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DORNBACH Mária

Gods in earthenware vessels. Gods and their Representation in the Afro-Cuban Santeria Religion / Istenek cseréptálakban. Istenek és ábrázolásuk az afro-kubai Santeria vallásban

**Eredeti közlés/Original publication:**

*Acta Ethnographica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, Tomus 26 (3–4), 1977, pp. 285–308. old.

**Elektronikus újraközlés/Electronic republication:**

AHU MAGYAR AFRIKA-TUDÁS TÁR – 000.000.860

Dátum/Date: 2014. április / April – május / May 15.

**Az elektronikus újraközlést előkészítette**

**/The electronic republication prepared by:**

B. WALLNER, Erika és/and BIERNACZKY, Szilárd

**Hivatkozás erre a dokumentumra/Cite this document**

DORNBACH Mária: Gods in earthenware vessels, *AHU MATT*, 2013, pp. 1–24. old., No. 000.000.860, <http://afrikatudastar.hu>

**Eredeti forrás megtalálható/The original source is available:**

Nagyobb könyvtárakban / In large libraries

**Megjegyzés:**

ellenőrzött, lektorált szöveg / controlled, reviewed text

**Kulcsszavak/Key words**

magyar Afrika-kutatás, terepmunka Kubában, az afro-kubai santeria vallás gyökerei: joruba mitológia, katolikus és joruba elemek keveredése: vallási szinkretizmus, a Santeria vallás istenei és ábrázolásuk  
African research in Hungary, fieldwork in Cuba, roots of the Afro-Cuban

Santeria religion, Yoruba mythology, mixture of the Catholic and Yoruba elements: religious syncretism, gods and their representation in Santeria religion

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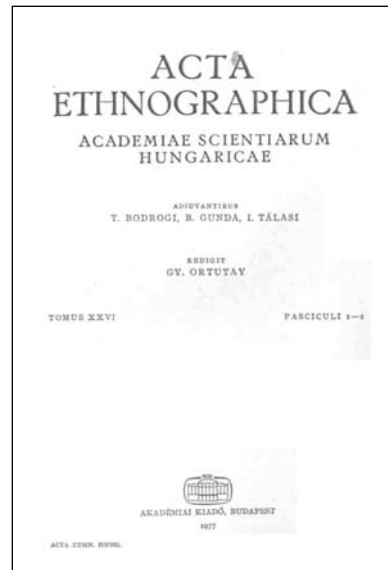
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## GODS IN EARTHENWARE VESSELS

### Gods and their Representation in the Afro-Cuban Santeria Religion

Mária Dornbach  
Budapest



### *I. Roots of the Afro-Cuban Santeria*

Yoruba culture of West Nigerian origin was "transplanted" into Cuba in the 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> century with the slave-trade and went through a double transformation process. Through the integration of the Yoruba and other "primitive" African religions as well as from the syncretism of the catholic religion, a new third religion evolved: Santeria.

The name itself refers to the character of the religion and also to the above mentioned syncretism; Santeria is both the cult of saints (*santos*) and – according to their Yoruba name – cult of the "Orisha" (*Regla de Osha*).

None of the Afro-Cuban religions are institutionally organized, just as Santeria, and exists in local variants. The differences between variants, however, are merely formal and are manifest mainly in the syncretic cult of certain gods.

In order to be able to practice their old religion, slaves of the 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> century accepted many formal traits from the Catholic religion. Becoming acquainted with Catholic saints, Yoruba slaves discovered more and more

similarities between the saints and the Orishas of their devotion. Finally a Catholic saint was found parallel to each Yoruba divinity. In their rites even today the names of the African gods and the Catholic saints are often confused. Unfortunately today it is sometimes difficult to establish which of the similar traits were the basis for syncretism. Yoruba slaves getting acquainted with the multitude of Catholic saints without adequate knowledge about religious beliefs could easily get confused and often the basis of identification were local functions or qualities. In modern practice both priest and believer know exactly which Catholic saint corresponds to which Yoruba Orisha and very few can but now then explain only the reason for syncretism.

An effect of the Catholic religion is that in the Yoruba rites the pictures and statues of Catholic saints are more and more frequently included. Following the Catholic pattern altars we are built for the Orishas decorated with candles and flowers. The cult of such altars is evidently present in modern Santeria too.

Santeria is a polytheistic religion. The complete Yoruba Pantheon houses more than 600 gods. The reason for this extraordinary great number was reached by the various forms in which the Orishas appear by the so-called "routes" (*camino*). The present religious practice, however, did not preserve every form of the Orisha cults.

During my research in Cuba (Havana) in 1971–1972 and 1973 I endeavoured to establish the appearance and forms of representation of the most worshipful Orishas and systematize them. The majority of most instructive informations were given by six magnanimous, selfless informants, all initiated priests of the Santeria religion. My informants not only described the Orishas, the Santeria rites and their instruments, but also told me many myths still alive, and with their aid I could myself partake in various religious ceremonies. It is first of all on the basis of their information that I could note and systematize the characteristic traits of 21 major Orishas, their routes (*Camino*) and forms of representation.

## ***II. Gods and their representation***

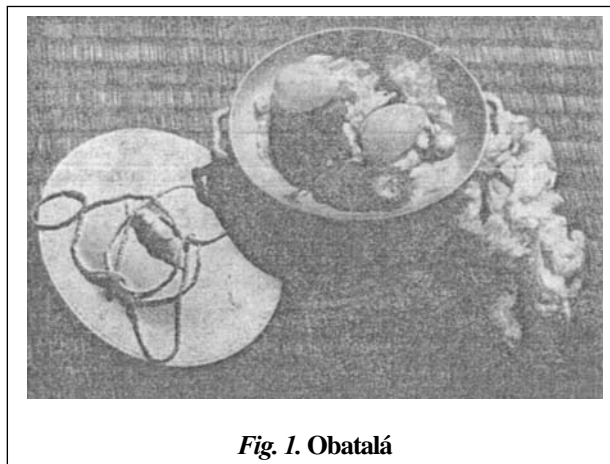
Olofi (Olofin) is the Yoruba Creator, the first of the gods. He created the universe out of nihil and fatigued after the hard work, retired and divided his power among the Orishas. He continues to exist as a passive head-god

(*deus otiosus*) and has therefore no separate cult. His name is included only in songs and prayers.

