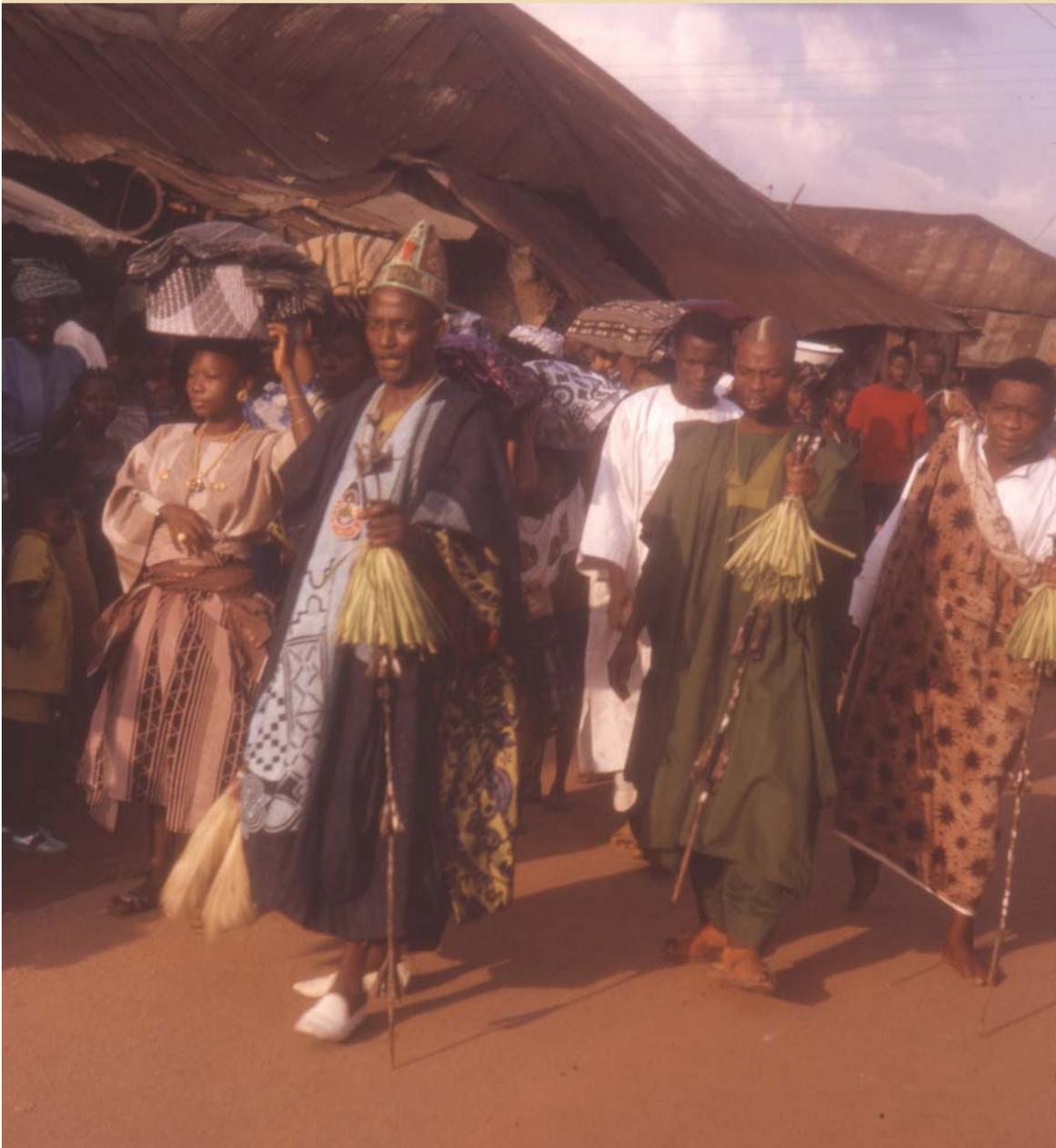


Yoruba Art & Culture



Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology
University of California, Berkeley





Yoruba Art and Culture

PHOEBE A. HEARST MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY

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Special thanks to Tokunbo Adeniji Aare, Oduduwa Heritage Organization.

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ABSTRACT not a realistic or exact copy of something

ADZE a tool used to cut and shape wood

BABALAWO a diviner in Yoruba society

CASSAVA a starchy root similar to a sweet potato

COMPOUND a building or buildings where people live set off and enclosed by a barrier

DEITY divine character or being of a supreme nature, a god or goddess

DIASPORA a scattering of a people from their original homeland

ECONOMY the management of the resources of a country

EXPORT to ship goods to other countries or places for sale, exchange

GOODS materials made to be sold

IMPORT to bring or carry in from an outside source, especially to bring in (goods or materials) from a foreign country for trade or sale

INDIGO a blue dye obtained from various plants

KOLA NUTS brownish seed, about the size of a walnut containing caffeine

MILLET a grain used as food for humans and fowls

ORISA a god or deity

PALM OIL an oil obtained especially from the crushed nuts of an African palm (*Elaeis guineensis*) used to make soaps, chocolates, cosmetics, and candles

PETROLEUM crude oil found in the ground which is refined and used to power things like cars and gas stoves

PLANTAIN a starchy form of the banana

REALM a region, sphere, or domain

SHRINE any structure or place devoted to a saint, holy person, or deity, as an altar, chapel, church, or temple

SORGHUM an edible cereal grass

STAPLE a basic or necessary item of food

TARO a stemless plant, farmed in tropical regions, for the edible tuber

URBAN characteristic of the city or city life

YAM a starchy root or sweet potato



Western Spellings and Pronunciation Key of Yoruba Words

Esu: Eshu

Ilesa: Ilesha

Olorun: Olorun

Orisanla: Orishala

Orisa: Orisha

Sango: Shango



AFRICA

Africa is the second largest continent in the world after Asia. It is an extremely diverse place with many different cultural groups and landscapes.

There are tropical forests, grasslands, plains, and deserts. There are 54 countries in Africa, over 800 million people, and over 1,000 different languages spoken.





NIGERIA

People

Nigeria's population is multi-ethnic with more than 250 groups having a variety of customs, religions, traditions, and languages. The country's major ethnic groups, which make up about two-thirds of the total population, include the Hausa and Fulani in the north, the Yoruba in western Nigeria, and the Igbo in eastern Nigeria. Other groups include the Kanuri, Nupe, and Tiv of the north, the Edo of the south, and the Ibibio-Efik and Ijaw of the southeast. Although English is the official language of the country, Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba are commonly spoken. About half of the population living in the north are Muslim; another 40 percent, in the south, are Christian. The remaining population follows traditional beliefs.

