- Part I:* If we use chalk to paint the house of money.
 And use camwood ointment to paint the house
 of beads.
 The head that was first created does not fail to
 prosper in the market. 30
- Part II:* Ifá divination was performed for Èjì Ọ̀bàrà
Part III: On the day he was going to perform sacrifice
 In the house of Ọ̀lọ́fin.
- Part VIII:* What did you sell?
 What did you sell 35
 That made you rich?
 Ordinary pumpkin.
 Èjì Ọ̀bàrà, what did you sell
 That made you rich?
 Ordinary pumpkin. 40
 Palm-tree,⁹⁶ it seems as if I should not lose any
 part of it.

(b) Repetition of Single Lines

The most frequent occurrence of repetition in *ẹ̀sẹ Ifá* is the repetition of single lines. This is of two types: complete repetition of single lines and incomplete repetition of single lines. The following are examples of **complete repetition of single lines**.

Couplets

- i Ìgbà ìwòyí,
 Ìgbà ìwòyí.
 A díá fún Mọ́níyere ìgbà ọ̀jò.⁹⁷

This time of the year

This time of the year

Ifá divination was performed for He-who-has-locust-beans
 in the raining season.

- ii. Ejò méjì njà l'ókè odò,
Wòn ɣe araa wòn lónkẹ.
*Wòn ɣe araa wòn lónkẹ.*⁹⁸

Two snakes were fighting on the other bank of the river.
They shook each other persistently.
They shook each other persistently.

Every Third Line

- i. Ẹ́ẹ́ aya fún wa wá ò,
 Oní dandan ni t'àìdan.
 Ẹ́ẹ́ ọmọ fún wa wá ò,
 Oní dandan ni t'àìdan.
 Ẹ́ẹ́ ogbó fún wa wá ò,
 Oní dandan ni t'àìdan.⁹⁹

Bring wives to us,
Today, this very day.
 Bring children to us,
Today, this very day.
 Bring old age to us,
Today, this very day.

- ii. Ta ní ó wǎ bá ni t'áyée wa wònyí so?
Ewé ọ̀pẹ̀pẹ̀ tilẹ̀ sọ.
 Ọ̀rúnmilà ní ó wǎ bá ni t'áyée wa wònyí so.
Ewé ọ̀pẹ̀pẹ̀ tilẹ̀ sọ.
 Ifá ní ó wǎ bá ni t'áyée wa wònyí so.
Ewé ọ̀pẹ̀pẹ̀ tilẹ̀ sọ.
 Baraapetu ní ó wǎ bá ni t'áyée wa wònyí so.
*Ewé ọ̀pẹ̀pẹ̀ tilẹ̀ so.*¹⁰⁰

Who then will help us mend our lives?
 The palm-tree grows leaves right from the ground.¹⁰¹
 It is Ọ̀rúnmilà who will help us mend our lives.
 Palm-tree grows leaves right from the ground.
 It is Ifá who will help us mend our lives.
 Palm-tree grows leaves right from the ground.

Every Fourth Line

- i. Ikú wáá f'Èlẹ̀pẹ̀ẹ́ 'lẹ́,
Orí ẹran ló mú lẹ́.

Pààròpààrò, awo ilé Èlèpè.

Àrùn wáá f'Èlèpèé 'lè,

Orí ẹran ló mú lọ.

Pààròpààrò, awo ilé Èlèpè.

Òfò wáá f'Èlèpèé 'lè,

Orí ẹran ló mú lọ.

Pààròpààrò, awo ilé Èlèpè.

Ajogun gbogbo wáá f'Èlèpèé 'lè,

Orí ẹran ló mú lọ.

*Pààròpààrò, awo ilé Èlèpè.*¹⁰²

Death left Èlèpè

And took away an animal's head.

Exchange-of-things, Ifá priest of the household of Èlèpè.

Disease left Èlèpè

And took away an animal's head.

Exchange-of-things, Ifá priest of the household of Èlèpè.

Loss left Èlèpè

And took away an animal's head.

Exchange-of-things, Ifá priest of the household of Èlèpè.

All evil things left Èlèpè

And took away an animal's head.

Exchange-of-things, Ifá priest of the household of Èlèpè.

ii. Ó ní àwa agba la jọ nṣe 'gbó.

Tètè máa rìn,

Tètè máa yan.

Ó ní àwa ijòkùn la jọ nṣ'òdàn.

Tètè máa rìn,

Tètè máa yan.

Àwa keekée la jọ nṣ'Ọyọ Àjàká.

Tètè máa rìn,

Tètè máa yan.

Kò sí onílè t'ó lè pé tètè ó má telè.

Tètè máa rìn.

*Tètè máa yan.*¹⁰³

He said he lived with *agba*,¹⁰⁴ the climbing stem in the forest.

Spinach, walk freely.

Spinach, move gracefully.

He said he lived with *ijòkùn*¹⁰⁵, the climbing stem in the savanna.

Spinach, walk freely.

Spinach, move gracefully.

He said he lived with *keekèè*,¹⁰⁶ the rope in Old Òyó.

Spinach, walk freely.

Spinach, move gracefully.

There is no landlord who can forbid Spinach from stepping on his land.

Spinach, walk freely.

Spinach, move gracefully.

Every Fifth Line

i. *È má gàn mí o.*

Ganniganni,

Ègàn ò p'óyin má dùn.

Mo láya títi,

È má gàn mí o.

Ganniganni,

Ègàn ò p'óyin má dùn,

Mo bímọ kúnlé,

È má gàn mí o.

Ganniganni,

Ègàn ò p'óyin má dùn.¹⁰⁷

Don't deride me.

You who trade in derision.

Derision doesn't prevent honey from being sweet.

I have many wives,

Don't deride me.

You who trade in derision.

Derision doesn't prevent honey from being sweet.

I filled the house with children,

Don't deride me.

You who trade in derision.

Derision doesn't prevent honey from being sweet.

ii. *Mo mò yín o.*

Èni àlmọ,

Mo mò yín o.

Àbẹjẹrù,

Mo mò yín o.

Èni àlmọ,

Mo mò yín o.

Àkòráhùn-òmọ-dídan-dídan.

Mo mọ yín o.

Eni àímọ,

Mo mọ yín o.¹⁰⁸

I know you.

Unknown persons.

I know you.

*Àbẹjẹ,*¹⁰⁹ the fearful one,

I know you.

Unknown persons.

I know you.

He who one always meets in sorrow for lack of children.

I know you.

Unknown persons.

I know you.

Incomplete repetition of single lines is that type of repetition which involves part of a line. The repetition may be at the beginning or in the middle or at the end of a line, and it may involve a word or a group of words within the line. The following are few examples of this type of repetition.

Couplets

- i. Òdí Méjì díímọ Ikú,
Ó díímọ àrùn,
*Ó díímọ kurukuru wéle.*¹¹⁰
Òdí Méjì prevents death,
It prevents disease;
It prevents all other evil things.

- ii. *O róşọ dúdú,*
*O róşọ pupa.*¹¹¹
You wrapped a black cloth around your waist,
You wrapped a red cloth around your waist.

- ii. *Òsánşọ gbá yìgí,*
*Òwẹ̀wù gbá yìgí.*¹¹²
He who wraps cloth round the loins and swings round.
He who wears a garment and swings round.

Every Third Line

- i. *Ikú té orí ìgbá,*
Ìgbá gbìrà mú nílẹ̀.
Ikú té orí apá,

Apá *gbirà mú nílẹ̀*
Ikú té orí ooro,
 Ooro *gbirà mú nílẹ̀.*¹¹³

Death alighted on top of the locust-bean tree.
The locust-bean tree fell down with a great noise.
Death alighted on top of the apá tree.
The apá tree fell down with a great noise.
Death alighted on top of ooro tree.
The ooro tree fell down with a great noise.

- ii. Ọ̀rúnmilà ní ó wǎ bá ni t'áyée wa wònyí sọ.
 Ewé ọ̀pẹ̀pẹ̀ tilẹ̀ sọ.
 Ifá ní ó wǎ bá ni t'áyée wa wònyí sọ.
 Ewé ọ̀pẹ̀pẹ̀ tilẹ̀ sọ.
 Baraapetu ní ó wǎ bá ni t'áyée wa wònyí sọ.
 Ewé ọ̀pẹ̀pẹ̀ tilẹ̀ sọ.¹¹⁴

It is Ọ̀rúnmilà who will help us mend our lives.
 Palm-tree grows leaves right from the ground
 It is Ifá who will help us mend our lives.
 Palm-tree grows leaves right from the ground.
 It is Baraapetu who will help us mend our lives.
 Palm-tree grows leaves right from the ground.

Every Fourth Line

- i. Agbàrá ní í ràtàá bo yanrìn lódò.
 Ifá, ràtàà bò mí,
 Ibí pọ̀ lóde.
 Ètipón-qlá ní í ràtàá bolẹ̀.
 Ifá, ràtàà bò mí,
 Ibí pọ̀ lóde.¹¹⁵

It is the torrent which covers up sand in the river
 Ifá, shelter me,
 There are many evils outside.
 It is ètipón-qlá vegetable which covers up the earth.
 Ifá, shelter me,
 There are many evils outside.

- ii. Nígbà èkíní,
 Mo wọ́lé Oníkǎmògún,
 Èmi ò bá Oníkǎmògún n'lé.
 Nígbà ẹ̀kẹ̀ta,
 Mo wọ́lé Oníkǎmògún,
 Èmi ò bá Oníkǎmògún n'lé.¹¹⁶

On the first occasion,
I entered the house of Oníkǎmògún,
I did not find Oníkǎmògún at home.
On the third occasion,
I entered the house of Oníkǎmògún,
I did not find Oníkǎmògún at home.

- iii. *Ṣ'ojú olóko* ni ilá ẹ́ é kó.
Ifá, *t'ojú araà mi*,
K'ó o tún'wà araà mi ẹ́.
Ṣ'ojú olóko ni ikàn ẹ́ é w'ẹ̀wù ẹ̀jẹ.
Ifá *t'ojú araà mi*,
K'ó o tún'wà araà mi ẹ́.
Ṣ'ojú olóko ni ewùrá ẹ́ é yesì.
Ifá, ò bá *t'ojú araà mi*,
K'ó o tún'wà araà mi ẹ́.¹¹⁷

It is in the presence of the farmer that okro grows stringy.

Ifá, *in my own presence*,
Help me improve my well-being.

It is in the presence of the farmer that garden egg becomes overripe.

Ọ̀rúnmílà, *in my own presence*,
Help me improve my well-being.

It is in the presence of the farmer that the water-yam grows bad.

Ifá, *in my own presence*,
Help me improve my well-being.

Every Fifth Line

- i. Ñjé, owó ló bá ńwù mí ò,
Mo wí.
Èjì Ọ̀yẹ̀,
Ifá ní ó yẹ́'ree tẹ̀mi f'ẹ̀mi.
Aya ló bá ńwù mí ò,
Mo wí.
Èjì Ọ̀yẹ̀,
Ifá ní ó yẹ́'ree tẹ̀mi f'ẹ̀mi.¹¹⁸

If it is money *I want*,
I certainly will say so.

Èjì Ọ̀yẹ̀,¹¹⁹

Ifá will allot my own fortune for me.

If it is a wife *I want*
I certainly will say so.

Èjì Ọ̀yẹ̀,

Ifá will allot my own fortune for me.
 If it is a house *I want*
 I certainly will say so.
 Èjì Òyè,
 Ifá will allot my own fortune for me.

- ii. *Mo lájé lájé,*
Ajèè mi ò tó.
Hìn-in hìn-in,
Títí lajèè mi òlò.
Mo láya títí,
Ayaà mi ò tó
Hìn-in hìn-in,
Títí layaà mi òlò.
Mo bímq títí,
Qmqò mi ò tó
Hìn-in hìn-in,
Títí lmqò mi òlò.¹²⁰

I have plenty of money,
 My money is not enough.
 That is right.
 I continue to have more money.
 I have many wives.
 My wives are not enough.
 That is right.
 I continue to have more wives.
 I have many children,
 My children are not enough.
 That is right.
 I continue to have more children.

5. Personification

Personification is an important stylistic feature of Yoruba oral literature in general and of *èṣẹ Ifá* in particular. In *èṣẹ Ifá*, stories are told about animals, birds, insects, trees and other aspects of nature as if such stories are being told about human beings.¹²¹ The result is that human characteristics are ascribed to animals and ordinary objects of nature. Personification can also involve part of the human body like *Qwó* (Hand) and *Èṣẹ* (Foot). Personification therefore enables the priest of Ifá to tell stories about anything in the characteristic Ifá form without having to change his language and his emotions

whenever he moves from the human to the non-human zone. The following are a few examples.

In the example below, the personification involves the Standard Measure (*Òṣùnwòn*). Like a human being, Ifá divination was performed for this instrument, it was cautioned, it performed divination and reacted like human beings.

- Ó dúró níṣẹ̀kun òpópó,
 Ó bèrẹ̀ níṣẹ̀kun òpópó.
 Òkitì bàbààbà ní m̀bẹ̀ níṣẹ̀kun òpópó.
 A díá f'Òṣùnwòn
 Tí ńlọ s'ọ̀jà Èjìgbòmẹ̀kùn. 5
 Wòn ní k'Òṣùnwòn ó rúbọ.
 Wòn ní Òṣùnwòn ó níyì púpọ.
- Ó sì rú u.
 Ìgbà t'ó d'ọ̀jà Èjìgbòmẹ̀kùn,
 Ní wòn bá bèrẹ̀ sí í fà á ní àfàgbà. 10
 Ijọ ní ńjó,
 Ayọ ní ńyọ.
 Ó ńyin àwọn awoo rẹ.
 Àwọn awoo rẹ ńyin 'Fá.
 Ó ya ẹnu kótó, 15
 Orin awo ní ńkọ.
 Ó ní, 'Tòótọ lo gbédè láwo,
 Òṣùnwòn.
 Tòótọ lo gbédè láwo,
 Òṣùnwòn.¹²² 20

- He stood at the end of the highway;
 He stooped at the end of the highway;
 There is a large heap at the end of the highway.
 Ifá divination was performed for Standard Measure
 Who was going to the market of Èjìgbòmẹ̀kùn. 5
 Standard Measure was asked to perform sacrifice.
 He was told that he would have plenty of honour.
 And he performed the sacrifice.
 When he got to the market of Èjìgbòmẹ̀kùn,
 People started to struggle to take possession of him. 10
 He started to dance.
 He started to rejoice.
 He praised his Ifá priests
 While his Ifá priests praised Ifá.
 As he opened his mouth, 15

He uttered forth the song of Ifá
 He said, 'Truly, you understand secret language.
 Standard Measure.
 Truly, you understand secret language.
 Standard Measure.'

20

In the following example, the personification involves *Qwó* (the human hand). The hand is conceived as the mother of the five fingers. Like a human being, the hand performed sacrifice on behalf of her five offsprings (i.e. fingers) to prevent death. Like a mother, the hand cares for her children and prevents them from harm.

Òkúta là pàá mọ̀ sẹ̀jẹ.
 A díá f'Qwó,
 Qmọ̀ abárũnjàrún.
 Wọ̀n ní ó rúbọ̀ fún ọmọọ rẹ.

Nitorí ikú.

5

Gbogbo ọmọ̀ máraàrún tí Qwó bí nàà ló rúbọ̀ fún.

Gbogbo àwọ̀n ọmọ̀ nàà sì yè.

Ó ní, 'Qmọ̀ Qwó kì í t'ojú Qwó kú,

Qmọ̀ Èsẹ̀ kì í t'ojú Èsẹ̀ rọ̀run.

Kèè pẹ̀ o,

10

Kèè jìnà,

È tètè wáá bá ní láikú kangiri.¹²³

It is the stone which breaks suddenly without bleeding
 Ifá divination was performed for Hand,
 Offspring of he who inherits five (fingers) and retains
 five (fingers).

She was asked to perform sacrifice for her children
 To prevent imminent death.

5

Hand performed sacrifice for all her five children

And all the children survived.

She said, 'Hand's children do not die in the presence
 of Hand.

Foot's children do not die in the presence of Foot.

Very soon,

10

At no distant date,

Come and find us alive, strong and healthy.'

6. Figures of Speech

(a) **Simile.** This is an important figure of speech in *èsè Ifá*. Statements and descriptions are made more vivid by the use

of simile drawing comparison between two or more things. Here are a few examples.

- i. *Ìbẹ̀rẹ̀ àgbà bí a ńnàró ló rí.*¹²⁴

When an old man stoops down it seems as if he is standing.

- ii. *Ifá ńlẹ̀e t'áyé Olúufẹ̀, Orò, sọ.*
*Bí ẹnì tí ńsọgbá.*¹²⁵

Ifá was going to mend the king of Ifẹ's life
As one mends calabash.

- iii. *A díá fún Ọ̀rúnmilà,*
Ifá ó ràtà b'ọmọ ẹ
*Bí igún Ẹ̀gẹ̀mọ.*¹²⁶

Ifá divination was performed for Ọ̀rúnmilà.
Who would shield his children
Like the vulture of Ẹ̀gẹ̀mọ.

- iv. *Qjọ t'íkú bá ńwá mi í bọ wá,*
Ifá, ẹ̀wọ̀ nì o ràtà bọ mí,
B'ẹ̀wé ńlá tí í ràtàá boori;
*B'ẹ̀rì ńlá tí í ràtàá bo yanrìn lódò.*¹²⁷

On the day Death is seeking for me,
Ifá, you are the one to shelter me;
As a big leaf shelters solid maize gruel.
As a large body of water shelters sand in the river.

(b) Metaphor. Metaphoric language in *ẹ̀sẹ Ifá* consists mainly in the ascription of human characteristics to non-human objects. This makes the language of *ẹ̀sẹ Ifá* highly imaginative. Here are a few examples.

- i. *Ìṣẹ̀ àpọ̀n ọ̀ lórí,*
*T'alábiamọ ló san diẹ.*¹²⁸

The poverty of a bachelor has no head¹²⁹
But that of a parent is slightly better.

- ii. *Ó wáá tó gégẹ̀*
*K'ájé ó gbàríjọ s'òdò mi wàyi o.*¹³⁰

It is now high time
Money gathered together and came to me.

- iii. Ṣ'ojú olóko ni ikàn Ẹ é w'ẹwù ẹjẹ.¹³¹
It is in the presence of the farmer that garden egg wears a garment of blood.
- iv. Tètẹ mọq rìn,
Tètẹ mọq yan.¹³²
Spinach, walk about freely.
Spinach, move gracefully.

(c) **Hyperbole.** Hyperbolic language in ẹṣẹ Ifá is used partly for emphasis and partly for making descriptions more vivid. Here are a few examples.

- i. Mo dúró, mo kọ'rún;
Mo bẹrẹ, mo kọ'fà;
Mo f'ídùbúlẹ kọ'gba.¹³³
I stood up and made one hundred soil heaps;
I stooped down and made one hundred and twenty;
I lay down and made two hundred.
- ii. Ó mú'lé pọnti,
Ó m'ọnà rokà,
Ó fi gbogbo agbada dín'ran.¹³⁴
He filled the house with drinks.
He filled the streets with food.
He used all pots to fry meat.

7. Special Vocabulary

The use of special vocabulary is an important feature of the language of ẹṣẹ Ifá. Almost every ẹṣẹ Ifá contains special words the meanings of which non-cult members cannot understand. Such words may be archaic words which have survived only in the Ifá literary corpus or may be ordinary words used in an unfamiliar sense or formed by an unfamiliar rule of contraction.¹³⁵ The following are a few of such special vocabulary.

(a) Vocabulary Related to Divination

- i. Ó ká orí, ó tẹ ẹ mọyẹ.

He put his hands full of Ifá divination instruments on his own head.

ii. A díá fún. . .

Ifá divination was performed for

iii. A bù fún . . .

Ifá divination was also performed for. . . .

iv. Şe Ifá fún. . . .

Perform divination for. . . .

v. Wọn ní kí wọn ó yẹ àwọn lówó kan ibò wò.

They asked that *ibò*¹³⁶ be used to find out the solution to their problem.

(b) Vocabulary Related to Sacrifice¹³⁷

i. Ẹbọ́ fín, ẹbọ́ dà.

The sacrifice is accepted by the gods.

ii. Àbọ́rúbọ́yè bọ́ síşẹ.

May the sacrifice be blessed and accepted by the gods.

iii. Ó gbọ́ rírú ẹbọ́, ó rú.
Ó gbọ́ èrù àtùkèsù, ó tù.

He was told to perform sacrifice and he did so.

He was asked to offer sacrifice to *Ẹşù* and he complied.

iv. Rírú ẹbọ́, àtètè tu èrù.

The making of sacrifice leads to quick reward.

(c) Vocabulary Related to Ẹşù and Ajogun¹³⁸

i. Ejiẹ (death).

ii. Ajogun (all evil things including death, illness, loss etc.

iii. Eníyán (the witches).

iv. Ẹşù l'ó di àgbò
Mo l'ó di àfàkàn,
Òkuuru ọpọ́n ọnàá sún.

Ẹşù said it was time to go.

I said we must be on the move.

The carved bowl of sacrifice was on the move.

PART THREE

The Contents of *Ẹsẹ Ifá*

CHAPTER V

Orí and Man's Choice of Destiny

THE YORUBA CONCEPT OF ORÍ

THE Yoruba have a strong belief in predestination. They believe that the success or failure of any man depends to a large extent on the type of choice he made in heaven. Some people are said to have chosen a life of poverty and simplicity while others chose a life of affluence and glamour. Some people chose short life while others chose long life. This belief in predestination is used to explain the success or failure of every man on earth. If a person suddenly becomes rich the Yoruba say that it is due to his predestined choice in heaven. The same thing is said when a person dies in the flower of his youth or if he fails in an important endeavour. It follows, therefore, that while human effort cannot be ruled out for success or failure, the greater part of it can be ascribed to predestination. This is the meaning of the Yoruba saying:

A kúnlẹ̀, a yan ẹ̀dá,
A dáyé tán,
Ojú ńkán nì.

We knelt down (in heaven) and chose our destinies,
But when we arrived on earth,
We became impatient.

Predestination among the Yoruba is known by different names. Sometimes it is known as *àyànmọ* (choice) or *ipín* (predestined share) or *kádàrá* (divine share for man) or *ipòrí* (inner head). Whatever the name by which predestination is known, it is always associated with Orí (the inner head). It is believed that the symbol of free choice is Orí (inner head) which everyone received in heaven. A man's destiny, that is to say his success or failure in life, depends to a large extent on the type of head he chose in heaven.

The belief of the Yoruba in Orí as the symbol of predestination is manifested in their sayings, for example:

- i. Ẹni t'ó gbọn,
Orí ẹ l'ó ní ó gbọn.
Èyàn tí ò gbọn,
Orí rẹ l'ó ní ó gò j'ùṣu lọ.

He who is wise
Is made wise by his Orí.
He who is not wise
Is made more foolish than a piece of yam by his Orí.

- ii. Èyàn ò fẹ k'á rẹrù k'á sọ,
Orí ẹni ní í sọ ni.

Other people don't like to see a man relieved of his burden.
It is the man's Orí who brings relief.

The Yoruba regard Orí as one of the gods in their pantheon. Indeed, in a sense, Orí may be regarded as the greatest god of all.¹ Every man's Orí is regarded as his personal god who is expected to be more interested in his personal affairs than the other gods who are regarded as belonging to everybody. As a god, Orí is worshipped and propitiated by the Yoruba (Plate 11). There are many references to the propitiation of Orí in *ẹṣẹ Ifá*, for example:

- i. Wọn ní k'Íyàndá ó rúbọ,
K'ó sì bọ'rí araa rẹ.²

Íyàndá³ was asked to perform a sacrifice
And to propitiate his Orí.

- ii. Wọn ní bí mo bá délé,
Kí n wẹwọ ọgáà mi nù téninténí;
N w'ápò àgbìrà ọgáà mi nù nwọjọ nwọjọ,
N f'adlẹ òkòkó bọrì mi àpéré.

I was told that when I get home,
I should wash my sacred palm-nuts of divination carefully.
I should wash my divination bag persistently,
And offer a hen to my Orí as sacrifice.⁴

As mentioned in Chapter I, Ọ̀rúnmìlà is believed to be the mouthpiece of the other gods. It is through him that one knows the wishes of the other gods. As a mouthpiece for Orí Ọ̀rúnmìlà is regarded as *ẹ̀lẹ̀rì-ìpín* (witness of man's choice of destiny). It is believed that Ọ̀rúnmìlà was present when every person chose his destiny in heaven. It is not difficult therefore for Ọ̀rúnmìlà, through the Ifá divination system, to tell every person here on earth the wishes of his Orí. Since the destiny of every person has been decided in heaven, it is considered vital for every man to consult Ifá from time to time so that he might know what pleased or displeased his Orí. By so doing, every man would be able to tread the path already laid out for him in heaven without beating about the bush. This is exactly why the Yoruba believe in Ifá divination as an important factor in the life of every person.

Broadly speaking, therefore, one can say that when a person goes to consult Ifá all he is doing is finding out the wishes of his Orí. Ifá is merely a mouthpiece, an intermediary between the inquirer and his Orí. Ifá carries the message of Orí and the gods to the supplicant and carries the sacrifices made by the latter to Orí and the gods. The role of the gods is to aid Orí in leading every person to his destiny in life. Whatever a man's Orí has refused to approve cannot be granted by any other god.

The gods themselves have their own Orí directing their daily life. Like human beings, the gods know the wishes of their Orí by consulting Ifá. Ọ̀rúnmìlà himself consulted his Ifá divination instruments in order to find out the wishes of his Orí.

The following passages from *ẹ̀sẹ Ifá* show that Ọ̀rúnmìlà himself consulted his Ifá divination instruments in order to find out the wishes of his Orí.

- i. Ikú, Àrùn, Ọ̀fò, Ẹ̀gbà, Ẹ̀sẹ,
Gbogbo wọn ní nýọ Ọ̀rúnmìlàá wò.
Wọn níwí pé ọ́ọ kan
Ní àwọn ó pa á.
Ní Ọ̀rúnmìlà bá gbé òkè Ìpòrú rẹ kalẹ.⁵

Death, Disease, Loss, Paralysis and Wickedness
Were all staring at Ọ̀rúnmìlà.
They said that one day
They would kill him.

Ọrúnmilà then set down his divination instruments ready to consult his Orí.

- ii. Nnkan ló dẹrùba Ọrúnmilà,
 Ló bá wálé,
 Ó bi òkè Ìpòrí rẹ léèrè wò.⁶

Something frightened Ọrúnmilà,
 And he came home
 And consulted his Ìpòrí⁷ about it.

DISCUSSION OF THE THEME ORÍ IN ẸSẸ IFÁ

The Yoruba concept of Orí analysed above is a fascinating theme running through many *ẹsẹ Ifá*. Most of the *ẹsẹ* dealing with Orí are found in Ọgúndá Méjì and Ogbègúndá⁸ but since the concept of Orí is so vital to Ifá divination, it is not surprising to see that almost every *Odù* has at least one *ẹsẹ* dealing with this theme in one form or the other.

The theme of Orí in *ẹsẹ Ifá* amplifies most of the basic beliefs of the Yoruba about Orí. In this theme of Orí could be found myths tracing the process of the selection of Orí in heaven to the success or failure of every individual on earth. These myths also emphasize the point that Orí is greater than any other god and that each individual should take all problems first of all to his Orí. There are also stories which stress the important point that success in life also depends to some extent on the individual's good use of his ability to bring to fruition what has already been predestined for him in heaven by the choice of a good Orí. In the following pages, a number of *ẹsẹ Ifá* dealing with several aspects of the concept of Orí will be presented and analysed.

The first excerpt below is taken from Ogbègúndá. It embodies a myth which tells of how each man chooses his Orí in heaven from Àjàlá, the skilled porter who is notorious as an incorrigible debtor and who makes heads with clay in heaven. Since Àjàlá is such an irresponsible man, he sometimes forgets to put necessary finishing touches to some of the heads made by him. For example, he might forget to bake some of them in fire or he might over-bake them, rendering such heads potentially weak and unable to bear the strains of the long journey to earth. If a man is unfortunate to pick one of these potentially

bad heads, he is doomed to failure in life. Indeed, before such a person reaches earth, a heavy downpour of rain may wear away part of the imperfect head. On reaching earth, therefore, the person would find out that all the work he does would yield no gain because what would have been his gain is used up in repairing the damage already done to his useless head.⁹

On the contrary, if a man is lucky to choose one of the really good heads made by Àjàlá, such a person becomes prosperous and successful on earth since his head would be intact by the time he reaches earth. If such a person works hard, he will invariably make considerable gain and he will be able to use the gain for his own welfare, since he does not need to spend anything on making repairs to his head.

The myth tells of three friends, Orisèṣékú (the son of Ògún¹⁰), Orilèémèrè (the son of Ìja¹¹) and Afùwàpé (the son of Òrùnmìlà) who were going from heaven to earth to settle down there. The three friends set out for the house of Àjàlá—the maker of heads. Before they left heaven, they were advised not to call at any place on the way including the homes of their fathers. Afùwàpé, the son of Òrùnmìlà, did not heed this advice. He called on his father on the way and his friends had to leave him behind. When the other two reached the home of Àjàlá, they did not find him because, as usual, he was in hiding to avoid his creditors. When they waited for a long time without seeing Àjàlá, they asked for the store-house of heads from the people they found in the house. When they got there, they picked the heads of their choice not knowing that they picked the poor heads which Àjàlá had not bothered to make properly. Before the two friends reached earth, their useless heads were half worn-out by rain. Consequently, they were unsuccessful in all the things they did.

When Afùwàpé reached the home of his father, he found his father Òrùnmìlà consulting his Ifá. He told his father that he was on his way to the house of Àjàlá to choose a head which he would take to earth. The Ifá priests of the household of Òrùnmìlà then consulted Ifá for Afùwàpé. They told Òrùnmìlà that he should offer plenty of money and salt as sacrifice for his son. Part of this sacrifice of money and salt was given to Afùwàpé to carry with him on his journey.

On his journey, Afùwàpé encountered a gate-keeper from whom he asked for the road leading to the house of Àjàlá. He found the gate-keeper cooking soup and using ashes as his salt. He introduced salt to the gate-keeper who had never tasted it before and the gate-keeper liked it. He therefore gave the remainder of the salt to the gate-keeper. This kind deed made the gate-keeper take Afùwàpé all the way to the house of Àjàlá. The gate-keeper also instructed Afùwàpé to help Àjàlá pay up part of his debt so that the latter might help him choose the best head.