Olodumare (Olordumare, Oloddumare) is the mother of Olofi and according to some, also his wife. She has no cult of her own. In prayers and songs the names of Olofi, Olodumare and Olorun are mentioned together, Olofi being identical with the Father, Olodumare with the Son and Olorun with the Holy Ghost.

Oduduwa (Odua, Oddua, Oddudua) can be interpreted in three ways: some consider the god to be identical with the Holy Eucharist, others think he should be the god of the Underworld or one of the "routes" -of Obatalá. The last two forms are also identified with Saint Emmanuel. The priests of Oduduwa are initiated. Nowadays his cult is but sporadically kept up. Oduduwa lives in the house of Olofi, too. According to mythology he is under the protection of Obatalá who packed his body in fine cottonwool to protect it from the scorching sunrays. His necklace is made of pearls. His priests are generally initiated for hygienic reasons. Believers state that his food consists of a hundred and one white doves consumed at a time.

Obatalá (Obbatalá) is the creative god of the earth, of mankind, truth, purity, peace, the mightiest of the Orishas, appearing according to Yoruba mythology in either male or female form. The Catholic equivalents may be the Merciful Mother, Saint Joseph, Saint Anne, Jesus of Nasareth, and the crucified Jesus. The number presenting this god is eight, the favourite metal: silver. This god has not less than 24 "routes" of which eight are well known and the most cultivated forms of worship.



**Fig. 1. Obatalá**

Obatalá Ayágguna is the youngest of the Obatalás. His necklace is made of white beads with one or two red ones strung inbetween. This god is of a very fighting nature and is identified with the crucified Jesus.

Obatalá Yeku-Yeku is the eldest of all Obatalá and is represented as a shaky old man with a stick in his hand. His necklace of white beads has a few corals in it. No Catholic identity was known by my informants.

Ochanla is syncretised with Swint Anne and her chain is made of white and green beads.

Oba Moro's chain is made of white and brown beads and he is identified with Jesus of Nasareth.

Osakriñán has Saint Joseph as Catholic equivalent, who is supposed to be a herdsman. His chain is strung of white and red beads.

Obatalá Alagguéma is identified with King Jesus of Catholic religion and his chain is strung only of white beads.

Iba-Ibo and Obatalá Yemu are the most ancient "routes" of this God and it is said that they lived together and the other Obatalá derive from them.

The initiated priests of Obatalá place the goddess into a white porcelain dish into which 18 shells (*cypria moneta*) have been placed with 4 or 8 shiny pebbles and various silver objects all covered up with cottonwool.

According to mythology when Olofi created the world he wanted to fill the earth with people. So mankind was created. However, these creations had only a body, no head and could not speak. Why? Who knows. Perhaps the Creator did not care to make them a head or just forgot about it. So he commanded Obatalá to make heads for the creations. Obatalá, however, happened to drink too much rum and was heavy drunk. He made heads for men, but forgot about the eyes. That is why there are blind people on earth.

Obatalá, the representative on earth of Olofi helps the troubled and cures the sick. Those who are ill visit the priest, the *santero* who carries out a purifying rite in honour of Obatalá, he plucks some plumes of a dove, wraps the dove in white cloth and passes his hand over the body of the sick saying the following prayer;

*Sara yeyé bakuró*  
*Sara yeyé bakuró...*

The sick is sure to be cured ... However, the rite must not be made with a white dove, for a bird of white plume or a white animal, be it a river crab, white beans, salt and spirits are tabu for Obatalá.

Eleguá (Eleguá, Legbá, Elegguá) the god of roads and cross-roads, and also of the walk of life and fate is a naughty joker. According to the ritual the ceremony begins with songs and prayers said to him and the first sacrifice is also made in his honour so as to ensure the successful and peaceful course of the festivities. His colours are red and black, the colours of life and death. His Catholic equivalents may be Saint Anthony of Padua, the transmigrating soul and the Child Jesus of Prague. Present religious practice differentiates 24 "routes" of this god.

Eshu Anangui (Anaggi) is the guardian of cemetery gates, he provides the other Eleguas with work. Eleguará was born from the marriage of the oldest Eleguá and Okuboró.

Eshu Laguaná lives in the Savanna and is the representative of misfortune and trouble. The Catholic equivalent is the transmigrating soul.

Eshu Laroye (Alaroye) lives behind the entrance door, he is a mighty god and all who enter a house greet him first. He is a glutton, greedy to get the last morsels, and is neither against drink

nor tobacco. His master has to see to it that his little dish of earthenware should always be filled with some fresh cake, candy and savoury things.

Eshu Okuboro is lord of life and death. He is the father of all Eleguás.

Eshu Oggunnileble (Ogguanible) lives on street corners. He who does not regard his power, would be revenged terribly for Eshu may bring him into great trouble.



**Fig. 2. Eleguá, the "Guardian of the House"**

Eshu Beleké (Belenké, Ibori) has the Good Shepherd as Catholic equivalent. This Eleguá is a boisterous mischief-maker, a little boy with the face of a very old man and wears a checkered suit and hat, a cigar never missing from his mouth. He must not be kept in a house where there are children for out of jealousy he might bring them into trouble. According to mythology once when Olofi was very ill and thus the medicin-men lost their capacity to cure, Eshu Beleké was the only one all over the world who could heal the Lord of heaven and earth.

Eshu Eluasama lives at the roots of sugar cane and his believers fear him so greatly that they dare not even to raise their eyes on him. They look up at him only when being fed. His help is required for nothing but harm.