Land

Abuja has been the capital city of Nigeria since 1991. Nigeria is more than twice the size of California. The Republic of Niger borders it to the north, the country of Cameroon to the east, the Republic of Benin to the west, and the Atlantic Ocean to the south. The Niger River runs through the country. Nigeria has a coastline made up of sandy beaches, behind which lies a belt of mangrove swamps and lagoons. North of the coastal lowlands is a broad hilly region, with rain forest in the south, and savanna in the north. Behind the hills is the great plateau of Nigeria, a region of plains covered largely with savanna. This area becomes scrubland in the north.



Lagos, Nigeria, 1960



Political Structure and Economy

Although Nigeria's natural resources include vast amounts of oil and gas reserves, the country suffers from poverty. Nigeria has endured warfare and civil unrest since it became an independent nation. Years of military regimes and political corruption have left the country with economic problems.

Nigeria has one of the largest populations of all the African countries with an estimated 104 million people. About 60 percent of the population live in rural areas. However, the capital cities are crowded as a result of people leaving the countryside in search of social and economic

well-being. Although agriculture is an important part of Nigeria's economy it is difficult for the country to produce enough food to keep up with the rapid population growth. Although Nigeria still exports goods it must also import some of the country's food in order to feed all of its people.

In 1999 democratic elections were held and Olusegun Obasanjo was elected. There is hope that his leadership will turn Nigeria's economy around. Even so, Nigeria still has many challenges to overcome before it can obtain a strong economy.





THE YORUBA

The Yoruba people live on the west coast of Africa in Nigeria and can also be found in the eastern Republic of Benin and Togo. Because the majority of the slaves brought to the Americas were from West Africa Yoruban descendants can also be found in Brazil, Cuba, the Caribbean, and the United States. There are also many Yoruba currently living in Europe, particularly Britain, since Nigeria was once a British colony. The Yoruba are one of the largest cultural groups in Africa. Currently, there are about 40 million Yoruba world-wide. The Yoruba have been living in advanced urban kingdoms for more than 1,500 years. They created a strong economy through farming, trading, and art production. Their outstanding and unique artistic traditions include woodcarving, sculpture, metal work, textiles, and beadwork.



Beaded Ibeji (twins)

The Yoruba have one of the highest rates of twin births in the world. Twins (ibeji) are considered special children whose birth signifies good fortune. The loss of a twin is considered a great misfortune. If a twin dies, the mother has a memorial figure made and the soul of the deceased twin is transferred to it. The figure is then kept in the home and the mother continues to take care of it. She offers it food and prayers weekly and performs more elaborate rituals on the twin's birthday.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY NICOLE MULLEN

Beaded bag (detail)



West Africans, such as the Yoruba, have lived in urban societies and have produced extraordinary art work since the 5th century BC. During this time, the Yoruba began to use iron to create metal tools and weapons such as machetes, axes, and hoes. These tools made it easier for the Yoruba to farm the land. They planted crops including yams, their staple food. They also harvested the seeds from the palm oil tree. The seeds from this tree produce a vegetable oil that is used for cooking. Kola nuts were also grown and harvested. Soon the Yoruba began trading with neighboring areas for rice and sorghum. Due to increased agriculture, the Yoruba community began to grow in size and large towns were created. They arranged their communities by clan lines, or extended families. Families who had the same ancestors lived next door to each other in large compounds. An elder was put in charge as the head of the compound. Towns became organized by the type of work that people did.

For example, farmers lived close by blacksmiths who made the tools they needed to farm their land. By 600 AD the Yoruba were ruled by kings and chiefs.



Forestland, Nigeria



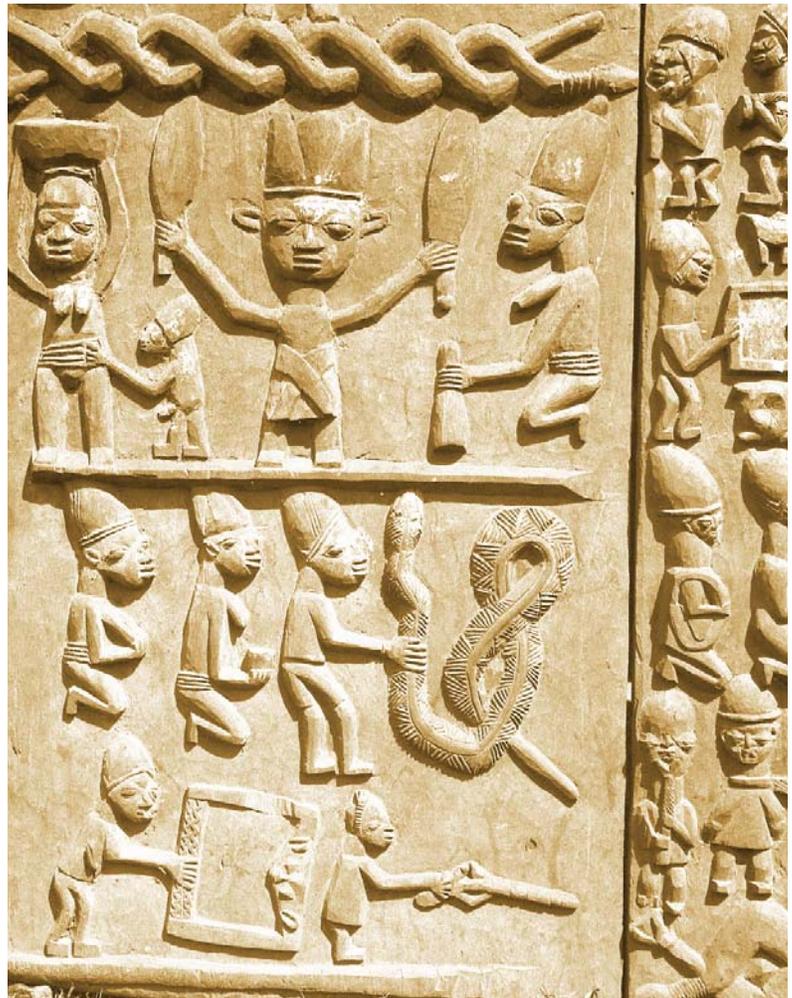
Royal palace compound, Oyo, Nigeria, 1960



