

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: SYMBOLS AND RITUAL: THE SOCIO-RELIGIOUS
 ROLE OF THE ÌGBÌN DRUM FAMILY.

Tamara De Silva, Master of Arts, 2006

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The Ìgbìn drum was used throughout Yorubaland and the socio-religious role of the drum is infused in many segments of Yoruba ritual, civic, and spiritual practice. Without the music of the Ìgbìn drums most funerals, festivals, and incantations at ceremonies would have been incomplete or impossible. My work discusses the meaning of the carved symbols on the drums surface, which connects us to the culture and religion. I also explain particular ceremonies or festivals where the drums have been used, as well as the more general habitual use of the drum by royalty and those in government. I consider the drum in context as a three-dimensional carved artwork, which is also a percussion instrument. I note its place

in terms of maintaining heritage and creating a liminal space taking into account Yoruba philosophy. The Ìgbìn is an instrument for retelling history, for exploring phenomena, and understanding the Yoruba religious canon.

SYMBOLS AND RITUAL: THE SOCIO-RELIGIOUS ROLE OF THE
ÌGBÌN DRUM FAMILY.

By

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Introduction

The drum is often used as a symbol to represent Africa. It is used on the cover of books, posters, and web pages as a cliché to flatten our notion of cultural Africa. Scholars have often indicated that historically the drum was used to indicate Africa and its culture; some argue that the use of this symbol was meant to be indicative of “primitive” culture.

The music of the *djembe*, which has origins in Guinea, Senegal and Mali, is respected and prevalent in the study of West African culture. Since the 1950s the *djembe* drum has been found outside of Africa in classrooms and community centers throughout the United States and Europe. Despite its prevalence throughout urban communities in the United States, the *djembe* drum should not be understood as the hegemonic voice of West African tradition and history. The *djembe* is only one of many percussive instruments used in Africa; the popular *djembe* drum frequently associated with the Baga people of Guinea, West Africa, like the *dun dun* and *bata* drums of the Yorùbá in Nigeria. Each drum descended from a rich lineage in Africa and has had an impact beyond its culture of origin, such as in the United States and the African Diaspora.

Many styles and types of Yorùbá drums are used in most cultural events and their collective symbolism helps to tie together elements of Yorùbá society. Community and cult members were connected to certain drums because it allowed for communication between the living and the ancestors. One example of maintaining tradition is in the cosmology of Yorùbá, expressed through the arts. Yorùbá arts demonstrate cultural preservation and oral tradition by the retelling of

history; relationships between young and old generations are praised, as well as between older generations and ancestors.

Drums known as the ritual drums of Nigeria have remained primarily remote and covert. On the other hand, drums such as the *dun dun* and *bata* are used primarily for secular events and are more visible in contemporary society. This music is mainstreamed into Nigerian popular music. Recordings of the music created on the ritual drums, conversely, are exceptionally rare; they can only be heard on one recording that was made in 1953 in Ọ̀yọ́, the once capital of Yorùbáland.¹ (See fig. 1)

Many ritual drums contain carved images. These depictions are not always indicative of a linear story; they are representations of events and traditions, mythic figures, and powerful forces from nature. A pictorial scene of figures on the drum is often like a snapshot of a moment during a ritual or civic meeting. Not all ritual drums contain highly sculptural carvings or narratives on their surfaces. Artists also carved decorative patterns with carefully designed forms, which serve certain functions. The ritual drum expresses the Yorùbá desire to honor Ifè, family history, tradition, myth, and spirituality.

I present the highly decorated carved ritual drums, known as *ìgbìn*, in terms of their use throughout the Yorùbá religious sphere. I discuss how the *ìgbìn* ritual drums and their carved sculpted “bas relief”² or low relief surfaces provide a symbolic representation of sacred space in ritual. I argue that application of the

¹ William Bascom, “Drums of The Yorùbá of Nigeria,” Folkways Records and Service Corporation. (1953. Ethnic Folkways Library: Album No. FE 4441), 2.

² William Bascom, “Drums of The Yorùbá of Nigeria,” 3. Here Bascom speaks of bas-relief to express the carved figures which project, most often only slightly from the background.

Yorùbá symbols such as those for *òrìṣà Èṣù* and *òrìṣà Olókun* directly correlate to the importance of these two mythic personalities in enacted rituals. My thesis contributes to the appreciation of these drums as complex art objects and as musical and metaphysical instruments.

In order to expound on these drum symbols, I answer three questions with regard to *ìgbìn* drums: What physical and functional characteristics define the *ìgbìn* drum family? What are the meanings behind the carved symbols? Why are the highly sculptural drums so important to Yorùbá understandings of temporality and the nature of being?

This paper does not address all the possible situations where the ritual drums are used. The ceremonies and rituals described here examine the *ìgbìn* drum family in “symbol situations.”³ Such a level of analysis presents a temporal cross section of events. Panoramas carved on the drums surface, which may appear as static snapshots, are better understood as triggers for dynamic and continuous activity.

The carvers of the drum created symbols that would strongly affect onlookers and people in prayer near the drums. This intention is implicit for carvers: if they have been trained well then they have given attention and care to the presentation of the drum. The carver knows that their images will contribute to the drummer’s preparation of ritual space for the exchange of energy and

³ Susanne Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969). I drew significant influence from Langer in this publication. Particularly, Langer affects the ways I have begun to formulate some explanations of symbols and signs. For example in this publication, she explains “sign” as something to act upon and “symbol situations” as observed meaning or relationships between symbolic meanings.

information. Yorùbá oral historians sing praises, prayers, and also recite myths; the drum is often the accompaniment. This includes the sound of drumming as well as the quiet presence of a decorated ritual drum.

The decorated drum is ornamented so that the viewer witnesses a physical and possible divine power. In his 1963 evaluation of Nigerian art, William Fagg wrote:

...whereas civilizations see the material world as consisting of static matter which can move or be moved in response to appropriate stimuli, tribal cultures tend to conceive things as four-dimensional objects in which the fourth or time dimension is dominant and in which matter is only a vehicle, or the outward and visible extension, of energy or *Ilfè* force.⁴

His point suggests that Yorùbá ritual figures (or sculptures) are not prayed to as an end but that the figure is a vehicle that aids in uplifting the prayers and intentions of priests and parishioners, who may be musicians. The artist works with the carving of the object while attending to the time dimension. This enables him to emulate temporal phenomena and the non-physical universe. He is manifesting the unseen energy.

The drum embodies what scholar of African art and literature Robert Plant Armstrong calls the “affecting presence” and can be expressed through the physical. Armstrong says, “Within the affecting presence lies energy, of which form is the visible dimension.”⁵ The art of the drum is a perfect example of the fourth dimension in visual space where Yorùbá aesthetics and metaphysics come

⁴ William Fagg. “Nigerian Images” (London: Lund Humphries, 1963), 122-123. Quoted in Robert Plant Armstrong “Wellspring: On the Myth and Source of Culture (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press., 1975), 28.

⁵ Robert Plant Armstrong. “Wellspring: On the Myth and Source of Culture” (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press., 1975), 31.

together. The signs and symbols affixed to, embodied in, and energized by the drum translate into spiritual traditions, ontological explanations, and representations of the arts of Nigeria. The drum facilitates activities in multi-dimensions. With the right spiritual medicine and charged symbols, in ritual context, the drum directly contributes to human beings experience of the presence of ancestor spirits and deified kings (*òrìṣà*).

Important Variables in the Study

Current fieldwork on the role of these drums in present day Nigeria does not exist. In the following chapters of this thesis I explain the covert role of the drum. The music of the *Ìgbìn* is clandestine; I have spoken with Akin Euba, whose texts are referenced throughout this paper, and he confirmed that there is only one recording of the music of the ritual drums, which was done by William Bascom and produced by the Smithsonian Folkways label.⁶ He also claims that the drums are still in use.

My research brings together various terms when referring to the drums so that they can be understood as existing in a broad classificatory schema of percussion instruments.⁷ Historians and ethnomusicologists have, for the most part, not shared terminology. For example, the *Ògbòni* drum is not symbolic of the form and function of all cylindrical membranophones in Yorùbáland. Rather the

⁶ William Bascom. "Drums of The Yorùbá of Nigeria," 1-6.

⁷ In the beginning of my research this was a major challenge, if I was reading a history document that referenced one of the key drums, without images, I could not be clear as to the actual drum under discussion.

Ìgbìn drum serves the purpose for a group term. Their most important use is for religious observances and state or local ceremonial occasions.

Generally, vocal chants are used along with the Ìgbìn drums. Both hand and/or stick techniques also are employed. A drummer may speak aloud the words in a praise poem, *oríkì*, along with or after a rhythm is drummed. In Òyó (the city known as the most powerful Nigerian political center in the 17th century), Akin Euba claims that this type of praise poetry was performed in the early morning. He states that music played at dawn was for listening:

... rather than dancing, all secondary instruments normally used for dance music are excluded with the exception of the *gudugudu* (a small kettle drum) which alone supplies the basic pattern against which no less than five talking drums [*dun dun*] play poetry in unison.⁸

Drumming in the morning can indicate various scenarios. Music in the king's compound would have been played in the morning for instance, in the tradition of waking the king with his drums. Also the music that was played in and outside of the palace in the morning was especially important to alert people of problems and situations. At any time of day, a visitor may arrive to the king's compound and drummers may drum "the *oríkì* of a visitor." Scholar of Yoruba culture, Karin Barber says:

Quoting an *oríkì* often leads automatically to a historical narrative. It may also be flushed out into a discussion of family taboos, the characters of the gods, or the composition and relations of social groups. *Oríkì* are used to swell the reputation of the person they are addressed to and to lay claim to membership of certain social groups.⁹

⁸ Akin Euba, *Essays On Music in Africa Vol. I*, (Bayreuth, West Germany: Akin Euba), 22.

⁹ Karin Barber. "Yorùbá Attitudes Towards *Òrìṣà*," *Africa* Vol. 51 No. 3 (1981): 3.

Very few individuals would have heard the drumming performed in the king's compound. Certain kings may have had their own set of court drummers and drums, which Akin Euba implies would never be played outside the king's palace and so the music would be heard by a select few.¹⁰

Margaret Thompson Drewal's published images of the royal ìgbìn drums are among the few images taken in the field. She identifies them as Ògbòni and *agba* (I will clarify these terms later). (See fig. 2) When these particular drums were taken out of the Ògbòni palace or temple all non-members would be chased into their homes.¹¹ So both visually and aurally these ìgbìn were accessible to only the selected few.

The greatest challenge to interpreting the ìgbìn occurs when the highly decorated carved drum visually depicts a connection to the religious, "the play," and the rule of governance simultaneously; one drum might be used in numerous settings. Victor Turner, writing on the idea of ritual and play states:

For 'work' is held to be the realm of the rational adaptation of means to ends, of 'objectivity', while 'play' is thought of as divorced from this essentially 'objective' realm, and, in so far as it is its inverse, it is 'subjective,' free from external constraints, where any and every combination of variable can be 'played' with.¹²

A range of meaning is embedded in Yorùbá ritual and social activities. Whether the ìgbìn is put to use in the highly religious sphere or in daily prayer, there lies potential for something magical to be present and for play to occur.

¹⁰ Akin Euba, *Essays On Music in Africa*, 35-38.

¹¹ Margaret Thompson Drewal, *Yorùbá Ritual* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992).

¹² Victor Turner, *From Ritual To Theatre; The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York City: Performing Arts Journal Publications: 1982), 17.

In *The Ritual Process; Structure and Anti-Structure*, Victor Turner presents the concept of *spontaneous communitas*. In his text he asks us to consider “the moment” as he explains “...when compatible people- friends, congeners- obtain a flash of lucid mutual understanding on the existential level, when they feel that all problems, not just their problems, could be resolved, whether emotional or cognitive (if only the group which is felt in the first person as ‘essentially us’) [then] they sustain its intersubjective illumination.”¹³ This sphere of interaction is experienced as “in time” or harmonious, and the value of honest self-presentation and sincerity is seriously elevated among this group. When this combination takes place in ritual there is an elevation of energy and power, which is necessary to reach the goal(s) intended. In this concept of *spontaneous communitas* actualization is heightened such as in Yorùbá ritual when the drum and its language is used.

I focus on the many roles of the Ìgbìn but the reader should continue to consider what is not seen in the setting where the drum is used. The fourth or time dimension holds a critical role in the meaning of the drums symbols and plays an essential role in creating community.