Eshu Mako (Arere Obi Oke) has the Little Jesus sitting on the arms of Saint Anthony of Padua as his Catholic equivalent. According to mythology he is perfect little thief.

Eshu Bi (Eshunbi) also lives on street corners, and his Catholic equivalent is the Child Jesus of Prague. He is very mischievous and loves to make practical jokes.

Eshu Barakeno lives in bushes, of all Eleguas he is the smallest. Eshu Ayeru is the guardian of the house of Orula, the god of divination and of the *babalao*, the highest of the priests in the Santeria religion. He wears a little metal arrow on his forehead.

Eshu Arayeyi (Barayiku) is also the assistant of Orula and the guardian of his house, living at its gate.

Eshu Araleilu is a weary old man.

Eshu Akokorobina is a playful child, fond of playing with glass marbles, and loves to dance and smoke cigars.

Eshu Asuayu (Ayo, Yayo, Yaya, Yayito) guards the entrance door. Eshu Batieyi (Latieye) is one of the strongest Eleguas who always carries out his will.

Eshu Ilé (Oloya, Kaloya) is the Elegua of market places and open areas. Eshu Kualu (Alalu) is the guardian of road crossings.

Eshu Afrodi, is contrary to other Eleguas who speak through 21 shells, the lord of 24 cowrie shells. He lives behind the door or on the yard. He too is a boy with the face of an old man, wears black and white checkered trousers, shirt and garbage heap.

Eshu Agguere (Aguere) lives on a bill.

Eshu Merileye is the god of road crossings, of the four winds, the god of the mouth opening to four words and four ears.

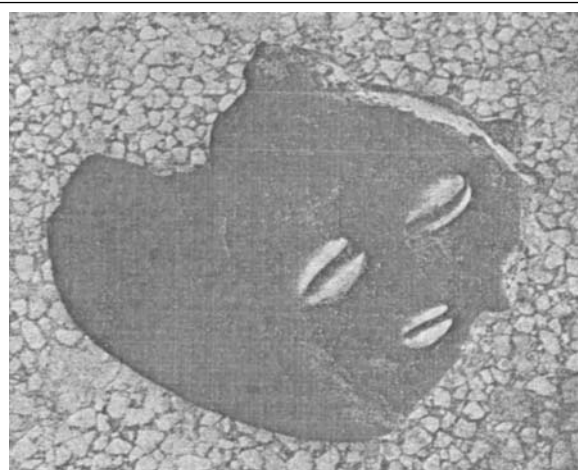


Eshu Layiki (Alayiki, Alayeki) is the incarnation of hopelessness, treachery, a greedy glutton.

Eshu Barainé is the body-guard of Shango, the militant god of fire, lightening and manliness, and also of Osain, the witch curer.

Eshu Lele (Arailele) lives in stray dogs.

Very rarely is anybody initiated to be priest of Eleguá. In his red and black dish there are in contrast to other gods not 18 cowry-shells, but 21, the bones of sacrificed animals (balls, whistles) are placed on his altar, candies, sweets and the hooked staff of Eleguá.

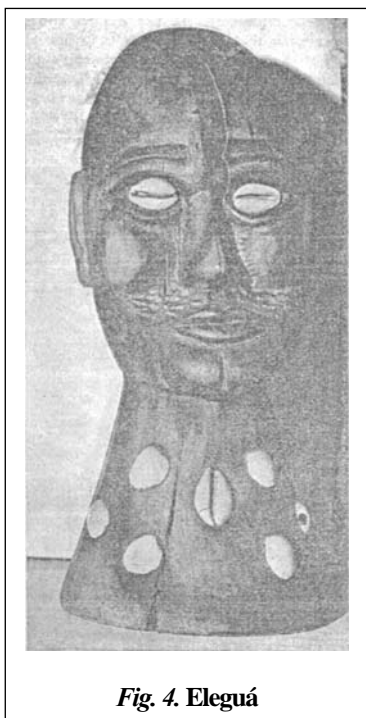


**Fig. 3. Eleguá**

Eleguá is generally a guardian-spirit of the house, almost at all believers living in a casket behind the door, protecting his master from ill-fate and keep up his luck. Any believer may have such a "house guardian Elegua", invitation is not required, only a simple rite. Eleguá is one of the three fighters, thus they are inseparable comrades; he, Oggun and Oshosi. In this function Eleguá appears in a different form: a head made of clay that is to say of cement with eyes and mouth of shells is placed into a little earthen dish. All the symbols of the god were kneaded in the dough: earth from various places (from road crossings, from the foot of the walls of a Catholic church, a prison, or from the prison itself, that to say, from the earth around a hospital, from a street-corner), of plants one of each species in the possession of the god, pebbles from the savanna, a piece of coal, two different coins, powder made by the *babalao* (the secret is known only by the head-priest),

decoction cooked from the plants of the god (*omiero*), the oil of the *corojo* palmtree, dry wine and honey. All these ingredients are well mixed with cement of which the head is formed. The bottom of the model is often covered with a piece of hikotea tortoise-shell. The "patina" of the prepared Eleguá is given by the tint of blood poured on it from sacrificed animals, and blood is the main- food of the Eleguá. His favourite blood is, however, that of black cocks, chickens, *hutia* rats or mice. He is neither against toasted corn nor brandy and is very fond of smoking, indeed.

Some "house-guard" Eleguás are made of big sea shells. In this case cement prepared in the described manner gets stuffed into the shell and represents the head of the god. His eyes and mouth are made of small cowrie-shells.



**Fig. 4. Eleguá**

Oggun is the owner of all metals, the god of hills and woods, of the savanna and of fighting and is the patron-god of sugar cane harvesters. His Catholic equivalent is Saint Peter. The basis of syncretism is probably because Saint Peter is the guardian of the keys of heaven. The number of this god is twenty-one. His dance is of a fighting nature. The dancer holds the cane cutting knife in his hands which represents the Orisha. His colours are green and black. In present Santeria religion eight "routes" of this god are known.