Yoruba Kingdoms

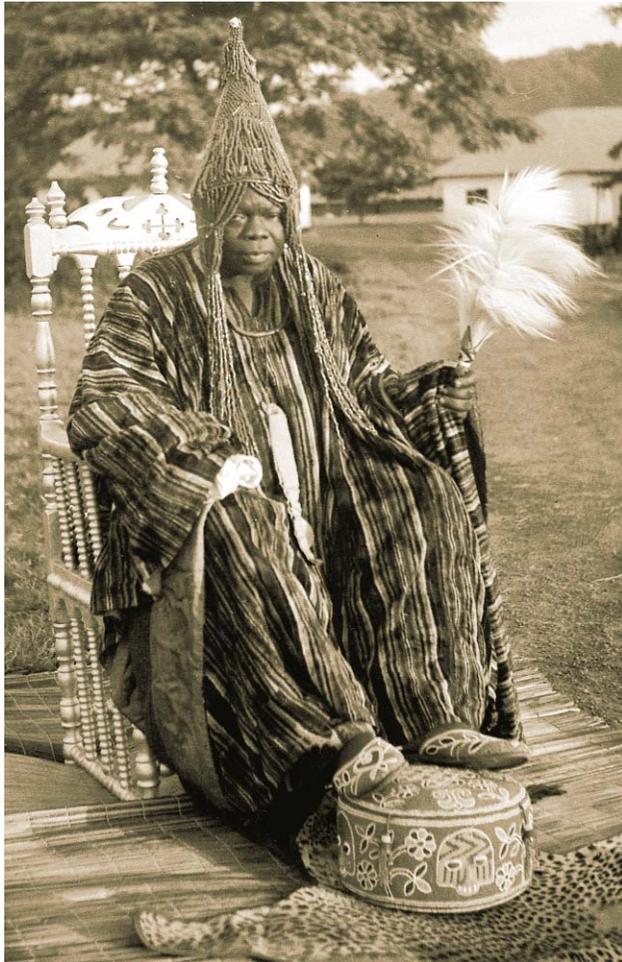
There were about 20 Yoruba kingdoms at one time with a different king ruling over each one. Ife was known as the center of cultural and religious life.

Oyo was the strongest kingdom with the largest military and political system. The kingdom of Oyo was close to the Niger River. The rich soil in Oyo allowed the people to grow more crops than they needed. This helped the kingdom of Oyo to easily trade with neighboring groups. They also created a strong military. Oyo was in control of 6,600 towns and villages by the end of the 18th century. Internal wars and fighting with neighboring groups, along with the beginning of the slave trade, eventually led to the decline of these great kingdoms.



Above: royal palace door, (Detail) 1951

Below: Royal Place horse, Oyo, Nigeria 1960



A Story of How the Yoruba Kingdoms Were Created

Odua became old and blind. He told his sixteen sons to go the ocean to collect salt water to cure his blindness. None of his sons except the youngest, Obokun, brought back saltwater. Odua washed his eyes with the salt water and could once again see. When he opened his eyes he saw that his land and all his crowns except for the one upon his head had been stolen away from him by his sons. Obokun was the only son of his who took nothing from him. He thanked his son by giving him a sword. Obokun then went to Ilesa and became king. Odua's other sons also built large kingdoms. Kings that rule even today are said to be ancestors of these sixteen kings.



PHOTOGRAPH BY NICOLE MULLEN



PHOTOGRAPH BY NICOLE MULLEN

Above: King, Otun, Nigeria, 1951

Left: Beaded crown of a Yoruba king

Right: Beaded royal foot cushion



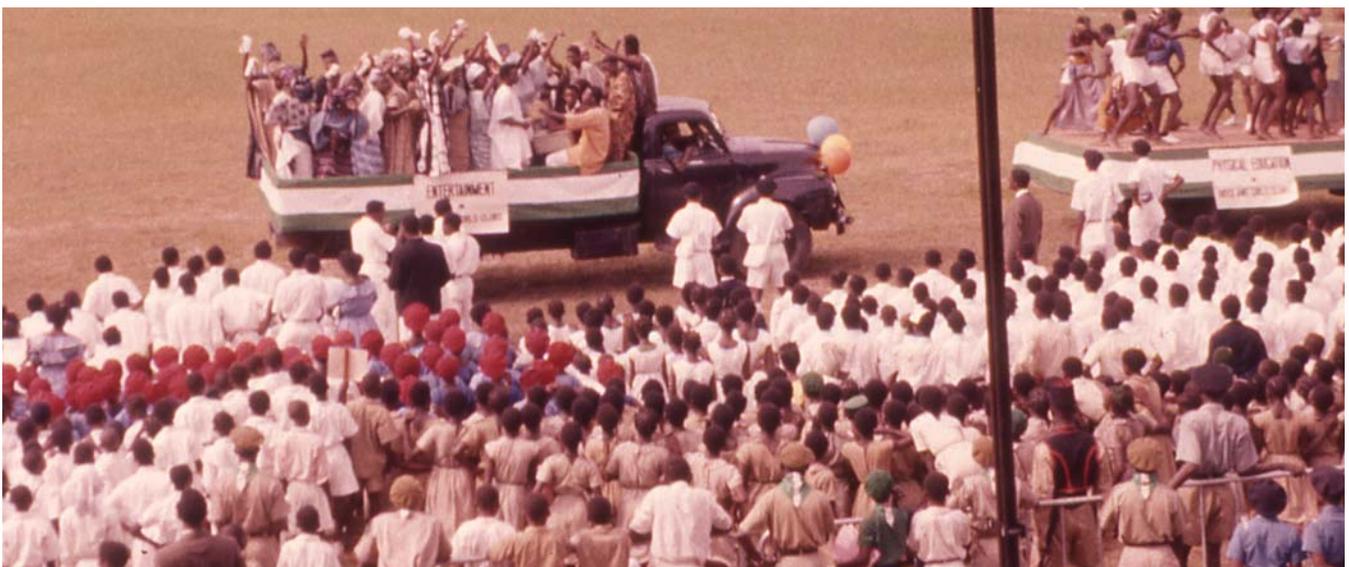
In the 18th century, European countries were beginning to create colonies all over the world. Europeans were taking villagers from West Africa and bringing them to the New World to be slaves in the new colonies. The British came to Yorubaland in 1852. By 1884 European nations were meeting to discuss how they would break-up Africa into different colonies. The British were granted the right by the other European nations to colonize Yorubaland, and in 1893 Yorubaland became part of a larger colony known officially as Nigeria.

In 1960 Nigeria became an independent country. Ten million Yoruba were known to live in Nigeria at that time amongst many other ethnic groups. Today, the Yoruba still continue many of their traditional ways of life. Many Yoruba live in large towns and cities, and many towns are still based on the extended family dwellings in compounds. Lagos is the largest city in Nigeria and over ten million people live there, including a large Yoruba population. Many Yoruba today are still employed



Oyawoye family at the Independence Exposition, Lagos, 1960

as carvers, blacksmiths, farmers, weavers, and leather workers. Today, the Yoruba still make some of the world's greatest works of art.