¹³ Victor Turner. *The Ritual Process; Structure and Anti-Structure*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977.

Chapter 1 Understanding the Role of the Drum

The drum is an essential aspect of Yorùbá culture. For secret societies like the Ògbòni and for the pantheon of Yorùbá gods known collectively as the *òrìṣà* the drummer can serve as a narrator of a story or a ceremony. Drummers may tell a story in between drumming verses; they may also directly assist a priest in conducting activities of ritual. Drummers, like priests and diviners, are a medium to connect the social world of the Yorùbá to the unseen world.

The historian Samuel Johnson lived in Nigeria in the mid-nineteenth century. Johnson was born in Freetown, Liberia, in eighteen forty-six.¹⁴ His father was a “recaptive,” he was enslaved, possibly in Òyó during a war, and then freed at sea. Afterwards he resettled in Freetown.¹⁵ Samuel Johnson, as a child, moved to Nigeria with his family. His brother made sure his work on Yoruba history through the years was published, at the time of his death his manuscripts were apparently missing.¹⁶

Johnson’s field notes are some of the first to refer to specific drums, such as the *gbedu*, and to drummers as Isugbins, well-known members of the palace orchestra. Johnson wrote, “They [Isugbins] number about 210 persons, playing on Flfès, the *okinkin* [trumpets] and Ivory trumpets, and the special drums were *Gbedu* [capitalization his]. The Alukoso or Koso drummer’s chief duty is to wake

¹⁴ The Reverend Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorùbás; From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate* (Westport, Connecticut; Negro University Press: 1921 and 1970), 43.

¹⁵ Olu Akinwumi, http://www.dacb.org/stories/nigeria/johnson_1samuel.html DACB, The Dictionary of African Christian Biography. Copyright © 2002 Dictionary of African Christian Biography.

¹⁶ Olu Akinwumi, http://www.dacb.org/stories/nigeria/johnson_1samuel.html

up the King every morning at 4 a.m. with his drum.”¹⁷ The drummers who played the *aludundun* or the *dundun* were also in the palace orchestra but their main responsibility was to visit the palace everyday during assigned hours. The *aludundun* drum informed the king of visitors. (The *aludundun* are not Ìgbìn.) According to Johnson, all drummers were responsible for knowing the important royal and founding lineages and the narratives that connected these personages so that the drummer might drum the visitor’s lineage upon arrival. In order to maintain this knowledge the drummer worked with a special civil servant appointed to preserve oral history – the Arokins,¹⁸ who were also the drummers. He states further, “The names, praises and attributes of every family of note are known to all drummers, and musicians, and they are experts in eulogizing and enlarging on the praises of anyone they wish to honour, speaking it with their drums.”¹⁹ The Arokins are also performers of national history. Their recitation of key historical events is interspersed with drumming which restates in a rhythmic language the important aspects of the oratory. Isugbins can also be national historians. They are responsible for repeating and practicing daily “...in song the genealogy of the kings, the principle events of their lives and other noble events in the history of the Yorùbá country.”²⁰

¹⁷ Johnson, *The History of the Yorùbás; From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, 58.

¹⁸ “The chief of the Arokins is a councilor, bearing the title of Ologbo, ‘one who possesses the old times,’ and a proverb says ‘Ologbo baba arokin,’ Ologbo is the father of chroniclers.” Ellis, A.B. “The Yorùbá-Speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa, 1894” <http://www.sacred-texts.com/afr/yor/yor12.htm> Internet Sacred Text Archive, Copyright 2006.

¹⁹ Johnson, *The History of the Yorùbás; From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, 58.

²⁰ Ibid.

The very vocabulary of the drum music acts to support, conserve, and energize an otherwise primarily oral linguistic history. One example of the drum language follows:

The first king of whom the *arokbi*, or chroniclers, have any knowledge is *Ajagbo*, who appears to have reigned soon after 1780, and whose name is preserved in the metrical sentence which fixes the rhythm of the *ogidigbo* drum, as follows: *Gbo, Ajagbo, gbo oba gbo, ki emi, ki osi gbo.*” Translates as: "Grow old, *Ajagbo*, grow old king, grow old, may I also grow old." Each drum has its own measure or rhythm, which is proper to it, and, in order to preserve this rhythm, sentences are invented to call it to mind. In this case the rhythm is--Gbo | Ajegbo | - | gbo | oba gbo | - | ki emi ki osi | gbo.²¹

In another example music is performed for *òrìṣà* Obàtálá (a deified king). The drum language is played and its meaning is recited as a prayer:

Babarugbo se ree mi fun mi, *òrìṣà*, seree mi fun mi, Obàtálá se rere mi fun me. Babarugbo o wo le me ji, o gba gba o bi. Baba baba burin buirin gba gbao bi. Old man, help me to realize my good fortune, god, help me to realize my good fortune. Old man he who enters houses, he received two hundred cola nuts. Wise one who cuts journeys and received two hundred cola nuts.²²

Certain drums are the medium for the king’s connection with the ancestors.

The court of a Yorùbá king typically has an *ìgbìn* royal drum “set” which is emblematic of his regal authority and may be permanently housed within the court. These paramount drums stand as proxy for the deified kings and sacred ancestors, which are celebrated and placated with these drums. Yorùbá art and cultural history help to explain how drums have helped to preserve history and how they have served as a conduit for the ancestors. Even carved royal doors and diviner’s bowls sometime show the drum holding a key role. A royal door from Osi-

²¹ A.B. Ellis. “The Yorùbá-Speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa, 1894” <http://www.sacred-texts.com/afr/yor/yor12.htm> Internet Sacred Text Archive, Copyright 2006.

²² Akin Euba, *Essays on Music in Africa*, Vol. I. (West Germany: Universitat Bayreuth, Iwalewa-Haus, 1988), 18.

Ilorin reveals three drummers, top of the lower left scene: two playing the *dun dun* and one playing a small *gudugudu*, which is worn around the neck – played with hands or sticks. (See fig. 3) Since the beginning of Yorùbá civilization at Ifè, circa 1300, kingship has been held to be a divine entitlement. In Ifè and Òyó, systems of government and spirituality have been historically interconnected. The Yoruba believe the king has the ability to live with the people and also to communicate with the gods and the ancestors. This in-depth connection is visible in the palace and in public on special occasions. The drums and musicians together represent, connections with the ancestors, nobility, and structure in society.

In this paper I argue that the Ìgbìn drum is metonymic; it represents the interconnectedness of Yorùbá spiritual Ifè. Drumming provides a means for the *òrìṣà* to enter the world of the living and sometimes with possession trance. “Each *òrìṣà* has its own town of origin, its own personality and special attributes, its own taboos and observances, and its own corpus of *oríkì* [praise poems].”²³ Many *òrìṣà* were once living people and upon their death were deified. There are *òrìṣà* that are associated or represent natural elements and can be connected to a town’s local waterway or mountain. The Ìgbìn was used throughout Yorùbáland (archaeological and intellectual term for the Yorùbá territory) and the socio-religious role of the drum is infused in many segments of Yorùbá ritual and spiritual practice. Without the music of the Ìgbìn drums most funerals, festivals, and incantations at ceremonies would have been incomplete or impossible. More generally speaking without the use of percussion instruments, countless

²³ Karin Barber, “Yorùbá Attitudes Towards *Òrìṣà*,” *Africa* Vol. 51 No. 3 (1981): 724.

celebrations, possession rituals, and royal processions could not have been carried out.

The relationship between people and drums in Yorùbá society is innovative. This relationship provides access to spiritual, ontological, and cultural information that is visible and invisible. The drum allows this information to be accessed through sound, symbols, basic design, and characteristic rhythms. All drums in the Ìgbìn drum family represent historically, the bridge between domains both sacred and secular.

Specifically, the Ìgbìn drum family is made up of several sets. These drums are not played singly and were not meant to be played or seen as pairs but are often seen as such in museums around the world. Many of these instruments are displayed in books for visual analysis, but not in their original set. In Frank Willet's *African Art* and in M.T. Brincard's *Sounding Forms* these drums are showcased because of their intricately carved surface and majestic aesthetic.²⁴ (See figures 4,5) Similarly the *gbedu* drum is shown solo in Sandra T. Barnes' *Africa's Ògún*.²⁵ (See fig. 6) During the course of time many drum families were separated; drums are often retired, purchased by art collectors and museums, or sold off at the breakdown of a cult or community. By extracting the drums from the intended setting and singling them out for aesthetic purposes, knowledge of their primary

²⁴ Marie-Thérèse Brincard, *Sounding Forms; African Musical Instruments* (New York: American Federation of Arts, 1989), 113. Willett, Frank *African Art* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), 249.

²⁵ Sandra T. Barnes, *Africa's Ògún; Old Worlds and New* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 111.

forces and functions has been scattered. Thankfully extensive cross-disciplinary research can reassemble the meanings carried by the drums.

Through the epistemological lens of ethnomusicologists, art historians, and Africanists, I provide an analysis that spans the sacred and secular, the royal and vernacular. This allows for an analysis of the drums that preserves the integrity of their aesthetic and functional value. My study focuses on those drums from the collections of the Museum of Unity, Alesinloye, Ibadan and The National Museum, Lagos in Nigeria.²⁶ In 2004 I assisted Dr. Ekpo Eyo and Dr. Chris Slogar with fieldwork in Calabar. After completion of our work, I traveled to Ibadan and then to Lagos to gather information on and to photograph several *ìgbìn* drums in the museums' collections.

Review of the Literature

Several texts are essential to my own study. They include Margaret Thompson Drewal's *Yorùbá Ritual*, Darius Thieme's dissertation *A Descriptive Catalogue of Yorùbá Musical Instruments*, and William Bascom's article "Drums of the Yorùbá of Nigeria."²⁷ Each of these recent publications includes images of the drums in the field and are based in ethnomusicology.

²⁶ See National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM), National Museum, Onikan Road, Lagos, Nigeria.

²⁷ William Bascom. "Drums of the Yorùbá of Nigeria," 2. Darius Thieme L. A., "Descriptive Catalogue of Yorùbá Musical Instruments." PhD Diss., Catholic University Press. (1969). Margaret Thompson Drewal, *Yorùbá Ritual* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992).

Other works important to my understanding of the role of the drum and, specifically its emblems include: *Yorùbá Art and Aesthetics*,²⁸ *The Yorùbá Artist: New Theoretical Perspectives on African Arts*, and *Icon and Image; A Study of Sacred and Secular Forms of African Classical Art*.²⁹ Most vital to my visual analysis are my unpublished photographs of drums from the collection of the Lagos and Ibadan National Museums (NCMM), which I was able to take, thankfully, in 2003 with the assistance of Dr. Eyo.

In surveying the relevant literature, I have found that some of the ìgbìn drums are well illustrated, but are often accompanied by poor, incomplete, or incorrect contextual information. In other studies, the context and meaning of the drum is clear, yet the visual description is conspicuously absent. Therefore, I bring the two together by presenting the settings in which these highly decorated drums would be seen or heard in combination with their symbolic significance. The social contexts in which the drums were intended to function directly determine the way the meanings of the symbols carved on the drums are interpreted. I rely on key scholars in the areas of Yorùbá ritual, Yorùbá art history and masquerades to provide crucial background for my analysis of ìgbìn drums.

Scholars and ethnographers working in the field often sidelined the ìgbìn drums. Yorùbá history between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries is exciting as well as complicated and sometimes extremely dense; there were many migrations

²⁸ Rowland Abiodun, Henry John Drewal, and John Pemberton III, *The Yorùbá Artist: New Theoretical Perspectives on African Arts* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994).

²⁹ Denis Williams, *Icon and Image; A Study of Sacred and Secular Forms of African Classical Art* (London: Allen Lane, 1974). Rowland Abiodun, Henry John Drewal, and John Pemberton III, *Yorùbá Art and Aesthetics* (Museum Rietburg, Zurich: Center for African Art and Museum Rietberg, 1991).

and wars in the region to consider. Should we assume then that ethnographers overlooked the presence of these drums? That maybe they were not present or that they were not accessible or important to the researcher? These are difficult questions; usually the few from the twentieth century who documented the existence of these drums were cultural historians and did not often describe the drum.

Darius Thieme³⁰ and Oba Layole I³¹ are ethnomusicologists and cultural historians. They describe Yorùbá drum families in terms of musicological and anthropological terms. Scholars Akin Euba³² and Margaret Thompson Drewal³³ bring the Yorùbá drums to Ifè when they discuss the drums in terms of the living performative arts and art history. My work includes synopsis on key terms these scholars present.