Oggun Kobu-Kobu lives in the savanna and "works" at noon, which is the most favourable time for his believers to ask for his help.

Oggun Relekum lives at railroad crossings and highway crossings and works at any time of day. His chain is usually made of one and one green or of seven and seven black beads.

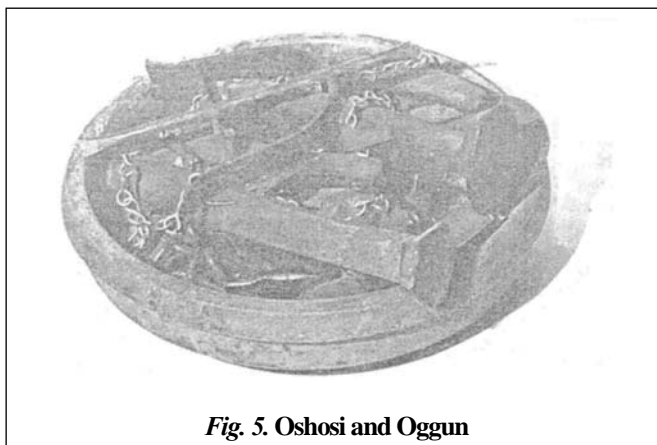
Oggun Aguaníyó is the forest guard.

Oggun Alaguedé lives in ironworks. He "works" round-the-clock. His chain is generally strung of green and black beads, but in the country there are some places, where only green or black chains are to be found.

Oggun Areli (Arere, Arele) lives on open places and in woodland clearings. Oggun Aguanilé lives at the Pollee.

Oggun Chibiriki is a smith. His chain is made of 21 black and 8 green alternatively strung beads.

Oggun Ilé lives on the railroad rails.



**Fig. 5. Oshosi and Oggun**

This god has initiated priests who place the two earthenware bowls which conceal the god on something like a cupboard. One of the bowls is smaller than the other and in that one are the three militant gods, Eleguá, Oshosi and Oggun concealed; in the other bowl the larger one, are the objects representing Oggun to be found: three pebbles, various iron objects (their number is generally not defined), and also the so-called Chibiriki, which is nothing but a miniature copy of the 21 iron utensils on an iron stand. Instead of a Chibiriki a metal chain may be used from which also 21 tiny iron utensils are hanging down (*achabbá*).

Similarly to the Eleguá – or together with the Eleguá and Oshosi – anybody may receive an Oggun. The god protects its owner from the police and prison, and with its macheté he keeps away any trouble hanging over his master's head. For the same reason gets the god symbolized by various iron utensils placed into an earthen dish or an iron skillet with three feet (nails, hooks, pieces of rail, chains, keys, etc.).

Oshosi is the third of the three fighters, the god of hunting. His Catholic equivalent is Saint Norbert. The reason for syncretism cannot be discovered anymore. He imitates the dance movements of a hunter while stalking. His indispensable attributes are the bows and arrows. His arrow shuts down any danger threatening his master. His colour is green. He is represented in the form of an iron bow and arrow placed on iron objects symbolizing Oggun.

There is no religious cult attached to this god, his followers have to take the other two fighters with him, should they want to have him.

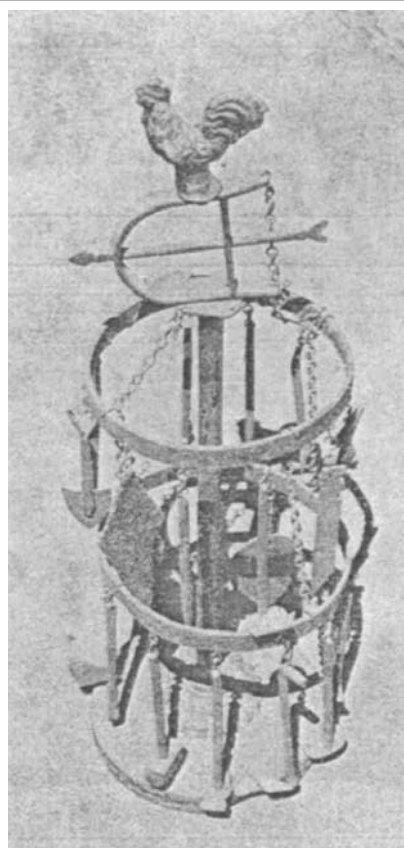
A well-known myth relating to him is as follows: one day Orumbila, the herald of Olofi visited Oshosi to remind him of his masters' order according to which he was not allowed to hunt on Holy Thursdays. Oshosi, however, did not give the slightest heed to Olofi's reprimand. As the sun rose at that day the hunter went after all into the wood. Suddenly he sighted a wonderful animal. He took horridly his bow and arrow and aimed at the animal which turned in the very moment into a man.

– Oduduwa! – exclaimed the hunter recognizing the Orisha and the moment he shot out his arrow he turned into stone.

Orula (Orumbila, Orumila, Ifá) is the god of divination. His Catholic equivalent is Saint Francis of Assisi. His colour is green and yellow. He has not less than a hundred and one "routes".

The priests' of Orula are not initiated, they simply receive the objects symbolizing the god: in a white porcelain dish twice twenty-one cola coco-nuts (a black African kind of coco-nut), four heads of mice; the whole is divided in the middle with wooden boards. Only men can be the priests of Orula, the so-called *babalaos*, the head priests of the Santeria religion. But anybody can receive the "Hand of Orula", even women: a bracelet of green and yellow beads which guards its owner of all kinds of danger. The bracelet of men is called "Igdá de Orulá", that of women "Kofá de Orulá".