Lagos, Independence Day Ceremony, 1960



Food, Agriculture and Trade

Yams are the most important food for the Yoruba in their homeland of Nigeria. Grains, plantains, corn, beans, meat, and fish are also eaten. Poultry, goats, sheep, pigs, and cattle are raised as livestock. Large rivers, lagoons and the ocean provide fish and shrimp for the Yoruba. Fishermen sell fresh and dried fish through traders at the local markets. The Yoruba make stews out of yams, plantains, corn, cassava, and taro. Palm oil from the nuts of the palm oil tree is often used to cook with.

Every country has an economy. People create economies through employment, trade, and the buying and selling of goods. Around 1900 cacao

became the most important crop that Nigeria sold to other countries in order to earn money. Cotton and indigo were also grown and sold. Today natural resources like crude oil, coal, palm oil, peanuts, cotton, rubber, wood, corn, rice, millet, cassava, and yams are exported. Many men are employed as farmers. Women are responsible for selling goods at the markets.

Potters, blacksmiths, carvers, and leather and bead workers are important to Yoruba society because they all contribute to the economy. The goods that they produce are made to be used and also have great artistic value.



Iseyin Market, 1960



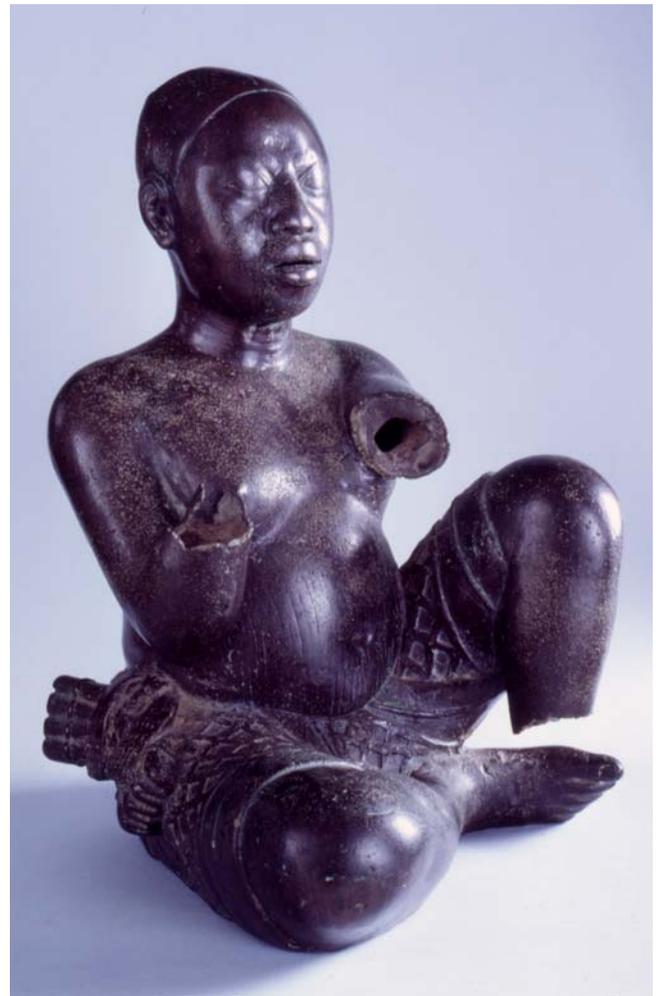
Sculpture

The Yoruba began creating magnificent sculpture out of terra cotta clay in the 12th through 14th centuries. Bronze figures were made during the



14th and 15th centuries. To create bronze sculptures, artists first made models out of clay. When the clay dried they would put a thin layer of beeswax over the clay and engrave details in the wax. Next, they covered the wax with more layers of clay until they created a thick mold.

The mold would then be heated over a fire until the middle layer of wax melted. The artist poured the bronze into the top of the mold through tubes. The bronze now took on the form of the wax that was once there. When the bronze cooled and hardened the outer layer of clay was broken off and the sculpture was completed. These life like sculptures may represent kings and gods.



Above: Tada bronze figurine

Left: Ife bronze heads

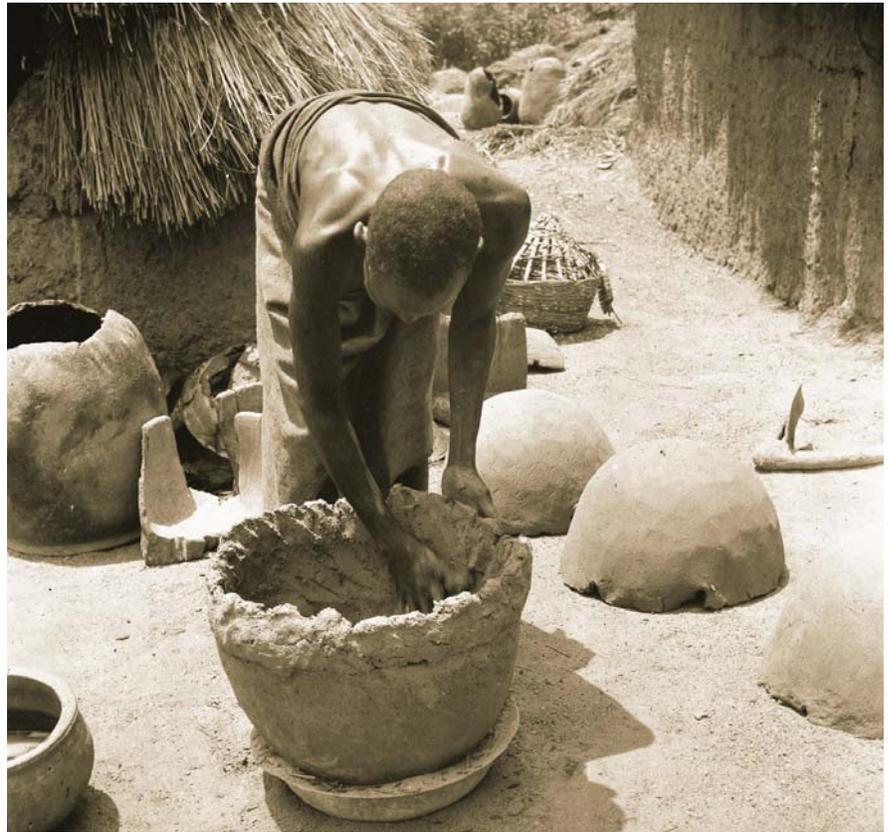
The Yoruba began to create more abstract wooden sculpture as their major art form later on. Many African cultures choose to create sculptures of humans in an abstract form rather than a realistic one.





Pottery

Women are the potters in Yoruba society. They make many different types of pottery including pots for cooking, eating, and storage. Palm oil lamps are also crafted. Unique pots are made in honor of Yoruba deities. Pottery is only made in towns where clay is available. It is sold to neighboring towns that do not have access to clay.