As usual, when Afùwàpé got to the house of Àjàlá, the latter was not at home but one of his creditors was waiting for him. Before Àjàlá returned, Afùwàpé paid Àjàlá's debt and the creditor departed. When Àjàlá returned, he was very happy at the kind deed of Afùwàpé and he personally led Afùwàpé to the store-house of heads and picked the best head for him. The result was that the good and durable head given to Afùwàpé withstood the hazards of the journey to earth and the head was intact when Afùwàpé reached earth. Consequently, Afùwàpé became a successful man on earth. The full story is told as follows:

Èbitì, ègbàkè ní í yè'dí pẹ.
 A díá fún Orísẹ̀ẹ̀kú, ọmọ Ọ̀gún;
 A bù fún Orílẹ̀émèrè, ọmọ Ọ̀ja;
 A díá fún Afùwàpé tí í ẹ̀'ọmọ Ọ̀rúnmilà
 Níjọ tí wọn ńrè'lé Olódùmarè lọ rée yanrí. 5
 Àwọn mètẹ̀tẹ̀ta tí a dárúkọ wònyí, ọ̀rẹ̀ ní wọn.
 Nígba t'ó d'ọjọ kan ni wọn bá gbìmọ pọ̀ pé
 Kí àwọn ó lọ s'ílẹ̀ ayé.
 Wọn ní bí àwọn bá dé'lẹ̀ ayé,
 Kí àwọn ó jọ máa gbé'bẹ̀, 10
 Bóyá ibẹ̀jẹ̀ lẹ̀ san àwọn ju ọ̀run lọ,
 Ní wọn bá fi ọ̀rọ̀ nàá lọ àwọn àgbàlagbà t'ó jù wọn lọ.
 Wọn ní bí wọn bá ńlọ s'ílẹ̀ ayé,
 Wọn ńlátí kókọ̀ lọ sí ọ̀dọ̀ Àjàlá
 Látí yan ipín nìbẹ̀. 15
 Wọn ní: 'Èèwọ̀ kan nàá ni ẹ̀ ńlátí sà o.
 Bí ẹ̀ bá ńlọ;
 Ẹ̀ kò gbọ̀dọ̀ yà sí ọ̀tún,
 Bẹ̀ẹ̀ ni ẹ̀ kò gbọ̀dọ̀ yà sí ọ̀sì,
 Ilé Àjàlá ni kí ẹ̀ máa lọ tààràtà.' 20

Wọn sọ fún wọn pé:

'Bí ẹnìkán bá gbúró babaa rẹ lónà,

Kò gbọdọ yà'bẹ o.'

Wọn ní ilé Àjàlá nì kí wọn ó máa lọ tààrà.

Wọn ní nígbà tí wọn bá yànpín tán lẹdò Àjàlá 25

Nì kí wọn ó tóó kọrí s'óde Isáláyé.

Wọn ní àwọn gbọ o.

Nì wọn bá múra,

Ó d'ilé Àjàlá, aláamọ tí í mọrí.

Nígbà tí wọn rìn sàà, 30

Wọn kan Afabéré-gúnyán níbi t'ó gbé ngúnyán pẹlú okini.

Wọn ní: 'Ẹ nìlẹ o, baba.'

Ó ní: 'Hò.'

Wọn ní: 'Ẹ jọọ,

Ọdọ Àjàlá là nìlọ.' 35

Afabéré-gúnyán ní àfi bí òun bá gúnyán òun tán

Nì òun tóó leè júwe ọ̀nà fún wọn.

Nì Afùwàpẹ bá gba abéré lẹwọọ rẹ,

Ló bá nfi í gúnyán.

Ó gúnyán náà fún odidi ọjọ mẹtá 40

Kí ó tóó gún un tán.

Nígbà tí ó gúnyán yíi tán,

Nì Afabéré-gúnyán wáá sọ fún wọn wí pé

Kí wọn ó máa lọ.

Ó ní bí wọn bá rìn diẹ, 45

Kí wọn ó yà sí apá ọtún.

Ó ní wọn ó kan oníbodè kan m̀bẹ,

Kí wọn ó béèrè lẹwọọ rẹ,

Yóó sì júwe ọ̀nà fún wọn.

Nígbà tí wọn rìn sàà, 50

Nì wọn bá dé ibikan.

Nì Orisẹ̀ékú, ọmọ Ọ̀gún, bá dúró sii.

Ó bèrè sí í gbúró babaa rẹ.

B'ó tí nímú apó,

T'ó nímú ọfà, 55

T'ó nímú ọrun.

Orisẹ̀ékú ọmọ Ọ̀gún, ní òun ó lọ

Bá baba òun palẹ ogun mọ o.

Nì wọn bá rán an létí pé

Se bí wọn ti ka èèwọ fún àwọn 60

Pé àwọn ò gbọdọ yà sí ibikan.

Nì Orisẹ̀ékú, ọmọ Ọ̀gún, bá sí sẹ,

Ó ní kò burú.	
Ni wọn bá ńlọ.	
Nígbà tí wọn rín sàà,	65
Ni wọn bá kan ilé Ọ̀rúnmlà.	
Wọn ńgbọ́ tí Ọ̀rúnmlà ńsẹ́'pọn Ifá poro, poro, poro.	
Ni Afùwàpẹ́ bá dúró sii.	
Àwọn méjì yókú ní kí ó jẹ́ kí àwọn ó máa lọ.	
Afùwàpẹ́ ní òun ò ní í lọ mọ́,	70
Àfi bí òun bá fojúkan baba òun.	
Ni wọn bá rán an létí èèwò tí wọn kà fún wọn.	
Afùwàpẹ́ sá kò jálẹ́,	
Ó ní òun fẹ́ẹ́ fojúkan baba òun.	
Ló bá rá giiri wọlé.	75
Ni wọn bá ńlọ.	
Nígbà tí Ọ̀rúnmlà fojúkan Afùwàpẹ́,	
Ó bi í níbi t'ó ńlọ.	
Afùwàpẹ́ ní òun ńlọ s'óde isálayé ni,	
Òun sì nílátí kọ́ lọ yanrí lódò Ẹ̀jàlá.	80
Ni Ọ̀rúnmlá bá kó Ifáa rẹ́,	
Ó fi kan Afùwàpẹ́ lórí.	
Ìgbà tí yóó da Ifá nàà sílẹ́,	
Ogbèyónú (Ogbègúndá) ni wọn rí.	
Nígbà tí àwọn babaláwo ilé Ọ̀rúnmlà wo Ifá nàà	
sun-un,	85
Wọn ní: 'Ìwọ Ọ̀rúnmlà,	
Ibikan ni ọmọ́ rẹ ńlọ yìi,	
K'ọmọ́ nàà ó lè rí ipín rere mú nìbẹ́,	
Ẹbọ ní kí ó ẹ́.'	
Kín ni àwọn ó ha rú bá yìi?	90
Wọn ní kí wọn ó ní egbínrín iyò mẹ́ta,	
K'ó sì ní egbẹ́gbàafà ọ̀nà mẹ́ta.	
Ni Ọ̀rúnmlà bá kó gbogboo rẹ́ kalẹ́,	
Ni wọn bá ẹ́fá fún Afùwàpẹ́.	
Wọn bu díẹ́ fún un nínú iyò nàà,	95
Wọn sì fún un ní egbàafà nínú egbàasán tí ó rú.	
Ni wọn bá ní kí Afùwàpẹ́ ó máa lọ.	
Nígbà tí Afùwàpẹ́ jáde n'ilé Ọ̀rúnmlà,	
Kò rí Orísẹ́ẹ́kú, ọmọ Ọ̀gún,	
Àti Orílẹ́mèrè, ọmọ Ịja, mọ́.	100
Wọn tí lọ ní tí wọn.	
Nígbà tí àwọn méjì yìi ńlọ,	
Wọn kan oníbodè àkọ́kọ́,	
Wọn bèèrè ilé Ẹ̀jàlá lẹ́wọ́ rẹ́.	

- Onibodè ní ilé Àjàlá jìnnà sí ìhín. 105
 Ó ní bí kò bá jìnnà ní,
 Òun ibá fi hàn wọn.
 Ní wọn bá binú kúrò lódòṣò rẹ,
 Wọn bèèrè lódò ẹlòmíràn.
 Ní wọn bá de'lé Àjàlá. 110
 Nígbà tí wọn dé'lé Àjàlá,
 Wọn ò bá a nilé.
 Ní wọn bá jókò dè é.
 Nígbà t'ó di ọjọ kejì tí Àjàlá ò dé,
 Ní wọn bá wí fún àwọn ará ilée rẹ pé 115
 Nnkan kan làwọn wáá ẹ.
 Wọn ní àwọn wáá yanrí ní.
 Ní àwọn ará ilé Àjàlá bá dáhùn pé:
 'B'ó bá ẹ pe t'orí ní,
 Orí m̀bẹ́ n'̀lẹ́. 120
 Ní wọn bá mú wọn lọ síbì tí Àjàlá m̀orí sí.
 Nígbà tí Orísẹ̀ẹ̀kú ó bọ síbẹ́,
 Orí t'ó jẹ tuntun,
 Tí Àjàlá ò tìl sun rárá ló mú.
 Nígbà tí Orílèémèrè náà ó bọ síbẹ́, 125
 Orí nílá kan báylí ló gbé
 Lálmọ pé ó ti fọ sára.
 Ní àwọn méjèjì bá gbé oríi wọn borí.
 Ní wọn bá fọn ọn,
 Ó di òde-ayé. 130
 Ó kù diẹ kí wọn ó d'óde-ìsálayé,
 Ní ọjó bá dé.
 Ọjò yí rọ títi,
 Ó kọ, kò dá mọ,
 Bẹẹ ní ó npa Orísẹ̀ẹ̀kú àti Orílèémèrè. 135
 Nígbà tí ọjó pa orí yí tó bẹẹ,
 Ló bá bèrẹ sí í mumi yó.
 Bí oríi wọn náà bá kẹ yín-ín,
 Ní ó bǎ rí bọ sílẹ̀ pọ.
 Orí sáà ǹkẹ́ yín-ín 140
 Títí tí ó fi bú lẹgbẹ́,
 T'ó fi rí dànù,
 Tí gbogboo rẹẹ wáá kù pẹlẹbẹ.
 Ní wọn bá fi bẹẹ wọ'lé ayé.
 Nígbà tí wọn dé'lé ayé tán, 145
 Wọn ẹ́sẹ́, ẹ́sẹ́,
 Wọn ò r'ère jẹ.

- Bí wọn bá fi eépinnì sòwò,
 Eépinnì náà lè tún dá gbèsèè kọ̀ọ̀-kan-àbò
 Sí wọn lórùn. 150
- Nígba tí wọn ẹ̀ kinní yí títí,
 Fún bí ọ̀dún mēwǎ,
 Tí wọn ò rí ọ̀jútúú rẹ̀,
 Ní wọn bá m'éejì k'ẹ̀ta,
 Wọn looko akònilògbòn. 155
- Àwọn awòyeróye wáá fi yé wọn pé
 Orí tí wọn mú ni ò dára.
 Wọn ní: 'Nígba tí ẹ̀ m̀bò,
 Njẹ̀ ọ̀jọ̀ pa yín lònà?'
 Wọn ní, 'Bẹ̀ ni.' 160
- Wọn ní: 'Nígba tí ẹ̀ m̀bò wá silé ayé,
 Orí burúkú lẹ̀ gbé.
 Bí orí náà kò bá ẹ̀ tútù,
 A ẹ̀ èyí t'ó ti fọ̀ sára.'
 Wọn ní: 'B'ẹ̀ ẹ̀ ti m̀bò lònà un,
 T'ọ̀jò npa yín,
 Ní orí burúkú t'ẹ̀ ẹ̀ gbé ǹyìn rìn,
 T'ó nri dànù.'
 Wọn ní: 'Nígba tí ẹ̀ ó fi dé'lé ayé,
 Orí t'ẹ̀ ẹ̀ gbé kò jù pẹ̀lẹ̀bẹ̀ lọ̀ mọ̀. 170
- Láti lgbà náà, gbogbo iṣẹ̀ tí ẹ̀ nṣe,
 Orí burúkú pẹ̀lẹ̀bẹ̀ un lẹ̀ fi nḍí,
 Ó sì di lgbà tí ẹ̀ bá kún un títí,
 Tí ó bá dé déédéé èyí tí ẹ̀ gbé kúrò lóde-òrun,
 Kí ẹ̀ tóó máa rí ẹ̀.' 175
- Nígba tí Afùwàpẹ̀ m̀bò,
 T'ó rìn sàà,
 Ó kan oníbodè àkòkọ̀.
 Ó bi í lèèrè ilé Àjàlá.
 Eléyiún ní àfi bí ọ̀dún bá se ọ̀bẹ̀ tí ọ̀un nṣe tán. 180
- Ní Afùwàpẹ̀ bá jókò tì í.
 Ó m̀bá a á koná.
 Ibi tí Afùwàpẹ̀ ti nkoná
 Ló ti rí i pé eérú ní oníbodè m̀bù sínú ọ̀bẹ̀.
 Ó ní, 'Baba, eérú lẹ̀ m̀bù s'ọ̀bẹ̀ yí!' 185
- Babá ní ohun t'áwọn nḣẹ̀ ní t'áwọn nù-un.
 Ní Atùwàpẹ̀ bá mú ọ̀kan nínú egbínrín iyọ̀ rẹ̀,
 Ó bu iyọ̀ nḣẹ̀.
 Ó fi sínú ọ̀bẹ̀.
 Ló bá ní kí oníbodè ó tọ̀ ọ̀ wò. 190

- Nígba tí oníbodè ó fi kan ẹnu,
 Ó ní níbo ló ti rí ohun t'ó dùn tó báyii?
 Ó ní nǹjẹ o lè bun òun níbi iyókù?
 Afùwàpẹ ní kò burú,
 Ló bá kó egbínrín iyò méjèèjì fún un. 195
 Nígba tí wọn ẹ ọbẹ yí jiná,
 Ni oníbodè bá dide,
 Ó Ẹaájú,
 Afùwàpẹ tẹlé ẹ.
 Wọn rín tití, 200
 Wọn búrín, búrín,
 Ni wọn bá súnmọ ilé Àjàlá.
 Ni wọn bá bèrẹ sí í gb'áriwo.
 Oníbodè ní: 'Ilé Àjàlá ni wọn tí nǹpariwo un.'
 Ó ní: 'Àjàlá ọ sí nǹlẹ nù-un, 205
 Ó ti sá pamọ fún olówó ọ rẹ nù-un.
 Olówó náà ní nǹpariwo báun.'
 Ó bi Afùwàpẹ b'ó bá ní owó lówó.
 Afùwàpẹ ní bèẹ ni.
 Ó ní bí Afùwàpẹ bá fojúkan olówó Àjàlá náà 210
 Kí ó bá Àjàlá san owó tí ó jẹ ẹ.
 Nígba tí Afùwàpẹ dé'lé Àjàlá,
 Ó bá ẹni tí Àjàlá jẹ lówó náà
 Tí ńkẹ, tí nǹyán bí ẹsin.
 Ni Afùwàpẹ bá bi í ní iye gbèsè náà. 215
 Ó ní ẹgbàafà ni.
 Ni Afùwàpẹ bá tọwọ b'apò,
 Ló bá san án.
 Nígba tí ó san owó náà tán,
 Tí olówó náà lọ tán, 220
 Ni Àjàlá bá bẹ sílẹ láti òkè àjà.
 T'ó sá pamọ sí.
 Ó kí Afùwàpẹ,
 Afùwàpẹ náàá kí i.
 Ó ní: 'Nǹjẹ o bá ẹnikan nihin?' 225
 Afùwàpẹ ní òún bá a
 T'ó sọ wí pé o jẹ òun ní ẹgbàafà.
 Afùwàpẹ ní ẹ̀gbẹ̀n òún tí san owó náà o.
 Ni Àjàlá bá dúpẹ lówó Afùwàpẹ.
 Ọ bí i pe kín ló wáá ẹ. 230
 Afùwàpẹ ní òún wáá yanrí ni.
 Ni Àjàlá bá mú un,
 O ní k'ó kálọ.

- Nígbà tí ó yá,
 Wọn dé ibi tí Àjàlá mọ orí sí. 235
 Wọn bá ọ̀kànlérúgba orí níbẹ̀.
 Ní Àjàlá bá ju ọ̀pá irin sí ọ̀kan,
 Níse ló bú pẹ̀ẹ̀.
 Àjàlá ní: 'O ò rí i,
 Èyiun ò d́áa.' 240
 Ó tún rí èkejì,
 Ó ju ọ̀pá irin sí i,
 Èyiun nááá tún bú pẹ̀ẹ̀.
 Àjàlá ní èyiun náà ò d́áa.
 Ní wọn bá tún níkáàkiri 245
 Títí tí Àjàlá fí rí ọ̀kan,
 Ó tún ju ọ̀pá irin sí òun náà,
 Ó dún kangó kangó, koro koro.
 Ó tún gbé e,
 Ó jù ú mọ̀lẹ̀, 250
 Ó yí gbiiri.
 Ló bá gbé e fún Afùwàpẹ̀.
 Afùwàpẹ̀ ní ẹ̀ ẹ̀yí ló d́áa?
 Àjàlá ní bẹ̀ẹ̀ ní.
 Ní Afùwàpẹ̀ bá gbé e karí. 255
 Ló bá kọ̀rí s'òná òde-ìsálayé.
 Ó kù diẹ̀ k'ó d'òde-ìsálayé ní òjò bá dé.
 Òjò yí pọ̀ tó bẹ̀ẹ̀ gẹ́ẹ̀,
 Ó sì pa Afùwàpẹ̀, etí rẹ̀ ẹ̀fẹ̀rẹ̀ di.
 Bí òjò yí ti ńpa orí Afùwàpẹ̀ 260
 Bẹ̀ẹ̀ ní ńtaá d́ànù.
 Korokoro ní orí nááá yè nígbà tí ó dé'lé-ayé.
 Nígbà tí Afùwàpẹ̀ dé'lé-ayé tán,
 Ló bá bẹ̀rẹ̀ sí í ẹ̀ ẹ̀wò,
 Ó sì ńẹ̀ ọ̀pọ̀lọ̀pọ̀ èrè. 265
 Ó níre ní ànító.
 Ó kọ̀lé, ó kààsẹ̀.
 Ó ní ọ̀pọ̀lọ̀pọ̀ aya,
 Ó sì bímọ̀ ló pọ̀lọ̀pọ̀ pẹ̀lú.
 K'ó bùsẹ̀ gádà, 270
 K'ó bùsẹ̀ gèdẹ̀,
 Ní wọn bá fí j'oyè Orisanmí.
 Nígbà tí Orísẹ̀ékú, ọ̀mọ̀ Ògún,
 Àti Orílẹ̀émèrè, ọ̀mọ̀ Ìja, fojúkan Afùwàpẹ̀,
 Púrú ní wọn bú sẹ̀kún. 275
 Wọn ní: 'N ò mọ̀'bí olórí gbé yanrí o,

Mbá lẹ yan tẹmi.

N ọ mọ'bi Afùwàpẹ yanrí o,

Mbá lẹ yan tẹmi.

Afùwàpẹ nááá sì dá wọn lóhùn wí pé:

280

'O ọ mọ'bi olórí gbé yanrí o,

Ọ bá lẹ yan tẹ.

O ọ mọ'bi Afùwàpẹ yanrí o,

Ọ bá lẹ yan tẹ.

Ibikan náà la ti gbé yanrí o,

285

Kádàrá ọ papọ ni. ¹

It is a snare which strikes suddenly.

Ifá divination was performed for Orisẹ̀kú, the son of Ọ̀gún;

Ifá divination was also performed for Orilẹ́mèrè, the son of Ịja;

Ifá divination was performed for Afùwàpẹ who was the son of Ọ̀rúnmìlà;

On the day they were going to the house of Olódúmaré to choose their heads. 5

These three people were all friends.

One day, they deliberated together

And decided that they would go to earth.

They decided that when they arrived to earth,

They would settle down together there, 10

Maybe the place would be better for them than heaven.

They asked for advice from older people.

And they were told that before going on earth,

They must first of all go to Àjàlá,

To choose their heads. 15

They were warned thus: 'You must observe one prohibition.

When you are going,

You must not turn to the right

Neither must you turn to the left.

You must go straight to the house of Àjàlá.' 20

They were warned:

'Even if one of you hears his father's voice on the way

He must not go there.'

They were told to go straight to the house of Àjàlá.

They were told that it was after they had chosen their 25

heads from Àjàlá

That they should go to earth.

They promised to heed the warning.
 They prepared themselves
 And started off on their journey to the house of Àjàlá,
 the potter who makes heads.
 After walking for some distance, 30
 They reached He-who-pounds-yams-with-a-needle
 pounding yams with a small needle.
 They said: 'Father, we greet you.'
 The father replied: 'Thank you.'
 They pleaded: 'Please, sir,
 We are going to the house of Àjàlá.' 35
 He-who-pounds-yams-with-a-needle said he must first
 finish pounding his yams
 Before he showed them the way.
 Afùwàpé took the needle from him,
 And started to pound the yams with it.
 He pounded the yams for three days 40
 Before he finished the pounding.
 When he finished pounding the yams,
 He-who-pounds-yams-with-a-needle told them that
 They could go.
 He told them that after travelling some distance, 45
 They should turn to the right
 Where they would find one gate-keeper.
 They should ask for the way from him,
 And he would show them the way.
 After travelling some distance, 50
 They got to a certain place.
 Orisèékú, the son of Ògún, stood still
 For he heard his father moving:
 As his father took up his quiver;
 As his father took up his bow. 55
 Orisèékú, the son of Ògún, then said that he would go
 To help his father prepare for war.
 But his companions reminded him that
 They had been warned
 That they must not call anywhere on the way. 60
 Then Orisèékú, the son of Ògún, moved forward,
 Saying that was true.
 And they continued on their journey.
 After travelling some distance,
 They came to the house of Òrúnmílà. 65
 They heard Òrúnmílà striking his divining board

- loudly with his rattle.
 Afùwàpé then stood still.
 The other two urged him to let them go on.
 But Afùwàpé said he wouldn't go on.
 Until he had seen his father. 70
 They reminded him of the warning given to them.
 But Afùwàpé refused bluntly
 And insisted that he must see his father.
 He then hurried into the house (of his father).
 The two others left him, 75
 And continued their journey.
 When Òrúnmilà saw Afùwàpé,
 He asked him where he was going.
 Afùwàpé said he was going to earth,
 And he must first of all go to Àjàlá to choose his head. 80
 Òrúnmilà then took his divination instruments,
 And touched Afùwàpé's head with them.
 When he cast the instruments on the ground,
 Ogbèyónú (otherwise known as Ogbègúndá) was the
Odù that appeared.
 When the Ifá priests of Òrúnmilà's household studied 85
 the *Odù* carefully,
 They said: 'You Òrúnmilà,
 Your son is going on a journey to a certain place.
 So that he might choose a good head,
 Let him perform a sacrifice.'
 What would they use for sacrifice? 90
 They were told to perform sacrifice with three bags of
 salt.
 And three times twelve thousand cowries.
 Òrúnmilà offered all the materials,
 And the sacrifice was performed for them.
 Part of the salt was given to Afùwàpé 95
 Together with twelve thousand cowries.
 They then asked Afùwàpé to proceed on his journey.
 When Afùwàpé came out of Òrúnmilà's house,
 He saw neither Orisèṣékú, the son of Ògún,
 Nor Orílèémèrè, the son of Ija. 100
 They had gone.
 When these two were going,
 They got to the keeper of the first gate.
 They asked for the house of Àjàlá.
 But the gate-keeper said that the house of Àjàlá was 105

too far.

He said that if it was not too far,

He would have taken them there.

They left him in anger,

And asked another person.

At last, they reached the house of Àjàlá.

110

When they got to the house of Àjàlá,

They did not find him at home.

They decided to wait for him.

When, on the second day, Àjàlá did not return,

They told the people of Àjàlá's household

115

That they had come for a certain thing.

They said that they had come to choose their own
heads.

The people of Àjàlá's household answered thus:

'If that is your mission,

Numerous heads are available.'

120

They then took them to Àjàlá's store-house of heads.

When Orisèékú entered,

He picked a newly-made head

Which Àjàlá had not baked at all.

When Orilèémèrè also entered,

125

He picked one very big head

Not knowing that it was broken.

The two of them put on their clay heads

And they hurried off

On their way to earth.

130

A little distance before they reached earth,

It started to rain.

The rain poured down for a long time,

And the rain refused to stop.

Yet it was beating down on Orisèékú and Orilèémèrè.

135

When the rain had beaten their heads for a long time,

The heads became waterlogged.

Then the heads expanded,

And started to drop off in bits.

The heads expanded more and more

140

Until the sides of the heads were completely worn
away,

And dropped off in lumps.

So that what remained was flat and small.

It was in that state that they entered earth.

When they got to earth

145

They worked and worked,
But they had no gain.
If they traded with one half-penny,
It led them
To a loss of one and a half-penny. 150
When they did this
For about ten years
Without any hope of improvement,
They added two cowry-shells to three,
And went to consult Ifá priests. 155
These wise men told them that
The fault was in the bad heads they had chosen.
They asked them: 'When you were coming to earth,
Were you beaten by rain?'
They answered: 'We were.' 160
They (the Ifá priests) said: 'When you were coming
to earth,
You chose bad heads.
If they were not unbaked heads,
They must have been broken ones.
As you were coming to earth, 165
And you were being beaten by rain,
The bad heads you chose were wearing away.
And dropping off in pieces.
Before you arrived on earth,
Your heads had become very flat. 170
Since then all the gain from the work you have been
doing,
You were using to make good the worn off parts of
your bad heads.
It is when you have made them good sufficiently
So that they are restored to their original sizes,
That you will begin to prosper very well.' 175
When Afùwàpé was coming,
He walked some distance
And got to the keeper of the first gate.
He asked from him the way to Àjàlá's house.
The gate-keeper said he would first finish cooking his 180
soup.
So, Afùwàpé sat patiently by him,
Helping him to kindle the fire.
As Afùwàpé was helping to kindle the fire,
He noticed that the gate-keeper was putting ashes into

the soup.

He said: 'Father, what you are putting into the soup
is ashes.' 185

The father said that was what he always ate.

Afùwàpé then took one of his bags of salt,

And took a little salt from it,

And put it into the soup.

He asked the gate-keeper to taste it. 190

When the gate-keeper tasted it,

He asked Afùwàpé whence he got such a thing.

He then implored Afùwàpé to give him some more
of it.

Afùwàpé agreed,

And gave the two bags of salt to him. 195

When they finished cooking the soup,

The gate-keeper stood up.

He led the way

And Afùwàpé followed him.

They walked for long. 200

They walked and walked,

And then they came close to the house of Àjàlá.

They heard a noise of someone shouting.

The gate-keeper said: 'That noise is from Àjàlá's
house.'

He said, 'That shows that Àjàlá is not at home. 205

He has hidden himself to avoid his creditor,

The creditor is the one making that noise.'

He asked Afùwàpé if he had money.

Afùwàpé said he had.

The gate-keeper said that if Afùwàpé saw Àjàlá's
creditor, 210

He should help Àjàlá to pay up the debt.

When Afùwàpé arrived at the house of Àjàlá,

He found Àjàlá's creditor.

Shouting, neighing like a horse.

Afùwàpé then asked him the amount of money invol-
ved. 215

The creditor said the amount was twelve thousand
cowries.

Afùwàpé then opened his bag,

Brought out the money, and paid the debt.

After he had paid the money,

And the creditor had gone away, 220

- Àjàlá jumped down from the ceiling
Where he had hidden himself.
He greeted Afùwàpé,
And Afùwàpé also greeted him.
He asked whether Afùwàpé found someone in the house. 225
Afùwàpé said he found someone.
Who said that you (Àjàlá) owed him twelve thousand
cowries.
Afùwàpé said that he had paid off the money.
Àjàlá then thanked Afùwàpé
And asked him what he wanted. 230
Afùwàpé said that he had come to choose a head.
Àjàlá then took him,
And asked him to come along.
After some time,
They got to Àjàlá's store-house of heads. 235
They found two hundred and one heads there.
Àjàlá threw his iron rod at one,
And that one broke into pieces.
Àjàlá said: 'Don't you see?
That one is not good.' 240
He saw another one,
And threw his iron rod at it.
That one also broke into pieces.
Àjàlá said that also was not good.
So, they went on searching. 245
Until Àjàlá saw one,
And threw his iron rod at that as well.
It gave a loud sound.
He then took it,
And threw it on the bare ground. 250
And it rolled all over the ground.
He gave it to Afùwàpé.
Afùwàpé asked whether that was a good one.
Àjàlá said it was good.
Afùwàpé then fixed it on his head, 255
And he went in the direction of earth.
Just as he was about to get to earth, it started to rain.
The rain was very heavy,
And it beat Afùwàpé so much that he became almost
deaf.
As this rain was beating Afùwàpé's head, 260

The rain was dropping off.
 His head was quite intact when he arrived on earth.
 When Afùwàpé arrived on earth,
 He started to trade.
 And he made plenty of profit. 265
 When he had enough of good things.
 He built a house and decorated its doors.
 He had many wives,
 And he had many children as well.
 After some time, 270
 In due course,
 He was honoured with the title of Orísanmí.
 When Orísèkú, the son of Ògún,
 And Oríémèrè, the son of Ìja, saw Afùwàpé,
 They started to weep. 275
 Each said: 'I don't know where the lucky ones chose
 their heads,
 I would have gone there to choose mine'
 I don't know where Afùwàpé chose his head,
 I would have gone there to choose mine.'
 Afùwàpé answered them saying: 280
 'You don't know where the lucky ones chose their heads,
 You would have gone there to choose your own.
 You don't know where Afùwàpé chose his head,
 You would have gone there to choose your own.
 We chose our heads from the same place, 285
 But our destinies are not identical.'

In the second excerpt which follows Orí is depicted as a god of greater importance than any other god because he is much more concerned with human beings than any other god. Every man's Orí is therefore his personal god who pleads for him before the other gods and without whom nothing can be achieved by any man. Hence the statement:

Orí pẹ́lẹ́,
 Atètẹ́ níran.
 Atètẹ́ gbe'ni k'òòṣà.
 Kò sóòṣà tí í dá'ni í gbè
 Lẹ́yìn Orí ẹni.¹²

Orí, I hail you,
 You who do not forget your devotees.
 Who bless devotees more quickly than other gods.
 No god blesses a man
 Without the consent of his Orí.