Oba Laoye I, Timi of Ede, is the foremost expert on Yorùbá drums and has provided my foundation for describing the Ìgbìn. He was a traditional Yorùbá ruler of the Western Nigerian city of Ede; the title of kingship in Ede is the *Timi of Ede*. He was also a master drummer and very much interested in cultural preservation. Hence, he has authority across disciplines. In his 1950 text he provides images of the drum families, hand drawn for illustration, and recounts their names individually and as groups. (See figures 7, 8) However similar his grouping seems,

³⁰ Darius Thieme L. A.. "Descriptive Catalogue of Yorùbá Musical Instruments." PhD diss., Catholic University press. (1969).

³¹ Oba Laoye, I, Timi of Ede. "Yorùbá Drums," *Od'u*. (Ibadan, Nigeria 1950): 5-14.

³² Euba, *Essays On Music in Africa Vol. I*.

³³ Margaret Thompson Drewal, *Yorùbá Ritual* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992).

he arranged his material purposefully to show that the instruments were not randomly put together for performances. His organization of materials allows the reader to see the similarities among individual drums and within the combinations for ensembles. His work along with Esther A. Dagan's *Drums The Heartbeat of Africa*³⁴ were useful in my own formulation and presentation of the ̀gb̀n ritual drums. (See fig. 9) Dagan's text is a broad overview of drums from across the African continent. The "agba" drums for ̀gb̀ni are highlighted as well as a pictorial of the ̀gb̀n drum's role in African art. Dagan even includes the illustrated image from Laoye's publication.

Explaining Ritual in Terms of the ̀gb̀n

In Yorùbáland, any recurrent festival or ceremony begins with the retelling of a Yorùbá myth. This performative feature is endemic to Yorùbá ritual. Myths are ritually enacted as systems to explore and seek explanation to human origins and ultimate destiny. "Rituals honor those who have passed on to the world of the ancestors and provide a space where we may explore the profound and experience phenomena."³⁵ Along with her text *Yorùbá Ritual* Margaret Thompson Drewal made a video in the field that is a great resource for the exploration of phenomena and ritual in Yorùbá culture. This video documents sacred ceremonies, no drums are displayed.

³⁴ Esther A. Dagan, *Drums The Heartbeat of Africa* (Quebec, Canada: Galerie Amrad Art Publications, 1993).

³⁵ Ritual or performances "...permeate our dreams, our value systems, our social transactions, our formulations of history, and our pursuit of answers through ritual enactment..." Carol E. Robertson "Myth, Cosmology, and Performance." *The Universe of Music* Vol 1 (1996) Malena Kuss, Ed Unesco & Smithsonian Institution Press.

Drewal utilizes Yorùbá terminology in order to better express how the Yorùbá conceptualize ritual. According to Drewal, when Yorùbá ritual is executed reality and drama interact. “Yorùbá rituals (*etutu*) are propitiatory performances for the deities, ancestors, spirits, and human beings. They propitiate, or “cool” (*tu*), in that they entail both sacrifice (*ebo*) and play (*ere*), and in this they are socially and spiritually efficacious.”³⁶ Participants usually known as actors, within the ritual setting, may not have designated roles. They have a wide array of social relations, which shape the extent of their participation. “Yorùbá ritual functions politically, often excludes certain categories of people, and involves power plays among participants or between participants and other groups.”³⁷ I would argue that in any ritual, the drum asserts a group’s power to give to their *òrìṣà*, and propagate its traditions. It can also be used to assert a government’s power to rule.

Ritual, festival, and spectacle overlap in what Margaret Thompson Drewal describes as “Yorùbá performance categories.”³⁸ The *Ìgbìn*’s role in “ritual” can range from subtle to extremely fiery. Using Margaret Thompson Drewal’s explanation of terms, the drums role within *òrìṣà* worship is ritual in public and in private. In his study of Yorùbá religion John Pemberton states: “Knowledge without ritual lacks efficacy”!³⁹

³⁶ Thompson Drewal, *Yorùbá Ritual*, 19.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 26.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 13. The analytic categories are depicted in her diagram.

³⁹ John Pemberton, *Eshu-Elegba: The Yorùbá Trickster God*, *African Arts* Vol IX. No 1.(October 1975): 66.

The Yorùbá Ritual Drum and The Journey

In Yorùbá culture ritual establishes a body of relationships and transformations. This includes, maintaining a relationship between an individual and the past history of his or her culture. It includes learning and teaching incantations, dances, songs, and ontology, thus establishing students and teachers. Teacher and student practicing the drum music with their traditions, re-establishes knowledge of self and wisdom.

Certain signs in the drums surface and the rhythms are meant as a reminder that Ifè is a journey just as a ritual can be a journey. Ositola, an Ifá Diviner or *Babaláwo*⁴⁰ who Margaret Thompson Drewal discusses in depth, affirms that the drums music is to support Ifè's "journeys." Ositola calls this music "*ewele*."⁴¹

For anthropologists and historians of religion, ritual has been a model *par excellence* of the return to the whole, a romantic longing for a mythical time and place where communality, coherence, connectedness, collective conscience, and efficacy characterized the social order.⁴²

The Ìgbìn drum survives on the practice of *habitus*: a Ifèstyle, which includes enormous repetition, implementation, and dedication. Any drummer or participant in a festival or masquerade could potentially become an oral historian; every time they participate they build knowledge of the meaning of the event, they build a relationship with themselves each time they play a part, and they build a

⁴⁰ "The highly-trained specialist *Ifá* priests, who master a great corpus of divination verses deal with every aspect of their cosmology." Barber, *Yorùbá Attitudes Towards Òrìṣà*, 724. "The highly-trained specialist *Ifá* priests, who master a great corpus of divination verses deal with every aspect of their cosmology."

⁴¹ Thompson Drewal, *Yorùbá Ritual*, 36.

⁴² Thompson Drewal, *Yorùbá Ritual*, XV.

relationship with the viewers when they repeatedly share their time and knowledge. Conceptually the drummer and carver of the drum both are surrounded by and are aware of on-going traditional and cultural events. Whether in the sacred or secular sphere they must convey, practice, and teach traditions so that customs will be perpetuated.

Chapter 2 Ìgbìn Drums and Socio Religious Groups: A Detailed Look

The drum helps to build the metaphor for journey; it uncovers a sensory threshold. If we study Yorùbá religious ceremonies including those entailing masquerade we can see that the ceremony can be a journey and it can be a metaphor for Ifè's larger journey. An aspect of understanding "journey" in these contexts is to compare a mixture of movement, change, and layered meanings, in a space where possession is possible.⁴³ This is a space where individuals are encapsulated by the energy they create as a group. Drum music can be played to create an atmosphere that may support singing, and possibly, together with music can facilitate a group or individual's connection to the ancestors and the living. This sort of gathering creates a setting where affiliates disconnect from notions of societal or status constructs. It opens a place where journey is possible. A journey often begins in a liminal space, one where the daily activities and daily roles may be put away for a while.

Other examples of spaces where a journey is possible include a physical journey one might set out on to learn something perhaps while traveling or a metaphorical journey when a devotee and deity travel together. In a service or prayer ceremony the devotee may be locked in an internal focus on the deity. This

⁴³ One aspect of possession can be read in Lorand Matory's discussion of Yorùbá History in Sex and the Empire. Lorand J Matory, *Sex and the Empire That Is No More: Gender and The Politics of Metaphor in Ọyọ-Yorùbá Religion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press., 1994). In this text, Şàngó in Ọyọ is conceptualized figuratively and literally. The mounting of a horse is realized in the power of Shango; to 'mount' a witch or a priest connotes spirit possession. Shango paid homage to the great king Oduduwa and he himself was considered a great king. Later, when "Şàngó died, he became an orisha. When he was deified he gained the power to mount or possess mortals in ritual celebrations.

occurs after a devotee moves from prayer and enters a trance or meditation while focusing on worship and the power of the divine. This energy may keep the devotee focused on his or her purpose in the circle of devotees with each individual aware of his or her role and responsibilities within the community. With concentration, the devotee can transcend these communal concerns, letting go of the group dynamic and embarking on a spiritual journey under the guidance of his or her *òrìṣà* in a private experience that no onlooker could fully read. The *òrìṣà* and the devotee must be dutiful. The drum and associated Yorùbá sculptures are often employed as catalysts for the type of concentration needed here.⁴⁴ The face of Èṣù, for example, is known to empower and assist with this type of focused concentration. (See figures 10-13)

I hope to convey the essence of the rituals, especially because descriptions of 'live' rituals by scholars on *òrìṣà* practices noted here are unavailable. Author O.B. Lawuyi discusses the intangibility of Yorùbá religious practice: "It is essentially difficult to describe a Yorùbá religious festival. It is not what happens that really matters, nor is it important what is done."⁴⁵ As I have searched for real ethnographic explanations taken in the field, I have continued to read that it is the mystical that is of the utmost importance.

⁴⁴ If the devotee is focused and following guidance as directed by priests he or she can connect with the *òrìṣà*: "...the deity must be alert or attentive to be effective, a state associated with the [devotee's] spiritual inner head, and visibly manifested in facial expression, particularly in the eyes." "The spiritual inner head is to a person's face (oju) what the invisible spirit of a deity is to its shrine (ojubo)." Henry John Drewal, and Margaret Thompson Drewal, "Composing Time and Space in Yorùbá Art," *Word and Image; African Art and Literature* Vol.3 No. 3 (July-September 1987): 228.

⁴⁵ O.B. Lawuyi. "The Obàtálá Factor in Yorùbá History" *History of Africa* Vol. 19 (1992): 369-375.

In some instances information on the group that utilized the *Ìgbìn* is supplied without, however, an adequate description of how that group used their drum. I therefore relay characteristics and any known practices of the drums in order for us to understand their owners. This is in addition to whatever we might understand of the people based on the symbols of the drums' surface carvings. I include descriptions of the *òrìṣà* most often associated with the *Ìgbìn* and their traditions and or the *òrìṣà* groups actual event where the drum is used.

I also introduce what are known as ancestor societies or cults. Much of the detail is important in order to frame the places and occasions in which the cults or societies were active. This background work should provide enough information so that we might be able to, in a potential, subsequent study, identify the date and place of origin of the actual drums featured in my photos taken in the Nigerian museums.

Introducing Ògbóni and Orò

Ògbóni and Orò are among the leading Yorùbá societies, or cults. They are often characterized as “secret” societies and the drum is central to many of their practices. *Òrìṣà* cults differ from Ògbóni and Orò in that their participants do not characteristically wear masks, exclude women, or conceal the identity of those initiated as members.⁴⁶ However, the *òrìṣà* cults and Orò and Ògbóni societies share a characteristic in that they act in an advisory role when serving the king.

⁴⁶ William Bascom. “The Sociological role of The Yorùbá Cult Group,” 49. See this article for an extended explanation of his definitions of cults or societies.

William Bascom claims in his work that both Orò and Ògbóni are considered political, social, and religious and at varying levels they are secret societies.

Bascom understands them as groups whose secrets must not lie in the hands of women, and it is especially important for them not to reveal their power and their knowledge publicly. Consequently, some restrictions on the participation of women are enforced, but according to art historian Babatude Lawal the more extreme cases of excluding women completely is a fairly new practice among these groups.

Discussions of Ògbóni and Orò depart markedly from discussions on *òrìṣà* because the former deal specifically with safeguarding society, rules, and funerary traditions. The Ògbóni, Orò, Egúngún, and Gelede are all ancestor cults whose networks of participants and officers constitute much of the political structure of Yorùbá society. Alongside and within the state, *òrìṣà* and Ifá practitioners and disciples could negotiate with Ògbóni members to resolve community problems. In a given town, an *òrìṣà* group, while religiously more significant, might not have as much political influence as the Ògbóni within that town.

Members of the *òrìṣà* groups were free to practice traditional rites, pray in a tightly knit community, and celebrate the many *òrìṣà* at their discretion in public ceremonies and privately in home shrines. When an individual prays to the *òrìṣà* that he was born to have as his or her spirit guide it is often in a home shrine (for some people this very personal *òrìṣà* is not known). Over a hundred *òrìṣà* have been documented, but the Ògbóni and Orò are far less inclusive in their membership.