Above:
Stages in constructing a water pot, Oyo, Nigeria

Below: Finished pots, Oyo, Nigeria





Leather and Beadwork

Men are responsible for leather and beadwork. Goat, sheep, and antelope skins are used to make things like bags, cushions, and sandals. Leather scraps in different colors are often pieced together to form designs. Beads are used to decorate crowns, hats, bags, and other items worn by kings and babalawo. Popular bead designs include, human faces, birds, and flowers.



PHOTOGRAPH BY NICOLE MULLEN



PHOTOGRAPH BY NICOLE MULLEN

Left: Leather and beaded knife case
Right: Leather and beaded pendant
Below: Royal leather cushion

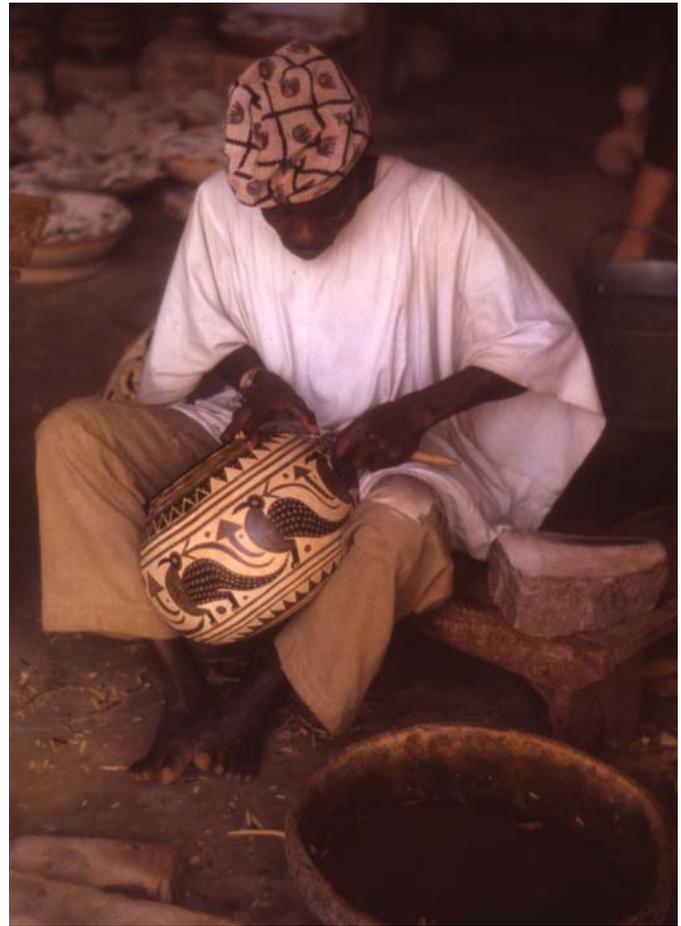




Blacksmiths and Calabash Carvers

Blacksmiths are very important to local towns and are responsible for making tools that many other professions use, such as hoes, axes, knives, chains and hammers.

Calabashes (dried gourds) are carved by men and are used to serve food or drink. Goods carried to markets are often carved from calabashes. They are also used as containers for storing medicines and food. Calabashes are also carved into musical rattles.



Above: Calabash carver, Oyo, 1965

Below: Calabash carver's tools





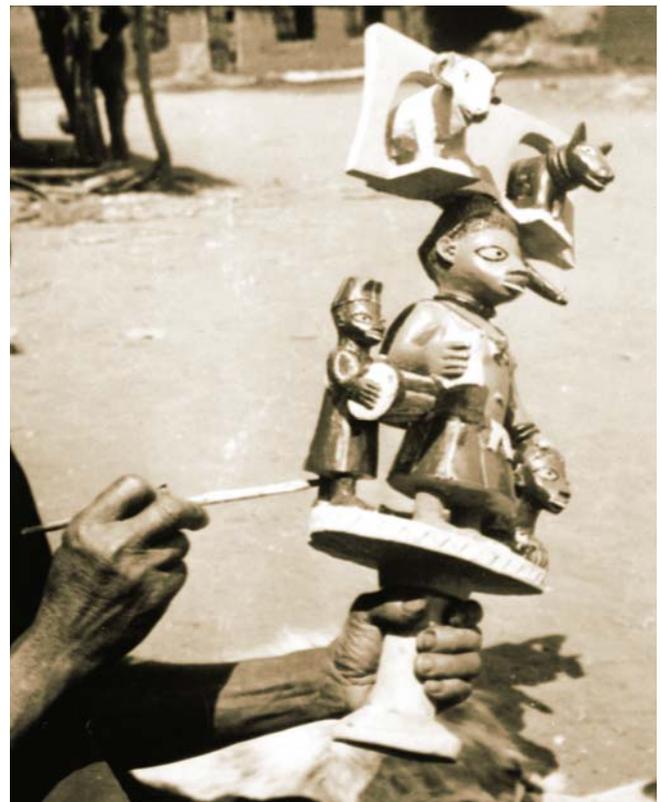
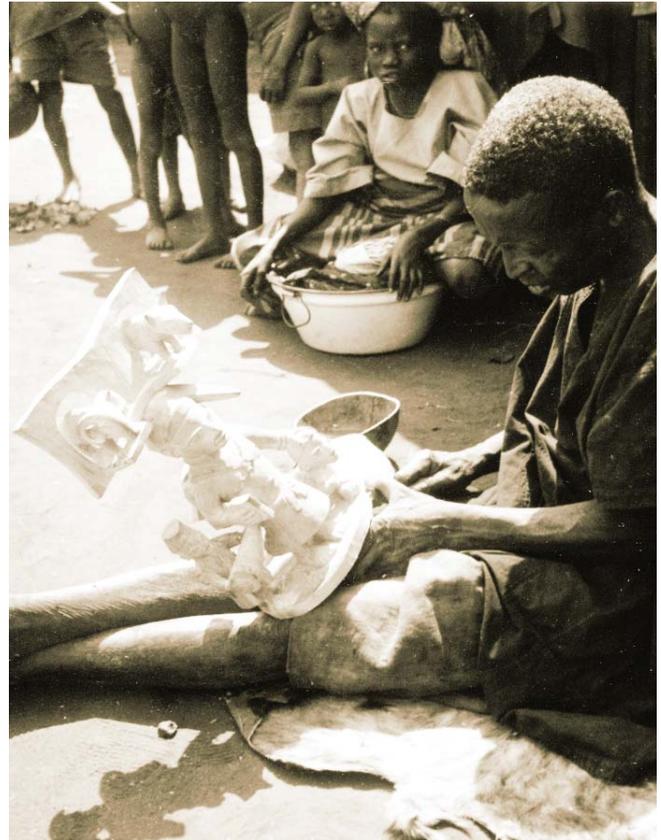
Woodcarving

Men are responsible for woodcarving. Woodcarving is the most important art form in Yoruba culture. Men use knives and adzes to carve wood. Divination trays and many other sacred objects are carved out of wood.