The full story is told as follows:

One day Ọrúnmilà gathered all the gods together and posed to them the question: 'Ta ló tó Alásan bá r'òkun?' (Who can accompany his devotee on a distant journey over the seas without deserting him at any stage¹³). Şàngó, the thunder god, and the boldest of all gods, was the first to take up the challenge. He said that he could go with any of his devotees to any place without looking back. The other gods then asked him what he would do if on his journey with his devotee, he arrived at Kòso, the home of his fathers. Şàngó answered that he would first of all call at his home. Then the other gods said that if he called at his home, that meant deserting his devotee and breaking his promise. One by one, all the gods boastfully answered the question posed by Ọrúnmilà. The question was also posed to Ọrúnmilà himself and he likewise answered the question boastfully. The gods then became confused and they complained that they did not understand the meaning of Ọrúnmilà's parable. They therefore begged him to unfold its meaning to them.

In his explanation, Ọrúnmilà said that only Orí, every person's Orí, could accompany everyone to the farthest place on earth without turning back. He said:

Orí nìkàn
 Ló tó Alásǎn bá r'òkun.
 Bí mo bá lówó lẹwọ,
 Orí nì n ó rò fún.
 Oríl mi, iwọ ni.
 Bí mo bá bímọ láyé,
 Orí nì n ó rò fún.
 Oríl mi, iwọ ni.
 Ire gbogbo tí mo bá ní láyé,
 Orí, nì n ó rò fún.
 Oríl mi, iwọ ni.¹⁴

5

10

It's Orí alone

Who can accompany his devotee to any place without
turning back.

If I have money,

It is my Orí I will praise.

My Orí, it is you.

If I have children on earth,

It is my Orí to whom I will give the praise.

My Orí, it is you.

All good things I have on earth,

It is Orí I will praise

My Orí, it is you.

The excerpt now follows.

Ọ̀rúnmílá ló d'òdèdè nìbèrè.

Ifá, mo ní: 'Ta ló tó Alásǎn bá r'òkun?'

Şàngó ní òún tó Alásǎn bá r'òkun.

Wọn ní: 'Njé b'ó o bá rìn títí,

B'ó o bá búrìn, búrìn,

B'ó o bá dé Kòso,

Ilée bàbàà rẹ́ ńkọ́?

Bí wọn bá se gbẹ̀gìrì,

Bí wọn bá rokà,

Bí wọn bá fún ọ́ lórógbó àt'àkùkọ́ adìẹ kan ńkọ́?'

Şàngó ní: 'Bí mo bá ti yó tán,

N ó padà s'ílèè mi ní.'

Wọn ní Şàngó ò tó Alásǎn bá r'òkun.

Ọ̀rúnmílá ló d'òdèdè nìbèrè.

Ifá, mo ní: 'Ta ló tó Alásǎn bá r'òkun?'

Ọyá ní òún tó Alásǎn bá r'òkun.

Wọn ní: 'Njé b'ó o bá rìn títí,

B'ó o bá búrìn, búrìn,

B'ó o bá dé'lée 'Rá,

Ilée bàbàà rẹ́ ńkọ́?

Bí wọn bá p'òdá t'ó tóbi.

Bí wọn bá fún ọ́ ní ìkòkò ègboò kan ńkọ́?'

Ọyá ní: 'Bí mo bá ti yó tán o,

N ó padà s'ílèè mi ní.'

Wọn ní Ọyá ò tó Alásǎn bá r'òkun.

Ọ̀rúnmílá ló d'òdèdè nìbèrè.

Ifá, mo ní: 'Ta ló tó Alásǎn bá r'òkun?'

Òòşàálá ní òún tó Alásǎn bá r'òkun.

Wọn ní: 'Njé b'ó o bá rìn títí,

- B'ó o bá bùrìn, bùrìn, 30
 B'ó o bá dé'lée 'Fọn,
 Ilée bàbàà rẹ ńkọ?
 Bí wọn bá pa àgbébọ adìẹ t'ó rọ'yin sínú.
 Bí wọn bá mú igba igbín
 Tí wọn ti sè ní òsíki ńkọ? 35
 Òòṣàálá ní: 'Bí mo bá ti yó tán,
 N ó padà s'ilèè mi ni.'
 Wọn ní Òòṣàálá ò tó Alásǎn bá r'òkun.
 Ọrúnmilá ló d'òdèdè nìbèrẹ.
 Ifá mo ní: 'Ta ló tó Alásǎn bá r'òkun?' 40
 Ẹlẹgbáraá ní òún tó Alásǎn bá r'òkun.
 Wọn ní: 'Njẹ b'ó o bá rìn títí,
 B'ó o bá bùrìn, bùrìn,
 B'ó o bá dé Kétu,
 Ilée bàbàà rẹ ńkọ?' 45
 Bí wọn bá fún ọ lákùkọ adìẹ
 Pẹlú ọpọlọpọ epo ńkọ?
 Ẹlẹgbáraá ní: 'Bí mo bá ti yó tán,
 N ó padà s'ilèè mi ni.'
 Wọn ní Ẹlẹgbára ò tó Alásǎn bá r'òkun. 50
 Ọrúnmilá ló d'òdèdè nìbèrẹ.
 Ifá, mo ní: 'Ta ló tó Alásǎn bá r'òkun?'
 Ọgún ní òún tó Alásǎn bá r'òkun.
 Wọn ní: 'Njẹ b'ó o bá rìn títí.
 B'ó o bá bùrìn, bùrìn, 55
 B'ó o bá dé'lèè 'Rè,
 Ilée bàbàà rẹ ńkọ?
 Bí wọn bá fún ọ lẹwà ẹyan;
 Bí wọn bá bẹ'já fún ọ tán,
 Tí wọn f'àkùkọ adìẹ ẹbòsẹẹ rẹ; 60
 Bí wọn bá fún ọ lóti àti ẹmu ńkọ?'
 Ọgún ní: 'Bí mo bá ti yó tán o,
 Ìjálá tan-taan-tan
 Ní n ó máa sun bọ wá'lèè mi.
 Wọn ní Ọgún ò tó Alásǎn bá r'òkun. 65
 Ọrúnmilá ló d'òdèdè nìbèrẹ.
 Ifá, mo ní: 'Ta ló tó Alásǎn bá r'òkun?'
 Ọṣún ní òún tó Alásǎn bá r'òkun.
 Wọn ní: 'Njẹ b'ọ o bá rìn títí,
 B'ó o bá bùrìn, bùrìn,
 B'ó o bá dé 'Jùmú, 70
 Ilée bàbàà rẹ ńkọ?

- Bí wọn bá fún ọ lópòlópò ẹkọ
 Pẹlú ẹfọọ yánrin àti ẹkẹtẹ ńkọ?
 Ọṣun ní: 'Bí mo bá ti yó tán ọ,
 Idẹ wẹrẹwẹrẹ ni n ó fi ẹ'ẹsin gùn wá'lèè mi.'
 Wọn l'Ọṣun ò tó Alásǎn bá r'òkun.
 Ọrúnmilá ló d'òdèdè nìbèrẹ.
 Ifá, mo ní: 'Ta ló tó Alásǎn bá r'òkun?'
 Ọrúnmilá ni òún tó Alásǎn bá r'òkun. 75
 Wọn ní: 'Njẹ b'ó o bá rìn títi,
 B'ó o bá búrìn, búrìn,
 B'ó o bá d'ókè Ìgẹtí,
 Ilée bàbàà rẹ ńkọ?
 Bí wọn bá fún ọ léku méjì olùwéré;
 Ẹja méjì ablẹwẹ gbàdà;
 Obídiẹ méjì abẹdò lùkélùkẹ;
 Ewúré méjì abámú rẹdẹrẹdẹ.
 Ẹinlá méjì t'ó f'ìwo ẹ'òsùkà.
 Bí wọn bá gúnyán, 85
 Tí wọn rokà.
 B'ó o bá gb'ọtí abọda;
 B'ó o bá gb'ata tí ò sǐjú;
 B'ó o bá gb'obì tí ò làdọ.'
 Ọrúnmilá ní: 'Bí mo bá ti yó tán ọ,
 N ó padà wálèè mi ni.'
 Wọn ní Ọrúnmilá ò tó Alásǎn bá r'òkun.
 Akápò é è jusi,
 É è sòrò,
 É è jáwe. 100
 Ọrúnmilá, mo jẹwọ ọbùn.
 Wáá dásọ ró mi.
 Mápó Eléré,
 Mòkun Ọtan,
 Mèsín ilée 'Láwẹ. 105
 Mápó Ẹlẹjẹlú,
 Gbólájókò, ọmọ ọkinkin tí í m'érin fọn.
 Ọrúnmilá, iwọ laráa 'wájú,
 Èmi lèrò ẹyin,
 Ẹ bí iwọ lẹ ọ k'ọmọ lóràn bí iyekan ọmọ. 110
 Ifá, mo ní: 'Ta ló tó Alásǎn bá r'òkun?'
 Ifá ní Orí,
 Orí nìkàn
 Ló tó Alásǎn bá r'òkun.
 Ọrúnmilá ní bí habaláwo bá kú, 115

Wọn a ní ẹ lọ ru Ifáa rẹ dà sí kòtò.
 Bí adóşùn Şàngó bá kú,
 Wọn a ní ẹ kó Şàngó ẹ dànù.
 Bí akápò Òòşàálá bá kú,
 Wọn a ní ẹ kó gbogbo nhkan ẹ tọ ọ. 120
 Òrúnmílá ní níjọ tí èèyán tí nkú,
 Ta ní wọn gé oríi rẹ ẹ lẹ?
 Ifá ní Orí o,
 Orí níkan
 Ló tó Alásǎn bá r'òkun. 125
 Bí mo bá lówó lówó,
 Orí ní n ó rò fún.
 Oríi mi, iwọ ní.
 Bí mo bá bíwọ láyé,
 Orí ní n ó rò fún. 130
 Oríi mi, iwọ ní.
 Ire gbogbo tí mo bá ní láyé,
 Orí ní n ó rò fún.
 Oríi mi, iwọ ní.
 Orí, pẹlẹ, 135
 Atètẹ níran.
 Atètẹ gbe'ni k'òòşà.
 Kò s'òòşà tí í dá'ni í gbè
 Lẹyin Orí ẹnì.
 Orí, pẹlẹ, 140
 Orí àbíyè.
 Ẹni Orí bá gbẹbọọ rẹ
 K'ó yò şẹşẹ.¹⁵

Òrúnmílá said that on entering a room, one stoops down at the doorway.¹⁶

Ifá, the question is: 'Who among the gods can accompany his devotee on a distant journey over the seas without turning back?'

Şàngó answered that he could accompany his devotee on a distant journey over the seas without turning back.

He was asked: 'What will you do if after walking a long distance,

Walking and walking, 5
 You arrive at Kòso,¹⁷
 The home of your fathers.
 And they prepare *gbẹgiri* soup;¹⁸

- And they prepare yam flour pudding;
 And they give you bitter kola and one cock? 10
 Šàngó said: 'After eating to my satisfaction,
 I will return to my home.'
 Šàngó was told that he could not accompany his
 devotee on a distant journey over the seas with-
 out turning back.
 Òrúnmìlà said that on entering a room, one stoops
 down at the doorway.
 Ifá, the question is: 'Who among the gods can accom- 15
 pany his devotee on a distant journey over the seas
 without turning back?'
 Qya¹⁹ answered that she could accompany her devotee
 on a distant journey over the seas without turning
 back.
 She was asked: 'What will you do, if after walking a
 long distance,
 Walking and walking,
 You arrive at Irá,²⁰
 The home of your fathers. 20
 And they kill a fat animal,
 And they give you a pot of maize pudding?'
 Qya said: 'After eating to my satisfaction,
 I will return to my home.'
 Qya was told that she could not accompany her devo- 25
 tee on a distant journey over the seas without
 turning back.
 Òrúnmìlà said that on entering a room, one stoops
 down at the doorway.
 Ifá, the question is: 'Who among the gods can accom-
 pany his devotee on a distant journey over the
 seas without turning back?'
 Òòṣàálá²¹ said that he could accompany his devotee
 on a distant journey over the seas without turning
 back.
 He was asked: 'What will you do after walking a long
 distance,
 Walking and walking, 30
 You arrive at Ifón,
 The home of your fathers.
 And they kill one hen pregnant with eggs;
 And they take two hundred snails
 Seasoned with vegetable and melon?' 35

Òòṣàálá said: 'After eating to my satisfaction,
I will return to my home.'

Òòṣàálá was told that he could not accompany his
devotee on a distant journey over the seas with-
out turning back.

Òrúnmílà said that on entering a room, one stoops
down at the doorway.

Ifá, the question is: 'Who among the gods can accom- 40
pany his devotee on a distant journey over the seas
without turning back?'

Èlégbára²² said that he could accompany his devotee
on a distant journey over the seas without turning
back.

He was asked: 'What will you do, after walking a
long distance,

Walking and walking,

You arrive at Kétu,²³

The home of your fathers. 45

And they give you a cock

And plenty of palm-oil?'

Èlégbára said: 'Once I eat to my satisfaction,
I will return to my home.'

Èlégbára was told that he could not accompany his 50
devotee on a distant journey over the seas with-
out turning back.

Òrúnmílà said that on entering a room, one stoops
down at the doorway.

Ifá, the question is: 'Who among the gods can accom-
pany his devotee on a distant journey over the seas
without turning back?'

Ògún said that he could accompany his devotee on a
distant journey over the seas without turning
back.

He was asked: 'What will you do, if after walking a
long distance,

Walking and walking, 55

You arrive at Ìré.²⁴

The home of your fathers.

And they give you fried beans,

And they kill a dog for you

Together with a hen; 60

And they give you guinea-corn beer and palm-wine?'

Ògún said: 'After eating to my satisfaction,

I will chant Ìjálá loudly and joyously
All the way home.'

Ògún was told that he could not accompany his devotee on a distant journey over the seas without turning back. 65

Òrúnmìlà said that on entering a room, one stoops down at the doorway.

Ifá, I ask: 'Who among the gods can accompany his devotee on a distant journey over the seas without turning back?'

Òṣun²⁵ said that she could accompany her devotee on a distant journey over the seas without turning back.

She was asked: 'What will you do, after walking a long distance,

Walking and walking, 70

You arrive at Ìjùmú,²⁶

The home of your fathers,

And they give you plenty of corn-starch pudding

Together with *yánrin* vegetable²⁷ and maize beer?'

Òṣun said: 'After eating to my satisfaction, 75
I will return to my home.'

Òṣun was told that she could not accompany her devotee on a distant journey over the seas without turning back.

Òrúnmìlà said that on entering a room, one stoops down at the doorway.

Ifá, the question is: 'Who among the gods can follow his devotee on a distant journey over the seas without turning back?'

Òrúnmìlà said that he could accompany his devotee on a distant journey over the seas without turning back. 80

He was asked: 'What will you do after walking a long distance,

Walking and walking,

You arrive at Ìgèṭí,²⁸

The home of your fathers;

And they give you two fast-moving rats, 85

Two fish that swim gracefully,

Two hens with big livers,

Two goats heavy with foetus;

Two short-horned cows with big horns.

- If they prepare pounded yam, 90
 And they prepare yam-flour pudding.
 If they give you well-brewed guinea-corn beer,
 And they give you alligator pepper,
 And they give you good kolanuts?
 Òrúnmílà said: 'After eating to my satisfaction, 95
 I will return to my home.'
 Òrúnmílà was told that he could not accompany his
 devotee on a distant journey over the seas with-
 out turning back.
 Ifá priest was dumbfounded.
 He couldn't say a word
 Because he does not understand the parable. 100
 Òrúnmílà, I confess my helplessness.
 Please clothe me with wisdom.
 Mápó²⁹ in the city of Eléré³⁰;
 Mòkun³¹ of the town of Òtan;³²
 Mèsín³³ of the city of Iláwè;³⁴ 105
 Mápó of the city of Èlẹ́jẹlú;³⁵
 Gbólájókò,³⁶ offspring of tusks that make the elephant
 trumpet.
 Òrúnmílà, you are the leader,
 I am the follower.
 You are the sage who teaches one wise things like 110
 one's relation.
 Ifá, the question is: 'Who among the gods can accom-
 pany his devotee on a distant journey over the
 seas without turning back?'
 Ifá said: 'It is Orí,
 It is Orí alone,
 Who can accompany his own devotee on a distant
 journey over the seas without turning back.'
 Òrúnmílà said: 'When an Ifá priest dies, 115
 People say that his Ifá divination instruments should
 be thrown into the ditch.
 When a devotee of Şàngó dies,
 People say that his Şàngó instruments should be
 thrown away.
 When a devotee of Òòşàálá dies,
 People say that his paraphernalia should be buried 120
 with him.'
 Òrúnmílà said: 'Ever since human beings have been
 dying,

Whose head is ever severed from his body before
burial?’

Ifá said: ‘It is Orí,

It is Orí alone,

Who can accompany his devotee on a distant journey 125
over the seas without turning back.’

If I have money,

It is Orí whom I will praise.

My Orí, it is you.

If I have children on earth,

It is Orí whom I will praise. 130

My Orí, it is you.

All good things that I have on earth,

It is Orí whom I will praise.

My Orí, it is you.

Orí, I hail you. 135

You who do not forget your devotee.

Who bless your devotee more quickly than other
gods.

No god blesses a man

Without the consent of his Orí.

Orí, I hail you. 140

You who allow children to be born alive.

A person whose sacrifice is accepted by his Orí

Should rejoice exceedingly.

In the following excerpt, Orí is depicted as a god more sympathetic to human beings than all other gods. Since every man's Orí is his personal god, he is more interested in the welfare of the individual than the other gods. Therefore, if an individual is in need of anything, he should first of all make his desires known to his Orí before he approaches any other god for assistance. If a man's Orí is not in sympathy with his cause, no god will sympathize with him and consequently he will not have the things he wants.

In this excerpt the story is told of an Ifá priest who lacked all good things. He approached Òrúnmìlà so that he might have his heart's desires. Òrúnmìlà referred him to Èṣù (the trickster god) who sometimes acts as spokesman for Òrúnmìlà. Èṣù told the Ifá priest that Òrúnmìlà was not in sympathy with him over all the things he wanted. Èṣù therefore advised him to tell his heart's desires to his Orí. After the Ifá priest had

followed the advice of Èṣù, he had all the good things he previously lacked. He therefore exclaimed:

Ŋjẹ ohun gbogbo t'ó bá ńdun mí,
N ò máa rò f'Órìl mí.
Orí ẹnì ní alágbòrànḍùn.
Orìl mí, là mí o.
Ìwọ lalágbòrànḍùn.³⁷

Truly, all my heart's desires,
I will disclose to my Orí.
A man's Orí is his sympathizer.
My Orí, save me.
You are the sympathizer.

The excerpt is as follows:

Olóòótọ́ tí m̀bẹ́ láyẹ̀ ò p'ógún.
Ṣíkàṣíkà ibẹ́ wọn ò mọ́ níwọn ẹgbẹ́fà.
Ọjọ́ ẹsan ò lọ́ títí,
Kò jẹ́ k'ọràn dun ní.
A díá fún ọràn gbogbo tí ńdun akápò 5
Bẹẹ ní wọn ò dun 'Fá.
Ọràn owó ńdun akápò;
Ọràn obinrin ńdun akápò.
Ọràn omọ-bíbí ńdun akápò.
Akápò wáá lọ́ sọ́ fún Ọrúnmilà. 10
Ó ní gbogbo ire gbogbo ní òun ńwá.
Ọrúnmilà ní kí akápò ó lọ́ sọ́ fún Èṣù.
Èṣù ní gbogbo ọràn tí ńdun iwọ́ akápò yìi,
Kò dun Ifá.
Èṣù ní iwọ́ akápò, 15
Oríi rẹ́ ní kí o lọ́ rò fún.
Nígbà tí akápò ẹ́ bẹ́ẹ́ tàn,
Ọràn-an rẹ́ wáá bẹ́rẹ́ sí í d́áa.
Ijó ní akápò ńjó,
Ayọ́ ní ńyọ́. 20
Ó ńyin àwọn awoó rẹ́,
Àwọn awoó rẹ́ ńyin Ifá.
Ó ní bẹ́ẹ́ gégé
Ní àwọn awo òun wí.
Olóòótọ́ tí m̀bẹ́ láyẹ̀ ò p'ógún. 25
Ṣíkàṣíkà ibẹ́ wọn ò mọ́ níwọn ẹgbẹ́fà.
Ọjọ́ ẹsan ò lọ́ títí,
Kò jẹ́ k'ọràn dun ní.

A díá fún ọ̀ràn gbogbo tí ńdun akápò Bẹ̀ẹ̀ ni wọ̀n ọ̀ dun Ifá. Ẹ̀jẹ̀, ohun gbogbo t'ó bá ńdùn mí, N ọ́ máa rò f'Ọ̀rìl mí. Orí ẹnì ní alágbọ̀rándùn. Ọ̀rìl mí là mí o. Ẫwọ̀ lalágbọ̀rándùn.³⁸	30 35
Truthful men are not as many as twenty on earth, Wicked men are much more than sixty score. The day of vengeance is not far, That is why one is not aggrieved. Ifá was consulted on account of all matters which a certain Ifá priest desired, But which Ifá did not desire. The Ifá priest lacked money. The Ifá priest lacked a wife. The Ifá priest lacked children. He therefore complained to Ọ̀rúnmílà. He said that he was looking for all good things. Ọ̀rúnmílà asked the Ifá priest to make his complaints to Èṣù. Èṣù said that all the things which the Ifá priest desired Ifá did not desire them. Èṣù said: 'You, Ifá priest, Go and complain to your Orí.' When the Ifá priest did as he was ordered, His life became good. He started to dance, He started to rejoice. He was praising his Ifá priests While his Ifá priests praised Ifá. He said that was exactly What his Ifá priests had predicted. Truthful men are not as many as twenty on earth. Wicked men are much more than sixty score. The day of vengeance is not far, That is why one is not aggrieved. Ifá was consulted on account of all matters which a certain Ifá priest desired But which Ifá did not desire. Therefore, all the things I desire, I will disclose to my Orí A man's Orí is his sympathizer.	5 10 15 20 25 30

My Orí, save me.

You are the sympathizer.

35

The next excerpt amplifies the point made earlier that the success or failure of any person depends to a large extent on the type of Orí or Ìpín (destiny) which that person had selected for himself from heaven and that once a person has chosen his destiny in heaven it becomes almost impossible to alter it on earth. Indeed, the gods themselves are not in a position to change man's destiny.

In this excerpt there is the story of an Ifá priest who complained to Olódùmarè (the Almighty God) that he received no support from Ọ̀rúnmilà whom he worshipped night and day. The Almighty God interviewed Ọ̀rúnmilà to hear his own version of the case. Ọ̀rúnmilà told Olódùmarè that he had tried all his best for his devotee but that the destiny chosen by the latter prevented him from achieving success on earth. The last line of this excerpt says that when Olódùmarè heard Ọ̀rúnmilà's explanation the whole matter became very plain to him.

Qwọ̀ èwe ò tó pẹ̀pẹ̀,
Tí àgbàlagbà ò wọ̀ akèrègbè.

Ìṣẹ́ èwé bẹ́ àgbà,

Kí ó má ẹ́ kọ̀ mọ̀.

Gbogboo wa ni a níṣẹ́ a jọ̀ m̀bẹ́ 'raa wa.

5

A díá fún Ọ̀rúnmilà

Èyí tí akápòò rẹ̀

Ó pè lẹ́jọ̀ lódò Olódùmarè.

Olódùmarèé wáá ránṣẹ́ sí Ọ̀rúnmilà

Pé kí ó wáá sọ̀ ídí nàà

10

Tí kò fi gbe akápòò rẹ̀.

Nígbà tí Ọ̀rúnmilà dé iwájú Olódùmarè,

Ó ní òun sa gbogbo agbára òun fún akápò.

Ó ní Ìpín akápòò ni ò gbọ̀.

Nígbà nàà ni ọ̀rọ̀ nàà

15

Tóó wáá yé Olódùmarè yékéyéké,

Inúu rẹ́ẹ́ sì dún

Pé òun kò dá ẹ́jọ̀ eékún kan.³⁹

A child is not tall enough to stretch his hand and reach the high shelf.

An adult's hand cannot enter the mouth of a gourd.
 The work an adult begs a child to do
 Let him not refuse to do.
 We all have work to do for each other's good. 5
 Ifá divination was performed for Ẹrúnmilà
 About whom his devotee
 Would make a complaint to Olódùmarè.
 Olódùmarè then sent for Ẹrúnmilà
 To explain the reason why 10
 He did not support his devotee.
 When Ẹrúnmilà got to the presence of Olódùmarè,
 He explained that he had done all in his power for his
 devotee
 But that the destiny chosen by the devotee made his
 efforts fruitless.
 It was then that the matter 15
 Became quite clear to Olódùmarè.
 And he was happy
 That he did not pronounce his judgement on the
 evidence of only one of the two parties.

The following excerpt states that most people chose the wrong
 Orí in heaven and as a result, they are doomed to failure on
 earth. But since human beings do not naturally like to accept
 failure, they engage in an endless and fruitless struggle to achieve
 the impossible, to improve their chosen bad destiny.

Bí ó bá ẹ pé gbogbo orí gbogbo ní í sun pòsí,
 Ìròkò gbogbo ìbá tí tán n'ìgbó.
 A díá fún igba ẹni,
 Tí ñt'ìkòlẹ̀ ọrun bọ wá sí t'ayé.
 Bí ó bá ẹ pé gbogbo orí gbogbo ní í sun pòsí, 5
 Ìròkò gbogbo ìbá tí tán n'ìgbó.
 A díá fún Ọwèrè,
 Tí ñt'ìkòlẹ̀ ọrun bọ wá sí t'ayé.
 Ọwèrè là ñjà,
 Gbogboo wa. 10
 Ọwèrè là ñjà.
 Ẹni t'ó yan'rí rere kò wọpọ.
 Ọwèrè là ñjà,
 Gbogboo wa.
 Ọwèrè là ñjà.⁴⁰ 15

If all men were destined to be buried in coffins,
All *irókò* trees⁴¹ would have been exhausted in the
forest.

Ifá divination was performed for two hundred men
Who were coming from heaven to earth.

If all men were destined to be buried with coffins, 5
All *irókò* trees would have been exhausted in the forest.

Ifá divination was also performed for Struggle
Who was coming from heaven to earth.

We are only struggling.

All of us. 10

We are only struggling.

Those who chose good destinies are not many.

We are only struggling.

All of us.

We are only struggling. 15

The excerpt below stresses that nobody can tell who has chosen a bad or a good Ori. The shape or size of a bad head may not be different from that of a good one. The type of Ori chosen by a particular person remains unknown to him and to all other men; it is *Ọrúnmìlà* alone, as the only witness of the act of the choice of destiny, who can tell what type of head each person has chosen. Hence the need for every person to consult *Ọrúnmìlà* from time to time.

Orí burúkú kì í wú tuulu.

A kì í dá ẹ̀sẹ̀ aṣiwèrẹ̀ẹ̀ mọ̀ lójú-òṇà.

A kì í m'orí olóyè lówùjọ.

A díá fún Mọ̀bówú

Tí í ẹ̀ obìnrin Ọ̀gún. 5

Orí tí ó jọba lọla,

Ẹ̀nikan ò mọ̀;

Kí tọ̀kọ-taya ó mọ̀ pe'raa wọ̀n ní wèrè mọ̀.

Orí tí ó jọba lọla,

Ẹ̀nikan ò mọ̀.⁴² 10

A bad head does not swell up.

Nobody knows the foot-prints of a mad man on the
road.

Nobody can distinguish the head destined to wear a
crown in an assembly.

Ifá divination was performed for Mọ̀bówú

Who was the wife of Ògún.

5

The head that will reign tomorrow,

Nobody knows it.

Let husband and wife stop calling each other names.

The head that will reign tomorrow,

Nobody knows it.

10

The excerpts quoted so far show clearly the important role that Orí plays in the success of every man on earth. The Yoruba concept of Orí, however, also stresses the need for hard work in bringing to fruition the potential success that the choice of a good Orí carries with it. Therefore, the choice of a good Orí does not automatically lead to success. One has to work hard in order to bring to fruition this potentiality. For those who have chosen the bad Orí, however, there is little hope of improvement even if they spend all the twenty-four hours of each day at work.

The following excerpt tells the story of the day all heads gathered themselves together to deliberate on something which they wanted to bring to fruition. They did not invite Èṣẹ (Legs) to the meeting. After all their deliberations, they discovered that there was nobody to carry them about to execute their plans. They were therefore forced to recognize the importance of Èṣẹ in the execution of their plans. Èṣẹ is here used as the symbol of power and activity while Orí (Head) is the symbol of predestined success. The point of the story is that even if one is predestined to success by the choice of a good Orí, one cannot actually achieve success without the use of one's Èṣẹ, the symbol of activity and power.

Òpèbè, awo Èṣẹ,

Ló díá f'Èṣẹ,

Níjọ tí ńt'Ìkòlẹ̀ ọ̀run bọ̀ wáyé.

Gbogbo àwọn orí ọ́a araa wọn jọ,

Wọn ò pe Èṣẹ sí i.

5

Èṣú ní: 'È ò pe Èṣẹ sí i,

Bí ó ti ọ́ gún náà nù-un.'

Ìjà ni wọn fi tóká nìbẹ̀.

Ni wọn tóó wáá ránṣẹ́ sí Èṣẹ.

Nígbà náà ni imòrán tí wọn ngbà tóó wáá gún.

10

Wọn ní bẹ̀ẹ̀ gégé

Ni àwọn awo àwọn wí.

Òpèbè, awo Èsè,

Ló díá f'Èsè

Níjọ tí òt'kòlé ọrun bọ wáyé.

Òpèbè mà mà dé ò,

Awo Èsè.

Eníkan kì í gbìmọràn

K'ó yọ t'èsè 'lẹ.

Òpèbè mà mà dé ò,

Awo Èsè.⁴³

15

20

Òpèbè,⁴⁴ the Ifá priest of Legs,

Performed Ifá divination for Legs

On the day he was coming from heaven to earth.

All heads called themselves together.

But they did not invite Legs.

Èsù said: 'Since you do not invite Legs,

We will see how you will bring your deliberations to success.'

Their meeting ended in a quarrel.

They then sent for Legs.

It was then that their deliberations became successful.

They said that was exactly

What their Ifá priests had predicted.

Òpèbè, Ifá priest of Legs,

Performed Ifá divination for Legs

On the day he was coming from heaven to earth.

Òpèbè has surely come,

Ifá priest of Legs.