Orò

The Orò are noted for insuring justice and policing the community especially during special occasions. “In the name of the Earth sometimes goes Orò, the men who use the bullroarer to make terrifying sounds to underscore moral vengeance and occasionally as the basis for sculpture in secluded ceremonies.”⁴⁷ The bullroarer – often decorated with carvings – is used for sounding warnings and also to scare off the uninitiated. It is also celebrated in some indigenous cultures in Australia. This rare idiophone is represented in relief on Ìgbìn drums. (See fig. 14) The bullroarers on fig. 14 flank the figurative representation of Èṣù which is central to the positions in which the symbols are aligned. “When a rope is passed through the hole at one end and the rhomb is whirled rapidly, it produces a sound believed to be that of Orò, a cult deity who represents the male dead.”⁴⁸ They utilized their totem instrument and symbol the bullroarer to “...proclaim curfew when riots were expected...”.⁴⁹ The bullroarer or rhomb was used to announce executions in a secret area of the Orò grove. In Yorùbáland the bullroarer itself is usually carved of wood and adorned with the human figure or a scene.⁵⁰

The spirit of the ancestors works through the Orò cult to carry out their will.

The Orò can work on behalf of or directly with the Ògbóni to regulate rules. The

⁴⁷ Robert Farris Thompson, *Black Gods and Kings*, 3.

⁴⁸ J.R. Ojo. “Ògbóni Drums,” 51.

⁴⁹ Saburi O. Biobaku, *The Egba and Their Neighbors 1842-1872* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1965), 5.

⁵⁰ For more details on the bullroarer see Thompson, *Black Gods and Kings*. Thompson, Robert Farris. *Black Gods and Kings* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1971), Chapter 6 figures 24, 25.

Egba forest was within the Ọ̀yọ́ Yorùbá provinces; it may have been in Egba when the Orò cult first arose. Since the nineteenth century and after numerous wars, Egba has been an independent city. African art historian, J.R. Ojo argues that in Egba, the Orò cult drew its members from the males who belonged to Ọ̀gbóni. Ojo includes in his statement a note on the Orò as an ancestral cult at its root, which is closely associated with Ọ̀gbóni. The Orò high priest was known as Ijeun. The Orò handled the execution of condemned criminals most likely with directions from Ọ̀gbóni.

During Orò festivals, practical application of traditional honor and obedience is performed. “The drama of moral vengeance resounded in urban festivals like Orò and perhaps contributed to the general peace and honesty which prevailed in most kingdoms until the civil wars of the nineteenth century resulting from multiple foreign pressures.”⁵¹ J.R. Ojo contends that the Orò would be called and the name of the spirit Orò would be loudly announced in the streets; this was done, in some instances, to try to deter people from converting to Christianity.

The Orò and Ọ̀gbóni were dedicated to the maintenance of Yorùbá cultural continuity and were active during the height of colonialism. Colonial repression is likely one of the reasons these cults and societies adopted so many secret practices. In a photograph cited as “Orò Yorùbá” the squat ̀gbìn drum is shown being played inside a tight circle of people. (See fig. 15) They are members of Orò. This is one of very few supporting documents on the practice of drumming by

⁵¹ Thompson, *Black Gods and Kings*, 2.

the Orò society but because they worked closely with Ògbóni we can assume that drumming is also a part of much of traditional Ògbóni practices.

Ògbóni

The Ògbóni society is at its core a political and religious cult. Evidence suggests an “origin” in Ile-Ifè then, through southward migration and conquest it was transferred to Egba and Ijebu. Ògbóni was established in Ile-Ifè possibly before the first Yorùbá king, king Oduduwa’s rule. According to Babatunde Lawal, Ògbóni was first known as ‘Mole.’ Ògbóni continued to develop in New Òyó in the nineteenth century. “The Egba brought the Ògbóni institution with them from Ile-Ifè and developed it to such an extent that it has become the most characteristic Egba institution.”⁵²

Lawal argues that in Egba and Ijebu this society is known as Òsùgbó. “Much of the society’s authority derives from its role as the vital link between the community and the Earth that sustains ... In essence, the Ògbóni venerates the Earth (Ilè) to ensure human survival, peace, happiness, and social stability in the community.”⁵³ Ògbóni spirituality is based on relationship to and veneration of the Earth; its worship practices are not dependent on the creation of temples or objects in its reverence. The essential reason here for imparting such emphasis on the discussion of Ògbóni, or Òsùgbó, is its function to support societal and spiritual cohesiveness and preserve tradition and history.

⁵² Saburi O. Biobaku, *Egba and Their Neighbors*, 5.

⁵³ Babatunde Lawal. “Á Yà Gbó, Á Yà Tó; New Perspectives on Edan Ògbóni,” *African Arts* (Winter 1995): 37.

In an article titled *The Yorùbá Ògbóni Cult: Did it Exist in Old Òyọ́?*

J.A. Atanda dedicated his studies to “clarifying” Peter Morton-Williams’ so-called misattribution of the cult in Old Òyọ́. Williams’ work shows the predominant role Ògbóni had in Old Òyọ́. Atanda’s work challenges Morton-Williams’ assertion of an Ògbóni presence in Old Òyọ́. Atanda does not claim to know the exact time and distinct place that Ògbóni began in New Òyọ́, but he argues they did not have a presence in Old Òyọ́. New Òyọ́ was founded in 1837 when Alafin Atiba ruled New Òyọ́ after the collapse and destruction of the Old Òyọ́ Empire.⁵⁴

Atanda challenges earlier scholars who documented Old Òyọ́ history without full consideration of Òyọ́ political Ifè. These scholars, Atanda argues, neither analyzed the role of government in the society nor considered the effect of this government on the real lives of the people under its authority. He says, “...the Ògbóni as a phenomenon in Òyọ́’s history did not anti-date the reign of the Alafin Atiba (c.1837-1859), who came to throne after the fall of the Old Òyọ́ Empire.”⁵⁵ When he refers to the time between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Atanda specifies, “... nothing checks the Òyọ́ Mesi from constantly rejecting the Alafins.”⁵⁶ If the Òyọ́ Mesi has the final say he could have too much power; historically the Ògbóni checks the Òyọ́ Mesi.

⁵⁴ It is plausible that practices associated with Ògbóni were first presented in Old Òyọ́. And artistic works may be able to help support this fact. However, there is much supportive information to oppose this. Justice Anyebe and J.A. Atanda would argue, the Ògbóni did not exist there- an important note for any reader who delves into Ògbóni history or who dates carvings from Òyọ́.

⁵⁵ J.A. Atanda. “The Yorùbá Ògbóni Cult: Did it Exist in Old Òyọ́,” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*. Vol. VI No. 4 (June 1973): 366.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 367.

Reverend Samuel Johnson lived near and studied at Old Òyó. He discovered no evidence of the Ògbóni there. In his *History of the Yorùbá*, he presents knowledge of "...its early existence elsewhere in Yorùbáland, particularly among the Egba and the Ijebu."⁵⁷ (In these areas it is more commonly known as Òsùgbó.) He investigated the neighboring towns, which were the most influenced by Old Òyó including the incorporation of Ògbóni into their ritual practices; these were towns such as Saki, Igboho, Igbeti and Ogbomoso. In his studies he asserts that there is no indication "...that the cult was of any significance in the traditional political set-up of these towns at least up to the time of the collapse of the Old Òyó empire in the early nineteenth century."

Johnson first mentions Ògbóni in his discussion of high ranking women at the court. "Obagunte ...represents the King in the Ògbóni house on ordinary occasions, her work being strictly connected with that fraternity. She enters the Ògbóni chamber on all occasions and acts in the King's name, reporting to his majesty the events of each day's sitting. Whenever the King wishes to entertain the Ògbónis, she has to undertake that duty."⁵⁸ Johnson also draws special attention to the Ògbónis in his section on Egba history. Many Egba people resettled in New Òyó after a series of wars. Johnson also notes that at Abeokuta the Ògbónis were the town council. He observes that the "...executive and even the "king" was subject to them."⁵⁹ Then, when discussing Ijebu history, Johnson includes the Ògbóni or Òsùgbós in a description of the civil authorities. He notes

⁵⁷ Ibid, 367.

⁵⁸ Johnson, *The History of the Yorùbás; From the Earliest Times to the Beginning*, 66.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 78.

that Òsùgbós are of high authority and that any king would be of that fraternity.

Johnson states:

Amongst the Egbas and Ijebus, the Ògbónis are the chief executive; they have the power of Ilfè and death, and the power to enact and to repeal laws: but in the Òyó provinces the Ògbónis have no such power: they are rather a consultative and advisory body, the king or Bale being supreme, and the only matters involving bloodshed are handed over to the Ogbinis for judgment or for execution as the king sees fit. The actual executioners at Òyó are the Tetaus, amongst the Ibolos, the Jagun, and the Epo districts the Akodas or sword bearers of the principal chiefs acting together. War chiefs (Ologun) protect the land during and after Egba civil war and the Owiwi war.⁶⁰

During Egba's reorganization they built a Grand Lodge (Ile Ògbóni Egba) in order to form an all Egba Ògbóni. The Egba succeeded at ruling with a fair use of power with the newly established Ògbóni lodges. Their rule was so extensive that when an Anglican missionary set out from Sierra Leone with the cooperation of The Church Mission Society in Egba to abolish slavery, he could not do so without permission from Ògbóni. Johnson said, "He, therefore, wrote from Badagry to Apati, the Bashorun, and Okukenu, the Sagbua of Ake, who was recognized as the head of the Egba Ògbóni."⁶¹ The Ògbóni elders had to approve the goals of the church mission. Johnson also agrees with Peter Morton-Williams' assertion that the Ògbóni were to oversee any instance of the shedding of human blood. This most often meant the execution of a criminal. But Reverend Johnson did not otherwise see any predominant role for the Ògbóni in the Òyó state.

Although the dating of Ògbóni in Òyó by P. M. Williams is under scrutiny he is widely published on Yorùbá societies and his work is well respected. Peter

⁶⁰ Ibid, 66.

⁶¹ Biobaku, *The Egba and Their Neighbors 1842-1872*, 32.

Morton-Williams outlines the political structure of the Ògbóni in Òyọ (Old Òyọ) with their beliefs, and traditional practices. The Ògbóni were affiliated with the most powerful Oba or Alafin, king of Òyọ. In Òyọ (Old Òyọ) during the early nineteenth century, the Ògbóni's political role was to check the orders and activities of the Alafin. The Òyọ Mesi checked the Alafin, and he in turn was checked by the Ògbóni cult. The Òyọ Mesi, a group of non-royal government officials, was required to attend Ògbóni meetings and participate in libations and discussions. They could not be actual members because of their responsibility to the community.⁶² This was set this way in order for the Òyọ Mesi to maintain some objectivity; the Òyọ Mesi could have the Alafin removed from office and even killed. "The Alafin's attributive titles are 'Lord of the World and of Ifè', 'Owner of the Land', and 'Companion of the Gods'."⁶³ The Ògbóni are said to be responsible for any blood that should meet the earth. It was a large responsibility, in government to prevent the Òyọ Mesi from exercising his constitutional power of forcing an Alafin to commit suicide.

At the Orun festival, which celebrates the land of the ancestors or heaven, the Alafin prayed in the Ògbóni lodge and consulted the spirit of the Earth to confirm that Ile, the Earth, still supported his rule. The leader of all of the Òyọ Mesi was known as Basorun, he is the spokesperson. He might "... declare, after divination, that the king's fortune as symbolized by his head would be bad and that

⁶² Peter Morton-Williams. "An Outline of the Cosmology and Cult Organization of the Òyọ Yorùbá," *Africa*. Vol. XXXIV. No. 3. London, Oxford University Press. (July 1964): 245. See this article for more on the "Òyọ Misi." Williams underscores that Johnson wrote this as "Òyọ Mesi".

⁶³ *Ibid*, 245. See this article for more on the "Òyọ Misi."

his orun-spirit double in the sky no longer supports his stay on Earth.”⁶⁴ The gods, including the *òrìṣà* of the Ògbóni members, would give the warning or omen and the Basorun at the Orun festival would “...order the Alafin to commit suicide.”⁶⁵ Atanda states that this sanction was rare but asserts that the Ògbóni, as the guardian of “mother Earth,” were the only social institution with the authority “to sanction anything involving the shedding of human blood.”⁶⁶

For the Ògbóni to consent to such an act was said to be rare especially because the Alafin was represented by a female agent whose role it was to represent and safe guard him within the Ògbóni lodge.⁶⁷ Those women, wise and considered as elders, could be sent for when the Alafin could not be present and were there to protect him by all means.