Stages in the carving of a Sango staff, Meko, Nigeria, 1950

[View the completed staff on page 22](#)





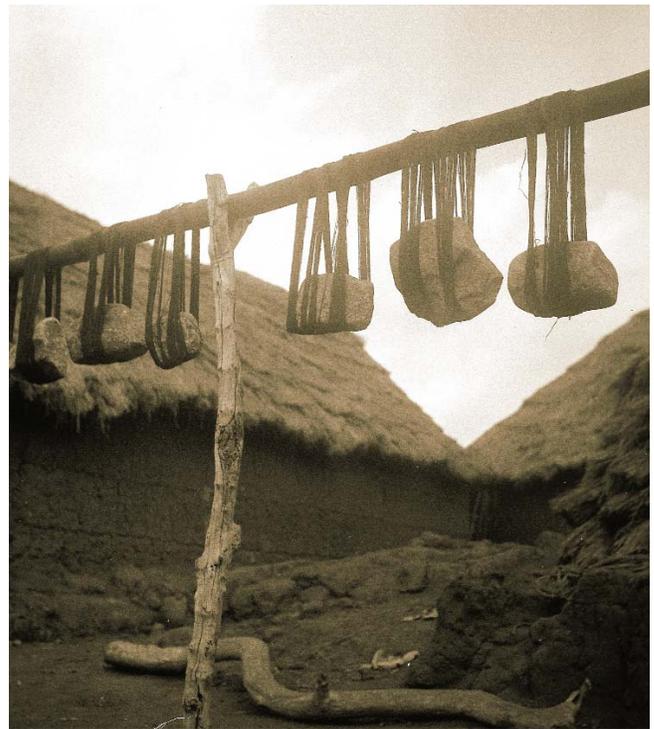
Textiles

Men and women both act as weavers and dyers. Weaving is done on different types of looms. Weavers create hundreds of different patterns on their looms. Wild silk and cotton are used to make cloth. Indigo, a native plant, is often used as a dye to color threads.

Above: Man's loom, Meko, Nigeria, 1950

Below left: Master weaver, Oyo, Nigeria, 1951

Below right: Drying dyed yarn, Meko, Nigeria, 1950





Religious Beliefs

Traditional Yoruba beliefs see the world made up of two connected realms. The visible world of the living is called *Àye*, and the spiritual world of the Orisas, the ancestors and spirits, is called Orun. *Àse* is the life force that is given to everything by the Creator of the universe. *Àse* is in everything: plants, animals, people, prayers, songs, rocks, and rivers. Existence is dependent upon *Àse* because *Àse* is the power to make things happen and change.

The Yoruba believe in the Creator who rules over the entire universe along with many other gods that serve underneath him. The Creator of the universe is called Olorun. Olorun lives in the sky and is considered to be the father of all the other gods. Olorun is the only god that never lived on earth. Olorun is the supreme god and has no special group of worshippers or shrines, like the other gods do.

The Yoruba people worship over four hundred different deities. These gods are called Orisas. Some of the Orisas are worshiped by all of the Yoruba. Other gods are only worshiped by certain towns or families. Every person is given or receives a special deity to worship. A person usually worships the god of his father, but some worship the god of their mother. Some people are contacted by a particular god in their dreams and are instructed to worship them.



PHOTOGRAPH BY THERESE BABINEAU

Stool. Made by Duga, Meko, Nigeria, 1950

This Stool is made to represent Iroko, a deity who makes peace when Esu, the trickster and divine messenger, causes a fight.



Creation Myth

Every culture has stories that explain how the universe was created. This is one version of a creation story that is told by the Yoruba to explain the beginning of the universe.

Olorun lived in the sky with all the other gods. He told Orisanla, the god of whiteness, to create the earth for him. Olorun gave Orisanla some soil, a chain, a five-toed chicken, and a snail shell and sent him on his way. When Orisanla got to the gates of heaven he noticed some other gods having a party. He stopped to chat with the other gods for a bit and drank some of their palm wine. Orisanla became quite drunk from the palm wine and fell asleep. Orisanla's younger brother Odua came by and noticed his brother fast asleep. He took all the things that Olorun had given him and went to the edge of heaven with Chameleon.

Odua dropped the chain and climbed down, throwing some of the soil onto the water.



PHOTOGRAPH BY THERESE BARBINEAU

He then released the chicken and the chicken scratched out the earth, expanding it in many directions until the ends of the earth were made. Chameleon then stepped upon the earth to make sure that it was stable. Odua followed and settled at a place called Idio.

Orisanla soon woke and realized what happened. From that time on Orisanla put a taboo on palm wine. Even today those who worship Orisanla are forbidden from drinking palm wine. Orisanla came down to claim the earth but his brother, Odua demanded that he was to be the owner of the earth since he had created it. The two brothers continued fighting until Olorun

heard them and called them to report to him. Olorun granted Odua the right to own the earth and rule over it. Olorun then told Orisanla that he would become the creator of mankind. In order to keep peace amongst the two brothers Olorun sent them back to earth with Sango, the God of Thunder; Ifa the God of Divination; and Eleshije, the God of Medicine.

Sango dance wand, made in Meko, Nigeria, 1950

Although every worshipper of Sango, the thunder god, owns a wand for his personal shrine, it is carried only by the group member who becomes possessed with Sango's spirit. The central figure represents such a devotee, carrying a Sango staff in his right hand. At his left is a female worshipper of Oya, the Goddess of the River Niger and Sango's most loyal wife; and on his right is a man beating Sango's drum. At the top left is a ram, Sango's favorite sacrificial animal, and at the right, the dog that is sacred to him.



Ifa ceremony at the Egbodo Erio Festival. Ife, Nigeria; 1965

There are many important Yoruba deities. Esu acts as a messenger for the other deities and he is also a great trickster. He assists Olorun and the other gods by causing trouble for people who offend them or fail to worship them. Everyone prays to Esu so that he will not harm them.

Ifa is the god of Divination, and no matter what other deities a person worships everyone asks Ifa for knowledge and guidance in times of trouble. Ifa is a great wiseman, and he acts as the interpreter between all gods and humans. Ogun is the God of Iron and War. He is a great blacksmith and a fearless hero. Woodworkers, leatherworkers, and blacksmiths worship him. Without Ogun

people would not have tools to farm the land that they live on. Other gods rely on Ogun to clear paths for them with his great machete.