Shangó is the militant god of fire, lightening, of drums, manlihood and courage. According to historical data he was a living man, the dreaded daring king of Oyo, a province in Nigeria. He followed his father Orafian



**Fig. 6. Oggun Chibiriki**

and his elder brother Ayaka on the throne. His colours are red and white. He is always represented holding an adze to accentuate his combatting nature. His Catholic equivalent is Saint Barbara, also a militant saint, patron of artillerymen, of lightening and in general warfare. In his dances Shangó imitates the grasping of lightening in the clouds and breaking it. He has only a single "route", but can be called by twelve different names. (His older name is Addima-Addima Shangó; the name Obbalubbe reminds the time when he was the husband of the goddess Obba; Obbaná means he is master of drums; Shangó-Obayé that he is the lord of fire; Oni Oba that he is the son of the king; Alafi, that he is king of kings; Olufinakako is the name of the child Shangó; Obbaná Aná, king of the earth; the lord of gales, lightening, war; Shangó-Eyó – the god spitting lightening and fire; Obba Dimeyi, he who lives in a *ceiba* tree; Shangó-Obáyé, the lord of fire; Oban-Yoko, the King of Takua Land. His necklace is always made of red and white beads. His chosen followers receive the wooden bowl representing the god at their initiation, it is painted red and white and is placed on a wooden stand (*pilón*) about a meter and a half high.

In this bowl are to be found the objects symbolising the god: six usually flat stones hit by lightning, 18 cowrie shells and a larger shell (*ajé*). Around the wooden bowl onto the altar are placed *guira* pumpkins painted red and white (*acheré*); an adze of the same colour and the food for the Orisha (for example bananas, pumpkin, etc.).

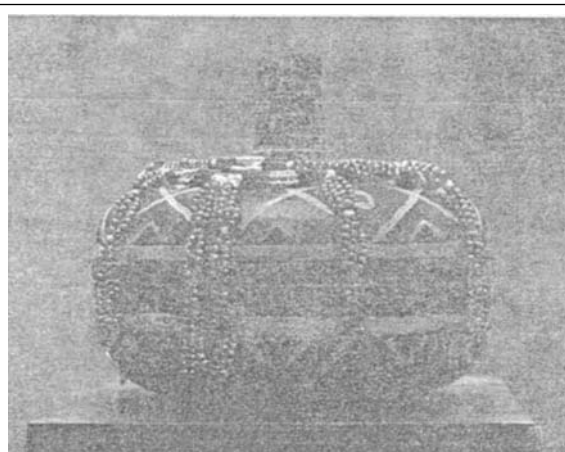
According to the legend Shangó lives in the king palm tree. He is the son of Obatalá and Argayu, Oggun is his younger brother.

Yemayá is the goddess of the sea, of salt water, of motherhood. Her Catholic equivalent is the Holy Mary of Regla. (According to the legend Holy Mary appeared to three fishermen in a village called Regla on the shores of the Havanna Bay.) The colour of Yemayá is blue, her number is seven. Her dance imitates the waves of the sea, sometimes delicately



**Fig. 7. Shangó**

rippling, sometimes roughly rolling. Her necklace is usually strung of dark blue beads and transparent pearls of a watery colour. She has seven "routes" which are well-known in modern religious practise too. Her necklace changes according to her image, and on each of her "routes" Yemayá has different qualities.



*Fig. 5. Shangó*

Yemayá Okoto can cry only with one eye. Most of her chosen followers squint. Her home is the Red Sea.

Yemayá Ibu Agganá lives in the Black Sea.

Yemayá Asesu lives on the surface of the sea, on the top of the waves and that is the reason that she eats duck (in spite of the fact that there are no ducks in the ocean!). Her necklace is made of sky-blue pearls.

Yemayá Mayeleo lives in the sand of the sea-shore, doesn't eat ducks and often pretends to be crazy. Her necklace is made of white, dark blue and dark pink beads.

The daughters of Yemayá Achabbá can be recognized by their silver anklets. Her necklace is made of beads coloured dark blue, red, white and black. They appears in the form of a sheep.

Yemayá Ibu Aro comes up from the bottom of the sea at full moonly. She is represented by the moon.

Yemayá Okuti (Oggute, Oggunde) also lives at the bottom of the sea and accompanies Oggun. She is sometimes dressed like a man in trousers and holds a knife for cutting brushwood in her hand. Seven beads of her necklace are transparent and one – or seven are dark blue.

The blue porcelain dish which conceals the goddess contains 18 cowrie shells, seven pebbles from the seaside, and seven objects made out of lead (the sun, the moon, oars, keys, an anchor, a life-saving belt, etc.). The dish is filled with seawater. The external surface is decorated with seven silver bracelets and a silver coronet.

Oshun is the coquettish goddess of fresh waters, rivers, gold, money, merriness and love. Her followers call her the "holy whore". She is identified with the Catholic Merciful Mother of Cobre, the Virgin Mary who appeared in the copper mine (Cobre means copper), but possibly or with the Virgin Mary of Loreto. The colour of Oshun is bronze and golden yellow. Her necklace is made of transparent golden yellow beads. Her number is five. She has five different "routes" and accordingly five different names and her Catholic identities and her necklaces differ appropriately.

Oshun Kolé is the maid of Olofi and lives in an aura bird, (a hawk-like bird of prey), her necklace is made of beads coloured red and golden; in the house of her daughters, in the middle of the room, a small *guira* pumpkin is to be found with five aura feathers on top.

Oshun Ololo-Oddi is the wife of Orula and lives together with him. She is identified with the Virgin Mary of Loreto. Her necklace is made of golden yellow, red and yellow beads. She may be recognized through having lost both her arms.

Oshun Ibu-Yumu is the eldest of all Oshuns and she sews and knits without stopping. She lives in the depths of the rivers and her necklace is made of golden yellow beads and corals.

Oshun Ibu-Aná is the goddess of drums. Her necklace is strung of white and sky-blue beads and of amber.



**Fig. 9. Shangó**

Oshun Ibu-Akuará is deaf, so she is not called by ringing bells, but cowbells. Her daughters buy her sometimes a canary and sometimes even a piano. She lives in the swamp at the bottom of rivers.