In Ògbóni practice there was a high degree of importance placed on elderly women. As elders they have reached old age and they have earned much of the dignity and respect that an elderly man might (this is specifically in comparison to times when they were younger and were not entrusted with Ògbóni secrets). Both male and female elders were the wisest members in society. They were entrusted with responsibility and empowered with great authority. Their ability to hold secrets would not be questioned at their stage of *Ilfè*.

The Ògbóni set up committees of six (*Iwarefa*) with a leader called *Oluwu*. The *Oluwu* conveyed issues and affairs of the *Iwarefa* to the *Apena*, the convener

⁶⁴ Ibid, 364.

⁶⁵ Atanda, “The Yorùbá Ògbóni Cult: Did it Exist in Old Òyó,” 367.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 367.

⁶⁷ This information is in both sources: Morton-Williams, “An Outline of the Cosmology and Cult Organization of the Òyó Yorùbá,” 365. Atanda, “The Yorùbá Ògbóni Cult: Did it Exist in Old Òyó,” 366.

of Ògbóni meetings. The Apena was responsible for being aware of all activities and events in and around the Ògbóni lodge. Saburi O Biobaku, author of *The Egba and Their Neighbors 1842-1872* stated that Ògbóni met every seventeen days. This time frame, he says, was set to accommodate those whose work kept them far from town. The Ògbóni were not directly involved in trade, hunting or war. Peter Morton-Williams' research shows, the Ọyọ Mesi met daily in the house of the Basorun, Ògbóni spokesman, and together consulted and gave honor to the Apena. "On the sixteenth day then they take their seats in the Iledi (lodge), in company with all other initiates of the senior grade."⁶⁸ Williams describes the meeting briefly and states "the meeting opens with a libation of gin to the Earth and to the spirits of the dead within it, but ordinarily no sacrificial rites take place. At the end of the meeting, kola nuts are split and eaten, an act reminding the members of their bond of secrecy."⁶⁹ Williams relays the scores of issues brought before the Ògbóni members and how the members' privacy and sworn secrecy of the lodge allowed for free dialogue to transpire. All members placed great value on their relative autonomy; they were not beholden to any constituency.

In Yorùbá society they instilled the practical application of morality and respectability. Values, art, and the state shaped Yorùbá culture and the Ògbóni were held accountable first, among the Yorùbá, in maintaining these ideals at reputable levels. A central practice in this was honoring and making offerings to the king in a ritually proscribed fashion. Honoring the elders, the gods, and the

⁶⁸ Morton-Williams, "The Yorùbá Ògbóni Cult in Ọyọ," 365.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 365.

king, was a noble act expected to sustain Ifè. Robert Farris Thompson argues: “Since Yorùbá depended upon the divine king to represent moral reality to the city, the collapse of one of the major Yorùbá Kingdoms, Ọyọ-Ile (Old Ọyọ) contributed to wide-scale breakdown of civil order. Serious wars flared and one Yorùbá city attacked another, sometimes selling their adversaries into slavery.”⁷⁰ He goes on to say how in the early nineteenth century this type of behavior contributed to the thousands of Yorùbá enslaved and sent to Brazil and Cuba. Thompson indicates that this depression in morals did not cause the demise of culture. Rather that this lapse ended prior to the twentieth century and that some towns evaded by war most successfully maintained traditions. The majority of the Yorùbá in the land adapted and even excelled in the face of extreme pressures of social change. Margaret Thompson Drewal also speaks to these pressures and the Ọgbóni’s efforts to maintain the Yorùbá’s cultural heritage through Yorùbá rituals.

Ọgbóni, in one translation means literally, the elderly and wise people. Because they are wise they express that even at an old age, even the elders search. To search is to take part in a journey. This statement reveals key components in the importance placed on knowledge or ontology. A part of the Ọgbóni/Ọsùgbó philosophy, as mentioned earlier, crosses with Ifá. Some of this knowledge is revealed in an Ifá phrase:

They felt uncomfortable in their positions. They wanted to know more throughout the world. They decided to search for more, more, more. Because they were getting old, they felt worn out. That is why their staffs assisted them. Then their minds struck and asked them, ‘you, where are you going?’ *Enyin Orò, nibo lo nlo?* It started changing their conscience.

⁷⁰ Thompson, *Black Gods and Kings*, 2.

Then they remembered what Ifá had told them. On their journey they are searching for truth, wisdom, and knowledge.⁷¹

A person ideally is still searching even after he or she has worked for many, many years. The elders remember and tell the youth that: "...their conscience told them that if they search for knowledge and wisdom, it will be through all the rough paths, *ori oke on petele*. That means if they want to fulfill their destiny, they have to walk the path through the land, the hills, the water, the thorns, the troubles."⁷²

This can be understood as the continued search, which will reveal endurance, and at the end of the journey there will be a cooler place where minds will find clarity, holiness, and a smoother road to walk and live.⁷³ Drewal applies the English term "cool," and notes that it can be translated in many ways in Yorùbá such as calmness and tranquility.

Ògbóni as an institution served to safeguard the culture, traditions, and history from total obliteration by the colonials. Ògbóni was established in Ile-Ifè to preserve their "indigenous institutions of the land from annihilation under the influence of the new regime."⁷⁴ They were an underground, publicly invisible organization until their services were needed to aid in the settlement of matters brought before the lodge. When conflicts in public or private disputes transpired and evidence or testimony conflicted, the elders of Ògbóni were consulted. In J.A. Atanda's work, the Ògbóni were found to be the second most powerful leaders in Ifè, "until the introduction of the Native Courts under Colonial rule in the early

⁷¹ Thompson Drewal, *Yorùbá Ritual*, 34.

⁷² Ibid, 34.

⁷³ Ibid, 34.

⁷⁴ Atanda. "The Yorùbá Ògbóni Cult: Did it Exist in Old Òyó," 367.

decades of this century.”⁷⁵ Ògbóni still today is a secret society but is much like *òrìṣà* cults in that it communicates with the ancestors and maintains communion with the spirit world.

Ògbóni and Irunmole

Irunmole – better known as Ọ̀rúnmìlà or Ifá – is the name of a cult and also the name of a deity. In Lawal’s *New Perspectives on Edan Ògbóni*, he suggests that Irunmole or Ifá is the mother of all the *òrìṣà* and that Ifá has the most wisdom and therefore without Ifá’s consent there cannot be success in man’s achievements in the physical world.

Several levels of priests for the Ifá cult are known. They include the *Babaláwo* and those who are also various levels of chiefs; the highest Ifá chief is given the title *Araba*. Divination is not only a major activity connected to the main branch of philosophy in Yorùbá culture but a practice for those who have Ifá as their *òrìṣà*.

Lawal provocatively contends that if Earth is a prominent figure in divination and a main figure in Ògbóni then it is female. This has been a contested matter in Ògbóni history and ideology. Lawal also discusses that it was Ifá who originally created the rituals of Ògbóni.⁷⁶ In the context of the broader range of Yorùbá worship, it makes sense to see the Earth goddess as an *òrìṣà* or even as the mother of all the *òrìṣà*.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 368.

⁷⁶ See more on his research on Ifá’s instructions. (Lawal “New Perspectives on Edan Ògbóni,” 41.)

In *New Perspectives on Edan Ògbóní*⁷⁷ Lawal argues that the Earth is certainly, most accurately, represented as a goddess. He includes in his remarks on Henry Drewal's research: "Drewal contends that the Ijebu do not recognize the Earth as a goddess, but rather view it as the abode of Earth spirits called *imole* or *irunmole* [non capitalization of these *òrìṣà* his]...Drewal tends to suggest that the Ijebu do not recognize the Earth as a deity at all, not to mention a goddess."⁷⁸ Lawal argues that this is a part of a recent practice to exclude women's groups from traditions, that the elders in Ijebu and Remo districts in 1967 told him that the Earth was indeed a powerful goddess.⁷⁹ These findings argue for distinguishing, when possible, between older and more recent understandings of rituals and symbolic systems in Ògbóní.

Woman may not often hold prominent roles in certain Yorùbá sects but they are consistently honored in the arts. When they are represented in the arts it is an indication of the stature they hold in their community and in tradition. We can see in Yorùbá carvings and castings a woman suckling her baby, or a woman holding or offering her breasts, indicative of the woman as nurturer not only to her child but also to the society. This is incorporated into an Edan (Ògbóní bronze caste sculpture), shrine figures, and also in highly sculptural house posts. (See fig. 17) The Edan is the set of castings with which the Ògbóní are famously associated. The Edan, usually cast in brass or bronze, is a man and woman usually connected by a bronze chain. (See figures 17 and 18) Only Ògbóní title holders can own a

⁷⁷ Lawal. "Á Yà Gbó, Á Yà Tó; New Perspectives on Edan Ògbóní," 39.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 39.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 40.

pair. They are used in ritual and are sometimes sent, with a messenger who is delivering a message, as a symbol of strength and unity. In some pairs of Edan the heads of the figures are treated realistically while others are highly stylized.⁸⁰

A house post or a female anthropomorphic drum of a woman suckling her child, represents the Earth nurturing the Yorùbá people (capitalized when referring to the Earth as the spirit or goddess). The Edan provide humans with a dynamic object with which to access ancestor and gods. Each set of Edan carry the weight of the Earth as a guardian spirit. The land was and is sacred to all Yorùbá rulers, priests, and common people alike whether or not Imole (Ifá) was their personal *òrìṣà*.

Definitions of Earth and earth ownership are steady themes in Yorùbá history. There are many royal titles, and royal arts that reflect the connection between the living, which includes the living earth, and the ancestors. Peter Morton-Williams makes the comparison that earth is to Onilé more nearly as the thunderstorm and lightning are to “Şàngó, or the river to Yemoja, though the analogy is not precise; Onilé is the Earth Goddess.⁸¹ In William Bascom’s memoirs, he writes from the words of members of Ògbóni in awe: “They say they worship an orisha, of which the symbol (iponri) is the Earth.” Bascom cites Talbot stating, in the same way, that the palm kernels (ikín) represent Ifá, the thunder-axes (ẹdun ara) “Şàngó, and the small [clay] pots (aṣé) Yemoja, so the Earth

⁸⁰ For a detailed history on Edan see: Lawal, “Á Yà Gbó, Á Yà Tó; New Perspectives on Edan Ògbóni,” 37-49.

⁸¹ Morton-Williams. “The Yorùbá Ògbóni Cult in Ọyó,” 365.

represents Ògbóni.”⁸² These nature elements become evocative symbols for carvings, including drums and ritual houses.

Drum Culture Behind Ògbóni

A drummer speaks aloud the words in a praise poem and follows this with a drummed praise. In Òyó, Akin Euba describes this type of praise poetry as being played in the early morning. Ògbóni drums, according to J.R.O. Ojo in his article “Ògbóni Drums,” were beaten in the morning only for cult meetings “that take place every seventeenth day.”⁸³ At dawn when the music is played it is for listening “rather than dancing, all secondary instruments normally used for dance music are excluded with the exception of the *gudgudu*, small kettle drum which alone supplies the basic pattern against which no less than five talking drums play poetry in unison.”⁸⁴ As noted, drumming in the morning can indicate various scenarios. The music at dawn may describe the particulars of a crime that may have taken place. This music which most likely comes from the Ògbóni or Yorùbá chief’s palace in the morning may also express praises for the king or even accusatory statements criticizing chiefly abuses with defiant statements.

The Ògbóni society would use the drums for numerous occasions. (See fig. 2) When a set of Ògbóni drums are played, the largest or mother drum is positioned in the center. In figure 2 the largest is in the center and the two others

⁸² William R. Bascom. “The Sociological Role of the Yorùbá Cult-Group.” *American Anthropologist Association*. Vol. 46 No.1 Part 2 (January 1944): 63.

⁸³ Ojo, “Ògbóni Drums,” 51.

⁸⁴ Euba, *Essays On Music*, 8.

are smaller, narrower and shorter and about the same size.⁸⁵ A set of three would be set up this way for the drummers to best play their rhythms in tune. The positioning of the drums is important to achieve the sounds intended by the drum maker; the drummers must hear each other with the largest sound coming from the center or the mother drum, each is footed and cylindrical. They are carved in high relief and the skin is attached with pegs. In the photograph, taken at a funeral, the actual carvings on the drum's surface are undistinguishable because the drums are set back under an awning and are in shadow.⁸⁶ These drums are much like those in figure 19 in terms of the deep relief carving style.