No one deliberates

Without reckoning with Legs.

Òpèbè has surely come,

Ifá priest of Legs.

5

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Man and the Supernatural Powers

THE YORUBA CONCEPT OF THE SUPERNATURAL

THE Yoruba are a deeply religious people¹ and therefore have a strong belief in the existence of supernatural powers. These supernatural powers are believed to affect the everyday life of Man for good or ill. As has been pointed out in the preceeding chapter, the Yoruba believe that in the process of selecting his *Orí*, every person has chosen his destiny in life; that this destiny for someone who has chosen good *Orí*, is no more than a potential ability to lead a successful life; and that human effort, aided or hindered by the supernatural powers, also contributes a great deal to the attainment of success in life. In other words, the Yoruba believe that those who have chosen good destinies and are aided by the supernatural powers will, if they work hard, become successful in life. As for those who have chosen bad destinies, there can be no hope of success in life, except they can perform sufficient sacrifice to make good the defects in their bad heads.

The Yoruba conceive the supernatural powers as being of two types, good and evil. The good supernatural powers are also believed to be of two types: the gods (*Òrìṣà*) and the ancestors (*Òkú òrun*). The good supernatural powers aid Man in his daily life. They are, however, sometimes angry with Man if he neglects his duty either to his fellow man or to the supernatural powers. Through *Òrúnmilà*, the mouthpiece of the gods and of the ancestors, it is always possible to find out when and for what reason the super-natural powers are angry. When they are angry, they can always be appeased with a sacrifice. Generally speaking, however, the gods and the ancestors do not work against Man's interest and are therefore regarded as friends of Man, protecting Man from the evil supernatural powers.

The evil supernatural powers are also of two types: the

Ajogun (Belligerent Enemies of Man) and the *Eníyán* or *Ẹlẹyẹ* (Witches). Generally speaking, the evil supernatural powers work against Man's interest by trying to prevent the timely achievement of his destiny. The most important of the *Ajogun* are *Ikú* (Death) responsible for putting an end to Man's life; *Àrùn* (Disease) responsible for afflicting Man with illness; *Ẹgbà* (Infirmity) who brings paralysis to Man and *Òfò* (Loss) who destroys or carries away Man's property. The *Ajogun* are Man's enemies for they work against Man's interest all the time. The *Ajogun* can however be appeased with sacrifices.

The *Eníyán* are also known as *Ẹlẹyẹ* (birds) because they are believed to be capable of assuming the form of birds whenever they want to work against Man's interest. As will be shown later, the Witches have no other purpose in life than the destruction of Man and his property. They are therefore the arch-enemies of Man. The sad thing is that against the Witches there is hardly any form of armour since sacrifice hardly helps when they are ready to strike. A man's surest protection against the Witches is his *Orí*.²

The belief that Man has friends and enemies among the supernatural powers leads on to the belief that conflict develops now and then between the good powers on one side and the evil powers on the other side. This conflict is inevitably caused by the clash of interest that develops between the good and the evil powers over the regulation of the affairs of Man. Conflict between the good and the evil supernatural powers is a fascinating theme running through many *ẹsẹ Ifá*. Some of these *ẹsẹ* are presented below.

Standing between the evil powers and the good powers is the mischievous figure of *Ẹṣù*³ (the Yoruba trickster god) who is more or less a neutral force in the conflict between the good supernatural powers and the evil ones. Although *Ẹṣù* is believed to belong to the zone of the gods, he does not always favour his fellow gods. Indeed, *Ẹṣù* is prepared at any time to favour any human being or supernatural power according to his own whims and caprices influenced by whether or not the person or power concerned has performed the prescribed sacrifices.

THE GODS AND THE ANCESTORS, FRIENDS OF MAN

(a) In this example, Ọ̀rúnmilà is depicted as a protector of his devotees. It is also a prayer addressed to Ọ̀rúnmilà imploring him to shield his devotees from evil.

Ọ̀nì lònì Onísìn Ìkọ,
 Ọ̀là lẹ̀lẹ̀ Ọ̀bàrà̀mọ̀jẹ;
 Ọ̀tunla ọ̀mọ ịyá ẹ,
 Bí ó wǎ,
 Bí ò wá, 5
 Ẹ̀nikan ò mọ.
 A díá fún Ọ̀rúnmilà
 Ifá ó ràtà b'ọ̀mọ ẹ
 Bí igún Ìgẹ̀mọ.
 Èwí n'lé Adó, 10
 Ifá, ràtà bò mí,
 Ibí pọ̀ lóde.
 Àgbàrá ní í ràtàá bo yanrìn lódò.
 Ifá, ràtà bò mí,
 Ibí pọ̀ lóde. 15
 Ètìpọ̀n-ọ̀lá ní í ràtàá bo'lẹ.
 Ifá, ràtà bò mí,
 Ibí pọ̀ lóde.
 Ìhùhùhù ladiẹ fi í ràtàá b'ọ̀mọ ẹ.
 Ọ̀rúnmilà, ràtà bò mí, 20
 Ibi pọ̀ lóde.⁴

Today is the day of Onísìn Ìkọ,⁵
 Tomorrow is the day of Ọ̀bàrà̀mọ̀jẹ,⁶
 The day after tomorrow, its kinsman,
 Whether it will come
 Or whether it will not come, 5
 Nobody knows.
 Ifá divination was performed for Ọ̀rúnmilà
 Who sheltered his children
 Like the vulture of Ìgẹ̀mọ.⁷
 Èwí in the city of Adó,⁸ 10
 Ifá, shelter me,
 There are many evils outside.
 It is the torrent which covers up sand in the river.
 Ifá, shelter me,
 There are many evils outside. 15

It is *ètípón-plá* vegetable⁹ which covers up the earth.
 Ifá, shelter me,
 There are many evils outside.
 The hen shelters her children with her feathers.
 Òrúnmìlà, shelter me,
 There are many evils outside.

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(b) In the following excerpt the role of Òrúnmìlà in human life is likened to that of the calabash-mender. Because he protects Man from danger everyday, he could therefore be said to mend human life as one mends calabash.

Pá bí ọsán já;
 Ọsán já,
 Awoo wọn lóde Ìtóri.
 Akàtànpo jákùn,
 Ó dòbìliri kálẹ̀.
 A díá fún Òrúnmìlà,
 Ifá nílẹ̀ t'áyé Olúufẹ̀, Orò, sọ
 Bí ẹni tí ńsọgbá.
 Ta ní ó wǎ bá ni t'áyée wa wònyí sọ?
 Ewé ọpẹ̀pẹ̀ tilẹ̀ sọ.
 Òrúnmìlà ní ó wǎ bá ni t'áyée wa wònyí sọ.
 Ewé ọpẹ̀pẹ̀ tilẹ̀ sọ.
 Ifá ní ó wǎ bá ni t'áyée wa wònyí sọ.
 Ewé ọpẹ̀pẹ̀ tilẹ̀ sọ.
 Baraapetu ní ó wǎ bá ni t'áyée wa wònyí sọ.
 Ewé ọpẹ̀pẹ̀ tilẹ̀ sọ.¹⁰

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Sudden as the snap of bow-string;
 The bow-string snaps,
 Their Ifá priest in the city of Ìtóri.¹¹
 When a cross-bow loses its string,
 It dances all over the ground.
 Ifá divination was performed for Òrúnmìlà
 Ifá was going to mend the life of the king of Ifẹ̀
 As one mends a broken calabash.
 Who then will help us mend our lives?
 Palm-tree grows leaves right from the ground.¹²
 Òrúnmìlà will help us mend our lives.
 Palm-tree grows leaves right from the ground.
 Ifá will help us mend our lives.
 Palm-tree grows leaves right from the ground.

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Baraapetu¹³ will help us mend our lives. 15
 Palm-tree grows leaves right from the ground.

(c) The following excerpt tells how Šàngó, the thunder god, once helped a man known as Ọlógbun Àyíkú¹⁴ to conquer his enemies by throwing stone-celts at them.¹⁵

Irinó ẹfọn,
 Ẹgbẹrin iwo;
 Ọnlénú ẹfọn
 Ní í rìn waara waara létí ọpa.
 A díá fún Ọlógbun Àyíkú. 5
 Wọn ní kí ó rúbọ.
 Wọn ní àwọn ọtá fẹẹ pa á lódún náà.
 Wọn ní kí ó lọ dímọ Šàngó.
 Ó sì ẹ gbogboo rẹ.
 Ibi tí àwọn ọtáa rẹ gbé nípèpèrò 10
 Pé àwọn ó pa á,
 Ní Šàngó bá lọọ sọ ẹdùn ààrá sí ààrin wọn.
 Ẹgbà tí ó ẹgun àwọn ọtáa rẹ tán,
 Ó wá nọ,
 Ó nọ. 15
 Ó ní bẹẹ gégé ni àwọn awo oun wí.
 Irinó ẹfọn,
 Ẹgbẹrin iwo;
 Ọnlénú ẹfọn
 Ní í rìn waara waara létí ọpa. 20
 A díá fún Ọlógbun Àyíkú
 Èyí tí ó d'Ọlógbun Àyílà gbiri gbiri lóri ọta.
 Èrò Ọpa,
 Èrò Ọfà,
 Ẹ wáá bá ni lálkú kangiri 25
 Àlkú kangiri là á b'ókè.¹⁶

Four hundred bush-cows,
 Eight hundred horns.
 Two hundred and eighty bush-cows
 Walk confidently near a snare.
 Ifá divination was performed for Ọlógbun Àyíkú. 5
 He was asked to perform a sacrifice.
 He was told that his enemies wanted to kill him during
 that year.
 He was told to go and cling to Šàngó for protection.

And he did everything.
 As his enemies were conspiring together 10
 In order to kill him,
 Šàngó went and dropped a stone-celt in their midst.
 After he had conquered his enemies,
 He started to dance,
 He started to rejoice. 15
 He said that was exactly what his Ifá priests had pre-
 dicted.
 Four hundred bush-cows,
 Eight hundred horns.
 Two hundred and eighty bush-cows
 Walk confidently near a snare. 20
 Ifá divination was performed for Ológbun Àyikú
 Who would become Ológbun Àyílà¹⁷ on top of stone.
 Travellers to Ipo,
 Travellers to Ofà,
 Come and meet us alive and in good health. 25
 One always finds the hill alive and in good health.

(d) The following *ese Ifá* emphasizes the role of one's dead
 parents (representing the ancestors) and one's *Ikin* (sacred
 palm-nuts of divination representing the gods) and one's *Orí*
 (Destiny God) in leading Man to success in life by protecting
 and supporting one. The ancestors are regarded in this excerpt
 as Man's best confidants in times of difficulty.

Ọsán ni ò sán pé,
 Ọru ni ò ru pé,
 Ọkùnkùn ò kùn pé;
 Ọ pa bàtà m'ọmọ lẹsẹ pẹẹ pẹẹ pẹẹ.
 A díá fún Báalẹjọ 5
 Tí nt'Ìkòlé ọrun bọ wáyé.
 Bá a bá lẹjọ o,
 Ọe b'ọrun ẹni là á báá sọ.
 Yóó gbè ọ o,
 Baba ẹni kì í gbẹ'ni í tì. 10
 Yóó gbè ọ o,
 Iye ẹni kì í gbẹ'ni í tì.
 Yóó gbè ọ o,
 Ikin ẹni kì í gbẹ'ni í tì.
 Yóó gbè ọ o, 15
 Orí ẹni kì í gbẹ'ni í tì.¹⁸

Daylight does not keep longer than usual;
 Night does not keep longer than usual;
 Darkness does not keep longer than it usually keeps.
 He who provides a pair of sandals for a child's feet.¹⁹
 Ifá divination was performed for Báaléjò²⁰ 5
 Who was coming from heaven to earth.
 If one has a problem,
 One should take it to one's ancestors.
 He shall protect you;
 One's dead father never fails to protect one. 10
 She shall protect you;
 One's dead mother never fails to protect one.
 It shall protect you;
 One's sacred Ifá divination palm-nuts never fails to
 protect one.
 He shall protect you; 15
 One's Orí never fails to protect one.

(e) The following *ẹsẹ Ifá* portrays an example of the type of difficulty that may be encountered by someone who has neglected his ancestors. The *ẹsẹ* tells a story about one Oyěpolú²¹ who lost his mother when he was a child and therefore grew up to become ignorant of the sacrifices and taboos of his ancestors. The result was that he lacked all the good things of life. It was not until after he had appeased his ancestors that he started to enjoy prosperity.

Pèpé, awo ilé;
 Òtùtá, awo òde;
 Alápààndèdè ló kólé tán,
 Ló kojúu rẹ s'ódòdòdo,
 Kò kanmi, 5
 Kò kànkè;
 Ó wáá kojúu rẹ s'ódòdòdo.
 A díá fún Oyěpolú,
 Ọmọ ịsòrò n'Ífẹ,
 Èyí tí ìyáa rẹ ó fi sílẹ 10
 Ní òun nikan ọso lénje lénje.
 Ịgbà tí Oyěpolú dàgbà tán,
 Kò mọ ohun orò ilée babaa rẹ mọ.
 Gbogbo nńkan rẹ wáá dàrú.

Ó wá obìnrin,	15
Kò rí.	
Bẹ̀ẹ̀ ní kò rí ilé gbé.	
Ló bá m'éejì k'ẹ̀ẹ̀ta,	
Ó looko aláwo.	
Wọn ní gbogbo nìkan orò ilée babaa rẹ̀	20
T'ó ti gbàgbé	
Ló ndà á láàmú.	
Wọn ní kí ó lọ	
Sí ojú-oórì àwọn babaa rẹ̀,	
Kí ó máa lẹ́ọ júbà.	25
Ìgbà tí ó ẹ̀ bẹ̀ẹ̀ tán,	
Ló wáá bẹ̀ẹ̀ sí í gbádùn araa rẹ̀.	
Ó òlájé,	
Ó lóbìnrin,	
Ó sì bímọ̀ pẹ̀lú.	30
Ó ní bẹ̀ẹ̀ gẹ̀gẹ̀ ní àwọn awo òún wí.	
Pẹ̀pẹ̀, awo ilé;	
Òtítà, awo òde;	
Alápààndẹ̀dẹ̀ ló kọ̀lé tán,	
Ló kọ̀júu rẹ̀ s'ódòdò,	35
Kò kanmi.	
Kò kànkè,	
Ó wáá kọ̀júu rẹ̀ s'ódòdò.	
A dáfá f'Óyěpolú;	
Ọ̀mọ̀ ọ̀sòrò n'Ífẹ̀.	40
Oyěpolú ò mọ̀kan.	
B'ẹ̀po lẹ̀ ẹ̀ kọ̀fọ̀ ta á lẹ̀ ní,	
Èmi ò mọ̀.	
Oyěpolú ò mọ̀kan.	
B'ọ̀tí lẹ̀ ẹ̀ kọ̀fọ̀ ta á lẹ̀ ní,	45
Èmi ò mọ̀.	
Oyěpolú ò mọ̀kan.	
Gbogbo ọ̀sòrò ọ̀run,	
Ẹ̀ sùré wá,	
Ẹ̀ wáá gb'orò yí ẹ̀.	50

Pẹ̀pẹ̀²³ is the Ifá priest of the House;

Òtítà²⁴ is the Ifá priest of Outside;

It is the Ethiopian swallow who builds his nest

And curves its entrance downward.

The nest is neither on water

Nor clearly on dry land.

- its entrance just droops down in a curve.
 Ifá divination was performed for Oyěpolú
 Offspring of sacrifice-makers at Ifẹ
 Whose mother would die and leave him 10
 All alone in his early childhood.
 When Oyěpolú grew up,
 He did not know the sacrifices and taboos of his
 father's household.
 His life became confused.
 He looked for a wife to marry, 15
 But he found none.
 In addition, he had no comfort at home.
 He added two cowry-shells to three,
 And went to an Ifá priest for divination.
 He was told that the sacrifices and taboos of his 20
 father's household
 Which he had neglected
 Were the cause of his troubles.
 He was told to go
 To the graves of his ancestors
 To beg for power and authority. 25
 After he had done as he was ordered,
 He started to enjoy his life.
 He started to have money.
 He had a wife.
 And he had children. 30
 He said that was exactly what his Ifá priests had pre-
 dicted.
 Pèpé is the Ifá priest of the House;
 Òtítà is the Ifá priest of Outside;
 It is the Ethiopian swallow who builds its nest
 And curves its entrance downward; 35
 The nest is neither on water
 Nor clearly on dry land.
 Its entrance just droops down in a curve.
 Ifá divination was performed for Oyěpolú,
 Offspring of sacrifice-makers at Ifẹ. 40
 Oyěpolú does not know anything.
 Whether palm-oil is the first thing to spill on the
 ground,
 I do not know.
 Oyěpolú does not know anything.
 Whether alcohol is the first thing to spill on the ground, 45

I do not know.

Oyěpolú does not know anything.

All sacrifice-makers of heaven

Come quickly

And help to perform this sacrifice.

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THE AJOGUN AND THE WITCHES, ENEMIES OF MAN

(a) In the following excerpt, a man named *Ońdẹ̀sẹ̀* was besieged by Death and the other Ajogun but was saved by his Ifá priests who painted him with the juice of *ibùjẹ*²⁵. This juice turned *Ońdẹ̀sẹ̀*, a light-complexioned person, into a black man. When the Ajogun arrived in his house, they could not recognize him again because of the change in his complexion.

Ọlálẹ̀kun lò ó jẹ́;

Ọ̀mìnńńkun;

Erin ò ẹ̀ é yí padà kun;

Àtàtàbíà kun;

Ọ̀kùnrin kun kùn kun lóru.

5

Akọ ajá lọlá,

Akọ àgùàlà loşù.

Ọ̀mọ̀bọ̀kun,

Ọ̀mọ̀ ẹ̀ni a b'óyinde.

Ọ̀mọ̀ ẹ̀ni ò ẹ̀'dí jẹ̀hẹ̀kẹ̀,

10

K'á f'ílẹ̀kẹ̀ sí t'ọ̀mọ̀ ẹ̀lòmíràn;

Ọ̀mọ̀ ẹ̀ni l'ọ̀mọ̀ ẹ̀ni í jẹ́.

A díá fún Ońdẹ̀sẹ̀ pupa t'òkẹ̀ Àpà,

Èyí tí t'íkútàrùn nkan 'lẹ́e rẹ́ rẹ́,

Ajogun gbogbo nkan 'lẹ́e rẹ́ ní lílọ ní lílọ.

15

Ní àwọn awoo rẹ́ bá ní k'ó rú ọ̀pọ̀lọ̀pọ̀ ibùjẹ́.

Ní wọn bá mú lára bùjẹ́ náà fi pa á lára,

Ní ó bá di èyàn dúdú fafa.

Ní àwọn ajogun ò bá lée dá a mọ̀ mọ̀.

Ijó ní nájó,

20

Ayọ ní nýọ.

Ó nýin àwọn awoo rẹ́,

Àwọn awoo rẹ́ nýin 'Fá.

Agogo ní Ìpóró,

Àràn ni Ìkijà,

25

Ọ̀pá kugúkugù lójúde Ìşẹ̀rimogbe.

Ó ya ẹ̀nu kótó,

- Orin awo ló bọ sí i lẹnu;
 Ẹsẹ tí ó nà,
 Ijó fà a. 30
 Ó ní: 'Ikú má ẹ'oníbùjé pa.
 Aṣẹniyànmọ,
 Aṣẹniyànmọ.
 Arùn má ẹ'oníbùjé ẹe.
 Aṣẹniyànmọ, 35
 Aṣẹniyànmọ.
 Ìjògun ọrun,
 Ẹ pẹyindà,
 Aṣeniyanmọ,
 Aṣẹniyànmọ.²⁶ 40
- You are known as *Qlálékun*²⁷
 Whose other name is *Òmìnìnkun*;²⁸
 An elephant cannot be turned over for carving;
 Whose name is *Atàtàbià-kun*,²⁹
 The short and terrible man at night. 5
 A male dog means honour,
 A male *àgùàlà*³⁰ is known as moon.
 One's child is for one a source of *okùn* beads.³¹
 One's own child is for one a source of all wealth.
 Whilst the buttocks of one's child are without beads, 10
 One won't decorate with beads the waist of another
 person's child.
 One's child is always treated as one's own child.
 Ifá divination was performed for *Ońdẹsẹ*, the light-
 complexioned man of *Àpà Hill*
 Whose house was haunted by Death and Disease, 15
 Whose house was haunted persistently by all *Ajogun*.
 His Ifá priest therefore asked him to offer plenty of
bùjé as sacrifice.
 They took part of the *bùjé* and robbed it on his body.
 And he became a very black person.
 As a result, the *Ajogun* could not recognize him. 20
 He started to dance,
 He started to rejoice.
 He started to praise his Ifá priests
 While his Ifá priests praised Ifá.
 Gongs were beaten at *Ìpóró*,
Àràn drum was beaten at *Ìkijà*, 25
 Sticks were used to produce melodious music at
Ìṣẹrimogbe.

He opened his mouth a little,
 And he uttered forth the song of Ifá.
 As he stretched his legs,
 Dance caught them. 30
 He said: 'Death, do not kill the *bùjé* man mistakenly.
 You who are now bound to mistake man for some-
 thing else.
 You who henceforth must mistake man for another
 being.
 Disease, do not afflict the *bùjé* man mistakenly. 35
 You who are now bound to mistake man for some-
 thing else.
 You who henceforth must mistake man for another
 being.
 Warriors of heaven,
 Turn your backs and hurry away,
 You who are now bound to mistake man for another 40
 being.

(b) In the following excerpt, Èsù helped a man named
 Ọlọmọ,³² to destroy the *Ajogun* who besieged him by putting
 yam-flour in their mouths. It is believed that the *Ajogun* must
 not taste yam-flour because it makes their mouths sour and
 locks up their jaws.

Àtàtà-tàin-tàin.
 A díá f'Ọlọmọ,
 Ìyan, ìyan, gldìgbí.
 Gbogbo ajogun gbogbo ní òdòdòyíkà Ọlọmọ
 Tí wọn nífẹ́ pa á. 5
 Wọn ní ẹbọ ní ó rú.
 Ó sì rú u.
 Ní ọjọ kan,
 Ikú, Àrùn àti Òfó dide,
 Wọn nísígun lọ s'ílẹ Ọlọmọ. 10
 Wọn bá Èsù lójúde.
 Bí wọn bá tí fẹ́ wọ'lẹ Ọlọmọ,
 Èsù sáà m̀bu iyẹfun èlùbó sí wọn lẹnu ni.
 Bẹẹ ni gbogbo ajogun kò gbọdò fẹnukan iyẹfun èlùbó.
 Ìgbà tí iyẹfun èlùbó kan àwọn ajogun lẹnu. 15
 Òmílí kú,
 Òmílí sì sàárẹ ninúu wọn.

Şùgbón kò sí èyí ti ó leè wọ'lé Qlòmọ nínúu wọn.
 Ìgbà tí inú Qlòmọ dùn tán,
 Orin awo ní òkọ.

20

Ó ní: 'Àtàtà-tàin-tàin.

A díá f'Qlòmọ,
 Ìyan, iyan gídìgbí.

Ikú tó lóun ó p'awo,

Kò leè p'awo mọ.

25

Ikú ti yẹ lórí awo.

Ikú è é j'èlùbọ.

B'Íkú bá p'óun ó j'èlùbọ,

Ẹnuu rẹ a kù,

Ẹnuu wọn a fún tuuru.

30

Àrùn t'ó lóun ó şawo

Kò leè şawo mọ.

Ikú è é j'èlùbọ.

B'Íkú bá p'óun ó j'èlùbọ,

Ẹnuu rẹ a kù,

35

Ẹnuu wọn a fún tuuru.

Ajogun gbogbo t'ó l'óun ó şawo

Kò leè şawo mọ.

Ikú è é j'èlùbọ.

B'Íkú bá p'óun ó j'èlùbọ,

40

Ẹnuu rẹ a kù,

Ẹnuu wọn a fún tuuru.³³

*Àtàtà-tàin-tàin.*³⁴

Ifá divination was performed for Qlòmọ,

The tall and hefty one.

All *Ajogun* were moving around Qlòmọ.

They wanted to kill him.

5

He was asked to perform sacrifice,

And he performed it.

One day,

Death, Disease and Loss stood up,

And set out to carry war to the house of Qlòmọ.

10

They found Èşù outside the house.

As they were trying to enter the house of Qlòmọ,

Èşù repeatedly put yam-flour into their mouths.

And it is forbidden for all *Ajogun* to taste yam-flour.

When yam-flour touched their mouths,

15

Some of them died,

And some fell ill,

But none could enter Ọlọmọ's house.
 When Ọlọmọ became happy,
 He started to sing the song of Ifá priests. 20
 He said *Àtàtà-tàin-tàin*.
 Ifá divination was performed for Ọlọmọ,
 The tall and hefty one.
 Death who wanted to kill Ifá priest,
 Can no longer kill him. 25
 Death has moved away from the head of Ifá priest.
 Death does not eat yam-flour.
 If Death attempts to eat yam-flour,
 His mouth becomes stiff,
 His jaws are locked up. 30
 Disease who wanted to afflict Ifá priest
 Can no longer afflict him.
 Death does not eat yam-flour.
 If Death attempts to eat yam-flour,
 His mouth becomes stiff, 35
 His jaws are locked up.
 All *Ajogun* who wanted to attack Ifá priest
 Can no longer attack him.
 Death does not eat yam-flour.
 If Death attempts to eat yam-flour, 40
 His mouth becomes stiff,
 His jaws became locked.

(c) The following excerpt tells the story of a man known as *Lápàdè*³⁵ who was using all his wisdom to acquire wealth but who was being harrassed by Death. As in all short forms of *ẹsẹ Ifá*, the story does not tell what happened to *Lápàdè*. It ends up with an incantation in which Death is urged to fear the Ifá priest just as the fire which devours the grass roof of a thatch-roofed house 'fears' the ceiling and leaves it untouched.³⁶

A kì í fì ìpọ̀njú bá babaláwo gbélé;
 A kì í fì ìpọ̀njú lé babaláwo bọ sóde;
 Ẹ̀ni tí ó bá fì ìpọ̀njú bá babaláwo gbélé,
 Ẹ̀ni tí ó bá fì ìpọ̀njú lé babaláwo sóde,
 Olúwaarẹ̀ yóò t'ẹ̀sẹ̀ bọ gyan èèrùn.
 A díá fún Lápàdẹ̀,

Ọmọ òròrò ẹwà.

Tí ó nífi ọgbọn inú pawó,

Tí Ikú nífi ọgbọn inúú wáá kiri.

Ikú, bí o bá wọlé,

O bẹ̀rù awo.

Bí iná bá jó koríko ilé,

A bẹ̀rù àjà.³⁷

10

One must not live in want while sharing a house with
an Ifá priest.

One must not send out an Ifá priest from one's house
because of want.

He who lives in want while sharing a house with an
Ifá priest,

He who sends out an Ifá priest away from his house
because of want,

That person thereby puts himself in danger.

5

Ifá divination was performed for Lápàdé,

A man of exceeding beauty.

Who was using his wisdom to make money

But whom Death was seeking about with all wisdom.

Death, when you enter a house,

10

Fear the Ifá priest.

When fire burns the grass roof of a house,

It fears the ceiling and leaves it untouched.

(d) The following excerpt exposes the evil purpose of the Witches to destroy Man and his handiwork. When the Witches and the Human Beings were coming from heaven to earth, each group was asked what his purpose was in going to earth. The Witches said that their own purpose was the destruction of all the things done by the Human Beings. The Human Beings said that they were going to earth to do all the things that they considered to be useful. Both groups were asked to perform a sacrifice. The Witches performed a sacrifice but the Human Beings did not. The result was that when both parties arrived on earth, the Witches started to kill the children of Human Beings and to destroy all their property. The Human Beings could not do anything to stop the Witches. They therefore made Egúngún³⁸ with which they masked themselves as they used proverbial language to abuse the Witches.

- Pààká sẹ̀yìn kúngíí,
 Ó hogójì nílẹ̀.
 A díá fún Eníyán,
 A bù f'Èniyàn.
 Àwọn méjèèjì ní'ìkòlẹ̀ ọ̀run bọ̀ wáyé. 5
 Wọn ní kí àwọn méjèèjì ó rúbọ̀.
 Eníyán ní bí ọ̀n bá dé'lẹ̀ ayé,
 Ọ̀n ó máa ba ti gbogbo Èniyàn jẹ̀ ní.
 Èniyàn náàá ní bí ọ̀n bá dé'lẹ̀ ayé tán,
 Ohun tí ó bá wu ọ̀n ní ọ̀n ó máa ẹ̀. 10
 Wọn ní kí ọ̀n náà ó rúbọ̀.
 Kò rú.
 Ìgbà tí àwọn méjèèjì dé'lẹ̀ ayé tán,
 Ló bá di pé bí Èniyán bá bímọ̀ sílẹ̀ tán,
 Eníyán ó pa á. 15
 Gbogbo nńkan tí Èniyán ní,
 Ní àwọn Eníyán m̀bà á jẹ̀.
 Ní Èniyán bá padà lẹ́ sí oko aláwo.
 Ó lẹ́ rúbọ̀.
 Wọn ní kí ó lẹ́ dá Eégún. 20
 Ní ó bá bọ̀ sínú ẹ̀kú,
 Ó nílọ̀ koroó mọ̀ àwọn Eníyán.
 Ó ní bẹ̀ẹ̀ gégé ní àwọn awo ọ̀n wí.
 Pààká sẹ̀yìn kúngíí,
 Ó hogójì nílẹ̀. 25
 A díá fún Eníyán,
 A bù f'Èniyàn.
 Àwọn méjèèjì ní'ìkòlẹ̀ ọ̀run bọ̀ wáyé.
 Eníyán ní.
 Èniyàn ní. 30
 Eníyán wọn ò j'Èniyàn ó nísìmi.³⁹

*Pààká*⁴⁰ stiffened his back into a hump,
 And took up forty cowries from the ground.
 Ifá divination was performed for the Witch,
 Ifá divination was also performed for the Human
 Being
 Both of them were coming from heaven to earth. 5
 Both of them were asked to perform a sacrifice.
 The Witch said that when she arrived on earth,
 She would be spoiling the handiwork of the Human
 Being.
 The Human Being said that when he arrived on earth,

- He would be doing whatever he wanted. 10
 He too was asked to perform a sacrifice.
 But he did not.
 When both of them arrived on earth,
 Whenever the Human Being gave birth to children,
 The Witch would kill them. 15
 All the belongings of the Human Being
 Were being damaged by the Witch.
 The Human Being went back to his Ifá priest
 And performed the sacrifice which he previously
 neglected.
 He was asked to go and make Egúngún. 20
 He put on the robes of his Egúngún,
 And started to use proverbial language against the
 Witch.
 He said that was exactly what his Ifá priests had pre-
 dicted.
Pààká stiffened his back into a hump
 And took up forty cowries from the ground. 25
 Ifá divination was performed for the Witch,
 Ifá divination was also performed for the Human
 Being.
 Both of them were coming from heaven to earth.
 They are all Witches
 Though they are Human Beings. 30
 The Witches prevent the Human Beings from having
 rest.