Sango is the God of Thunder. He lives in the sky and he creates the thunder that comes to the earth. His thunderbolts kill those that offend him or lights their houses on fire. He is married to Oya, the goddess of the Niger River. She comes to the earth as a strong wind before Sango throws his lighting bolts down on earth. Oya has the power to blow the roofs off of homes and knock down trees.

All Yoruba people make offerings to the gods they worship. Each god has favorite foods that a person may leave at the god's shrine. Worshippers of a certain deity might wear beads or special clothing to show that they worship a particular god. There may also be taboos—foods or things that people cannot partake in because of the god that they worship. For example, Esu's favorite foods are corn, beans, and palm wine. These things are often placed at his shrine. His followers often wear black beads around their neck. They never eat or use palm oil because this is said to make Esu angry.

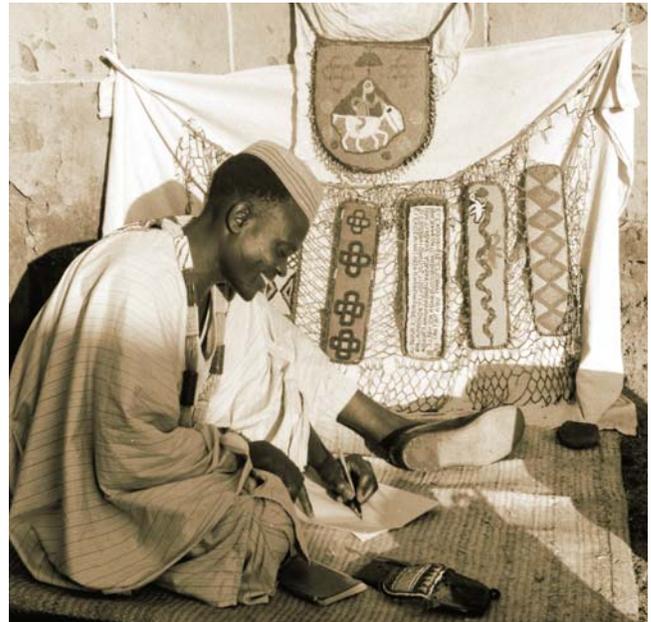


Ifa Divination

Divination is a method of solving problems and foretelling the future. It has existed for thousands of years throughout the world in different forms. Ifa divination is a traditional way to solve problems among the Yoruba. Divination helps to explain why certain misfortunes are happening to someone. For example, if a farmer's crops are not growing or if someone in the family is ill they would seek the help of a diviner. Ifa diviners are called *babalawo* (fathers of ancient wisdom). The function of the Ifa diviner is to determine the reasons that are causing a person's misfortune. He does this by performing a ritual with the person which reveals the source of the problem.

The Divination Ceremony

Divination depends on interpreting marks made on the divination tray. Divining powder is used to make these marks. Sixteen palm nuts from the African palm tree are the most important of all the objects used in divination. Palm nuts are a



symbol of Ifa, the God of Divination. The diviner tries to pick up all sixteen palm nuts in his right hand. If one nut remains in his left hand he makes a double mark in wood dust on his tray; if two remain, he makes a single mark. The diviner recites a verse based on the marks made. These verses act as the advice to help solve the person's problem.



PHOTOGRAPH BY NICOLE MULLEN



Above: Babalawo at a Sango shrine, Oyo, Nigeria, 1951

Divination tray

The carved face represents Esu, the messenger of Ifa and the other deities.

Left: Divination bowl, woman with chicken, Nigeria, Efon-Alaiye



The Training of a Babalawo

Babalawo begin training to be diviners as young as five or six years old. An apprentice usually studies with a master babalawo for three to ten years. Students learn by watching their teachers perform divinations for other people. Students are then tested by the instructor. Diviners memorize a thousand or more Ifa verses during this time. Diviners will continue to learn new divination verses for the rest of their lives. Because the

Yoruba had no written language to record important knowledge these verses acted as unwritten texts. The verses tell of myths, songs, riddles, proverbs, magic, and rituals in Yoruba society. There are said to be over 4,000 Ifa verses. Only men can become diviners. They usually do so because their father was a diviner or because they were told through divination to become a diviner.

Samuel Elufisoye, *divining for two clients who are seated across from him, Ife, Nigeria, 1937.*



Music and Dance

Music and dance have always been an important part of Yoruba culture for those living in Nigeria as well as in the diaspora. Yoruba music and dance are used for many different occasions in life such as religious festivals, royal occasions, and entertainment.

Yoruba traditional music focuses on Yoruba deities. Drums and singing are the main elements of Yoruba music. Instruments such as metal bells and wind instruments are sometimes used. Yoruba is a tonal language. Words must be pronounced in the appropriate tone (pitch) in

order to understand speech in its correct meaning. There are three major tones: high, mid, and low. Most of Yoruba music is based on these tonal patterns of speech.

Juju emerged in the 1920's and is the most well known form of Yoruba popular music in Nigeria. Juju has its roots in traditional Yoruba drum-based music. Juju is dance music played by large ensembles centered around guitars and drumming. Singing is a major part of Juju music and is inspired by Yoruba poetry, proverbs, praise songs, and the musical character of the language.



Drumming, Oro, Nigeria, 1960



Egungun Ceremonies

Egungun ceremonies take place in order to honor ancestors. Like Gelede festivals, masks and elaborate costumes are worn. Offerings are made to ancestors and performances help to remind people of the lives of their ancestors, while helping to reinforce the relationships between the living and the dead.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY NICOLE MULLEN

Gelede Festivals

Gelede festivals celebrate women and motherhood. These festivals are meant to honor the power and authority of females. Gelede performances take place each year at the beginning of the agricultural season. Dancers wear elaborate costumes and masks similar to those of a masquerade.

Above (left to right): Wooden Egungun Masks

Left: Wooden Gelede Mask



The Yoruba Diaspora

Diaspora is a word used to describe the migration of a people from their original homeland. Slavery meant the migration of millions of people from Africa to the Americas, including large numbers of the Yoruba population. When coming to the Americas the Yoruba held onto many of their important cultural traditions such as religion, music, myths, and divination.

When slaves were brought to the New World, they were forbidden from practicing their traditional religion. For example, in Cuba, they were told to practice the Catholic religion. This provoked them to invent a new religion called Santeria. They would pretend to pray to Christian saints in order to avoid getting into trouble with their slave masters. However, secretly they would worship their own deities.



Members of the “Children in Flight” group performing on Djembe drums at the 11th Yoruba National Convention held in Oakland, California, 2003.