Drumming for Òsùgbó or Ògbóni Funerals

Margaret Thompson Drewal documented the drums use in an Isinku or funeral. The funeral she described included seven days of ritual or *etutu*. The seven days mark the time the recently departed spirit is still in the community and must transition from this realm to the world of the ancestral spirits.⁸⁷

The Isinku is a big expense for the family. They must pay for drummers, a feast for the family, and performances meant for the family to 'play'⁸⁸ for the benefit of the deceased. Ijeku, the seventh day of the funeral, is for celebration. Because of the expense, the funeral may be held as much as one year after the time of death. During this time the dead body is cared for and preserved.

⁸⁵ In *Yorùbá Ritual*/Margaret Thompson Drewal labels them agba.

⁸⁶ Margaret Thompson Drewal, *Yorùbá Ritual*, 49 fig. 3.3.

⁸⁷ Thompson Drewal, *Yorùbá Ritual*, 39. *Etutu* is "...performed to convey the spirit of the deceased to its otherworldly realm, where it remains along with other ancestral spirits."

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 44. See description of 'play' on page 7.

According to Drewal, the one who is proficient and trained in this cosmetology⁸⁹ is a member of the Òsùgbó society. The knowledge of the process of internment is traditionally restricted to the elders.⁹⁰ They are the ones closest to the ancestors, and have a wealth of wisdom and power.

The recounting of this ritual and the use of the drums resulted from one of many interviews Drewal conducted with Ọ̀ṣitọ̀la, a *Babaláwo* living in the village of Imodi Ijebu area, in November of 1986. Ọ̀ṣitọ̀la describes the *agba* drums and how they are played in harmony with the dancers in order to provide a metaphor for how to conduct oneself through Ifè and the troubles one may face. Ontology The drummer's music is intended to be in sync with the movements of the dancer. *Oríkì*, praise poems, are streamed-in with the drumming: "In and around the praise epithets, Ọ̀ṣitọ̀la weaves dance instructions-one-liners that are mixed and repeated to form a free rhythm, each alluding to Ifè's journey. Elder, watch the ground *Ágbá wolè*."⁹¹

This is spoken while the "player" actively watches where he or she moves and places his foot as the tones from the drum resound. Drewal notes this drum language as *ẹ̀wẹ̀/ẹ̀*: "an ideophonic word implying an assortment of rhythms considered good for dancing." Ositola, a drummer as well as diviner said he "...changes the rhythms according to the particular dancer's concentration." Drewal further explains: "By approximating the tonal patterns and rhythm of

⁸⁹ That is internment and the way the living help assure the dead body and the spirit's transition to the "other world" is smooth and resolved

⁹⁰ Thompson Drewal, Margaret, *Yorùbá Ritual*, 39. "Sacrificial blood, together with a preparation of water and herbs, is used to wash the corpse."

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 36.

spoken Yorùbá, Ositola weaves into the music praise epithets (*oríkì*) particular to each dancing elder.”⁹²

Margaret Thompson Drewal’s photo in figure 2 depicts the drums at a funeral and an elder walking toward the drums. He is carrying a cloth to wrap around the body. The other elders carry assorted cloths and may be dressed in similar ones. Though most are intricately patterned, one cloth is always white. The white cloth evokes the memory from the day of birth when the newborn is wrapped in a similar white cloth. So when one dies one should re-enact the memory of new Ifè - the transition from heaven to Earth - and be buried with intricately patterned cloth, just as ones peers wear for the funeral ritual, symbolic of all one has learned from the complex experiences one has endured. The Òsùgbó members then send the spirit into the world of the ancestors. This is just one phase of the seven-day funeral ritual, *irenoku*. *Oríkì* of the deceased are sung by both women and men at the funeral and then drummed to carry the words and meaning.

The Òrìṣà, Myth, and Use of the Drum

Many Yorùbá myths can be separated into two categories: creation stories and stories of conquests and migration. When Yorùbá art is examined myths often hold the explanation and meaning behind the certain symbols in the art. Of all the versions of the creation myth many describe fights for the authority to perform certain roles. Most agree on the creator as being Oludumare and his instructions

⁹² Ibid, 36.

for the deities to go forth from Orun (the other world), which is the abode of the sacred. Oludumare is the source of *ase*; he sends Obàtálá and Orishanla to the world to create land. According to Yorùbá myth everything begins at Ile-Ifè, the place where civilization began. Orun, the other world, is populated by *òrìṣà*, ancestors, and various spirits. Aye is the world of the living, visible, and tangible, where otherworldly forces visit and influence human affairs. All gods periodically journey to the world but Ifá and Èṣù stand at the border between Orun and Aye. The two assist in the communication between those in the two realms.

“The world is a marketplace we visit, the other world is home.”⁹³ In *Yorùbá: Nine Centuries of African Art*, authors Henry Drewal, Pemberton, and Abiodun state that for the Yorùbá in the beginning there was only water and chaos and the world was covered with water until a divinity descended on an iron chain, taking along a snail shell or a gourd filled with Earth, a five-toed chicken and a chameleon. The Supreme Being sent Obàtálá and Oduduwa down from the sky to create land out of the chaos. The deity poured the earth from the shell onto the water and the chicken spread it to create the land. The chameleon (igbin) walked on it to test its firmness so that the many deities could arrive and establish society.

Obàtálá, as one of Ifè's original divinity, made use of one of the most sacred dimensions: creation, and molded humans from clay by sacred order. Oduduwa arrived first, and Oduduwa became the symbol of political rule and the first king with the right to pass the sacred crown to his descendants. On their way,

⁹³ For full explanation see Drewal, Pemberton, and Abiodun, *Yorùbá: Nine Centuries of African Art and Thought*, 15.

Oduduwa and Obàtálá rested and drank palm wine. They drank so much that Obàtálá became drunk and fell asleep. Obàtálá is known to have created hunchbacks and cripples along with perfect humans because of this drunkenness.⁹⁴ Oduduwa was analogous to the cultural hero and used materials provided by the high god Ọlọrun to create the habitable world with a loci of power of 16 crowned rulers or the 16 lesser gods or *òrìṣà* who founded the world and started Ifè. In other myths Oduduwa is represented as a conqueror arriving from the east, often represented by Mecca, and establishing Ile-Ifè.⁹⁵

A slight deviation in the main story states that Obàtálá descended on a long chain and brought with him a rooster, some iron, and a palm kernel. First, he put the metal on the earth and the rooster on top of that. The rooster scratched the metal and spread it out to create land. Then he planted the palm seed and from it grew the earth's vegetation. The cock scratched it to become land, from the seed grew a tree with sixteen limbs, representing the original sixteen kingdoms. Olurun named earth Ifè and the first city Ile-Ifè. Ọrìṣàálá, also known as Obàtálá, created humans out of the earth and got Olurun/Olódùmarè to blow Ifè into them.

Robin Law writes on the first four rulers of Yorùbáland who each became *òrìṣàs*: Oduduwa, Oranyan, Ajaka, and Şàngó. Olòrun, the Supreme Being or sky god, communicated with the rulers. In E.M. McClelland's publication on Ifá he explains that the two oldest, wisest, and most trusted of Ọlọrun's 'assistants' are

⁹⁴ Ulli Beier, *Yorùbá Myths* (N.Y. and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 73.

⁹⁵ "All the Orisha exist in a continuity of emanation as an extension of the power of consciousness created by the Ache (power) of Obàtálá. This creationist view of the descent of power into manfèstation from a divine origin is clearly reflected on the Tree of LIfè by the path of the lightning flash." <http://www.willparfitt.com/obeah.html>

Òriṣàálá (sometimes called Obàtálá), and Òrúnmìlà or Ifá.⁹⁶ These *òriṣà* are considered royal and may be seen with ‘*Òriṣà*’ capitalized. “Kings and the great ones on earth may sometimes be termed *òriṣàs* (gods) by way of eulogy...”⁹⁷ The *òriṣà* and ancestor cults are made up of a cross section of the community. Each generation, certain families pray to a particular *òriṣà* to maintain tradition. Other families will learn at their child’s first divination ceremony that the child has a unique *òriṣà* to whom he will need to pray and make offerings. Later in Ifè a person may be called in a dream or by instinct, to be a part of another cult.

A major part of Peter Morton-Williams’ work is on Yorùbá cosmology. He describes the structure thus:

The House of the Sky [which] is the domain of the Supreme God Ọlórún Olódùmarè (Ọlórún means ‘Sky Owner’). He is male and rules the sky as king. Next to him are his principal subjects, beings called, collectively and specifically, *òriṣà*. These we may also call ‘gods’. In some myths they appear as royal children of the Supreme God, and in others as his creations who stand to him rather as vassal kings stand . . .⁹⁸

The majority of the time the *òriṣà* exist in the sky, but some such as Onilé primarily exist on the earth and others in the deep sea. *Òriṣà* Onilé and *òriṣà* Èṣù help bridge the gap between *òriṣà* and ancestor cults.⁹⁹

The Drum’s Role in Culture for Obàtálá in Yorùbá’s Ondo State

The drum is used to participate in *òriṣà* rites across Yorùbáland. Charles Young, a Yorùbá catechist at Ondo, southwestern Yorùbáland, in 1875 logged his

⁹⁶ McClelland and Parfitt, *The Cult of Ifá Among The Yorùbá*, 12.

⁹⁷ Johnson, *History of the Yorùbás*, 26.

⁹⁸ Morton-Williams. “An Outline of the Cosmology and Cult Organization of the Ọyọ Yorùbá,” 245.

⁹⁹ For descriptive, diagrams on the Yorùbá cosmology see Morton-Williams, “An Outline of the Cosmology and Cult Organization of the Ọyọ Yorùbá.”

experiences hearing and seeing music being made. Peter McKenzie's *Hail Orisha!* incorporates Young's findings. McKenzie's publication is a good source for a phenomenological overview on Yorùbá religion. He settled in Nigeria as a missionary, and then began immersing himself in local traditions. McKenzie draws specific attention to Young's writings on women playing drums and he draws connections to the interrelationship between *òrìṣà* and music. McKenzie quotes Young: "The drums are about four feet long, about eighteen inches small, below the top, on which leathers are fixed about twenty inches or more in circumference. One sits and supports the drum, another stands and beats the drum with the palm of the hands."¹⁰⁰ This was his description of drums he witnessed women playing for Obàtálá. He also mentions the Ògbóni drums he heard and the "melancholy" deep sound of the Orò bullroarer.¹⁰¹ He unfortunately offers no further description. The sound of the bullroarer with the drums was likely not a strange occurrence at all in Yorùbáland, but documentation from personal experience is scanty.

Young's account, which I refer to, is not an ethnological one. He translated what he perceived rather than describing exactly what he saw: "women turned out to worship the great goddess Obàtálá [they] beat drums with great skill...All night the drums beat, with songs and dances around and over the goddess."¹⁰² He further states his opinion that women's drumming was an event in which the gender roles were reversed. Based on my research the drummer is usually male.

¹⁰⁰ See more documentation on Charles Young, in: McKenzie, *Hail Orisha! A Phenomenology of West African Religion*, 78.

¹⁰¹ See image and description of the bullroarer idiophone in Fig 3.9c. (this is a percussive type instrument belonging to the Orò society or cult.)

¹⁰² McKenzie, *Hail Orisha! A Phenomenology of West African Religion in the Mid Nineteenth Century*, 78.

Additional research, especially fieldwork, would be needed in order to better document the number of instances or traditions in which women drum.

Drumming for Obàtálá Òrìṣàálá

Ulli Beier has written on a set of ìgbìn drums, at a shrine that was for Olufon, one manifestation of Obàtálá. His well-known article, “Three ìgbìn Drums from Igbomina,” documents the design of the carved instruments, the figures on the drum, and the technique and skill of the carver. (See fig. 20) He understands the carver of the drums to be from Igbomina, but finds the style of these particular drums to be unlike most Igbomina carvings. Beier also includes terms used to classify the ìgbìn set. The drums in his article are reminiscent of my photograph from the Ibadan Museum, in terms of composition. (See fig. 21)

Ìgbìn was the name for Obàtálá’s senior wlfè. Ullie Beier attributes the origin and creation of ìgbìn drums similarly to Bascom’s description: “Obàtálá was fond of dancing. His musicians were his wives who sang and clapped for him. Later, he made drums for them which he called ìgbìn (or iya nla), iya gan, keke and afere after their names.”¹⁰³

Beier’s photographs of this drum set show careful carvings of human beings in a procession, three of the four drums are decorated. Beier describes òrìṣà Obàtálá’s drums: “The Oba (Orangun) [is] preceded by his wlfè. A snail, a sacred animal of the creator, can be seen behind the Oba.” The snail (ìgbín) is the sacred animal of Olufon. Òrìṣà Olufon is a creation spirit known alternatively as

¹⁰³ Ulli Beier. “Three ìgbìn Drums from Igbomina,” *Nigeria Magazine* No. 78 (Sept. 1963): 163.