(e) In the following excerpt, the story is told of a woman named Èrúbàmi⁴¹ who was tormented by the Witches because she refused to give bean cakes⁴² to their mother. The Witches sent their *ògbingbin*⁴³ birds to go and cry in a terrifying manner in the backyard of Èrúbàmi's house. Èrúbàmi went to Òfún Méji⁴⁴ to find out the cause of the persistent cry of the bird. She was advised to offer the bean cakes which she had originally refused to give to the mother of the Witches. When she did as she was ordered, the terrifying cry of *ògbingbin* stopped.

Àsá ké,
 Kò dáké.
 Ògbingbín rin,
 Kò dabò.

Alálsàn m̀bẹ̀ níhà ibẹ̀ njoun?	5
A díá fún Èrúbàní	
Tí ó ò dágún iyá àwọn Èlẹ̀yẹ.	
Wọn ní ẹ̀bọ̀ ní kí ó ẹ̀.	
Èrúbàní a máa ẹ̀wò ò àkàrà.	
Iyá àwọn Èlẹ̀yẹ tọ̀rọ̀ àkàrà,	10
Èrúbàní ò fún un.	
Bí ó bá tí dì ní alẹ̀,	
Àwọn ọ̀gbíngbín á bẹ̀rẹ̀ sí í rìn	
Ní ẹ̀kùlẹ̀ Èrúbàní gbín gbín-in gbín.	
Nígbà tí rín àwọn ọ̀gbíngbín náà kò	15
Tí kò dáwọ̀dúró mọ̀,	
Ní Èrúbàní bá fí ariwo ta.	
Ó ńkẹ̀ pé:	
‘Èrú bà mí o,	
Èrú bà mí o.’	20
Ló bá fí bẹ̀ẹ̀ ké dé ilẹ̀ Ọ̀fún Méjì.	
Ọ̀fún Méjì ní àkàrà ní kí	
Èrúbàní ó lọ̀ fún iyá àwọn Èlẹ̀yẹ.	
Áfí ẹ̀gbà tí ó ẹ̀ bẹ̀ẹ̀	
Ló tóó ní ẹ̀símì. ⁴⁵	25

The kite cried,	
It did not stop.	
Ọ̀gbíngbín cried,	
It did not stop its terrifying cry.	
Is there a sick person in that neighbourhood?	5
Ifá divination was performed for Èrúbàní	
Who offended the mother of the Witches.	
She was asked to perform a sacrifice.	
Èrúbàní used to trade in bean cakes.	
The mother of the Witches begged for bean cakes	10
But Èrúbàní refused to give her.	
Whenever it was dark,	
Ọ̀gbíngbín would start to cry frighteningly	
In the backyard of Èrúbàní.	
When the cry of ọ̀gbíngbín continued for long	15
And it did not stop,	
Èrúbàní started to shout.	
She said:	
‘I am afraid,	
I am afraid.’	20
She shouted thus until she reached the house of Ọ̀fún	
Méjì	

Who advised her to give bean cakes
 To the mother of the Witches.
 It was after she did as she was ordered
 That she had peace.

25

CONFLICT BETWEEN THE GODS AND THE EVIL
 SUPERNATURAL POWERS

(a) In the following excerpt the story is told of Òrúnmìlà's experience when he was besieged by all the *Ajogun* but he conquered all of them with the help of his Orí. The excerpt ends with a prayer to Òrúnmìlà for protection from the *Ajogun*.

Ifá ló lòní;
 Ifá ló lola;
 Ifá ló lètunla pèlú è;
 Òrúnmìlà ló ni'jò méréèrín Òòsá dá 'áyé.
 A díá fún Òrúnmìlà 5
 Níjò tí Ajogun gbogbo
 Nkan 'léè rẹ lákànyún.
 Ikú, Àrùn, Òfò, Ègbà, Èsẹ,
 Gbogbo wọn ní nýọ Òrúnmìlàá wò.
 Wọn níwí pé ọjọ kan 10
 Ní àwọn ó pa á.
 Ní Òrúnmìlà bá gbé òkè Ìpòrìl rẹ kalẹ.
 Ó dá Ògúndá Méjì.
 Wọn ní ẹbọ ní ó wáá rú
 Ó sì rú u. 15
 Ìgbà t'ó rúbọ tán,
 Ní òkè Ìpòrìl rẹ bá ràtà bò ó mólẹ.
 Ní Ikú ò bá leè pa á mọ,
 Bẹẹ ní Àrùn ò leè ẹe é mọ.
 Ijọ ní nýọ, 20
 Ayọ ní nýọ.
 Ó nýin àwọn awoo rẹ,
 Àwọn awoo rẹ nýin 'Fá.
 Ó ya ẹnu kótó,
 Orin awo ló bó sí i lẹnu. 25
 Ẹsẹ tí ó nà,
 Ijọ fà á.
 Ó ní bẹẹ gégé
 Ní àwọn awo òún nṣẹnu rere é pe 'Fá.

Ifá ló lóní; 30
 Ifá ló lola;
 Ifá ló lètunla pèlú è;
 Òrúnmilà ló ni'jò méréèrin Òòsá dá 'áyé,
 A díá fún Òrúnmilà
 Nijò tí Ajogun gbogbo 35
 Nkan 'léé rẹ lákanyún.
 Ojò t'Íkú bá nwa mi í bọ wá,
 Ifá, iwọ ni o ràtà bọ mí
 B'éwé nla tí í ràtà á b'oori;
 B'eri nla tí í ràtà á bo yanrìn lódò. 40
 Nijò t'Árùn bá nwa mi í bọ wá,
 Ifá, iwọ ni o ràtà bọ mí
 B'éwé nla tí ràtà á boori;
 B'eri nla tí í ràtà á bo yanrìn lódò.
 Ojò t'Ájogun gbogbó bá nwa mi í bọ wá, 45
 Ifá, iwọ ni o ràtà bọ mí
 B'éwé nla tí í ràtà á b'oori;
 B'eri nla tí í ràtà á bo yanrìn lódò.
 Ètìpón-qlá ní í ràtà á bo'lẹ.
 Ifá, iwọ ni o ràtà bọ mí 50
 B'éwé nla tí í ràtà á b'oori;
 B'eri nla tí í ràtà á bo yanrìn lódò.⁴⁶

Ifá is master of today;
 Ifá is master of tomorrow;
 Ifá is master of day after tomorrow;
 To Ifá belongs all the four days of the week created
 on earth by Òòsá.

Ifá divination was performed for Òrúnmilà 5
 On the day all *Ajogun*

Were haunting his house persistently.
 Death, Disease, Loss, Paralysis and Evil-doer
 Were all staring at Òrúnmilà.

They were saying that one day, 10
 They would kill him.

Then Òrúnmilà assembled his Ifá divination instru-
 ments.

When he performed divination, he saw Ògúndá Méjì.⁴⁷
 He was asked to perform a sacrifice,
 And he performed it. 15
 After he had performed the prescribed sacrifice,
 His Orí shielded him

So that Death could no longer kill him;
 And Disease could no longer afflict him.
 He started to dance, 20
 He started to rejoice.
 He started to praise his Ifá priests
 While his Ifá priests praised Ifá.
 He opened his mouth a little,
 And he uttered forth the song of Ifá. 25
 As he stretched his legs,
 Dance caught them.
 He said that was exactly
 How his Ifá priests employed their good voices to
 praise Ifá.
 Ifá is master of today; 30
 Ifá is master of tomorrow;
 Ifá is master of day after tomorrow;
 To Ifá belongs all the four days of the week created on
 earth by Òṣà.
 Ifá divination was performed for Ọ̀rúnmìlà
 On the day all *Ajogun* 35
 Were persistently haunting his house.
 On the day Death is coming to seek for me,
 You are the one to shield me,
 Just as a big leaf wraps up *oori*,⁴⁸
 Just as a big stream of water covers up sand in the river. 40
 On the day Disease is coming to seek for me,
 Ifá, you are the one to shield me,
 Just as a big leaf wraps up *oori*,
 Just as a large volume of water covers up sand in the
 river.
 On the day all *Ajogun* are coming to seek for me, 45
 Ifá you are to shield me,
 Just as a big leaf wraps up *oori*,
 Just as a large volume of water covers up sand in the
 river.
Ẹ̀típón-ọ̀lá vegetable covers up the earth.
 Ifá, you are the one to shield me, 50
 Just as a big leaf wraps up *oori*
 Just as a big stream of water covers up sand in the river.

(b) The following excerpt tells how Ọ̀rúnmìlà was again attacked by a type of disease which had attacked him the

previous year. Ọrúnmílà used incantations to drive away the disease.

Ọkàrákàrá nìyagbá;
 Ọlóbọlòmbọlò omii tagi.
 A díá fún Ọrúnmílà,
 Wọ́n ní àrùn tí nṣe 'Fá ní èṣín tún dé.
 Ọrúnmílà ní b'ó bá le dé, 5
 K'ó dé.
 Ifá lárùn èṣín ò le ṣ'òun.
 Ẹ̀jì kí í jà, k'ó gb'ódó.
 Ifá lárùn èṣín ò le pòun.
 Ẹ̀jì kí í jà, k'ó gb'ọ̀lọ. 10
 Ọrúnmílà ní àrùn èṣín ò le ṣ'òun.
 Ikú wáá pin nígbà yí ò,
 Ikú pin.
 Ikú pin,
 Ikú pin, 15
 Làgbèdédé sẹ̀gún.
 Adìẹ òpìpì,
 Àkú 'áwoó mò mò wáá pin
 Lẹ̀sẹ Ọ̀bàrìṣà.⁴⁹

Ọkàrákàrá⁵⁰ is the sound made when calabash is smashed.

The juice of *tagi*⁵¹ is very slimy.

Ifá divination was performed for Ọrúnmílà

He was told that the disease which attacked him the previous year had come again.

Ọrúnmílà said if it had come, 5
 It was welcome.

Ifá said that last year's disease could not afflict him.

The land tornado does not carry mortars.

Ifá declared that last year's disease could not kill him.

The land tornado does not carry grindstones. 10
 Ọrúnmílà declared that last year's disease could not kill him.

Death has become powerless this time.

Death has become powerless.

Death has become powerless,

Death has become powerless, 15

That is what the blacksmith says when he strikes his hammer on the anvil.⁵²

The featherless hen offered for sacrifice ensures that
The Death of the Ifá priest is definitely put off
At the foot of the king of gods.⁵³

(c) The following excerpt describes an encounter between Death and Ọ̀rúnmilà. Ọ̀rúnmilà was frightened by something on his farm. He came home to find out from his Ori the cause of the fright through his Ifá divination instruments. Ọ̀rúnmilà was given a bow and three arrows by his Ifá priests and he was asked to shoot the arrows about all over his farm. One of the arrows struck Death on the chest and he temporarily left earth for heaven. Ọ̀rúnmilà was so happy that he danced back home from his farm praising his Ifá priests.

Pómú pómú sigì sigì sigì pomu pómú.
A díá fún Ọ̀rúnmilà,
Ifá ó tafà,
Yóó pa'Kú lóko.
Nhkan ló dẹ̀rùba Ọ̀rúnmilà, 5
Ló bá wálé,
Ó bi òkè Ẹ̀pòrú rẹ̀ léèrè wò.
Wọn ní ẹ̀bọ ní ó rú.
Ó sì rú u.
Ìgbà tí ó rúbọ̀ tán, 10
Ní àwọn awoo rẹ̀ bá fún un ní ọ̀fà mẹ̀ta.
Wọn ní kí ó máa ta á káàkiri okoo rẹ̀.
Ìgbà tí ọ̀kan nínú àwọn ọ̀fà náà ó lọ,
Láyà ló gbé bá Ikú.
Gbìlì tí Ikú lulẹ̀ bá yí, 15
Ló bá jáde láyẹ
Látì oko ni Ọ̀rúnmilà tí kó ijó wálé.
Ó ní bẹ̀ẹ̀ gẹ̀gẹ̀ ni àwọn awo òún wí.
Pómú pómú sigì sigì sigì pomu pómú.
A díá fún Ọ̀rúnmilà. 20
Ifá ó tafà,
Yóó pa'Kú lóko.
Olónimoró tafà,
Ó pa'Kú lóko.
Pómú pómú sigì sigì sigì pomu pómú.⁵⁴ 25
Pómú pómú sigì sigì sigì pomu pómú.⁵⁵
Ifá divination was performed for Ọ̀rúnmilà
Ifá would shoot an arrow

And kill Death on the farm.
 Something terrified Òrúnmìlà on the farm. 5
 He therefore came home
 And inquired about it from his Orí through his divination instruments.
 He was asked to perform sacrifice,
 And he performed it.
 After he had performed the prescribed sacrifice, 10
 His Ifá priests gave him a bow and three arrows
 And asked him to shoot them about on his farm.
 When one of the arrows was shot.
 It hit Death.
 It hit Death on the chest. 15
 Death fell down with a loud noise
 And left the earth.
 It was from the farm that Òrúnmìlà danced home.
 He said that was exactly what his Ifá priests predicted.
 Pómú pómú sigi sigi sigi pomu pomú. 20
 Ifá divination was performed for Òrúnmìlà.
 Ifá would shoot an arrow
 And kill Death on the farm.
 Olónímoró⁵⁶ shot an arrow,
 He killed Death on the farm. 25
 Pómú pómú sigi sigi sigi pomu pomú.

(d) In this excerpt we are told of a bitter contest between the Witches and some of the gods on account of a crime committed by Yemòó, the wife of Òðṣàálá (the god of creation). Yemòó stole water from the brook of the Witches and spoilt the remaining water after taking her own. When the Witches heard about Yemòó's action, they complained to her husband. Instead of begging the Witches, Òðṣàálá said that his wife had done nothing wrong. The Witches therefore swallowed him and his wife. Two other gods, Egúngún and Orò,⁵⁷ who wanted to rescue Òðṣàálá and his wife, were also swallowed up by the Witches. But, by means of àtè,⁵⁸ Òrúnmìlà arrested the Witches and killed them.

Páńkẹ́ẹ́ jingíní,
 Awo inúu 'gbó.
 A díá fún Yemòó
 Tí ẹ́cẹ obìnrin Òðṣà,

- Nijó tí ó ló lèé pòndò Èlẹyẹ. 5
 Èẹrùn ló yán,
 Ní omí dọwọn.
 Nígba tí wọn ò rí omi mu mọ,
 Àwọn èyàń gbẹ odò ti wọn sọtò,
 Àwọn Èlẹyẹ náàá sì gbẹ ti wọn sọtò. 10
 Àwọn Èlẹyẹ fi ẹluùlú sọ odò ti wọn.
 Wọn ní kí ó mú ẹnikẹni tí ó bá rí nìbẹ.
 Ìgbà tí odò ti àwọn èyàń gbẹ,
 Ní Yemòó bá ló sí odò àwọn Èlẹyẹ.
 Ó sì nṣe àlẹjò lówọ ní. 15
 Ìgbà tí ó pọnmí tán,
 Ló bá fi aṣọ òdee rẹ táábà sí iyókù.
 Èluùlú rí i,
 Kò fọhùn.
 Ìgbà ilẹ́ mọ, 20
 Ní àwọn Ìyámí bá wáá pọnmí lódò.
 Wọn bá ojú omi ní pípọn ṣeṣe.
 Wọn bi ẹluùlú pé ta ló pọnmí.
 Èluùlú ní: 'Yemòó ló pọnmí tán,
 Lẹ́jẹ ńrú tùú tùú tùú.' 25
 Wọn ní: 'Ó ṣá araa rẹ lógbẹ ní?'
 Ó ní: 'Kò ṣá araa rẹ lógbẹẹ,
 Èjẹ ẹdii rẹ nií.'
 Ní wọn bá kọrí s'ílẹ̀ Òòṣà.
 Wọn mú ẹhurù, ẹyẹ wọn, lówọ. 30
 Wọn ní: 'Òòṣà, w'ohun tí Yemòó ṣe o.'
 Òòṣà ní obìnrin òun ò ṣe ohun kan.
 Ní ẹhurù ẹyẹ wọn bá fọn fèrẹ,
 Ó ní: 'Àti Yemòó, àt'Òòṣà,
 Àhemì, àhemì, àhemì.' 35
 Ní wọn bá he Yemòó àti Òòṣàálá mì.
 Ní Eégún bá jáde sí wọn pẹlú àtòrì lówọ.
 Ẹhurúú ní: 'T'Eégún, t'Òòṣà,
 Àhemì, àhemì, àhemì.'
 Ní wọn bá he Eégún mì. 40
 Ní Orò bá bọ síta,
 Pé kí òun ó gbẹ wọn.
 Ẹhuùrúú ní: 'At'Eégún, at'Orò,
 Àhemì, àhemì, àhemì.'
 Ní wọn bá he Orò náà mì. 45
 Lálpẹ, Ọrúnmilà gbọ,
 Ló bá gbẹ òkè Ẫpọ̀rìi rẹ kalẹ.

Wọn ní kí Ọ̀rúnmlà ó rú àwo èkuru kan àti àtè.
Ní àwọn awo ilé Ọ̀rúnmlá bá ẹ̀ Ifá fún un.

Wọn fi èkuru náà pèèsè

50

Wọn gbé àwo kan sí ojú ilé,

Wọn sì gbé ọ̀kan sí ẹ̀jẹ̀tù.

Wọn wáá da àtè sílẹ̀ yíká àwo èkuru náà.

Láìpẹ̀, àwọn Ẹ̀lẹ̀yẹ̀ yọ ní ọ̀ọ̀kán.

Wọn nífò fẹ̀rẹ̀ẹ̀ bọ.

55

Nígbà tí Ọ̀rúnmlá rí wọn,

Ló bá sáré wọlé,

Ó gọ mọ̀lẹ̀.

Bí àwọn Ẹ̀lẹ̀yẹ̀ tí dé ilé Ọ̀rúnmlà,

Àti ẹ̀yí tí ó gbojúu 'lé,

60

Àti ẹ̀yí tí ó gbọ̀nà ẹ̀bùù,

Kítí ní wọn kan àwo èkuu n'lẹ̀.

Ẹ̀sẹ̀ àwọn Ẹ̀lẹ̀yẹ̀ ọ̀ sì gbọ̀dọ̀ fi ojú kan èkuru.

Ní wọn bá bèrẹ̀ sí í jẹ̀ ẹ̀.

Wọn jẹ, jẹ, jẹ,

65

Wọn fi ẹ̀ ikùn gbentọ̀,

Wọn ọ̀ tiẹ̀ rántí Ọ̀rúnmlà

Tí wọn nílọ̀ s'ílẹ̀ rẹ̀ mọ̀.

Nígbà tí Ọ̀rúnmlá rí i pé onjẹ náàà wọ̀ wọn lára tán,

T'ó rí i pé wọn tí f'apá àti ẹ̀sẹ̀ yí àtè dáadáa,

70

Ló bá bọ̀ sínú ilé,

Ó mú kùnmọ̀ lówọ̀,

Ló bá jáde sí wọn.

Bẹ̀ẹ̀ ní Ọ̀rúnmlá ẹ̀ lu gbogboo wọn pa.

Àti Ẹ̀lẹ̀yẹ̀ ní o,

75

Àti ẹ̀hurù ẹ̀yẹ̀ burúkú tí wọn mú lówọ̀,

Gbogbo wọn ní Ọ̀rúnmlá lù pa.

Ijó ní Ọ̀rúnmlá wáà nǵó,

Ayọ̀ ní nýọ̀.

Ó nýin àwọn awoo rẹ̀,

80

Àwọn awoo rẹ̀ nýin 'Fá.

Agogo ní Ìpóró,

Àràn n'Íkijà,

Ọ̀pá kugúkugú lójúde Ìṣẹ̀rimogbe.

Wọn s'ọ̀pá s'áràn,

85

Ó mú tinúu rẹ̀ jáde.

Ó ya ẹ̀nu kótó,

Orin awo ní nǵọ̀.

Ẹ̀sẹ̀ tí ó nà,

Ijó fà á.

90

Ó ní bèè gégé
 Ní àwọn awo òún wí.
 Pánkéré jingíní,
 Awo inúú 'gbó.
 A díá fún Yemòó 95
 Tí í ẹ obìnrin Òòṣà,
 Níjọ tí ó lọ lèé pọ̀n'dò Èlẹyẹ.
 Èròò 'Po,
 Èrò Òfà,
 Orí mi ní ó gbà mí lówó Èlẹyẹ.⁵⁹ 100

The small *pánkéré* stem,
 Ifá priest of the forest.
 Performed Ifá divination for Yemòó
 Who was the wife of Òòṣà,
 On the day she was going to draw water from the 5
 Witches' brook.
 The dry season was very severe,
 And water was scarce.
 When there was no more drinking water,
 Human beings made their own brook separately,
 And the Witches also made their own brook separately. 10
 The Witches used Èluùlú⁶⁰ to guard their brook.
 They instructed him to arrest any trespasser he saw
 there.
 When the brook of human beings dried up,
 Yemòó went to draw water from the Witches' brook.
 She was having her menstruation at that time. 15
 When she finished drawing water,
 She used her menstrual pad to wash her private part
 into the remaining water.
 Èluùlú saw her,
 But he did not say anything.
 When day dawned, 20
 The Witches came to draw water from their brook.
 They found the surface of the water very red.
 They asked Èluùlú who had drawn water.
 Èluùlú said: 'After Yemòó drew water,
 Blood was gushing out profusely.' 25
 They asked: 'Did she stab herself?'
 He answered: 'She did not stab herself,
 The blood was from her private part.'
 The Witches then went to the house of Òòṣà.

- They took Èhurù,⁶¹ their bird, along. 30
 They said: 'Òòṣà, consider what Yemòó has done.'
 But Òòṣà said his wife had done nothing wrong.
 Then, Èhurù, their bird, whistled,
 And said: 'Both Yemòó and Òòṣà
 Are to be swallowed, to be swallowed, to be swallowed.' 35
 They then swallowed Yemòó and Òòṣà.
 Then Eégún came out whip in hand.⁶²
 Èhurù said: 'Both Eégún and Òòṣà
 Are to be swallowed, to be swallowed, to be swallowed.'
 They swallowed Eégún. 40
 Then Orò came out
 In order to capture them.
 Èhurù said: 'Both Eégún and Orò
 Are to be swallowed, to be swallowed, to be swallowed.'
 Then, they swallowed Orò also. 45
 Before long, Òrúnmílà learnt about the incident.
 He assembled his Ifá divination instruments.
 Òrúnmílà was asked to perform sacrifice with a plate-
 ful of *èkuru* and *àtè*.
 The Ifá priests of Òrúnmílà's household performed
 Ifá divination sacrifice for Òrúnmílà.
 They offered the *èkuru* as the special sacrifice of 50
 Witches.
 They put one plate at the main entrance to the house,
 And put another one in the bathroom.
 They poured *àtè* around each plate.
 Before long, the Witches appeared
 They were jumping up joyfully. 55
 When Òrúnmílà saw them,
 He ran into the house.
 And hid himself.
 As the Witches entered Òrúnmílà's house,
 Both those who took the front door, 60
 And those who took the back door,
 All found the plates of *èkuru* unexpectedly.
 And the Witches are very fond of *èkuru*.
 They started to eat it.
 They ate and ate 65
 Until their bellies became extended.

They no longer remembered Òrúnmílà
 To whose house they were going.
 When Òrúnmílà noticed that they were completely
 absorbed in eating the food,
 And noticed that they had sufficiently soiled both their 70
 wings and legs with *àtè*,
 He went inside the house,
 Took a wooden club,
 And came outside to meet them.
 That was how Òrúnmílà beat all of them to death.
 Both the Witches, 75
 And Èhurù, the evil bird they took along,
 Were beaten to death by Òrúnmílà.
 Òrúnmílà started to dance,
 He started to rejoice.
 He was praising his Ifá priests 80
 While his Ifá priests praised Ifá.
 Gongs were beaten at Ìpóró,
 Àràn drum was beaten at Ìkijà,
 Sticks were used to produce music at Ìṣẹrimogbe.
 They applied sticks to àràn drum, 85
 It brought forth its pleasant melody.
 He opened his mouth a little,
 He started to sing the song of Ifá priests.
 As he stretched his legs,
 Dance caught them. 90
 He said that was exactly
 What his Ifá priest had predicted.
 The small *pánkéré* stem,
 The Ifá priest of the forest,
 Performed Ifá divination for Yemdó 95
 Who was the wife of Òòṣà,
 On the day she was going to draw water from the
 Witches' brook.
 Travellers to Ìpo,
 Travellers to Òfà,
 Only my Orí will save me from the Witches. 100

(e) The following excerpt is about how Òrúnmílà was once tortured by the Witches. Òrúnmílà met the Witches and some other gods at the mythical gate between heaven and earth. As the Witches were completely naked, they were ashamed to reach earth in such a state. They therefore begged each of the

gods in turn to give them part of his dress so that they might use it to cover up their nakedness. All the other gods except Ọ́rúnmìlà refused. Ọ́rúnmìlà first complained that since there were no bones in his body, if he mounted the Witches, on his back, he would not be able to walk again. But after a lot of persuasion, Ọ́rúnmìlà agreed to swallow up the Witches and let them out again on earth.

When Ọ́rúnmìlà reached earth, he informed the Witches about it and asked them to come out of his stomach. The Witches, however, refused saying that they were quite comfortable where they were. When they bluntly refused to come out, Ọ́rúnmìlà reminded them that if they did not come out in time, hunger would force them to do so eventually. When they heard this, they replied that the liver and the intestines of Ọ́rúnmìlà were quite sufficient to sustain them. They then started to bite Ọ́rúnmìlà.

Ọ́rúnmìlà was so greatly afraid that he ran to his Ifá priests to find out what to do. He was asked to offer as sacrifice a goat, plenty of ẹ̀kọ and palm-oil. With these materials, they prepared on Ọ́rúnmìlà's behalf the special sacrifice to the Witches and asked him to carry the sacrifice to the place where he had originally swallowed up the Witches. When Ọ́rúnmìlà got there, he did as he was told, and the Witches came out of his stomach. Ọ́rúnmìlà was so greatly terrified that for three months, he did not come out of his house for fear that the Witches might see him again.

Òdélé ló ẹ̀yìn gùnmòlẹ̀

Bí ẹnì arìnmọ̀rìn.

B'ó bá jà k'ó rìn,

A dúró sii.

A díá fún ọ̀kànlénú irúnmọ̀lẹ̀,

5

Wọ̀n nít'ọ̀run bọ wáyé.

A díá fún Ẹ̀lẹ̀yẹ̀,

Ẹ̀lẹ̀yẹ̀ nít'ọ̀run bọ wáyé.

A díá fún Eégún,

Eégún nít'ọ̀run bọ wáyé.

10

A díá fún Ọ̀òsà,

Ọ̀òsà nít'ọ̀run bọ wáyé.

A díá fún Ọ́rúnmìlà,

Ọ́rúnmìlà nít'ìkọ̀lé ọ̀run bọ wá sí tayé.

Eégún, Ọ̀òsà àti Ọ́rúnmìlà,

15

Gbogbo wọ̀n ló rí aṣọ bora,

ẚùgbọ̀n ihòdòhò nì àwọ̀n Ìyà mí wà.

Nígbà tí wọ̀n dé'bodè,

- Wọn ò leè lẹ mọ,
 Ojú ntí wọn. 20
- Wọn ní: 'Eégún, dákun, yá wa ní diẹ.
 Níbi asọ̀ rẹ alárà̀mbarà un,
 Kí á fi diẹ bora n'̀bẹ̀ d'ode ayé.'
 Eégún ní: 'E dákun, n ò ẹ̀erée gbèsè o.'
 Wọn ké sí Ọ̀dà pé, 25
 'Dákun, fún wa ní diẹ n'̀bi asọ̀ rẹ funfun un,
 Kí á fi bora dé'lé ayé.'
 Ọ̀dà ní: 'E dákun, n ò ẹ̀erée gbèsè o.'
 Wọn ké sí Ọ̀rúnmílà pé:
 'Ọ̀rúnmílà, b'ó ẹ̀e pípọn o pọn wá d'ode ayé.' 30
 Ọ̀rúnmílà ní ẹ̀e ẹ̀e rí i pé
 Kò sí eegun lára òun.
 Bí òun bá ti pọn yín,
 Ọ̀un ò ní í le rìn mọ.
 Wọn sá bẹ̀rẹ̀ sí í bẹ̀ Ọ̀rúnmílà. 35
 Wọn ní kí Ọ̀rúnmílà ó dákun, dábò,
 K'ó f'iyè dé'nú.
 K'ó f'iyè dé'kùn.
 K'ó f'iyè dé gbogbo ara.
 Nígbà tí ẹ̀bẹ̀ pò lápòjù, 40
 Ni Ọ̀rúnmílà bá bi wọn pé:
 'Sé k'ẹ̀ ẹ̀ fi d'ode-ayé náà ni?'
 Wọn ní: 'Bẹ̀e nil.'
 Ni Ọ̀rúnmílà bá ti àşẹ̀ Èşù bonu.
 Hàà tí ó ya ẹ̀nu báýí, 45
 Ni àwọn Íyámí bá ńrọ̀ sí i.
 Ló bá fi bẹ̀e gbé wọn dé'lé ayé.
 Nígbà tí wọn dé'lé ayé tán,
 Ọ̀rúnmílà ní: 'Òde ayé náà la dé yí o,
 E máa wáá sọ o.' 50
 Wọn ní kín ní í jẹ̀ sísòkalẹ̀?
 Wọn ní: 'A à tún sòkalẹ̀ mọ,
 Ibi tí a wà yí náàá dáraà.'
 Ọ̀rúnmílà ní: 'Níbo ló dára?'
 Ó ní: 'Ikùn tẹ̀mi nù-un.' 55
 Wọn ní ẹ̀e bí àwọn mọ̀ pé ikùn rẹ̀ ni tẹ̀lẹ̀
 Kí àwọn ò tóó kó síbẹ̀.
 Wọn ní àwọn ò sá sòkalẹ̀ mọ̀ ní.
 Nígbà tí ó pẹ̀ tí Ọ̀rúnmílà ti ńrọ̀ wọn,
 Tí wọn sá ń àwọn ò tún sòkalẹ̀ mọ̀ dandan, 60
 Ni Ọ̀rúnmílà bá ní: 'E máa gbé'̀bẹ̀,
 Ebi ní ó kùkú lée yín sòkalẹ̀.'