**Fig. 10. Yemayá**

The followers of the goddess place five river pebbles, 18 cowrie shells and five coppers respectively into a porcelain dish, and then fill the dish with river water. On the outside of the vessel the brass coronet of the goddess is to be seen with 55 tiny brass objects dangling on it with a brass bell to complete the adornment.

The myth why beautiful Oshun had so many lovers is still told today.

Oshun was a young girl of great beauty, who used to dance at festivals. Her lovely body had an intoxicating effect on men. She did not hide either the unparalleled perfect beauty of her forms from inquisitive eyes and when dancing nude pointed herself with honey to be more ecstatic.

Her mother decided to marry off her daughter, but only to a man, who could guess her name.

Once Eleguá happened to walk under the window of Oshun and heard the mother call her name. He revealed the secret name to old Orula for a fine sum and thus beautiful Oshun was married off to the old man.

They lived together for a time but the old husband could not meet the demands of his young wife so Oshun sought consolation elsewhere. It is said that she even sold her love for money.

Oyá (Yansa, Yansan) is the goddess of sparks, wind and the cemetery. Her wild dance imitates the dance of the wind. Her violent forceful movements are stressed by the black horse-tail held in her hand and she often wears a brass coronet on her head. Her robe is made of all colours of the rainbow. The Catholic equivalent of this goddess is either Saint Theresa or Saint Clara, different in various regions, or Our Lady of the Annunciation. In the latter case her necklace is made of nine brown plastic beads painted

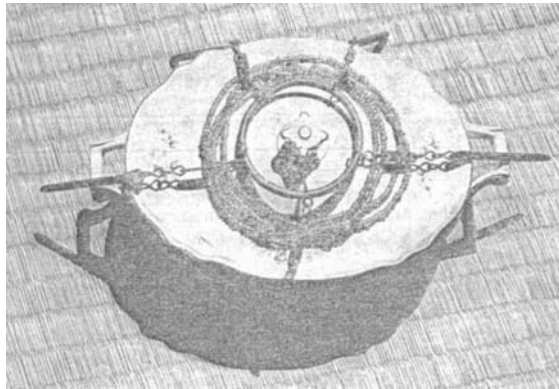


with tiny black and white stripes and nine brown pearls. This Oyá lives on market places.

However, should she be identified with Saint Theresa (or Saint Clara) she wears only a necklace of brown stripped beads and lives at the gate of a cemetery.

The followers of this goddess conceal her in a porcelain dish with nine pebbles and 18 cowrie shells in it covered with water. The vessel is decorated outside with a brass coronet and nine bracelets. Nine different brass objects hang from the coronet.

Oba (Ohba, Olba) is the goddess of fidelity. Her Catholic equivalents are Saint Catherine and Saint Rita both true to their faith. Only one "route" of this goddess is known today because she has no great cult and very few initiated priests. She lives in the cemetery. Most initiated receive Oba together with Oshun. The goddess is concealed in a bowl with 18 cowrie shells in it, 9 pebbles and a mask. The sad hearted goddess who had such a difficult life is a rare visitor on earth.



**Fig. 11. Oshun**

The sad story of Oba is a most lyric and well-known Yoruba myth.

Oba was the wife of greedy merry-making Shangó. Once she had no meat to cook for her husband and so that he should not be angry with her she cut off one of her ears and put it into cornmeal. When Shangó came home he started to eat with good appetite, but suddenly noticed that the head of his wife is covered with a white cloth full of blood spots. He started to cross-question his wife, she did not want to tell the truth. Then Shangó pulled the white cloth off and was terrified to see that an ear was missing. He at once

realized what had been cooked into the commmeal! He was so disgusted that he left his wife.

In her sorrow Oba went out into the world and wandered about with any purpose in a wide forest sobbing her heart out. Anywhere a tear was dropped a spring rose and that is how the first lake on earth was begun.

They say Oba lives in that lake, having drowned herself in it in her sorrow.

Olókun lives as it becomes her at the bottom of the ocean and is the goddess of oceans and seas. Some consider her to be the mother or grandmother of Yemayá but others think she should be one of the "routes" of Yemayá. With no regard to the cult of that god her followers receive a large earthenware jug filled with sea-water containing the goddess into which an indefinite number of pebbles have been placed, 18 cowrie shells, a mask and a serpent made of lead. No Catholic equivalent of this goddess is known.

She is highly revered and greatly honoured by the *santeros*. Her jug is opened only once a year to refill it with sea-water. None may see her face, therefore if on great holidays she does appear on earth and enters the body of one of her followers, one of her children, that follower may dance only wearing a mask and as soon as the festivities are over has to pass through a purifying rite, so as not to die.

According to a myth Olókun, the grandmother of Yemayá lived together with Argayu but on a fine day he caught her bewitching son Shangó, who was then only a child. Argayu cursed the sinful woman to scoop the water out of the ocean with a basket. That is the reason why Olókun is living ever since at the bottom of the sea.

Argayu (Agayu, Aggayu, Aga iu) is the god of rivers and the savanna. His Catholic equivalent is Saint Christophoros, the ferryman of the poor who once even carried the Child Jesus over a river, hence his name. Syncretism is evident in this case: the same function and profession. There is also a myth connected with his name relating how he carried the child Olodumare over a river.

Informants stated that he has only a single "route". His necklace is made of thick plastic beads coloured white, sky blue, red and brownish-red. The beads are strung by four in turns.

The chosen followers of Argayu are not initiated but receive the god in a much simpler rite, in a large earthen-ware vessel into which one larger pebble is placed and 18 cowrie shells with 3-6 tiny objects made of iron (e.g. a small arrow, a stick, a palm leaf).