Obàtálá. Frank Willet also notes seeing a carving at the Lagos Museum of Ìgbìn drums being played by women.¹⁰⁴ In his publication he includes a photo of this carving. It clearly shows a small wooden carving of two women playing the Ìgbìn drums. The figures support a bowl and a smaller figure is seated facing the drummers and supporting the drums. (See fig. 22) This contrasts with Ògbóni practice where only the males drum. I have not heard of women ever playing Ògbóni shrine drums but as noted here women are mentioned frequently in terms of the Ìgbìn drum set but not throughout the entire drum family.

In many carvings we see the calabash as a prominent symbol especially in *òrìṣà* arts and worship. In the end of a Ṣàngó festival, in Ede, documented by Ullie Beier, women use the calabash as a percussion instrument.¹⁰⁵ It is significant to Obàtálá (and Olufon, Òrìṣàálá). Beier states: “Argba, the virgin priestess of the Olufon cult, carries the calabash that symbolizes heaven and Earth.”¹⁰⁶ He also describes the surface of the *keke*¹⁰⁷ in his article: we see based on his description, (on the left) Aworò, high priest of Obalufon (same as Olufon), with a bow and arrow (symbol that he rids evil from the town) in his left hand an Obi (ritual kola nut) in his right, is followed by a female worshipper with rattles, and (right) a worshipper dancing with ceremonial swords.¹⁰⁸ (See fig. 20) He notes the figures are dancing elegantly but makes no specific reference to the name of the

¹⁰⁴ Frank Willet, *African Art*, 151.

¹⁰⁵ Ulli Beier, *A Year of Sacred Festivals in One Yorùbá Town*, (London: Tillotsons (Bolton) Limited, 1959), 75.

¹⁰⁶ Ulli Beier. “Three Ìgbìn drums from Igbomina,” 160.

¹⁰⁷ The keke is one of the drums in the Ìgbìn set.

¹⁰⁸ Ulli Beier. “Three Ìgbìn drums from Igbomina,” 163.

ceremony or particular context within the ceremony they may be playing or performing.

In Beier's article he wants the reader to be impressed, as he is, by the three quarter relief carving of the figures on the drums he shows. His opinion is that the quality and attractiveness of the carving is in the composition, not necessarily in the detail. He notes that it is a rarity to see such ornamented drums. In deference to their sacred character, Beier has not disclosed the "locality" of these drums; he unapologetically states that he will not reveal where the drums were found.

Fortunately William Bascom researched the ̀gb̀n drums along with his extensive Yorùbá studies and unravels the place along with the context in which this sort of drum set existed in Ọ̀yọ́. A photo he provides includes a non-adorned ̀gb̀n drum set, see figure; however he notes that ̀gb̀n drums are also decorated with figures in bas-relief and sometimes "the entire shape of the drum is adapted to that of the human figure."¹⁰⁹ (See fig. 23) He addresses the three in the photo as ̀gb̀n and further notes they are also known as *agba* and *apesi*. The names *agba* and *apesi* were mistakenly used here. A mistake easily made; *apesi* should have been *ipese*¹¹⁰ in terms of the Ipese set.¹¹¹

Bascom distinguishes the ̀gb̀n set as a type of talking drum. Each of the three in his set has a different tone and he states: "can be used for a three-toned

¹⁰⁹ Bascom, "Drums of the Yorùbá of Nigeria," 6.

¹¹⁰ In Oba Laoye I "Yorùbá Drums," he offers clarification on the use of the pegged cylindrical *ipese* drums in the Ipese set. He noted that Ifá worshippers use this set not usually for ritual but for recreational dance and play. This set is made up of three drums essentially - the same core arrangement as the ̀gb̀n only adding an *agogo* or iron bell based on one set in Oji, Warri State.

¹¹¹ Notes on Ipese here in chapter two, and first described in Darius Thieme's dissertation: Thieme, *A descriptive Catalogue of Yorùbá Musical Instruments*.

language.” The largest drum, with the deepest tone, was played with sticks as well as the combination of stick and left hand playing. The two smaller diffuse sounds with, as Bascom states: “intermittent rhythmic phrases which are dropped almost as soon as they become clearly established in the listeners mind, leaving him suspended in the middle of the phrase.”¹¹² The music created by this Ìgbìn set at the Ọ̀rìṣàálá (Ọ̀bàtálá) festival is the only one ever recorded.

The one record has since been formatted as a c.d. and has the music of the Bata set and Dundun set as well as the Ìgbìn. The music was made on the drum set at an annual festival of Ọ̀rìṣàálá (the great deity, Ọ̀bàtálá). The drummers were cult members and the drums, Bascom notes, were used “only for religious music.” According to Bascom the drums were in view at this festival where Ọ̀rìṣàálá’s principal temple was, at the time, at the house of chief Ashipa of Ọ̀yó.

Drums for Ifá

Ọ̀rúnmilà created the system of Ifá philosophy to provide an order or system for explaining complicated Ifè situations as well as giving advice. This system also provides the reason to keep Ifè functioning in the way of balance. All those who give praises to Ifá celebrate days in the month designated for this *òrìṣà*.

¹¹² Bascom, *Drums of the Yorùbá of Nigeria*, 3.

“With his great wisdom, knowledge and understanding, Ifá coordinates the work of all the gods in the Yorùbá pantheon.”¹¹³

In comparison to Ògbóni, Ifá is open to people in all stages of Ifè; still, there are privileged positions, such as those who may learn the principals of Ifá and work to become diviners. The Ifá cult is classified as a secret society. The priests may solely be practitioners of healing; others practice the art of divination and know chants and drumming which they may do at festivals. They practice to maintain these skills that are not shared with the uninitiated. “The traditional Ifá drum is *aran* and its accompaniment is *agogo* (the gong).”¹¹⁴ (*Aran* is one of the drums in the Ipele set displayed in my drawings (See figures 24-28) which were informed by the article “Yorùbá Drums” by Oba Laoye I.)

Tools and instruments that are a part of *òrìṣà* worship, such as those for Ifá, are kept in shrines. They include those for divination and for prayer and communication with Ifá. The diviner’s tray (*opon* Ifá) is for use in the practical translating of messages and instruction from Ifá, the diviner’s bowl, and the diviner’s bag (*akapo*). In Ositola’s shrine, described and addressed by Margaret Thompson Drewal,¹¹⁵ we see two small squat Ìgbìn drums--both sit behind Onilé figures. (See figure 30)

Patterns of adornment done by the artist on shrine objects connect all the sacred objects in Yorùbá sects. This embellishment is seen on the diviners pouch

¹¹³ Wande Abimbola, *Ifá; An Exposition of Ifá Literary Corpus* (Ibadan: Oxford University Press Nigeria, 1976), 9.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 9.

¹¹⁵ For additional information see Margaret Thompson Drewal and Henry John Drewal, “An Ifá’s diviner’s Shrine in Ijebuland,” *African Arts* Vol XVI, no. 2 (February 1983): 60-67.

as it is often on the side of Ìgbìn drums. This includes double rows of zig-zags or cross hatching like a woven textile. For example, see the pattern above and below the main scene in figure 30 reveals a similar design. The zigzag created is sometimes in double or triple layers or rows and are often associated with *òrìṣà* Ṣàngó (thunder and lightning god and deified king).

The cowry shell is also used for decorative adornment. When the cowry is cast with bones by a diviner it indicates a yes and the bone a no.¹¹⁶ This act would be done once a question is asked for Ifá to answer. Acts of divination need Èṣù's assistance; he helps to carry messages to and from Ifá and the *òrìṣà*. Èṣù is needed also to simply get their attention. Èṣù is also the one responsible for carrying sacrifices. Wande Abimbola expresses that Èṣù may be the closest god figure to Ifá.¹¹⁷ This might explain why many of Èṣù's symbols are also affiliated with Ifá.

Ifá is celebrated on designated days on the calendar; there are yearly, monthly, and weekly meetings. "Ojo Awo," as explained by Abimbola, is the official day of divination. On this day Ifá priests gather at their local lead priests' house and they celebrate, share meals, and pray. They also make sacrifices to Ifá. Chanting, creating dance music, and drumming in the house is their way of communing and giving praises. The larger the merriment the larger the honor Ifá receives; drumming fuels the celebrants energy in order for the rites of the ceremony to be conducted.

¹¹⁶ Wande Abimbola, *Ifá: An Exposition of Ifá Literary Corpus*, (Ibadan: Oxford University Press Nigeria, 1976), 12.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, 10.

The chanting performed by the Ifá priests is known as *iyere*. A chorus of priests may repeat chanted poems and praises in unison. “The chorus proper is sometimes repeated several times by the priests as they dance to the music of their drums and gongs.”¹¹⁸ This activity takes place at any annual Mole festival. Drumming and dancing is mentioned several times in the author’s discussion of these ceremonies. The Mole festival is to celebrate and give praises to the king while also bringing together their most honored Ifá priests from near and far. Early in Yorùbá history in Ọ̀yọ́, the Ifá cult often mediated between the king and commoners. The king of each Yorùbá kingdom had a principal role in the cult’s activities. According to Abimbola the king has not had a hand in Ifá cult activities in centuries yet this would explain some of the overlap between the Ọ̀gbóni and Ifá societies.

Drumming for Ọ̀gún

In the northern Yorùbá town of Ila Orangun art historian John Pemberton researched the Ọ̀gún festival Odun Ọ̀gún in 1977. The festival begins with a ritual enacting the day that the town was founded. The king, his wives, all members of his family, palace servants and messengers, palace drummers, and a variety of cult groups participate. There are two major festivals in this northern town that celebrate Ọ̀gún: Odun Ọ̀gún and Odun Oba. “The one Odun Ọ̀gún, is held for

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 16.

seven days in early June. The other, Odun Orò, similar to Odun Oba (festival of the king), is held for thirteen days in early September.”¹¹⁹

In Odun Ògún, there is a ritual segment known as Iwa Ògún. Pemberton postulates its main purpose as symbolizing Ògún and “the reality and ambiguity of violence in human experience, a violence that creates through acts of destruction, but which can also destroy what it has created. The rites of Odun Ògún require that Yorùbá recognize the irony of cultural existence: death is essential to Ilfè.”¹²⁰ Ontology Devotees understand that to achieve in the social realm and maintain political harmony they must appease Ògún and surrender to this higher cultural power.

On the third day of the festival numerous sacrifices are made to appease Ògún, known as Isagun. Two chiefs offer kolanuts and a prayer. Once the prayer is recited the two chiefs with their cutlasses approach the king’s drums. The drummers beat “Ògún’s rhythm” and the chiefs touch their cutlasses to the ground and recite: “Ògún we come to beg for peace!” They dance and then multiple drums are played.

In figure 31 a squat Ìgbìn on site of a ritual is shown. It is “the oba dancing to the *gbedu* drum at the Ògún shrine during the rite of Isagun”¹²¹ Here we see the *gbedu* of the Ìgbìn drum family. This should revalidate what Oba Laoye I claims to

¹¹⁹ John Pemberton. “The Dreadful God and the Divine King,” *Africa’s Ògún*, Edited by Sandra T. Barnes (Indiana: University Press, 1989), 107.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, 110.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, 111.

be in the Agere drum set which is used for Ògún. (Some Ògún symbols are discussed in subsequent chapters.)¹²²

¹²² In Western Yorùbáland such as in Egbado and Ogori, the *agere* is a dance for Ògún and Eyinle/Erinlẹ. “The *agere* has a quality distinct from others. Its rhythm is rolling: one foot essentially remains in place while alternately the other foot shifts backward and forward and backward and forward –each time assuming full body weight.” There is mention of a “traditional hunter’s drum” but no description of what it might be like. Sandra T. Barnes and Paula Girshick Ben-Amos, “Ògún The Empire Builder,” *Africa’s Ògún*, 58.