Wọn ní: 'Kín ní í j'èbi?	
Ìfun àtí ẹ̀dọ̀dọ̀ rẹ̀ yìí nààà tò wa á jẹ́.'	
Ni wọn bá ńjá Ọ̀rúnmilá á jẹ́ pátípátí.	65
Ni Ọ̀rúnmilá bá họ.	
Ló bá gb'òná oko aláwo lọ.	
Ó ní báwo loore tí òun ẹ̀	
Ò ẹ̀ ní í pa òun bá yíí?	
Wọn ní kí ó lọọ rú ewúré kan.	70
Ni wọn bá fi ifun rẹ̀ pèsè	
Pẹ̀lú ọ̀pọ̀lọ̀pọ̀ ẹ̀kọ̀ àtí epo.	
Wọn kó gbogboo rẹ̀ sínú agbada ńlá kan.	
Wọn ní kí Ọ̀rúnmilá ó máa ru èèsè nàà lọ	
Sí ibi tí ó ti gbé àwọn Ẹ̀lẹ̀yẹ̀ mì.	75
Wọn ní b'ó bá gbé èèsè nàà kalẹ̀ tán,	
Kí ó máa ya ẹ̀nuu rẹ̀,	
Kí ó máa wí pé:	
'Hàà, ẹ̀ jáde;	
Hàà, ẹ̀ jáde.'	80
Aré ikú ni Ọ̀rúnmilá sá dé'bi	
Tí ó ti gbé àwọn Ẹ̀lẹ̀yẹ̀ mì.	
Bí ó ti débẹ̀, tí ó ńse,	
'Hàà, ẹ̀ jáde,	
Hàà, ẹ̀ jáde.'	85
Ni àwọn Ẹ̀lẹ̀yẹ̀ bá ńfò ó jáde lẹ̀kẹ̀kẹ̀kan.	
Nígbà tí Ọ̀rúnmilá rí i wí pé	
Wọn ti jáde tán nínú òun,	
Ó tún fi ọ̀wọ̀ tẹ̀ ikùn wò,	
Ó rí i pé wọn ti tán pátá poo,	90
Ni Ọ̀rúnmilá bá ẹ̀ sí filà,	
Ló bá họ.	
Aré t'ó sá wọ yàráa rẹ̀ bá yíí,	
Oṣù mẹtá, kò tún jáde síta mọ.	
Tí ó sá lẹ̀kẹ̀kẹ̀ mọ̀lẹ̀,	95
Tí ó ba búúbúú.	
Ijó ní ńjó,	
Ayọ̀ ní ńyọ̀.	
Ó ńyin àwọn awoo rẹ̀,	
Àwọn awoo rẹ̀ ńyin 'Fá.	100
Agogo ní Ẫpóró,	
Àràn ní Ẫkijà,	
Ọ̀pá kugúkugù lójúde Ẫṣẹ̀rimogbe.	
Ó ya ẹ̀nu kótó,	
Orin awo ló bó sí i lẹ̀nu.	105

- Èsè tí ó nà,
 Ijó fà á.
 Ó ní bẹ̀ẹ̀ gégé
 Ní àwọn awo òún nṣ'enu rere é pe 'Fá.
 Òdèlè ló ṣẹ̀yìn gùmòlè 110
 Bí ẹnì arìnmọ̀rìn.
 B'ó bá jà k'ó rìn,
 A dúró sii.
 A díá fún ọ̀kànlénú irúnmọ̀lẹ̀,
 Wọn nít'ọ̀run bọ wáyé. 115
 A díá fún Èlẹ̀yẹ,
 Èlẹ̀yẹ nít'ọ̀run bọ wáyé.
 A díá fún Eégún,
 Eégún nít'ọ̀run bọ wáyé.
 A díá fún Òdṣà, 120
 Òdṣà nít'ọ̀run bọ wáyé.
 A díá fún Ọ̀rúnmilà,
 Ọ̀rúnmilà nít'Ìkòlẹ̀ ọ̀run bọ wá sí tayé.
 Èròò 'Po,
 Èrò Ọ̀fà, 125
 Orí mi ní ó gbà mí lẹ̀wọ̀ Èlẹ̀yẹ.⁶³

The roof has a convex arch
 Like a cripple who wants to walk but cannot walk.
 If the cripple tries to walk,
 He remains on the same spot.
 Ifá divination was performed for four hundred and 5
 one gods

Who were coming from heaven to earth.
 Ifá divination was performed for the Witches,
 When they were coming from heaven to earth.
 Ifá divination was performed for Eégún,
 When he was coming from heaven to earth. 10
 Ifá divination was performed for Òdṣà,
 When he was coming from heaven to earth.
 Ifá divination was performed for Ọ̀rúnmilà,
 When he was coming from heaven to earth.
 Eégún, Òdṣà and Ọ̀rúnmilà 15
 All wore clothes.
 But the Witches were naked.
 When they reached the gate of heaven and earth,
 They could not go again
 Because they were ashamed of themselves. 20

They said: 'Eégún, please, give us
 Part of your motley costume
 To cover up our nakedness until we reach earth.'
 But Eégún said: 'Please, excuse me, I will have no
 part in trouble.'

Then they said to Òòṣà: 25

'Please, give us part of your white robes,
 To cover up ourselves until we reach earth.'
 But Òòṣà replied: 'Please, excuse me, I will have no
 part in trouble.'

They then told Òrúnmílà,
 'Òrúnmílà, please, if you cannot do all other things, 30
 just mount us on your back till we reach earth.'

Òrúnmílà explained that as they could see,
 There was no bone in him.⁶⁴
 He complained that if he mounted them on his back,
 He would not be able to walk again.

But they continued to beg Òrúnmílà. 35

They implored Òrúnmílà passionately,
 They appealed to his big heart,
 They appealed to his gracious spirit.
 They appealed to his generous disposition.

When the pleading became unbearable, 40

Òrúnmílà asked them:
 'Is your wish solely to get to earth?'

They said: 'It is so.'

Òrúnmílà then put the powerful charm of Èṣù in his
 mouth.⁶⁵

As he opened his mouth, 45

The Witches began to enter into it.
 And so he carried them in his belly until they reached
 earth.

When they got to earth,
 Òrúnmílà said: 'We are now on earth,
 Will you please come out?' 50

But they answered asking him what he meant.

They said: 'We will not come out again.'

This place is good enough for us.'

But Òrúnmílà said: 'Which place do you say is good
 enough?'

He added: 'That is my own stomach.' 55

But they said that they knew it was his stomach
 Before they entered therein.

- They said that they would not come down at all.
 After Ọrúnmílà had begged them for a long while
 And they insisted that they would not come down, 60
 Ọrúnmílà said: 'All right, stay there,
 Hunger will soon chase you out.'
 They said, 'What do you mean by hunger?
 Your liver and your intestines are sufficient food for
 us to live upon'.
 They then started to bite Ọrúnmílà. 65
 Ọrúnmílà then took to his heels
 And went to the house of an Ifá priest.
 He asked how his act of kindness
 Would not bring about his death.
 He was asked to offer a goat as sacrifice. 70
 And the priests used its intestines to perform the special
 sacrifice of the Witches
 Together with *ẹkọ* and plenty of palm-oil.
 They put everything inside a large pot.
 They asked Ọrúnmílà to carry it
 To the place where he had swallowed up the Witches. 75
 He was told that as soon as he placed it down,
 He should open his mouth
 And utter the following incantation:
 'Hàà,⁶⁶ come out,
 Hàà, come out.' 80
 Ọrúnmílà ran like someone being chased by death
 To the place where he had swallowed up the Witches.
 When he got there and he started saying:
 'Hàà, come out,
 Hàà, come out,' 85
 The Witches began to fly out one by one.
 When Ọrúnmílà saw that
 They had all left his stomach,
 He pressed his stomach with his hands.
 Seeing that they were all gone, 90
 He then took off his cap,
 And took to his heels.
 He ran into his bedroom,
 And for three months, he did not come out.
 He stretched himself fearfully on the floor 95
 And hid himself carefully.
 He started to dance,
 He started to rejoice.

- He started to praise his Ifá priests
 While his Ifá priests praised Ifá. 100
 Gongs were beaten at *Ìpóró*,
Àràn drum was beaten at *Ìkijà*,
 Drumsticks were used to make music at *Ìṣẹrimogbe*.
 He opened his mouth a little
 And he uttered forth the song of Ifá. 105
 As he stretched his legs,
 Dance caught them.
 He said that was exactly
 How his Ifá priests employed their good voices in
 praise of Ifá.
 The roof has a convex arch 110
 Like a cripple who wants to walk but cannot walk.
 If the cripple tries to walk,
 He remains on the same spot.
 Ifá divination was performed for four hundred and
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 When he was coming from heaven to earth.
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 When he was coming from heaven to earth.
 Ifá divination was performed for *Ọ̀rúnmilà*,
 When he was coming from heaven to earth.
 Travellers to *Ìpo*,
 Travellers to *Ọ̀fà*, 125
 Only my *Orí* alone will save me from the Witches.

ÈṢÙ, A NEUTRAL FORCE

Although Èṣù is believed to be one of the gods, he does not always favour his fellow gods, and unlike the other gods, he does not always support human beings. It seems plausible to hold that the action of Èṣù in supporting or opposing any power or being is dictated sometimes by his own whims and caprices, and sometimes by a genuine desire to punish offenders, especially those who have neglected the prescribed sacrifice. Èṣù, therefore, assumes the role of an impartial police officer, punishing those who have disturbed the order of the universe.

Neglect of sacrifice is taken very seriously by Èṣù and he favours only those who have performed the prescribed sacrifice. This is the meaning of the saying 'Èni ó rúbọ́ l' Èṣùú gbè' (Èṣù favours only those who have performed the prescribed sacrifice), usually found in many *ẹsẹ Ifá*.

As mentioned above, whenever Ọrúnmilà himself wants to perform any wonderful or magical deed, he depends on Èṣù. This is because Èṣù has a charm known as àṣẹ (charm of command) which he could use to accomplish almost anything. But as the examples below show, Èṣù could attack Ọrúnmilà or any other god whenever it pleases him to do so. When it pleases him, Èṣù could also attack the Ajogun on behalf of any god or human being, provided the god or human being concerned has performed the prescribed sacrifice.

(a) Here is an *ẹsẹ Ifá* which contains an account of how on one occasion, Èṣù teamed up with Death and Disease against Ọrúnmilà. The three of them visited Ọrúnmilà at a time when he had nothing at home and he had no money with which to entertain visitors. Ọrúnmilà, knowing fully well who the visitors were and what could happen to him if he did not entertain them well, had to send his wife to go and sell some of his belongings in the market and thus obtain money to buy food and drinks with which to entertain his dreadful visitors.

Ọdà-owó, awoo Kóro;
 Ààbò, obinriin rẹ,
 Ọmọọ wọn Ọkè Ịjerò.
 Bí ọdà owó tí ndá mi,
 Bẹẹ ni ààbò mí mbò mí. 5
 A díá fún Ọrúnmilà
 Níjọ tí olojò mẹta
 Ó wọ s'ílée baba;
 Ifá ò sì ní í ní oókan
 À á yọ ọ ná. 10
 Ni Ọrúnmilà bá pe Ààbò, obinrin rẹ,
 Pé kí ó kó àwọn nnkan inú ọ̀n lọ s'ọja lọ tà.
 Nígbà tí Ààbò dé ọja Ejìgbòmẹkùn,
 Ịrọkẹ Ọrúnmilà tí ó rà ní egbẹje,
 Wọn ẹ é ni ogóje. 15
 Ịrùkẹẹ rẹ egbẹfà,
 Wọn ẹ é ni ogófà.

Ìbòrí Ifáa ẹgbẹ̀rindínlógún,
 Wọn ẹ́ é ní ọ̀kanlélógún.
 Ní Ààbò bá m̀ẹ̀kun, 20
 Ó fí dígbẹ.
 Ó fí iyẹ̀rẹ̀ ẹ́'ohùn arò.
 Ó ní àwọn ọ̀jà náà ò pójúowó.
 Ní Ọ̀rúnmilá bá fí iyẹ̀rẹ̀ dá a lóhùn
 Pé kí ó lọ ta àwọn ọ̀jà náà bẹ̀ẹ̀bẹ̀. 25
 Ní Ààbó bá ta àwọn ọ̀jà náà ní itàkutà.
 Ló bá m'ówó ra onjẹ wálẹ.
 Àwọn olojò m̀ẹ̀ta náà—Ikú, Àrùn àti Èsù—jẹ,
 Wọn sì yó.⁶⁷

Ọ̀dà-owó,⁶⁸ Ifá priest of Kóro;⁶⁹
 Ààbò,⁷⁰ his wife,
 Their daughter in the city of Ìjẹrò.⁷¹
 Just as I lack money,
 I also have security. 5
 Ifá divination was performed for Ọ̀rúnmilà,
 On the day three strange men
 Would lodge in the father's house.
 And Ifá did not have even one cowry shell
 Which he could spend. 10
 Ọ̀rúnmilà called Ààbò, his wife,
 To take all his belongings to the market to sell.
 When Ààbò got to the market of Èjìgbòmẹ̀kun,⁷²
 Ọ̀rúnmilà's *ìròkẹ*⁷³ which he bought for seven hundred
 cowries,
 Was priced at one hundred and forty cowries. 15
 His horse-tail ceremonial switch which he bought for
 six hundred cowries,
 Was priced at one hundred and twenty cowries.
 The ornamented cover-cloth of his Ifá divination
 instruments which he bought for sixteen hundred
 cowries,
 Was priced at twenty-one cowries.
 Ààbò wept, 20
 Instead of crying aloud.
 She chanted Ifá poems, instead of uttering a wailing
 cry.
 She said that the materials were priced far less than
 their cost prices.
 Ọ̀rúnmilà also answered her by chanting Ifá poems.

And instructed her to go and sell the materials. 25
 Ààbò then sold the materials at a loss,
 And took the money to buy food home.
 The three strange visitors—Death, Disease and Èṣù
 —ate
 And they were satisfied.

(b) In the following excerpt Èṣù is said to have teamed up with Ọ̀rúnmìlà when the latter seduced Death's wife. After taking the prescribed sacrifice from Ọ̀rúnmìlà, Èṣù went and sat in front of Ọ̀rúnmìlà house. Before long, Death came club in hand ready to kill Ọ̀rúnmìlà. He found Èṣù outside the house. Èṣù used a clever device to turn Death back.

Ó ẹ̀ẹ́ fírí kọ́jànà.
 A díá fún Ọ̀rúnmìlà
 Ifá ńlọ lèé gb'Ọ̀jòntarigì,
 Obìnrin Ikú.
 Ọ̀jòntarigì nìkan nàà ni obìnrin Ikú, 5
 Ọ̀rúnmìlà sì fẹ́ẹ́ gbà á lówọ́ Ikú.
 Wọ́n ní kí Ọ̀rúnmìlà ó rúbọ́.
 Ó sì rú u.
 Ìgbà tí ó rúbọ́ tán,
 Ló bá gba Ọ̀jòntarigì lówọ́ Ikú. 10
 Ní Ikú bá mú kùnmọ́ọ rẹ́,
 Ó kọ́rí s'ílẹ́ Ọ̀rúnmìlà.
 Ó sì bá Èṣù lójúde.
 Èṣù ní: 'Nílé o,
 Ikú, Ọ̀jẹ̀pẹ́ aláṣọ osùn.' 15
 Ìgbà tí wọ́n kíràa wọ́n tán,
 Èṣù ní: 'Níbo lò ńlọ́?'
 Ikú ní òun ńlọ́ ilé Ọ̀rúnmìlà ni.
 Èṣù ní: 'Kín ló de?'
 Ikú ní ó gba òun lóbinrin ni, 20
 Lóní ni òun ó sì pa á.
 Ní Èṣù bá ní kí ó jókò.
 Ìgbà tí ó jókò tán,
 Ní Èṣù bá fún un ní jíjẹ àti mímu.
 Ìgbà tí Ikú jẹun tí ó yó tán, 25
 Ó dìde,
 Ó mú kùnmọ́ọ rẹ́,
 Ó ńlọ́.
 Èṣù ní: 'Níbo ló dà?'

- Ikú ní òun òlọ ilé Ọ̀rúnmilà nì. 30
 Èṣù ní: 'À maa jẹun ẹnì tán, k'á tún pa nì?'
 O ò mò pé ohé Ọ̀rúnmilà lo jẹ yìi?'
 Ìgbà tí Ikú ò mò ohun tí yóó ẹ̀ mò,
 Ó ní: 'Sọ fún Ọ̀rúnmilà kí ó maa mú obìnrin náà.'
 Ijó nì Ọ̀rúnmilà nǹjọ, 35
 Ayò ní nǹyò.
 Ó ní ó ẹ̀ fírí kọ́jànà.
 A díá fún Ọ̀rúnmilà,
 Ifá nǹlọ lèé gb'Ọ̀jòntarigì,
 Obìnrin Ikú. 40
 Ọ̀ràn t'ẹ̀ ẹ̀ rọ̀ kẹ̀kẹ̀ sí,
 Alẹ̀ ànà nì mo fì s'ótí,
 Nì mo fì mu.
 Gbẹ̀rẹ̀fu.
 A f'ọ̀ràn yìi mu tábà.
 Àwá f'ọ̀ràn yìi mu tábà,
 A ò kú mò.
 Gbẹ̀rẹ̀fu.
 A f'ọ̀ràn yìi mu tábà.⁷⁴ 45

The one who dashed swiftly across the road.
 Ifá divination was performed for Ọ̀rúnmilà,
 When he was going to snatch Ọ̀jòntarigì,⁷⁵
 The wife of Death.

- Ọ̀jòntarigì was the only wife of Death 5
 But Ọ̀rúnmilà wanted to snatch her away.
 Ọ̀rúnmilà was asked to perform sacrifice.
 And he performed it.
 After he had performed the prescribed sacrifice,
 He snatched Ọ̀jòntarigì away from Death. 10
 Death then took his club,
 And went to Ọ̀rúnmilà's house.
 He found Èṣù outside the house.
 Èṣù said: 'I greet you,
 Death, nick-named *Ọ̀jẹ̀pẹ̀*, whose garment is always 15
 red.'

- After they had exchanged greetings,
 Èṣù asked: 'Where are you going?'
 Death replied that he was going to Ọ̀rúnmilà's house.
 Èṣù asked: 'What is the matter?'
 Death complained that Ọ̀rúnmilà had seduced away 20
 his wife

And vowed he would kill Ọ̀rúnmìlà that day.
 Then Èṣù asked Death to sit down.
 After he had sat down,
 Èṣù gave him food and drinks.
 After Death had eaten to his satisfaction, 25
 He stood up,
 Took his club,
 And started to go.
 Èṣù asked him again: 'Where are you going?'
 Death said he was going to Ọ̀rúnmìlà's house. 30
 Èṣù asked: 'Does one eat a man's food and rise up to
 kill him?'
 Don't you know that the food you ate is Ọ̀rúnmìlà's
 food.'
 When Death knew not what to do,
 He said: 'Tell Ọ̀rúnmìlà to keep the woman.'
 Ọ̀rúnmìlà started to dance, 35
 He started to rejoice.
 He said: 'The one who dashed swiftly across the road.'
 Ifá divination was performed for Ọ̀rúnmìlà,
 When he was going to snatch Ọ̀jòntarigì,
 The wife of Death. 40
 The matter over which you made a fuss,
 Last night, I put it in wine,
 And drank it off.
 Taking nothing else besides.
 We smoked this matter away along with tobacco. 45
 We smoked away this matter along with tobacco,
 We will not die.
 Taking nothing else besides.
 We smoked away this matter along with tobacco.

(c) The following excerpt tells of how Èṣù helped the people of a place known as Ìlọ̀wọ̀n⁷⁶ to drive away all the *Ajogun* which besieged them.

Ọ̀pẹ́ iháhá ab'ídí sìiríkí.
 A díá fún wọ́n n'Ìlọ̀wọ́n,
 Ajogún dí wọ́n mọ́lẹ́ pin pin-in pin.
 Wọ́n ní kí gbogbo ará Ìlọ̀wọ́n ó rúbọ́.
 Wọ́n sì rú u. 5
 Ìgbà tí wọ́n rúbọ́ tán,
 Ní Èṣú bá bá wọ́n lé gbogbo àwọ́n ajogun

Lọ kúrò lódòq wọn.
 Ìgbà tí wọn sẹgun tán,
 Inúu wọn dùn, 10
 Wọn ní bẹẹ gégé ní àwọn awo àwọn wí.
 Ọpẹ iháhá ab'ídí sìrikí.
 A díá fún wọn n'Ìlọwọn,
 Ajogún dí wọn mólé pin pin-in pin.
 Àwa ò mà mà r'ógun n'Ìlọwọn mọ, 15
 Ogún sí,
 Ogún lọ.
 Gbogbo àgbààgbà Ìlọwọn.
 L'ó rú orín méjì méjì.
 Ajogún ti pẹyìndà, 20
 Ajogún lọ.⁷⁷

Palm-tree with heavy load of rubbish⁷⁸ has a big base.
 Ifá divination was performed for them at Ìlọwọn
 When they were besieged by the Ajogun.
 All the people of Ìlọwọn were asked to perform sacrifice.

They performed it. 5
 After they had performed the prescribed sacrifice,
 Èṣù helped them to drive all the *Ajogun*
 Away from their midst.
 After they had conquered,
 They became happy, 10
 And said that was exactly what their Ifá priests had
 predicted.

Palm-tree with heavy load of rubbish has a big base.
 Ifá divination was performed for them at Ìlọwọn
 When they were besieged by the *Ajogun*
 We no longer see war at Ìlọwọn. 15
 War has moved away,
 War has gone.
 Each of the old people of Ìlọwọn
 Offered two chewing-sticks as sacrifice.
 The Ajogun have turned their backs. 20
 They have gone.

(d) In this excerpt, we can see how Èṣù punished the person who neglected the prescribed sacrifice while he blessed the one who performed the sacrifice. The story is one of three people—the rich, the wealthy and the parent. Each of them was asked

to perform a sacrifice but only the parent responded. As a punishment for the rich and the wealthy who refused to perform sacrifice, both of them had no children. When they died, Èsù asked all and sundry to go and divide up their money and their property. But on the day the parent who performed the prescribed sacrifice died, his own children alone shared their property.

- Ọtọ́tọ́tọ́tọ́tọ́, babaláwo Olówó
 Ló díá f'ólówó.
 Ọrọ́rọ́rọ́rọ́rọ́, babaláwo Ọlórọ́
 Ló díá f'ólórọ́.
 K'á j'ẹ̀wà tán, 5
 K'á gbọ̀n'wọ́ọ rẹ ẹ 'nú àwo poro poro poro,
 Babaláwo Ọlọmọ
 Ló díá f'ólọmọ.
 Wọ̀n ní kí gbogbo wọ̀n ó rúbọ nítorí ọmọ.
 Ọlọmọ nìkàn l'ó rú. 10
 Olówó àti Ọlórọ́ fi gbogbo owóo wọ̀n sòògùn,
 Sùgbọ̀n wọ̀n ò r'ọmọ bí mọ.
 Èsú ní: 'Ó di àgbòdò mi àfàkàn,
 Òkuuru ọpọ̀n ọnàá sún.'
 Wọ̀n ní: 'Ta ló sún kàn?' 15
 Wọ̀n ní: 'O sún k'Olówó àt'Ọlórọ́ àt'Ọlọmọ.'
 Wọ̀n ní: 'Ta ló ha rúbọ?'
 Wọ̀n ní: 'Ọlọmọ nìkàn ló rú.'
 Níjọ Olówó kú,
 Èsú ní kí wọ̀n ó máa lọ pín dúkláa rẹ. 20
 Níjọ Ọlọmọ kú,
 Àwọ̀n ọmọọ rẹ nìkàn
 Ló pín gbogbo nàkàn iníi rẹ.
 Ikú p'Olówó,
 Ó b'owó ẹ́ n'wú jẹ. 25
 Ikú p'Ọlórọ́,
 Ó k'ọ́rọ́ọ rẹ lọ.
 Èrò òkun,
 Èrò ọsà,
 Ta ni ò mọ 30
 Pé ipa Ọlọmọ ò ní í run.⁷⁹

Ọtọ́tọ́tọ́tọ́tọ́,⁸⁰ Ifá priest of the rich
 Performed Ifá divination for a rich man.
 Ọrọ́rọ́rọ́rọ́rọ́,⁸¹ Ifá priest of the wealthy,

- Performed Ifá divination for a wealthy man.
 When we finish eating beans, 5
 We shake off the crumbs from our fingers persistently
 into the plate.
 Ifá priest of the parent,
 Performed Ifá divination for a parent.
 They were all asked to perform a sacrifice so that they
 might not lack children.
 Only the parent performed the prescribed sacrifice. 10
 The rich man and the wealthy man used all their money
 to procure medicine,
 But they could not have children.
 Èṣù said: 'It is time, let us go to the next person.'
 The declaration was: 'The ornamented bowl of sacri-
 fice was already on the move.'
 The question followed: 'To whom has it moved?' 15
 The answer was: 'It has moved towards the rich man,
 the wealthy man and the parent.'
 Next came the question: 'Who among them performed
 a sacrifice?'
 The reply was: 'Only the parent performed sacrifice.'
 On the day the rich man died,
 Èṣù ordered all and sundry to go and share his belong- 20
 ings.
 On the day the parent died,
 Only his own children
 Shared his belongings among themselves.
 Death killed the rich man,
 And spoilt his riches. 25
 Death killed the wealthy man,
 And took away his wealth.
 Travellers at sea,
 Travellers on lagoon,
 Who does not know 30
 That the path of the parent shall never be effaced?

CHAPTER VII

Nature

APPRECIATION OF NATURE IN *ẸṢẸ IFÁ*

UTTERANCES embodying sound knowledge and deep appreciation of nature constitute an important part of the content of *ẹṣẹ Ifá*. These utterances give a vivid description and appreciation of many ordinary objects and creatures of nature, such as plants, animals, birds and insects. Usually an *ẹṣẹ Ifá* may be devoted to one or more of these objects or creatures of nature. Such *ẹṣẹ* are to be found in almost every *Oḍù*.

In dealing with an object or creature of nature, an *ẹṣẹ Ifá* usually dwells on its particular use or importance. Its special characteristics may also be discussed. Furthermore, in the *ẹṣẹ Ifá*, a parallel may be drawn between its special characteristics and some particular human characteristics. Thus, ordinary objects and creatures of nature serve as projections of human action and behaviour. This helps to create a sense of detachment necessary for seeing human actions, thoughts and situations more clearly and dispassionately.

When the subject-matter of an *ẹṣẹ Ifá* pertains to an object or creature of nature, the stylistic device of personification¹ is employed apparently because of the need to cast the material in the distinctive *Ifá* style. The object or creature concerned is therefore given human attributes; it is made to perform sacrifice, and to express various feelings characteristic of human beings.

This approach to the appreciation of nature not only emphasizes the importance the Yoruba attach to the created things of nature, it also shows the high capacity of the Yoruba for the appreciation of nature in all its aspects. It also leads to a more critical and less emotional vision of human problems. It must be emphasized however that this is a feature common to Negro African literature in general.

In many African folktales, narrative upon narrative brings this out clearly. Animals, nature, God, they have all been thoroughly humanised and, having been humanized, can then be assessed as man is assessed. Perhaps this is why there is no special genre devoted to satire in African literature, neither in prose nor poetry. Man is depicted as he is. That is a sufficient satire.²

A number of *ẹsẹ Ifá* dealing with different objects and creatures of nature will now be presented and discussed.

ANIMALS

Animals, both wild and domesticated, figure prominently among the creatures of nature mentioned in *ẹsẹ Ifá*. Among such animals, the most important are *èèkán* (the lion), *òkéré* (the squirrel) *ẹdun*³ (a type of monkey) and *tanpèq* (the dog). The manner in which these creatures are presented in *ẹsẹ Ifá* will be clearly shown in the following illustrative excerpts.

1. *The Lion*⁴

This excerpt comments on the great beauty of the lion and the impressiveness of his knife-like nails. It is said that the lion was endowed with honour and respect at creation but that his Ifá priests played a prominent role in making the lion a respected animal. According to the myth, Ifá priests asked the lion to offer a glossy cloth and ten knives as sacrifice and he did so. They covered the lion with the glossy cloth and fixed the ten knives to his nails. The glossy cloth was transformed into a beautiful skin and became the lion's coat while the ten knives became his sharp nails.

Àdánàà-yá òkété,
 Àfàkálẹẹ gbòrò.
 Bí tètẹ ẹgún bá so lódò,
 A tiiri gògòqòqò sínú omi.
 A díá f'Èèkán, aláwọqò minìhìjò.
 Òún le niyì báylí?
 Ní Èèkán dáfá sí.
 Wọn ní pípọ ní iyì rẹ,
 Şùgbọn k'ó rúbọ.
 Ó sì rú u.
 Ó rú abẹ mẹwă

5

10

- Àti așọ mìnìh̃jò kan.
 Abẹ mẹwǎ t'ó rú nǎà
 Nì àwọ̀n awoo rẹ̀ẹ̀ kàn mọ ọ̀n lẹ̀sẹ̀
 T'ó fì ń̀sọ̀kọ̀ fún gbogbo ẹ̀ranko. 15
 Așọ mìnìh̃jò t'ó rú nǎà
 Nì wọ̀n dàbò ó lára
 Tí ó sọ ọ̀ di arẹ̀wà ẹ̀ranko.
 Ijọ ní ń̀jọ,
 Ayọ̀ ní ń̀yọ. 20
 Ó ń̀yin àwọ̀n awoo rẹ̀,
 Àwọ̀n awoo rẹ̀ ń̀yin 'Fá.
 Ó ya ẹ̀nu kótó,
 Orin awo ní ń̀kọ.
 Ẹ̀sẹ̀ tí ó nà, 25
 Ijọ fà á.
 Ó ní bẹ̀ẹ̀ gégé
 Nì àwọ̀n awo òún ń̀s'ẹ̀nu rere é pe 'Fá.
 Àdánàà-yá òkété,
 Àfàkálẹ̀ẹ̀ gbọ̀rọ̀. 30
 Bí tètẹ̀ ẹ̀gún bá so lódò,
 A tirii gógóógó sínú omi.
 A díá f'èèkán, aláwọ̀ọ mìnìh̃jò,
 Adágbiyl ẹ̀ranko.
 Òòșà ló f'iyì f'Èèkán, 35
 Àdágbiyl ẹ̀ranko.
 Àdágbiyl ẹ̀ranko ò;
 Àdágbiyl ẹ̀ranko.
 Òòșà ló f'iyì f'Èèkán,
 Àdágbiyl ẹ̀ranko.⁵ 40

The giant-rat makes a fire without warming himself by it.⁶

The *gbọ̀rọ̀*⁷ vegetable creeps all over the ground.