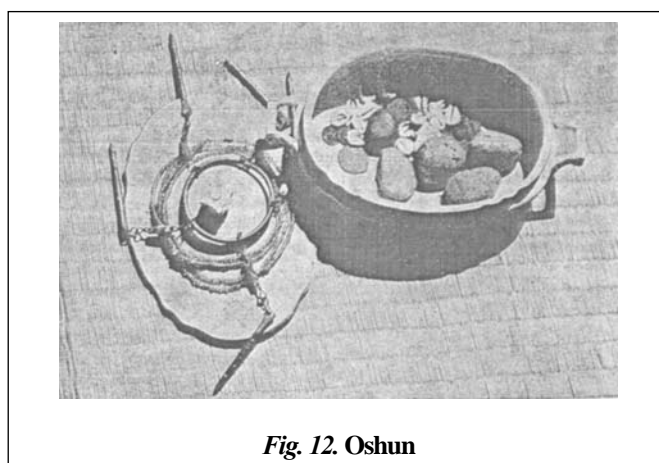
According to the myth Shangó was born in consequence of the love affair of Argayu and Obatalá.

Baba-lu-ayé is the patron of illnesses, especially dermatitis and venereal diseases. The Catholic equivalent is Saint Lazarus, known of similar qualities. The god comes from Dahomey. He is represented as a sick man leaning on a couch with two dogs accompanying him. In Dahomey the Araras receive this god through initiation, but the Yorubas receive him simply through the two earthenware bowls concealing the god similarly to the way Argayu is received. In one bowl are the objects representing the god (18 cowrie shells, nine pebbles), the other bowl is used for cover.

His number is nine and his chain is usually made of white beads on which thin blue stripes are painted.

Some of my informants stated that the god has 17 "routes", others know only of nine. But many people think he has only one form of appearance but is called by various names. His names refer to his wanderings, to the long way he made from Dahomey to the land of the Yorubas and then to Cuba.

All his forms are identified with Saint Lazarus, but each has a different Yoruba name and the colour of his necklace also alters.



**Fig. 12. Oshun**

Of his 17 or 9 forms the questioned informants only knew five. According to this Baba-lu-ayé – Asoyi was the name of the god when he was still living on Arara land. His necklace is made of 18 white beads, two blue with stripes, 9 black and 9 brown beads.

Baba-hi-ayé –Agromitasa has a necklace made of brown and black beads. The necklace of Baba-lu-ayé-Allua is all black.

The name Baba-lu-ayé – Afréketé applies to the "route" when the god hurried to help the goddess Yemayá who flew to the land of the Araras.

The necklace of Baba-lu-ayé – Asoyano is strung of white beads with blue stripes.

Three other names for Baba-lu-ayé are also known: Afrimayo, Kuddaso and Aso Iré.

Orisha-Okó is the god of agriculture and farming. According to his work the god is represented on an earthenware pot in the form of a peasant ploughing with two animals in the yoke. His colour is purple. His Catholic equivalent is Saint Izidorus.

People pray to Orisha-Okó for rain and for good harvest. His followers are not initiated, but simply receive the figure representing the god. He is not very much venerated.

Ibeyes (Obeyes, Himaguas) is the name of the holy twins, the patrons of children and physicians. Their Catholic equivalent is Saint Cosma and Domian, two martyrs, the patron saints of barbers and surgeons. The Ibeyes have no initiated priests, their followers simply receive the two identical little earthenware jugs -symbolizing the two gods with 4 pebbles in each, 4 shells (3 being cowrie shells and one a bigger shell), and generally two analogous wooden dolls rolled up in red rags and bound to one another but sometimes the figures are carved from one piece of wood. There were also such Ibeyes carved out of wood, which were hollow and human remains, bones, earth, roots, bloody rags were placed inside. The whole figure was bundled first in red and then in black rags and necklaces were hung around it.

The Ibeyes are not honoured with special rites, but they are revered almost like idols. According to the myth they are the illegitimate children of Shangó and Oshun and were brought up by their grandmother Yemayá. The secret of their magic power is their twinship but separation would break their magic power.

Osain is the god and lord of plants and of herbcurers. He is usually represented in the form of a man with one eye, one arm and one leg or of a *guira* pumpkin full of herbs. His Catholic equivalent is Saint Joseph, probably because the day of Saint Joseph, the 19th of March had been regarded to be the day when spring begins, the trees begin to bud and farmers go out to sow.

Osain is very much revered nowadays, but hardly any cult is attributed to him.

Yewá (Yegguá, Yeguá) is the goddess of graves. A virgin who expects her followers to be virgins. She likes neither noise nor children. Her colour is

pink. The Catholic identity for this goddess is the Virgin of Monserrat or the Mother of Defenceless. She has very few initiated children nowadays. In the presence of Yewá it is forbidden to be undressed, have intercourse, say obscenities, and women must not call their partner in marriage "husband". The initiated priestesses of this goddess are usually women who do not menstruate any more.

Osun symbolizes the life of his master and is the patron of the Santero. He is said to be the herald of Olofi. His duty is to collect all sacrifices made to the Orishas. It is said that Osun is not really an Orisha, a god.

He is represented in the shape of a cock perking on the top of a rod made of white metal. Beneath the figure of the cock there is a little funnel in which objects symbolizing the god may be found (*cargamento*): a piece of smoked fish, a piece of *hutia* rat, roasted corn, honey, ground egg-shells, the oil of the *corojo* palmtree, cocoa butter, and food cooked out of the plants of the god (*omiero*).

Believers receive Osun together with the three fighters, with Eleggua, Oggun and Oshosi. The tiny metal figure stands on a shelf as high as a man behind the entrance door. Should the figure stagger, it is foreboding evil to the house.

Osun is identified with the staff of Saint Francis, for what reason is by now lost in the mists of time. No rite was initiated for Osun the house guardian. The protection of this god is won through painting the metal figure once annually with cocoa butter and by "feeding" him with the blood of doves.

### ***III. The temple-room***

The Santeria, as said, is not an institutional religion and thus no such cultic centres could have developed as in the case of the Catholic religion. It is the house of the initiated person, the *santero* which serves the purpose of a



***Fig. 13. Ibeyes***

temple as the house of the gods, the Orisha (h é *Ocha*, *casa de santo*, *casa-templo*). The objects of religious cult are placed here and ceremonies are celebrated here.