The rich cultural heritage of the Yoruba slaves and their descendants has influenced and contributed a great deal to the Americas. Much of their traditional culture is still preserved in Brazil, Cuba, Haiti, and the United States.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY TOKUNBO ADEJIMI

Children listen to Yoruba folk tales told by Ogbeni Oladele Adejobi, at an event organized by Oduduwa Heritage Organization in Oakland, California, 2004.



Activities

1. Work as a group. Design your own economy—what crops would you grow, what goods would you sell, what would you export, and what would you need to import? What kinds of trades would be important to your economy? What trade would you want to have in the new economy and why?
2. There are many different ways of making art that represents people, as in the early life like sculpture of the Yoruba. Draw two (self) portraits, one abstract and one life like drawing. Which one do you prefer and why?
3. You have learned about two important Yoruba traditions, Gelede and Egungun ceremonies. Are there similar ceremonies or traditions in your community?

Make your own Egungun or Gelede masks in class using paper plates, crayons, markers and paint.



CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. How did many of the Yoruba get to the Americas from Africa? In what ways do you think their life-ways had to change? Where can the Yoruba be found today? Do they still practice any traditional life-ways?
2. What does diaspora mean? Can you think of other cultures besides the Yoruba that have been part of a diaspora?
3. If you were to worship a Yoruba Deity, which one would you choose and why?



REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Where is Nigeria located in Africa and what is the capital city of Nigeria?
2. Ifa Divination is part of the traditional religious practices of the Yoruba. What are some reasons why a person would seek divination and how would a Babalawo help?
3. Why are divination verses so important and what kind of subject matter do they talk about?
4. What is the most important instrument in Yoruba music?
5. List 3 Yoruba deities.
6. Name 3 staple foods for the Yoruba in Nigeria.
7. Why are twins important in Yoruba society?
8. List three ancient kingdoms in early Yoruba society.
9. What kinds of work do men and women do in Yoruba society?



REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Where is Nigeria located in Africa and what is the capital city of Nigeria?

Nigeria is located in West Africa, the capital is Lagos.

2. Ifa Divination is part of the traditional religious practices of the Yoruba. Why do people seek divination?

Ifa Diviners are called babalawo, fathers of ancient wisdom. Diviners are consulted about a wide-range of problems. Through the babalawo worshippers ask Ifa to help guide them in making a decision about whatever is troubling them.

3. Why are divination verses so important and what kind of subject matter do they talk about?

Because the Yoruba had no written language to record important knowledge these verses acted as unwritten texts. The verses tell of myths, songs, magic, rituals and social and political status in Yoruba society.

4. What is the most important instrument in Yoruba music?

drums

5. List 3 deities of the Yoruba.

Sango, Esu, Olorun, Oya, Ifa, Eleshije, Ogun.

6. Name 3 staple foods for the Yoruba in Nigeria.

Yams, cassava, plantains, meat, grains, poultry, fish, taro, palm oil.

7. Why are twins important in Yoruba society?

The Yoruba have one of the highest rates of twin births in the world. Twins (ibeji) are considered special children whose birth signifies good fortune. The loss of a twin is considered a great misfortune. If a twin dies, the mother has a memorial figure made and the soul of the deceased twin is transferred to it. The figure is then kept in the home and the mother continues to take care of it. She offers it food and prayers weekly and performs more elaborate rituals on the twin's birthday.

8. List three ancient kingdoms in early Yoruba society.

There were probably about 20 Yoruba kingdoms at one time. Some of them were known as Ife, Oyo, Ekiti, Nago, Ketu, Ijebu, Owo, Igbomina and Ondo.

9. What kinds of work do men and women do in Yoruba society?

Weavers, potters, carvers, farmers, fisherman, blacksmiths, beadworkers, babalawo.



LIST OF OBJECTS

After you have completed the lessons with your students, pass out some of the objects in class. Ask the students what they think the object might be and how it may be used.



1. **Yoruba painted wooden figure of Sango** the God of Thunder and a kneeling woman with a two faced headdress (see page 20).



2. **Yoruba brass figure** of a female child cast in the traditional wax method (see page 8).



3. **Yoruba divination bowl** in which the diviner (babalawo) stores the sixteen palm nuts used in Ifa divination. Painted male and female figures support the bowl.

Several types of containers for the palm nuts are commonly employed, the simplest of which is a pottery plate. In place of the earthenware black plates produced by Yoruba women, imported chinaware is often used. In Meko palm nuts were sometimes stored in a small cloth bag containing cowry shells. All these are considered perfectly adequate by diviners at Ife, and at Meko and Ilara; but if he can afford it, a diviner may wish to have a carved wooden cup or bowl to decorate his shrine and show his gratitude to Ifa.



4. **Yoruba divination bell**

As the figures marked in the wood dust are considered to be not simply the result of chance but are instead controlled by Ifa, who personally supervises each divination. The diviner may attract Ifa's attention before beginning to divine. As a greeting, he may knock a "bell" or tapper (iro, iroke Ifa) against the divining tray. Wealthier diviners have tappers carved of ivory or cast in brass, materials associated with kings and other elites. Many diviners own divining tappers, but they are not essential in divination, and in Ife the more experienced diviners often do not use theirs. However, when carried by a diviner, the tapper may serve to identify him.



5. **Yoruba beaded diviner's bag**

As diviners travel often in the pursuit of their profession, they frequently carry a portable set of Ifa paraphernalia in bags. The divining chain is kept and carried in a shoulder bag. It is made of locally woven cloth, or sometimes of leather, and it may be decorated with cowry shells or beads. Beaded bags are often smaller. A diviner is one of the very few non-royal persons permitted to use solidly beaded materials; these are usually reserved for the Yoruba kings, who had beaded cushions, slippers, and gowns, and who alone may wear beaded caps and crowns. Beaded bags, knife handles, hangings for the shrine, and other objects may be made by the diviners themselves, or by the beadworkers who work for the kings.

Palm nuts, divining tray, and bell may be carried in this bag if it is large enough, but for palm nuts other types of containers are usually provided, which remain at the shrine for Ifa most of the time.

(see pages 21-22 for more information on Ifa Divination)



6. **Yoruba woman's handbag** of leather dyed red, black and green (see page 14).



7. **Yoruba female ibeji figure** (see page 6).



8. **Carved gourd** (see page 15).



9. **Yoruba Gelede mask** used in festivals to honor women (see page 24).



10. **Yoruba cloth** of blue and yellow-brown cotton.

11. **Tape of traditional Yoruba music**

12. **Short film (no sound) of Yoruba pottery, textiles and woodcarving**



SOURCES CONSULTED

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“A Century Of Collecting” curated by Ira Jacknis, Research Anthropologist, PAHMA.

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