When thorny spinach bears seeds by the riverside,

It leans markedly towards the river.

Ifá divination was performed for the glossy-skinned Lion. 5

Could he possibly have honour?

That was the matter over which Lion performed divination.

He was told that he would have honour in great abundance.

But he was warned to offer a sacrifice.

And he offered it.	10
He offered ten knives	
And one glossy cloth for sacrifice.	
The ten knives which he used for sacrifice	
Were fixed to his fingers by his Ifá priests;	
And with these he harrassed all other animals.	15
With the glossy cloth which he offered as sacrifice,	
They covered his body	
And he became a beautiful animal.	
He started to dance,	
He started to rejoice.	20
He praised his Ifá priests,	
While his Ifá priests praised Ifá.	
He opened his mouth a little	
And started to sing the song of Ifá priests.	
As he stretched his legs,	25
Dance caught them.	
He said that was exactly	
How his Ifá priests employed their good voices to	
praise Ifá	
The giant-rat makes fire without warming himself	
by it.	
The <i>gbòrò</i> vegetable creeps all over the ground.	30
When thorny spinach bears seeds by the riverside,	
It leans markedly towards the river.	
Ifá divination was performed for the glossy-skinned	
Lion,	
An animal endowed with respect from creation.	
The god of creation gave honour to Lion,	35
An animal endowed with respect from creation.	
An animal endowed with respect from creation.	
An animal endowed with respect from creation.	
The god of creation gave honour to Lion,	
An animal endowed with respect from creation.	40

2. The Squirrel

The squirrel is usually depicted in *ẹsẹ Ifá* as a talkative creature who cannot keep even his own secrets. In this excerpt, the squirrel, a habitual road side dweller, could not keep secret the fact that his wife had given birth to two children. Instead, he called on all road-travellers to come and see how crowded his nest was with children. Soon, some travellers whose curio-

sity was aroused by the squirrel's unceasing cry, opened up his nest, took away the two children and killed them for food.

Ayóóró ẹnu,
 Ayòòrò ẹnu;
 Ẹbitì ẹnu ò tàsé.
 Ẹnu ofóró ní í p'ofóró,
 Ẹnu ofòrò ní í p'ofòrò. 5
 Ẹnu fòrofòro ní í p'òfóró.
 A díá fún Ọkẹré
 Tí yòò mú'lé l'ẹbǎ ọ̀nà.
 Wọn ní kí Ọkẹré ó sọra
 Nítorí pé ẹnuu rẹ kò bò. 10
 Wọn ní k'ó má máa fi gbogbo ohun tí ó bá rí
 Sọ fún èyàn mọ.
 Ọkẹré ò gbọ.
 Ẫgbà tí ó yá,
 Ẫyàwó Ọkẹré bímọ méjì lẹẹkan náà. 15
 Ẫgbà tí inú Ọkẹré dùn tán,
 T'ó di ọjọ kan,
 Ó ní: 'Ọkẹré bímọ méjì,
 Ilé kún tẹtẹtẹ;
 Gbogbo èrò ọ̀nà, 20
 Ẹ yà wáá wò ó.'
 Ẫgbà tí àwọn ayé gbọ,
 Wọn yà bó sínú Ẫgbẹ,
 Wọn nawọ gán ilé Ọkẹré,
 Wọn sì tú u wò. 25
 Ẫgbà tí wọn ó dẹ inúu lé Ọkẹré,
 Wọn bá ọmọ méjì tí ó bí náà,
 Ní wọn bá mú wọn lọ sílé.
 Ẫgbà tí àwọn ọmọ aráyé délé,
 Wọn fi àwọn ọmọ Ọkẹré lérí iyán, 30
 Wọn sì bá ọbẹ lọ.⁸

Restless mouth,

Slippery mouth.

The evil planned by the mouth never fails.

It is the mouth of the babbler which kills the babbler.

It is the mouth of he who talks at large which kills he
 who talks at large. 5

It is the restless mouth which kills the talkative.

Ifá divination was performed for Squirrel

Who built his nest by the roadside.
 Squirrel was warned to be careful
 Because of his inability to keep his mouth shut. 10
 He was told not to tell all that he saw
 To other people.
 Squirrel did not heed the advice.
 After some time,
 Squirrel's wife gave birth to twins simultaneously. 15
 When Squirrel became happy,
 On a certain day,
 He said: 'Squirrel bears two children,
 His nest is fully crowded.
 All road travellers, 20
 Come and see.'
 When passersby heard Squirrel's cry,
 They stepped into the bush,
 Took Squirrel's nest,
 And examined it. 25
 When they opened Squirrel's nest,
 They found his two children.
 Then they took them home.
 When they got home,
 They put Squirrel's children on top of pounded yam, 30
 And they travelled down (the gullet) with the soup.

3. *The Monkey*

Stories about the monkey are very prominent in *ẹsẹ Ifá*. In most of these stories, the monkey is depicted as a stupid animal. The following example concerns two monkey species known as *Ẹdun* (White-thighed Colobus Monkey) and *Àáyá* (Red Colobus Monkey). These two animals went to steal maize from a farm but the farmer caught them red handed. Before the farmer could reach them, *Àáyá* climbed a tree and ran away but *Ẹdun*, who is reputed to be a very slow runner on land, could not run to safety. The farmer therefore caught *Ẹdun* and took him to the cult house of the *Ògbóni*, the traditional judges of Yoruba society.

When the *Ògbóni* examined *Ẹdun*, they discovered that he was an offspring of the *Ọṣun* god whose relations they were forbidden to punish. *Ẹdun* was asked to pay compensation to the farmer but he pretended to be insane and started to behave

unnaturally. However, the Ògbóni acquitted Èdun. They then considered the case against Àáyá and concluded that he should be punished for running away when he saw the farmer.

Aré ló b'èdun n'lẹ,
 Èdun ò mò ọ́n sá.
 A díá fún Èdun,
 Èdun tí í ẹ ọmọ-iyá Àáyá.
 Àáyá fò fẹrẹ, 5
 Ó g'orí igbá.
 Èdún ta féré,
 Èdún g'orí igi.
 Nígbà tí ìwá sẹ,
 Ilẹ̀lẹ̀ ní Àáyá máa nín 10
 Ọ̀un pẹ̀lú Èdun,
 Ọmọ iyá ẹ.
 Sùgbọ́n ní ọjọ kan,
 Èdun àti Àáyá wáá jalẹ,
 Wọ́n lọ ọ jí àgbàdọ ya lóko. 15
 Àáyá ló kọ rí olóko
 Ló bá fò fẹrẹ gun igi igbá.
 Nígbà tí Èdun ó fi wí pé ọ̀un ó fò,
 Olóko ti dé,
 Ó sì mú Èdun. 20
 Olóko wáá di Èdun lókùn.
 Nígbà tí ó mú un dé ilẹ̀dì,
 Wọ́n rí i pé ọmọ Ọ̀sun ní.
 Wọ́n wáá sọ fún olóko pé
 Ènì tí o mú wá yí, 25
 Àwọ́n ò gbọdọ pa á
 Nítorí pé ọmọ Ọ̀sun ní.
 Wọ́n ní kí Èdun ó jẹwọ.
 Ní Èdun bá jẹwọ.
 Ó ní lóòótọ ní ọ̀un ya àgbàdọ 30
 Sùgbọ́n lójú olóko ní ọ̀un ẹ ya á.
 Wọ́n wáá bi Èdun pé
 Kín ní yóó san fún olóko.
 Èdún wáá bèrẹ sí í ẹ bíi wèrè.
 Ó ní: 'Èdún y'àgbàdọ hàà, 35
 Èdún y'àgbàdọ hàà.'
 Ní àwọ́n ẹgbẹ̀ ìmùlẹ̀ bá sọ wí pé
 Tí Èdún tán n'bẹ.
 Wọ́n ní Àáyá tí ó rí olóko sá

Ni kí wọn ó fi iyà jẹ.	40
Wọn ní ọmọ-iyá kan náà	
Ni Ẹdun àti Àáyá	
Ẹ̀gbón wọn ò fi àwọ̀ jọraa wọn.	
Ẹ̀dún bọ̀ nínú ẹ̀jọ̀,	
Ọ̀rán sì kan Àáyá.	45
Àwọn Ọ̀gbóni wáá ní,	
'Ta ní ó ò tánràn araa wọn?'	
Wọn ní: 'Ìwọ Ẹ̀dun,	
Nígbà tí o mọ̀ ìwà Àáyá	
Èé ẹ̀e tí ẹ̀ ò jọ̀ fò fẹ̀rẹ̀?	50
Ẹ̀dun gbálájá,	
Emi lo wáá sáré ẹ̀e?	
Kín ló ẹ̀e tí o ò fi fò mọ̀' gi?	
Tí olóko fi wáá mú ọ̀?	
Ẹ̀dún ní: 'Ọ̀mọ̀dé ní í yára bí àṣá,	55
Àgbà abikún dẹ̀ẹ̀rẹ̀ bí àpò.	
Aré b'ẹ̀dun nílẹ̀,	
Ẹ̀dun ò mọ̀ ọ̀n sá.	
Aré orí igi ló yẹ Ẹ̀dun.'	
Àáyá wá nífò sókè,	60
Ẹ̀dun rí bẹ̀.	
Àáyá fò sókè,	
Ẹ̀dún bẹ̀.	
Àáyá fò mọ̀'gì l'ọ̀rùn,	
Ẹ̀dún sí,	65
Ẹ̀dún lọ. ⁹	

When Ẹ̀dun had to run on the ground,	
He could not run very well.	
Ifá divination was performed for Ẹ̀dun,	
Who is of the same mother as Àáyá.	
Àáyá jumped quickly,	5
And climbed the locust-bean tree.	
Ẹ̀dun darted upwards,	
And climbed a tree.	
When the earth was young,	
Àáyá used to walk on bare ground	10
Together with Ẹ̀dun,	
His brother.	
But one day,	
Ẹ̀dun and Àáyá committed an act of theft.	
They plucked maize cobs from a farm.	15
Àáyá was the first to see the farmer.	

- He jumped up and climbed the locust-bean tree.
 Before Ẹdun could jump on any tree,
 The farmer had arrived.
 He captured Ẹdun 20
 And tied him up with a rope.
 When he took him to the culthouse of Ògbóni
 It was discovered that he was an offspring of Ọsun.
 The farmer was therefore told
 That the person he had brought before them 25
 They must not kill
 Because he was an offspring of Ọsun.
 Ẹdun was urged to admit his guilt.
 And he confessed.
 He said that indeed he plucked maize cobs 30
 But that he did so before the farmer's very eyes.
 They then asked Ẹdun
 What compensation he would give to the farmer.
 Then Ẹdun began to act like an insane person.
 He said: 'Ẹdun plucked maize suddenly and force- 35
 fully.
 Ẹdun plucked maize suddenly and forcefully.'
 Then the Ògbóni elders said
 That the case of Ẹdun had come to an end.
 They said that Àáyá who ran away when he saw the
 farmer
 Was the one to be punished. 40
 They said children of the same mother
 Were Ẹdun and Àáyá,
 But their colours were not alike.
 Ẹdun was acquitted
 But trouble remained in store for Àáyá. 45
 The Ògbóni then asked,
 'Who would pay a ransom for who?'
 They said: 'You, Ẹdun,
 Since you knew the ways of Àáyá
 Why did you not jump on the tree together with him. 50
 Ẹdun, the small one,
 Why did you run on the ground?
 Why didn't you jump up a tree?
 Why did you give the farmer the chance of catching
 you?'
 Ẹdun said: 'Small children are usually as fast as hawks. 55
 Old people have fat bellies which look like sacks.
 When Ẹdun had to run on the ground,

He could not run very well.

It is running on tree-tops that Èdun understands.'

Àáyá began to jump up,

60

Èdun began to hop.

Àáyá kept bouncing,

Èdun kept hopping.

Àáyá jumped up a tree.

Èdun dashed off

65

And escaped.

4. *The Dog*

The dog is depicted in *ẹsẹ Ifá* as a stubborn animal who could be found in any place whether or not he was wanted there. In this excerpt, heedless of the warnings given him by his Ifá priests, the dog went to a place to which he was not invited, and as a result he was beaten up.

B'élẹ̀bọ̀ ọ̀ pe ni,

Àsẹ̀fín ọ̀ yẹ̀ ni;

Ọ̀ràn tí ọ̀ sunwọ̀n,

Konko n̄sojú.

A díá fún Tańpẹ̀ọ̀

5

Tí ó gba kùmọ̀ s'átàrí.

Wọ̀n ní kí Tańpẹ̀ọ̀ ó ọ̀ra o,

Kí ó má lọ sí ibi tí wọ̀n ọ̀ pẹ̀ é sí.

Kò gbọ̀.

Ló bá lọ sí ibi tí wọ̀n ọ̀ gbé pẹ̀ é.

10

Bí ó tí dé'bẹ̀,

Kùmọ̀ ní wọ̀n kó tí í,

Ó sì jẹ̀ ọ̀pọ̀ iyà níbẹ̀.

Àyìn-ódì ní n̄yìn àwọn awoo rẹ̀.

Ó ní b'élẹ̀bọ̀ ọ̀ pe ni,

15

Àsẹ̀fín ọ̀ yẹ̀ ni;

Ọ̀ràn tí ọ̀ sunwọ̀n,

Konko n̄sojú;

A díá fún Tańpẹ̀ọ̀

Tí ó gba kùmọ̀ s'átàrí.

20

Kèè pẹ̀ o,

Kèè jìnnà,

Ẹ̀ wáá wo'fá awó kí

B'ó tí n̄sẹ̀.

A á ʒe mọ Tańpèq
 Ní à ńpe ajá.¹⁰

If one is not invited to a ceremony,
 One should not go as an intruder;
 When one has done a shameful thing,
 One wears a hard and shameless face.
 Ifá divination was performed for Tańpèq¹¹ 5
 Who would receive a blow on the head.
 Tańpèq was warned to be careful
 Not to go to a place to which he was not invited.
 He did not heed the advice.
 He went to a place to which he was not invited. 10
 As soon as he got there,
 They started to beat him with clubs,
 And he suffered a great deal.
 It was with regret that he praised his Ifá priest:
 He said, 'If one is not invited to a ceremony, 15
 One should not go as an intruder;
 When one has done a shameful thing,
 One wears a hard and shameless face.
 Ifá divination was performed for Tańpèq
 Who would receive a blow on the head. 20
 Very soon,
 At no distant date,
 Come and see the prediction of the Ifá priests
 Coming to pass.'
 How shall we know Tańpèq? 25
 That is another name for the dog.

BIRDS

Birds of different species are mentioned in *ẹsẹ Ifá* as common inhabitants of the Yoruba country. Excerpts are quoted below on the birds frequently mentioned in *ẹsẹ Ifá*: (i) *Ẹyẹlé* (Pigeon), (ii) *Òròrẹ* (Pin-tailed Whydah), (iii) *Igún* (Vulture), and (iv) *Àgbìgbò* (a bird with a disproportionately big head).

1. *The Pigeon*

There is a lot of material about the pigeon in the first *Odù*. *Ẹjì Ogbè*. For Ifá priests, the pigeon is a very important bird,

It stands for honour and prosperity and anybody who uses it for sacrifice is expected to achieve both.

The following *esẹ* traces the history of the pigeon from its original home in the forest to its present abode among human beings as a domestic bird. The pigeon is said to have become a domestic bird after it had been helped to have twin children by Èjì Ogbè and as a mark of gratitude to the latter, the pigeon decided to build its nest near Èjì Ogbè's house and thereby became a town dweller. From then on Èjì Ogbè commanded that any time the pigeon would bear children, it must always bear two children simultaneously.

Èjìgbèdè gbígbè ní o gbè mí. A díá fún Ojúoró Tí nìlọ isàlẹ àbàtà, Tí nìlọ lèé kanrìlẹ ọmọ ní bíbì. Èjìgbèdè, ẹyẹlé ò ẹ̀kọ, ò ẹ̀sabo, Wọ̀n a jùmọ jọraa wọ̀n Láìjùmọ yàtọ.	5
A díá fún Èjìgbèmí Tí í ẹ ọmọ iyáa Mọ̀yàmọ̀yà. Èjèèjì ní mo gbè, N ò gb'ẹ̀nì kan ẹ̀so ẹ̀mọ. A díá fún Ẹ̀yẹko Níjọ tí m̀bẹ láàrin igbẹ. Nígbà tí Ẹ̀yẹlé ńsunkún Òun ò r'ọ̀mọ bí.	10
Wọ̀n ní ẹ̀bọ ní kí ó wáà rú. Ó sì rú u. Nígbàa lááláé rí, Wọ̀n kí í pe Ẹ̀yẹlé ní Ẹ̀yẹlé, Ẹ̀yẹko ní wọ̀n ńpẹ é Nítorí pé oko ní ńgbé. Ọ̀mọ iyá ní òun àti Adàbà; Oori, ọ̀mọ iyá Ẹ̀yẹlé ní òun náà pẹ̀lú. Gbogbo wọ̀n ló bímọ, Ẹ̀yẹlé nikan ní ò bí.	15
Ó wáá tọ Èjì Ogbè lọ. Èjì Ogbè ní k'ó tọ̀jú àgbagbà aládlpọ̀ mèjì, Eku mèjì, ẹ̀ja mèjì, ẹ̀yindíẹ̀ mèjì, Kí ó fi gbogbo rẹ̀ rúbọ. Ẹ̀yẹlé sì ẹ̀ bẹ̀ẹ.	20
	25
	30

Nígba tí Ẹyẹlé ó pamọ,
 Méjì ló pa.
 Ó wáá kó àwọn ọmọ náà han Èjì Ogbè.
 Ó dúpẹ,
 Ó sì tún san ẹjẹẹgùn. 35
 Ó ní láti fi lmoore òun hàn,
 Kí Èjì Ogbè ó kólé fún òun
 Ní itaa rẹ
 Kí òun ó máa gbé.
 Ó ní: 'Mo bímọ méjì, 40
 Mo d'ẹyẹ ilé.
 Mo bímọ méjì,
 Mo d'ẹyẹ ilé.'
 Èjì Ogbè ní: 'Ẹyẹ yí yẹ ilé lóòótọ,'
 Ní wọn bá fi ńpẹ é ní Ẹyẹlé. 45
 Ó ní kí Ẹyẹlé ó fi ọkan
 Tí kò bá fẹ nínú àwọn ọmọ náà rúbọ.
 Ẹyẹlé ní: 'N ò le f'ikan rúbọ o.
 Èjẹ̀jẹ̀lì ní mo gbè,
 N ò le pà'kan; 50
 Èjẹ̀jẹ̀lì ní mo fẹ̀ràn.'
 Ní Èjì Ogbè bá fi àşẹ sí i pé
 Méjìméjì ní Ẹyẹlé ó máa bí
 Nígba_kùgbà tí Ẹyẹlé ó bá pamọ.'¹²

Èjìgbèdè,¹³ you should bless me.
 Ifá divination was performed for the Water Lettuce
 Who was going to the deep part of the pond
 To start producing children very fast.
 Èjìgbèdè, pigeons both male and female, 5
 Resemble each other
 Without any difference.
 Ifá divination was performed for Èjìgbèmí¹⁴
 Who was of the same mother as Mọyàmọyà.¹⁵
 I bless people in pairs, 10
 I no longer bless one by one.
 Ifá divination was performed for Ẹyẹko¹⁶
 When she was living inside the bush.
 When Pigeon was weeping
 For lack of children. 15
 She was advised to perform a sacrifice.
 And she performed it.
 In the olden days,

People did not call Pigeon by that name.
 They used to call her Èyẹko 20
 Because she was living in the bush.
 She was of the same mother as the Dove
 And also Oori.¹⁷
 They all had children
 Except Pigeon who had none. 25
 She then went to Èjì Ogbè
 Who asked her to get a twin pair of plantains
 Two rats, two fish, two hen eggs,
 And offer everything as sacrifice.
 Pigeon did as she was told. 30
 When Pigeon hatched her eggs,
 Two young birds emerged.
 She then took them to Èjì Ogbè.
 She thanked him,
 And paid him the usual due in gratitude for the effica- 35
 cious prescription.¹⁸
 She proposed that in order to demonstrate her grati-
 tude,
 Èjì Ogbè should build a nest for her
 Outside his house
 Where she would live.
 She said: 'I have given birth to two children, 40
 And thus become a domestic bird.
 I have given birth to two children,
 And thus become a domestic bird.'
 Èjì Ogbè said: 'Indeed this bird is suitable for the
 home,'
 And commanded that she be called Èyẹlé.¹⁹ 45
 He said that Pigeon should offer one
 Of the two children she did not like as a sacrifice.
 But Pigeon said: 'I cannot offer either as a sacrifice
 I am fond of both.
 I cannot kill either of them. 50
 I love both of them.'
 That was how Èjì Ogbè commanded that
 Pigeon should always have two children
 Any time she would hatch her eggs.

2. Òròrẹ (the Pin-tailed Whydah).

Òròrẹ is one of the birds often mentioned in *ẹsẹ Ifá*. It is
 sometimes depicted as an Ifá priest. It is also known as *ẹyẹ*

oba (the king's favourite bird). It is one of the tiniest and best-known birds of West Africa. It is therefore known in *ẹsẹ Ifá* as *kékeré òròrẹ* (tiny pin-tailed Whydah). Despite its small size, *Òròrẹ* is one of the most active birds known to the Yoruba and many *ẹsẹ Ifá* point to its agility and sturdy good health.

The following *ẹsẹ Ifá* depicts *Òròrẹ* as a diminutive but active bird. So active is this bird that one finds it difficult to differentiate the old and the young among them since all of them are equally active and tiny. The excerpt ends with a prayer from the *Ifá* priest that he should be as active, productive, prosperous and long lived as *Òròrẹ*.

O kí mi ní pááràpọ̀ngbà,	
Mo jẹ ọ ní pááràpọ̀ngbà;	
O kí mi ní pààràpọ̀ngbà,	
Mo jẹ ọ ní pààràpọ̀ngbà;	
À jí kó wèsèwèsè,	5
À jí kó wèsèwèsè,	
À jí kó wèsèwèsè Òròrẹ.	
A díá f'Òròrẹ ò dàgbà.	
Wón ní ó f'ẹbọ ọlà á 'lẹ,	
Ẹbọ ajogun ní ó ẹ.	10
N ó gbòó gbóó gbó láyé,	
N ó hewú.	
À jí kó wèsèwèsè Òròrẹ.	
N ó là là là tán,	
N ó s'ẹdùn ọlà á wájú.	15
À jí kó wèsèwèsè Òròrẹ.	
N ó lǎya fẹẹẹ t'ẹgbẹrin.	
À jí kó wèsèwèsè Òròrẹ.	
N ó bímọ bí yò yò yò láyé.	
À jí kó wèsèwèsè Òròrẹ. ²⁰	20

You greeted me on the highway,	
I answered you on the highway.	
You greeted me on the broad highway,	
I answered you on the broad highway.	
To wake up and feel active,	5
To wake up and feel more active,	
To wake up and feel most active,	
Ifá divination was performed for diminutive Òròrẹ.	

He was asked to stop performing sacrifices to induce riches.

But to perform a sacrifice against his enemies' evil plans. 10

I will live to a very old age on earth,

And grow grey hairs.

Òròrẹ wakes up in the morning always feeling active.

I will become very rich indeed,

And use my riches to benefit people in distant places. 15

Òròrẹ wakes up in the morning always feeling active.

I will have almost eight hundred wives.

Òròrẹ wakes up in the morning always feeling active.

I will have many children on earth.

Òròrẹ wakes up in the morning always feeling active. 20

3. *The Vulture*

The vulture figures prominently in *ẹsẹ Ifá*. He stands for prospects of living to a ripe old age. The vulture is a dirty bird and he feeds on remains of dead animals and birds. He also feeds on sacrifices deposited in various shrines. He can be seen around shrines, hunting for sacrifices. The vulture is therefore regarded as an important bird who plays a significant role in Ifá divination because he helps to get rid of sacrifices.²¹

In the following excerpt the importance of the vulture with regard to Ifá divination sacrifice is clearly brought out. Ifá maintains that without the vulture sacrifices cannot be performed successfully.

The vulture is therefore invited to eat the sacrifice so that it may be accepted by the gods.

Sàlàgèrẹjẹ ló dífá fún 'Gúnnugún

Ọmọ olójògbòdòlórò

Sàlàgèrẹjẹ wáà jẹbọ.

Igún wáà jẹbọ

K'ẹbọ ó lè baà fín. 5

Ètlẹ wáà jẹbọ

K'ẹbọ ó lè baà dà.

Igún, ètlẹ, aráà 'Lódè.

À ẹ́ bá ò rí 'Gúnnugún

A kí yóó lè ẹbọ; 10

B'á ò r'ákàlà,

A ò şorò.
 Sàlàgèrèjè wáá jẹbọ.
 Igún wáá jẹbọ
 K'ẹbọ ó lè baà fín.
 Ètíẹ wáá jẹbọ
 K'ẹbọ ó lè baà dà.
 Igún, Ètíẹ, aráà 'Lódè.
 Sàlàgèrèjè wáá jẹbọ.²²

15

Sàlàgèrèjè²³ was the Ifá priest who performed divination for the Vulture.

Offspring of Olójògbòòlórò.²⁴

Sàlàgèrèjè, come and eat sacrifice.

Vulture, come and eat sacrifice

So that sacrifice may be acceptable to the gods.

5

Ètíẹ, come and eat sacrifice

So that sacrifice may be taken away by the gods.

Vulture, nick-named Ètíẹ, offspring of Ìlódè.²⁵

One does not always realise that without Vulture,

One cannot perform a sacrifice.

10

Without Àkàlà,²⁶

One cannot perform any propitiation.

Sàlàgèrèjè come and eat the sacrifice.

Vulture, come and eat the sacrifice

So that the sacrifice may be acceptable to the gods.

15

Ètíẹ, come and eat the sacrifice

So that the sacrifice may be taken away by the gods.

Vulture, nicknamed Ètíẹ, offspring of Ìlódè.

Sàlàgèrèjè, come and eat sacrifice.

4. Àgbìgbò²⁷

Àgbìgbò is portrayed in *ẹsẹ Ifá* as an evil bird. It is regarded as a treacherous and dangerous bird who acts as an agent for Death and other supernatural powers. One *ẹsẹ* claims that this bird was originally a bastard born by one of Òrúnmìlà's wives. Òrúnmìlà taught him, along with his own children, the secrets of divination but he proved himself a bastard when he deceived Òrúnmìlà forcing the latter to curse him with the aid of Èşù. This was how he became a bird of

the forest. Several *ẹsẹ Ifá* also explain that Àgbìgbò got the tuft of hair on his head because of his treacherous deeds.

In the following excerpt, Àgbìgbò acts as an agent of Death. He goes about carrying the coffin of Death and in front of the house of whosoever he puts down the coffin, the householder is sure to die soon after. One day he carried this coffin to the house of Òrúnmìlà but he encountered Èṣù outside the house. Èṣù intervened and begged Àgbìgbò to accept birds and animals which Òrúnmìlà had used for sacrifice instead of himself. When he had left, Èṣù cursed him with the result that the coffin got stuck to his head and could not be removed. That coffin is now represented by the tuft of hair on the head of the Àgbìgbò bird.

Omii sẹlẹrú ò mu kẹ̀gbẹ̀.
 A díá fún Àgbìgbò̀nìwọ̀nràn
 Tí í ẹ̀ ọ̀mọ̀kùnrin ẹ̀gbẹ̀pọ̀sì.
 Bí Àgbìgbò̀ bá gbẹ̀ pọ̀sì kalẹ̀ tán,
 Ojúde ẹ̀ni tí ó bá gbẹ̀ e sí, 5
 Ikú ní láti pa olúwaarẹ̀.
 Ẹ̀gbá tí Àgbìgbò̀nìwọ̀nràn gbẹ̀ pọ̀sì tán,
 Ló bá gbẹ̀ e,
 Ó di ọ̀nà ilé Òrúnmìlà.
 Òrúnmìlà láláá ikú mọ́jú ọ̀jọ̀ nàá. 10
 Ló bá gbẹ̀ Ifáa rẹ̀ kalẹ̀,
 Ó bi í léèrè nípa alá tí ó lá.
 Ifá ní kí Òrúnmìlà ó sáré rúbọ̀.
 Ẹ̀gbà tí ó ru ú tán,
 Wọ̀n gbẹ̀ ẹ̀bọ̀ nàá lọ sí ẹ̀ṣù. 15
 Lálpẹ̀, Àgbìgbó dé ojúde Òrúnmìlà.
 Ó bá Èṣù lójúde.
 Èṣù ní kìn ní Àgbìgbó ó kí sínúu pọ̀sì nàá.
 Àgbìgbó dáhùn pé Òrúnmìlà ní. 20
 Èṣù wáá bi í léèrè pé
 Kìn ni ohun orò tí yóó gbà
 Tí kò fi ní í mú Òrúnmìlà lọ.
 Ó ní òun ó gba eku àti ẹ̀yẹ̀ àti ẹ̀ran.
 Èṣù dá a lóhùn pé gbogboo rẹ̀ nàá
 Ní Òrúnmìlà tí fi kún ẹ̀bọ̀ rú. 25
 Ní Èṣù bá kó gbogboo rẹ̀ jáde fún Àgbìgbò̀.
 Hàùn tí Àgbìgbó kó gbogboo rẹ̀,
 Ló bá gbẹ̀ pọ̀sì rẹ̀ nìlẹ̀,

Ó sì kọrí sí ọ̀nà ibòmí.	
Ìgbà tí ó lọ tán,	30
Èşú ní kò gbọdò sọ pọ́sì náà kalẹ̀ mọ̀ láéláé.	
Títí di ọ̀nì olónì,	
Pọ́sì náà m̀bẹ̀ lórí Àgbìgbò.	
Ìgbà tí inúu rẹ̀ dùn tán,	
Ijó ní ńjó,	35
Ayọ̀ ní ńyọ̀.	
Ó ní bẹ̀ẹ̀ gégé ní àwọ̀n awo ọ̀n wí.	
Omii sẹ̀lẹ̀rú ò mu kẹ̀ngbè.	
A díá f'ágbìgbòniwònràn	
Tí í ẹ̀ ọ̀mọ̀kùnrin ìgbẹ̀pọ́sì.	40
B'ẹ̀ku lo ó bǎ gbà,	
O gb'eku,	
O máa yára lọ.	
Àgbìgbòniwònràn gb'ẹ̀rù ẹ̀,	
Gb'ẹ̀rù ẹ̀,	45
Àwa ò rà.	
B'ẹ̀ja lo ó bǎ bà,	
O gb'ẹ̀ja,	
O máa yára lọ.	
Àgbìgbòniwònràn gb'ẹ̀rù ẹ̀,	50
Gb'ẹ̀rù ẹ̀,	
Àwa ò rà.	
B'ẹ̀ran lo ó bǎ gbà,	
O gb'ẹ̀ran,	
O máa yára lọ.	55
Àgbìgbòniwònràn gb'ẹ̀rù ẹ̀,	
Gb'ẹ̀rù ẹ̀,	
Àwa ò rà. ²⁸	

Spring water is not deep enough to cover up a gourd
dipped in it.²⁹

Ifá divination was performed for Àgbìgbòniwònràn,
The strong man who carved coffins.
After Àgbìgbò had finished making his coffin,
If he placed it in front of any man's house,
That person would surely die.