Every Yoruba god has its representing colour, a number, a certain metal, a necklace made of an appropriate number of coloured beads, each has its plant, its animal, its favourite food and drink, etc. The Orishas – as we have seen – are mostly symbolized by a definite number of pebbles deriving from a definite place (*otán*), tiny shells (*cyprea moneta*, called cowrie) and a definite number of objects in a definite shape and of definite material, which are placed into a dish made of porcelain, iron, wood or clay kept in the corner of the house or in the room consecrated to the god. The gods are concealed in these pebbles and speak through the shells.

According to the social position of the owner, the gods occupy either a room or take one corner of a room consecrated in their honour possibly opposite the entrance door. The furnishing of the temple-room differs in many things for example its riches and decoration vary, yet in spite of formal differences there are such general rules which have to be observed when making a place suitable for a temple room. In the small cupboard behind the entrance door live the three fighters, Elegguá, Oggun and Oshosi. Above them, on a shelf as high as a man can reach stands Osun, guardian of his master's "head".

A glass case with three shelves, the so-called *canastillero* stands against the wall into which the requisites of seven Orishas: Obatalá, Yemayá, Oshun, Oyá, Dadá, Obba and the Ibeyes are placed. The holy vessels are placed in strict sequence. The Orisha-bowl of Obatalá, the mightiest Orisha, comes on the top shelf; the bowl which conceals the god of which the initiated priest is the owner of the cupboard comes on the middle shelf, such as the ones of Yemayá, Oshun, Oyá, Obba, Dadá or the Ibeyes. For instance, in the cupboard of the priestess of Oshun are placed the dish of Obatalá on the top-shelf, Oshun's on the middle shelf, and the dishes of Yemayá and Oyá below.

The shelves of the cupboard are covered with paper or cloth in the colour representing the Orisha. Various small objects, – symbols of deity – are placed beside the sacred dishes (for instance beside that of Obatalá a silver bell, the so-called *agogó*, or the white tail of a horse fixed in a pearl handle, the so-called *iruké*; the black horse-tail of Oyá, called *iruké*; the *guira* pumpkin painted blue and white of Yemayá).

On the top of the cupboard the Catholic identities of the seven Orisha are placed, statues or holy pictures. In front of the *canastillero* food and drink sacrifice are placed on the floor, for instance coco-nuts.

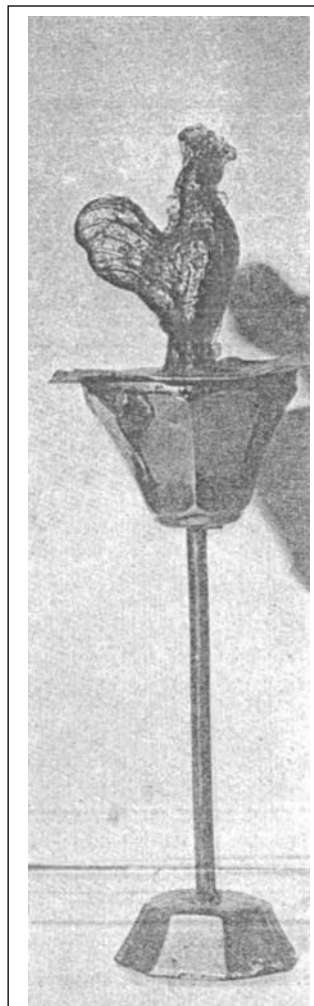
If the master of the temple room is not an initiated priest of the mentioned seven Orishas, but of some other god, then there is no *canastillero* in the temple room, because the dishes of other Orishas are either placed on the floor or on a piece of furniture resembling a cupboard. In this case according to Catholic pattern a true altar is built around the dishes concealing the gods. The sacred vessels placed on the floor are surrounded by food and drink sacrifices as well as tiny objects representing the god and the pictures and statues of the identical saints are hung on the wall.

When sacred dishes of the Orishas are placed on a dining-room cupboard which resembles the altar of a Catholic church, the similarity between the forms of Yoruba and Catholic religion become even more striking.

Separate altars are built, quite often for such Orishas the bowl of which is kept in the *canastillero*. In such a case only a statue of the identical Catholic saint is placed on the altar and small objects representing the Orisha. Such altars are often decorated with bunches of lowers, candles and portions of food- and drink sacrifice.

An altar from which the dish concealing the god is lacking, may be set up by anybody, it is not restricted to initiated believers.

Beside the temple-room there is a so-called *awobi*, the courtyard of the house where the favourite plants and animals of the god are kept. There is hardly a house without one or two white doves kept by the children of Obatalá, or a red cock of Shangó, or a duck for the initiated person of Yemayá, or a dog for the priest of Baba-lu-ayé. In the house of Shangó followers there is surely a banana palmtree.



**Fig. 13. Osun**

At times of ceremonies, especially during initiations the courtyard is an important place. The plants and herbs of the god are put here on the previous day and a so-called *omiero* is brewed out of them. The animals to be sacrificed are also kept on the courtyard and after the sacrifice, when the *santero*, the priest initiated to Oggun (achoggun) has *killed* the animals in the mystic room, the *igbodu*, where the secret rites of the initiation are performed, the carcasses are carried into the courtyard. Those *santeros* who do not take part in these ceremonies stay in the *awobi*, and that is the place where the uninitiated believers, the *aleyos* stay too while the rites are being performed.

The master of a temple-room has many tabboos to observe depending on his gods. For instance the sons of Shango may not whistle and may not walk about undressed in the house. They are not allowed to swear, or to wear a mask, or to spill salt or coffee on the ground. No such activity may be performed in the temple-room which is not in connection with the cult of the Orisha. If the vessel concealing the god is kept in the dwelling room, owing to lack of space, it is forbidden to fornicate there. It is not allowed to step over the threshold of the temple-room with impure body.

(*Acta Ethnographica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, Tomus 26 (3–4), pp. 285–308, 1977.)