5

After Àgbìgbòniwònràn had finished carving his coffin,
He carried it
And made for Ọ̀rúnmìlà's house.

Òrúnmìlà dreamt of death till day-break that night. 10
 He then took his Ifá divination instruments
 To find out the meaning of his dream.
 Ifá told Òrúnmìlà to perform sacrifice immediately.
 After he had performed the sacrifice,
 The sacrifice was carried to the shrine of Èṣù. 15
 Before long, Àgbìgbò brought the coffin to the front
 of Òrúnmìlà's house.
 And he found Èṣù there.
 Èṣù asked what Àgbìgbò would put inside the coffin.
 Àgbìgbò answered that it was Òrúnmìlà
 Èṣù then asked from him 20
 What offerings he would take
 So that he would not take Òrúnmìlà away.
 He said that he would take rats, birds and animals.
 Èṣù answered that all those things
 Had been included in Òrúnmìlà's sacrifice. 25
 Èṣù then brought all of them out for Àgbìgbò
 As soon as Àgbìgbò snatched them,
 He lifted up his coffin
 And went to another place.
 After he had gone, 30
 Èṣù cursed him saying that he must never put down
 the coffin again.
 Up till today,
 The coffin is still on the head of Àgbìgbò.
 When Òrúnmìlà became happy,
 He started to dance, 35
 He started to rejoice.
 He said that was exactly what his Ifá priests had
 predicted.
 Spring water is not deep enough to cover up a gourd
 dipped in it.
 Ifá divination was performed for Àgbìgbò nìwọ̀nràn
 The strong man who carved coffins. 40
 If it is a rat you will take,
 Take the rat,
 And go away quickly.
 Àgbìgbò nìwọ̀nràn, take your load,
 Take your load away, 45
 We don't want it.
 If it is a fish you will take,
 Take the fish,

And go away quickly.
 Àgbìgbònìwọ̀nràn, take your load, 50
 Take your load away,
 We don't want it.
 If it is an animal you will take,
 Take the animal,
 And go away quickly. 55
 Àgbìgbònìwọ̀nràn, take your load,
 Take your load away,
 We don't want it.

INSECTS

The insects mostly mentioned in *ẹsẹ Ifá* are *Yindinyindin* (black ants' undeveloped pupae), *Aáyán* (Cockroach), *Labalábá* (Butterfly), and *Alántakùn* (Spider).

1. *Yindinyindin*

These tiny creatures can be found on the farm when the farmer is weeding his farm. They are usually found in thousands clustered to a mould of earth. They seem to be the undeveloped pupae of a certain type of tiny black ants known as *èèrà*. They are white and tiny and resemble maggots.

Because they are very numerous, they are regarded in *ẹsẹ Ifá* as signs of plenty and fertility. It is believed that if a sacrifice or medicinal preparation is made with *yindinyindin*, the person for whom the sacrifice or medicine is made will have many children.

Òkúta ni ò ẹ́ é sàlégbé.
 A díá fún Yindinyindin
 Tí ní'omi ojú ú sògbéré ọmọ.
 Wọ̀n ní Yindinyindin ó rúbọ.
 Wọ̀n ní pípò n'ire ọmọ fún un. 5
 Ó sì rú u.
 Ìgbà ó rúbọ tán,
 Ó ní bẹẹ gégé ni awo òún wí.
 Òkúta ni kò ẹ́ é sàlégbé.
 A díá fún Yindinyindin 10

Òun sá ni t'ldin.
 Ayá mà mà mbí o,
 Ọkọọ rẹ ńpọn.
 Yindinyindin sá ni t'ldun.³⁰

Stone is not a good material for supporting a wooden
 object being carved.³¹

Ifá divination was performed for Yindinyindin
 Who was weeping for lack of children.
 Yindinyindin was asked to perform a sacrifice.
 She was told that the prospect of her having many 5
 children was very good.
 And she performed the sacrifice.
 After she had performed the sacrifice,
 She said that was exactly what her Ifá priests had
 predicted.
 Stone is not a good material for supporting a wooden
 object being carved.
 Ifá divination was performed for Yindinyindin 10
 Kinsman of maggot.
 The wife was producing so many children
 That the husband had to carry some on his back.
 Yindinyindin is kinsman of maggot.

2. *The Cockroach*

The cockroach is depicted in *ẹsẹ Ifá* as a stubborn creature who would not perform sacrifice. The cockroach also likes to go about where hens are many, regardless of the danger involved. In the excerpt which follows, the story is told of how Cockroach demonstrated his stubbornness by refusing to perform sacrifice and by using his smooth, brown wings to sweep the floor disdainfully in the midst of birds.

Èkútée 'lé ní í f'ibi gb'àrà ọdẹdẹ ẹ s'ọnà ní ririn.
 A díá f'Ááyán
 Tí ńjẹ lówùjọ ẹlẹyẹ.
 Wọn ní ó káakí Mọlẹ,
 Ó jàre,
 Ẹbọ ní ó ẹ.
 Ó p'awo lékě,

Ó p'Èṣù lólè,
 Ó w'òrun yàn yàn-àn yàn
 Bí ẹnì tí ò ní í kú mọ́ láyẹ,
 Ó wáá kọ'tí ògbọin s'ẹbọ.
 Òrúnmílà ló d'èké eku,
 Èèwọ Ifẹ.
 Aáyán ò gbọdọ f'ạṣọ ọdùn
 Gbólẹ gẹrẹ nísọjú ẹlẹyẹ.³²

It is the house rat who makes the middle of the sitting-room his pathway.

Ifá divination was performed for Cockroach
 Who was searching for food in the midst of birds.
 He was told to take care of Mọlẹ.³³
 He was told to perform a sacrifice.
 He took his Ifá priests for liars.
 He took Èṣù for a thief.³⁴
 He looked fearfully to heaven
 Like someone who would never die.
 He bluntly refused to perform sacrifice.
 Òrúnmílà said that to eat half a rat
 Is taboo in the city of Ifẹ.³⁵
 Cockroach must not trail his ọdùn cloth³⁶
 Pompously on the floor in the midst of birds.

3. The Butterfly

The Butterfly is a very prominent creature of the Yoruba natural environment. It is not surprising, therefore, that it features prominently in *ẹṣẹ Ifá* where it is regarded as a playful, healthy and harmless creature. The following excerpt illustrates the point.

Òkitì bàbààbà ní í pẹkun ọpópó.
 A díá fún Mọlágàn,
 A bù f'ẹṣú.
 Labalábá nìkàn ní múbẹ lẹyìn
 Tí ńṣẹbọ.
 Ó ní: 'Ẹ wo inú mi,
 Ẹ wo ẹyìn mi.'

Labalábá ò lóṭẹ nínú.
 Ẹ wo inú mi,
 Ẹ wo ẹyìn mi.³⁷

It is a very big heap that lies at the end of the highway.
 Ifá divination was performed for Mọlágàn.³⁸
 Ifá divination was also performed for Locust.
 Only Butterfly was left behind
 To perform a sacrifice. 5
 He said: 'Look at my belly
 Look at my back.'
 The butterfly has no evil plot in his mind.
 Look at my belly.
 Look at my back. 10

4. The Spider

The craftsmanship of the spider is always a wonder to many keen observers of nature. In *ẹsẹ Ifá* the spider is always referred to as a master craftsman who weaves his threads with great expertise. In the following *ẹsẹ Ifá* the expertise of the spider in weaving threads is regarded as a thing of wonder and amazement.

Ògòdò òwú ẹ'òkè odò
 Payín ke kee ke s'ólóko.
 A díá fún Alántakùn,
 Ọmọ ẹsòhun gbogbo bí idán bí idán.
 Ifá, bí idán bí idán 5
 Ní o ẹ'se'ree tẹmí f'ẹmí.
 Ògòdò òwú ẹ'òkè odò
 Payín ke kee ke s'ólóko.³⁹

The cotton wool stays on the other side of the river
 Beaming its white teeth to the farmer.
 Ifá divination was performed for Spider
 Offspring of he who does all things like magic.
 Ifá, like magic, like magic, 5
 Do all good things for me.
 The cotton wool stays on the other side of the river.
 Beaming its white teeth to the farmer.

CULTIVATED PLANTS

Yoruba society has always been primarily an agricultural society. One is not surprised, therefore, to see that names of plants both cultivated and uncultivated figure prominently in

ẹsẹ Ifá. The general features of such plants and the conditions favourable to their growth are usually discussed in *ẹsẹ Ifá*. Four of such cultivated plants namely, *Òwú* (the Cotton Tree), *Àgbàdò* (the Maize Plant), *Àgbagbà* (Plantain) and *Bàrà* (the Melon Plant) are presented below as they appear in *ẹsẹ Ifá*.

1. *The Cotton Plant*

The conditions favourable to the growth of the cotton plant form the subject-matter of the following *ẹsẹ Ifá*. These conditions are gentle rainfall in the early stages of its growth; plenty of dew-drops when it is forming its seeds; and sunny weather when its buds are opening up as cotton wool.

Ọlòsẹẹ, awo oko.

A díá f'ówù

Èyí tí ó maa fi gbogbo ọmọ ẹ̀wò àbígbìn.

Òwú ní báwo ní òun ó ẹ maa bí àbíyè báyii?

Tí ayé kò sì fi ní í ríran rí òun?

5

Wọn ní kí ó rúbọ.

Ìgbà tí ó rúbọ tán,

Ni wọn bá rán eji wẹ́rẹwẹ́rẹ

Pé kí ó lọ pa Òwú

Àti àwọn ọmọ ọ rẹ.

10

Nígbà náà ni Òwú wáá bèrẹ sí í rú.

Wọn rán lílẹ̀wọ̀wọ̀

Pé kí ó lọ p'Òwú.

Nígbà náà ni òwú wáá bèrẹ sí í bímọ.

Léyìn náà ni wọn wáá rán òòrùn

15

Pé kí ó lọ p'Òwú.

Ìgbà tí òòrùn ní p'Òwú

Ni Òwú wáá bèrẹ sí í là.

Ó ní bẹẹ gégé ni àwọn awo òún wí.

Ọlòsẹẹ, awo oko.

20

A díá f'Ówù

Tí nífi gbogbo ọmọ ẹ̀wò àbígbìn.

Wọn r'ẹ́ji wẹ́rẹwẹ́rẹ

Pé ó lọ p'Òwú o,

Òwú ní rú.

25

Wọn rán'rì wọ̀wọ̀

Pé ó lọ p'Òwú o,

Òwú ípalàbà.

Wón r'òòrùn

Pé ó ló p'Òwú o,

Òwú ílà.

Òwú írú o,

Òwú ílà.

Nísojú ẹlẹyẹ lówú ẹ é là.⁴⁰

30

Ọlósẹẹ, Ifá priest of the farmland.

Ifá divination was performed for Cotton Plant

Who was going to have children only to bury them again.

The Cotton Plant asked how his children could survive

And how his enemies might be unable to see him.

He was asked to perform a sacrifice.

After he had performed the prescribed sacrifice,

His enemies sent gentle rain

To go and kill Cotton Plant

And his children

But that was the time Cotton Plant started to have leaves.

Then they sent dew drops

To go and kill Cotton Plant.

But it was at that time that Cotton Plant started to produce seeds.

After that, sunlight was sent

To go and kill Cotton Plant.

But it was when the sun was shining on Cotton Plant

That his wool started to crack open.

He said that was exactly what his Ifá priests had predicted.

Ọlósẹẹ, Ifá priest of the farmland.

Ifá divination was performed for Cotton Plant

Who was going to bear children only to bury them again.

Gentle rain was sent

To go and kill Cotton Plant.

But Cotton Plant grew new leaves.

Dew drops were sent

To go and kill Cotton Plant.

But Cotton Plant started to shoot out its buds.

Sunlight was sent

To go and kill Cotton Plant.

5

10

15

20

25

30

But Cotton Wool started to crack open.
 Cotton Plant is having new leaves.
 Cotton Plant is shooting out its wool.
 It is in the presence of birds that Cotton Plant bring
 out its wool.

2. *The Maize Plant*

Maize is one of the main plants cultivated by the Yoruba farmer. The subject of the following *ese Ifá* is the ability of one maize grain to reproduce itself many times.

Ení tere,
 Èjì tere.
 A díá fún Àgbàdó
 Nìgbà tí nílòókò àlèrò ọdún.
 Wọ̀n ní pípọ̀ nì írẹ̀ rẹ̀, 5
 Ẹ̀gbọ̀n k'ó rúbọ̀.
 Ó gbọ̀ rírú ẹ̀bọ̀,
 Ó rú.
 Ó gbọ̀ èrù àtùkẹ̀sù,
 Ó tù. 10
 Ó gbọ̀ ìkarara ẹ̀bọ̀ ha fún un.
 Ijọ ní nájó,
 Ayọ ní náyọ.
 Ó nýin àwọ̀n awoó rẹ̀,
 Àwọ̀n awoó rẹ̀ nýin 'Fá. 15
 Ó ya ẹ̀nu kótó,
 Orin awo ló bọ sí i lẹ̀nu.
 Ó ní bẹ̀ẹ̀ gẹ̀gẹ̀
 Nì àwọ̀n awo òún wí.
 Ení tere, 20
 Èjì tere.
 A díá f'Àgbàdó
 Nìgbà tí nílòókò àlèrò ọdún.
 Àgbàdó rìn 'hòhò looko.
 Igba aṣọ l'Àgbàdó mú bọ. 25
 Igba aṣọ.
 Àgbàdó ṣ'òun nìkàn r'oko.
 Igba aṣọ,
 Igba aṣọ l'Àgbàdó mú bọ.
 Igba aṣọ. 30
 Àgbàdó ṣ'òun nìkàn r'oko.

Igba ọmọ,
 Igba ọmọ l'Àgbàdó mú bọ.
 Igba ọmọ.⁴¹

Collecting things one here, one there,
 Collecting things two here, two there.
 Ifá divination was performed for Maize Plant
 Who was going on her annual visit to the farm.
 She was told that much was her prospect of good 5
 fortune,
 But she was warned to perform a sacrifice.
 She listened to the call to perform a sacrifice.
 She performed it.
 She listened to the call to give sacrifice to Èṣù.
 She gave sacrifice to Èṣù. 10
 Her sacrifice was accepted by the gods.
 She started to dance,
 She started to rejoice.
 She praised her Ifá priests
 While her Ifá priests praised Ifá. 15
 As she opened her mouth a little,
 She uttered forth the song of Ifá.
 She said that was exactly
 What her Ifá priests had predicted.
 Collecting things one here, one there, 20
 Collecting things two here, two there.
 Ifá divination was performed for Maize Plant
 When she was going on her annual visit to the farm.
 Maize went nakedly to the farm.
 She brought back two hundred clothes. 25
 Two hundred clothes.
 Maize went to the farm alone.
 Two hundred clothes.
 She brought back two hundred clothes.
 Two hundred clothes. 30
 Maize went to the farm alone.
 Two hundred children.
 She brought back two hundred children.
 Two hundred children.

3. *The Plantain*

The plantain is another important plant to the Yoruba farmers. In this *ẹṣẹ Ifá*, the plantain is said to have been origi-

nally unproductive; she began to bear children only after consulting her Ifá priests and performing all the prescribed sacrifices.

B'ágbọn ó ọ́soro,
 A t'ídí bọ́'lé.
 B'ídà ó ọ́soro,
 A t'èèkù b'àkò.
 Kòròwò Àgbagbà ni wọn dífá fún, 5
 Nígbà tí ńjẹ nírògbun ọ́tá.
 Wọn ní kí Àgbagbà ó rúbọ́.
 Ó sì rú u.
 Ó sì sẹ́gun àwọn ọ́táa rẹ́.
 Ó wáá ńyin àwọn awoo rẹ́. 10
 Àwọn awoo rẹ́ ńyin 'Fá.
 Ó ní b'ágbọn ó ọ́soro,
 A t'ídí bọ́'lé.
 B'ídà ó ọ́soro,
 A t'èèkù b'àkò. 15
 Kòròwò Àgbagbà ni wọn dífá fún
 Nígbà tí ńjẹ nírògbun ọ́tá.
 Ọ́rúnmílá ló d'òsùrùnsùrù,
 Ọ́ba aláde ní't'orí ọ́táa bọ́'mi.⁴²

When the wasp wants to sting,
 It dips its abdomen into its nest.
 When the sword wants to strike,
 It puts its handle into its sheath.
 Ifá divination was performed for Big Plantain 5
 When she was amidst enemies.
 Big Plantain was advised to perform sacrifice.
 And he performed it,
 And he conquered his enemies.
 He praised his Ifá priests 10
 While his Ifá priests praised Ifá.
 He said when the wasp wants to sting,
 It dips its abdomen into its nest.
 When the sword wants to strike,
 It puts its handle into its sheath. 15
 Ifá divination was performed for Big Plantain
 When he was amidst enemies.
 Ọ́rúnmílá said: 'Quickly dipped in water,
 The crowned king keeps the head of enemies quickly
 dipped in water.'

4. *The Melon Plant*

The melon plant, a creeping stem, is very common especially in the savanna areas of Yorubaland. In this excerpt, the melon plant is depicted as a person originally barren who was asked to perform two sacrifices. The first one was to enable her to produce children while the second one was to prevent human beings from killing her children. Melon Plant did not perform the second sacrifice and that is why human beings 'kill' and make use of melon seeds.

Òní Bàrà, Òlā Bàrà. A díá fún Bàrà Tí òlò s'ókò àlèrò ọ̀dún. Tí òf'omi ọ̀júú s'èráhùn ọ̀mọ.	5
Ọ̀jú ọ̀mọ ní ńpọ̀n Bàrà. Ó yàgàn, Ó yàpàta, Ó r'ọ̀mọ léyìn adìẹ, Ó bú púrú s'ẹ̀kún.	10
Ló bá m'éejì k'ẹ̀ta, Ó looko aláwo. Òún lè bímọ báyii? Ní Bàrà dífá sí. Wọ̀n ní pípọ̀ n'ire ọ̀mọọ rẹ,	15
Şùgbọ̀n kí ó rúbọ. Kí ó rúbọ ọ̀pọ̀lọ̀pọ̀ ọ̀mọ, Kí ó sì rúbọ kí àwọ̀n ọ̀mọ aráyé Ó má pa àwọ̀n ọ̀mọ náà. Ẹ̀bọ ọ̀pọ̀lọ̀pọ̀ ọ̀mọ ní Bàrà rú,	20
Kò rúbọ ọ̀tá. Nígbà t'ó rúbọ tán, Wọ̀n ní k'ó gbé ẹ̀bọ náà lọ sí ẹ̀yìn-odi. Wọ̀n ní ibi tí ó bá gbé ẹ̀bọ náà sí Ní kí ó fi s'e'lé,	25
Kí ó sì máa gbé. Ó sì se bẹ̀ẹ̀, Ó sì bí ọ̀pọ̀lọ̀pọ̀ ọ̀mọ. Şùgbọ̀n nítorí ẹ̀bọ ọ̀tá tí Bàrà ò rú, Lọ̀dọ̀dún ní àwọ̀n ọ̀mọ aráyé	30
Ẹ̀pa á lómọ́ọ̀ jẹ. Àyìn-òdì ló wáà nýin àwọ̀n awoo rẹ. Ó ní: Òní Bàrà,	

Ọla Bàrà.

A díá fún Bàrà

Tí nlooko àlerò ọdún.

Rírú ẹbọ ní í gbe ní,

Àirú kí í gb'èèyàn.

Kèè pẹ o,

Kèè jìnnà,

Ẹ wáá wo'fá awó kí

B'ó tí nṣẹ.

Ifá dé, aláṣẹ,

Ẹbọra abìṣẹ.

Ọpẹ, abìṣẹ wàrà.^{'43}

Today the victim is Melon Plant,

Tomorrow the victim is Melon Plant.

Ifá divination was performed for Melon Plant

Who was going on her annual visit to the farm

Weeping for lack of children.

Melon Plant lacked children.

She was barren.

She was as unproductive as the rock.

She saw the hen with her chicks,

And burst into tears.

She added two cowry shells to three

And went to an Ifá priest.

Could she possibly have a child?

That was the problem upon which she consulted Ifá.

She was told there was good prospect of her having children.

But she was warned to perform a sacrifice.

She was told to perform a sacrifice in order to have many children;

And to perform sacrifice so that human beings might not kill the children.

Melon Plant performed a sacrifice in order to have many children

But she did not perform a sacrifice against the plan of her enemies.

After she had performed the sacrifice,

She was told to carry it outside the city walls.

She was told that wherever she deposited the sacrifice,

She should make the place her home,

And live there.

She did so,
 And had many children.
 But because of the sacrifice against the plan of enemies
 Which she neglected, 30
 Every year, human beings
 Kill and eat up her children.
 It was with regret that she praised her Ifá priests.
 She said: 'Today the victim is Melon Plant.
 Tomorrow the victim is Melon Plant. 35
 Ifá divination was performed for Melon Plant
 Who was going on her annual visit to the farm.
 It is the performance of a sacrifice that brings blessings.
 Neglect of sacrifice blesses no man.
 Very soon, 40
 At no distant date,
 Come and see the prediction of Ifá priest
 Coming to pass.
 Ifá has surely come, the great authority.
 Palm-tree, whose predictions come true speedily. 45

UNCULTIVATED PLANTS

Uncultivated plants of many species are mentioned in *ẹsẹ Ifá*. Four of such plants are Èèsún (Elephant Grass), Irínmòdò (a tall hardwood), Ìròkò (the famous West African hardwood) and Yèèpè (Cow-itch). Important features of such trees form the subject-matter of many *ẹsẹ Ifá*.

1. Èèsún (Elephant Grass)

Èèsún is a tall grass which thrives in many parts of Yorubaland especially near rivers and ponds. Given all favourable conditions, it reproduces itself at a very high rate. The ability of this grass to reproduce itself at a high rate forms the subject-matter of the following *ẹsẹ Ifá*.

Abítulà, awo àbàtà.
 A díá f'Èèsún
 Tí òm'ẹnuú ẹràhùn ọmọ.
 Nìgbà kan rí,
 Láàrin ọdàn l'Èèsún ńgbé.
 Kò ẹàhààní kan ń'bẹ,

His children were uncountable.
 He started to dance. 20
 He started to rejoice.
 He praised his Ifá priests
 While his Ifá priests praised Ifá.
 As he opened his mouth a little,
 He uttered forth the song of Ifá. 25
 As he stretched his legs,
 Dance caught them.
 He said: 'Look at the many small children of Abítulà.
 Look at the many small children of Abítulà.
 No one ever sees a barren Elephant Grass. 30
 Look at the many small children of Abítulà.'

2. *Iрінmqdò*

In *ese Ifá*, *Iрінmqdò* is said to be the queen of all trees.⁴⁵
 This tree is perhaps the tallest and biggest West African hard-
 wood. It is taller and more imposing than *Ìrókò*. But unlike
Ìrókò, it thrives only near fertile river valleys. In the following
 excerpt, *Òrúnmìlà* is said to have installed *Iрінmqdò* as the
 queen of all trees.

Ònà kán tihín wá,
 Ònà kán tòhún wá.
 Ìpàdé ònà méjì abenu sonso.
 A díá fún Iрінmqdò
 Tí ó jòba igi lóko. 5
 Ifá ló f'Iрінmqdò jòba.
 Òrúnmìlà ló gbe Iрінmqdò níyàwó.
 Ifá wáá f'Iрінmqdò jòba.
 Ifá wáá f'Iрінmqdò jòba ò,
 Ifá wáá f'Iрінmqdò jòba. 10
 Òrúnmìlà ló gbé Iрінmqdò níyàwó
 Ifá wáá f'Iрінmqdò jòba igi.⁴⁶

A road leads here from this direction,
 A road leads here from that direction.
 The junction of two roads forms a pointed spot.
 Ifá divination was performed for *Iрінmqdò*
 Who would be installed as queen of all forest trees. 5
 Ifá installed *Iрінmqdò* as a queen.
Òrúnmìlà married *Iрінmqdò* as a wife.
 Ifá installed *Iрінmqdò* as a queen.

Ifá made Irínmòdò a queen.

Ifá made Irínmòdò a queen.

10

Ọ̀rúnmilà married Irínmòdò as a wife.

Ifá made Irínmòdò the queen of all trees.

3. *The Írókò Tree*

Írókò is the most precious West African hardwood. It is a very tall and imposing tree which grows wild in the forest. The following *ẹ̀sẹ́ Ifá* tells of the distinctiveness of Írókò in the forest.

Agada-ngba Ọ̀sumàrè.

A díá fún Írókò Ìgbò

Nígbà tí ńjẹ láàrin ọ̀tá.

Àwọn ọ̀tá ní nda Írókò Ìgbò láàmú.

Ló bá m'éejì k'ẹ̀tá,

5

Ó looko aláwo.

Wọn ní ẹ̀bọ ni kí ó wáà rú.

Ó sì rú u.

Ìgbà t'ó rúbọ tán,

Ni Èsú bá lẹ́ pe àwọn àgbẹ́ wá

10

Pé kí wọn ó máa sán igbó

Tí Írókò múbẹ́ nínúu rẹ.

Gbogbo àwọn igi tí múbá Írókòó sọtá

Ni àwọn àgbẹ́ bẹ́ lulẹ́.

Ìgbà tí wọn dé idí Írókò,

15

Èsú ní wọn ò gbọdò gé e

Nítorí pé igi abàmí ni.

Ó ní bẹ́ẹ́ gégé ni àwọn awo òún wí.

Agada-ngba Ọ̀sumàrè.

A díá fún Írókò Ìgbò

20

Nígbà tí ńjẹ nírògbun ọ̀tá.

Igbó kí í dí gágán,

Kí ó dí gàngàn

K'ẹ̀ni má mò'Rókò.

Mo yagada-ngba Ọ̀sumàrè.⁴⁷

25

The giant Rainbow

Performed Ifá divination for Írókò of the city of Ìgbò⁴⁸

When he was living amidst enemies.

Enemies were threatening Írókò of Ìgbò.

He therefore added two cowry shells to three,

5

And went to an Ifá priest for divination.

He was asked to perform a sacrifice.
 And he performed it.
 After he had performed the prescribed sacrifice,
 Èṣù went and called farmers 10
 To come and clear the forest
 Inside which Ìrókò was.
 All the trees who were hostile to Ìrókò
 Were felled down by the farmers.
 When they got to the foot of Ìrókò, 15
 Èṣù commanded that they should spare him
 Because he was a special tree.
 He said that was exactly what his Ifá priests had pre-
 dicted.
 The giant Rainbow
 Performed Ifá divination for Ìrókò of the city of Ìgbò 20
 When he was living amidst enemies.
 The forest cannot be so thick,
 The forest cannot be so impenetrable,
 As to render impossible the recognition of Ìrókò.
 I have become the giant Rainbow. 25

4. *The Cow-itch*

The Cow-itch is a well-known climbing stem in many parts
 of Yorubaland. Its fruit is covered with a soft velvet-like bark
 which itches when it touches the skin. In the following *ẹṣẹ*,
 the Cow-itch is depicted as a respected plant. It is respected
 because of its velvet-like bark which itches anyone who comes
 into contact with it.

Ẹni t'ó ju ni lọ
 Ju'Fáa 'lé ẹni lọ.
 A díá fún Yèèpè
 Tí ní'omi ojúú sògbéré ọmọ.
 Wọ̀n ní kí ó rúbọ. 5
 Ó sì rú u.
 Ó sì bímọ.
 Ìgbà tí ọmọ nááà dàgbà tán,
 Aṣọ ọ̀wọ̀ ní Olódùmarè dá fún un
 Ní ọmọ nááà bá d'ẹni-ọ̀wọ. 10
 Yèèpè, iyáa rẹ nááà sì d'ẹni-ọ̀wọ̀ pẹlú.
 Ó ní bẹẹ gégé ní àwọ̀n awo òun
 Nṣ'enu rere é pé'Fá.

Èni t'ó ju ni ló
 Ju'Fáa 'lé èni ló. 15
 A díá fún Yèèpè
 Tí ní'omi ojúú sògbéré omọ.
 Èrò Ìpo,
 Èrò Qfà,
 È wáá bá ni ní àrúṣẹgun.⁴⁹ 20

He who is greater than oneself
 Is greater than the Ifá divination instruments of one's
 household.¹
 Ifá divination was performed for Cow-itch
 Who was crying in tears for want of children.
 She was asked to perform a sacrifice 5
 And she performed it.
 And she had a child.
 After the child had grown up fully,
 Olódùmàrè prepared a garment of honour for him
 And the child became an honourable person. 10
 And Cow-itch, his mother, became an honourable
 person as well.
 She said that was exactly how her Ifá priests
 Employed their good voices in praise of Ifá.
 He who is greater than oneself
 Is greater than the Ifá divination instruments of one's 15
 household.⁵⁰
 Ifá divination was performed for Cow-itch
 Who was crying in tears for want of children.
 Travellers to Ìpò,
 Travellers to Qfà,
 Come and join us as we conquer by means of sacrifice. 20