Chapter 3 The Ìgbìn Drum Family

The classification of Yorùbá drums is simplified by the existence of one particularly wide-ranging genus of drums: the Ìgbìn drum family. (See figs. 24-28) These instruments all have a single membrane affixed to a cylindrical or conical body. Some are barrel-shaped for their entire length and others have small pedestals or feet to support the conical shape. The family consists of both hand drums and those played with drumsticks or mallets. The body of the Ìgbìn drum is of a “modified cylindrical construction, with wooden pegs driven into the wooden body of the instrument to which the membrane is affixed.”¹²³ A goat or antelope hide is fastened to the top of the round body with hide or laces; this is then fixed firmly with long wooden pegs. The term Ìgbìn can be used to classify all ritual drums (excluding the *bata* drums). Their primary use is for religious observances and state or local ceremonial occasions. Ìgbìn with a lower case ‘i’ is the term for an individual drum in the Ìgbìn set.

Many Ìgbìn drums have similarities in their classifications and sometimes share names. The same drum may go by a different name depending on where and when it is being used. As such, I offer clarification in the text when necessary to differentiate which drums were used in their designated ceremonies, cults, and masquerades. Historian Darius Thieme has identified some of the difficulties in distinguishing the drums and the ceremonies in which they were meant to be played. Over time, sets have become separated from each other and there is

¹²³ Timi of Ede Laoye I, “*Yorùbá Drums*,” 6-9.

some confusion on the drums names in historical documents. One reason for the confusion is that historically titled persons in the designated cults were the only ones permitted to see their drums. To keep them from view, the drums were often draped with cloth as they were carried out into the community and played. Additionally, certain members initiated into an *òrìṣà* cult would only be exposed to those drums associated with their designated *òrìṣà*'s.

Another reason for the difficulty in understanding the classification is that over time many drums have been distributed across Yorùbá country and their singular identities have not remained intact. They may have been carried out into an array of informal community activities. Depending on whether or not a town had craftsmen, drums may or may not have been readily available; in such a case, a town may have borrowed a sacred drum for an important event. One case in point is a drum normally used for a funeral may have been borrowed from a neighboring Ògbóni (well respected religious group or cult) temple. In a separate instance a drum used to praise or call *òrìṣà* Èṣù (the messenger god) might also be seen, if only briefly, in a shrine for *òrìṣà* Obàtálá (deified king and creator god). We know classification is important, yet not always rigid; because drums are so essential to making a festival or ritual complete borrowing is accepted. The subject and meaning on the drum's surface is often intentionally chosen to suit more than one *òrìṣà* group.

Furthermore, because the Ìgbìn drum was so thoroughly infused into many segments of society, various cults, state houses, and *òrìṣà* groups' Ìgbìn drums were shared and replicas were made across Yorùbáland. In the Western region of

Yorùbáland, “Each tribe has its own sets of traditional drums and the drums bear resemblance to one another in shape, make or styles of drumming; and although they are being called by different names, one cannot help believing that they must be of the same origin. Drums used by Obas and Chiefs of Ekiti, Ijesha, Ijebu, and Egba areas for ceremonial occasions are not unlike those used in shrines of Orishas in Ọ̀yọ́ areas.”¹²⁴ Communities with drums were considered to have cultural wealth. Drums within a single set share the most similarities. (For example see fig. 32)

Nigerian Drums: Sounds of Unity was a national exhibition with an accompanying publication by The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). This publication illuminates the prevalence of drums in all of Nigeria and their national importance. It celebrates cultural development in Nigeria from 1988-1997. In it is a presentation of the scope of drums in Nigeria, the diverse drum styles, shapes, and adornment. Included is a small sampling of the ̀gb̀n, one likely from the ̀gb̀ni set. The quality of these images does not reproduce well enough to reprint. This publication highlights Nigeria’s variety of drums done in a wealth of styles and shapes. Among them, those few chosen with special carvings prove to be primarily in the ̀gb̀n family.

Arrangement of Drum Sets and Key Terms

The sets within the ̀gb̀n family of drums that hold the most interest for me are the ̀gb̀ni, ̀gb̀n, the Ipese, and Agere. Many authors use the terms ̀gb̀ni

¹²⁴ Laoye, “Yorùbá Drums,” 6.

and *gbèdu* interchangeably, and most often it is the shorter drums, which may be undecorated, that constitutes the drums of the *gbèdu*. The Ògbóni drums are also sometimes referred to as *agba*. As mentioned in chapter one these terms are often vague and do not specify clearly the drum type; both *agba* and *gbèdu* are generally descriptive words. *Agba* describes a very large drum, and *gbèdu* are associated with funerals and are usually short, squat drums. If the drum is given the title *agba* this can indicate an Ìgbìn shrine drum for an *òrìṣà* or an Ògbóni drum, as well as those used in the king's court.¹²⁵

Darius Thieme's research reveals certain traditional practices regarding the treatment of the *gbèdu* drums. He identified a drum in Òyó, western Yorùbáland, that had been de-skinned at the death of an Alafin (king) and the membrane destroyed, only to be replaced by a new membrane at the installation of a new ruler. He also states: "In some cases, *gbèdu* drums were said to have been left uncovered as a consequence of this belief, with the membrane being applied only on occasions when the drum was used." I can confirm that there are *gbèdu* drums outside of the Ìgbìn family, another instance that might lead to confusion. Thieme these bowl shaped drums identifies as being "used at Òyó and Ilorin for royal praise-announcements on special occasions. These are single membrane, bowl shaped instruments of fixed pitch, with a network of horizontal laces running

¹²⁵ Scholar Akin Euba briefly states: We know *agba* are large drums, more precisely those associated with Ògbóni royal drums "Although in practice any drums played for royalty among the Yorùbá maybe called *gbèdu*, this term properly denotes single-headed, fixed pitch pedestal drums of the *ìgbìn* type, which almost certainly predate the *dùndún*." Akin Euba, *Yorùbá Drumming; The Dundun Tradition* (Bayreuth University, West Germany 1990), 52.

around the surface of the body of the instrument.”¹²⁶ These *gbèdu* drums were traditionally dedicated to the king. When the *gbèdu* music was performed, the king historically would move with the processional and all, together would leave the palace. So far I have found that *gbèdu* (lower case g) is the name for a class of musical arrangements as well.

Description of Ìgbìn Drum Family

Figures 24-28 are arranged in categories that are based on work done by the Timi of Ede Laoye I.¹²⁷ The drawings were based on photographs I took while studying collections of these items housed in two Nigeria’s museums. The drawings are provided in order to have a better picture of how the sets in the drum family can be organized. In the sets I have presented none include more than four, however if the king or individual patron have wealth the sets will likely be larger. The following sets correspond to my drawings.

Ògbóni Set *a*

Ìgbìns from the Lagos Museum show carvings of a large face; many of these drums with a central face will have a surrounding mandorla. (See figs. 30, 33) Frank Williet, in his *African Art*, writes briefly on the drums he witnessed at an Ògbóni house in Ekiti, a small city in the Ọ̀yọ́ province. Two of the drums in the set he saw in 1959 were carved by artist George Bandele. He noted that the two

¹²⁶ Darius Thieme, *A descriptive Catalogue of Yorùbá Musical Instruments*, 244.

¹²⁷ Oba Laoye, I, Timi of Ede, “*Yorùbá Drums*,” *Od’u*. (Ibadan, Nigeria 1950): 5-14.

drums in his book *African Art*, do not represent the full shape of the mandorla like those he was able to see in figure 34, which displays a mandorla but it is not around the central figure but smaller images not in the main scene. This design is different from another, which has been reprinted in several publications. (See fig. 35)

Well-known drums in the *Ìgbìn* family belong in the *Ògbóni* cult. Levels of accessibility or exposure to certain *Ògbóni* drums would be indicative of the role of the *Ògbóni* or *Òsùgbó* society.¹²⁸ The cult or social group is known as *Òsùgbó* in such towns like Ijebu and Egba. Such authors such as those in *Yorùbá Art and Aesthetics*¹²⁹ and in *Johnson's History of the Yorùbás* emphasizes the role of the Oshugbos in Ijebu.¹³⁰ They argue whether or not this society or cult originated in Ile-Ife or Ijebu. Whether identified as *Ògbóni* or *Òsùgbó*, the society historically was found throughout most of Yorùbáland.

In *Ògbóni* history the royal and ritual *Ìgbìn* drums most likely originated out of practices in the city of Ile-Ife and from there went on to *Ọyọ* to *Òsùgbó* to Ijebu to Ekiti, and throughout all of Yorùbáland in Nigeria. It is possible that all of the *Ìgbìn* drums originated at the onset of Yorùbá culture, before the many cults formed rich identities.¹³¹ The drums more familiarly known today in or associated

¹²⁸ Spelled Oshugbo and *Òsùgbó*. (Similar to *òrìṣà*, which is also spelled orisha and *Èṣù* or Eshu.) Oshugbo is the name of a town in Yorùbáland and also the cult or society; in northern Yorùbá *Ògbóni* is also known as Oshugbo. *Yoruba Art and Aesthetics*, 136.

¹²⁸ Johnson, *History of the Yorùbás*, 78.

¹²⁹ Henry John Drewal, "Art and Ethos of the Ijebu," *Yorùbá Art and Aesthetics*, 136.

¹³⁰ Johnson, *History of the Yorùbás*, 78.

¹³¹ Yorùbá proper extends from Ife in the east, the Niger in the north, and the Dahomey and Bariba people in the west and Egbados in the south. The Yorùbá culture and people originated in Ile-Ife and *Ọyọ-Ile*. Although the history of *Ọyọ* before the 16th century is limited, we know that during the Trans Saharan trade (7th-14th century) Old *Ọyọ* hosted trading posts between the Sahel and the

with Nigeria are tension drums, or talking drums, some call them squeeze drums or *dundun*. Some *dundun* are adorned with light bronze bells and decorative cloth; today drummers often personalize their drum with colored cloth and short streamers. They have frequently replaced the Ògbóni drums in the king's court and in royal festivals. In my research, I have not yet located where and when the Ìgbìn drum sets might still be actively used today.

To the Ògbóni cult, Onilé is an important *òrìṣà* and nature element. Most consider *òrìṣà* Onilé the Earth goddess and an *òrìṣà* spirit. There is some dispute as to whether this is a feminine or masculine entity. For this paper Onilé will be referred to as a feminine entity based on my cited references. There are certain symbols that connote Onilé. I will discuss her symbols in chapter four. Whether in the temple or chief's government house Onilé is honored. This earth spirit is acknowledged whenever the Ògbóni/Òsùgbó members gather and meet.

The Ògbóni drums, as explained by art historian J.R. Ojo, are sacred objects possessing medicinal powers. Ojo states, "During annual ceremonies, blood of sacrificial animals is rubbed onto the sides of the drums; and when used in public nocturnal funeral rites of a member, its sides are covered at dawn with a new piece of cloth given by the bereaved -- only cult members are allowed to see its carved decoration."¹³² The blood is the "medicine" but how this affects the rites

forest region. This allowed the establishment of Òyó relations with the Hausa, who intern helped to maintain the health of the Òyó cavalry, which supported their strengths in trade. According to Robin Law: "The traditions of Òyó claim that the kingdom was founded by Oranyan, or Oranmiyan, one of the grandsons of Oduduwa who dispersed from Ile-Ife." Robin Law tabulates the list of Òyó rulers as beginning at 1570 and continues-up to 1825. Robin Law *The Òyó Empire c. 1600-1936: West African Imperialism in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Oxford, Clarendon Press: 1977).

¹³² J.R. Ojo. "Ògbóni Drums," *African Art*, (Spring 1973): 50-52.

is not revealed to outsiders. The surface of the drum in figure 33 looks especially dark and somewhat textured; there seems to be an uneven stain or patina. One can speculate as to whether or not it received the blood of a sacrifice for medicine.

Ògbóni Set b

There is certainly more than one style of carving used for the body of an Ògbóni drum. The Ògbóni drums in set *b* share similarities with the drums J.R. Ojo writes about in his article, “Ògbóni Drums.” (Fig. 32) He notes that they are described as “*gbèdu*” and that the drums were beaten in the morning for cult meetings, which he states take place every seventeenth day. Either publication provide in-depth histories on the iconography. However the symbols on the drum surface, as I will show, can reveal the context in which the drum is used. Both of these scholars note that the Ògbóni drum can be identified as *agba*.

Often, Ògbóni drums are heavy and difficult to carry; they are not made for easy mobility and they are not carved with feet or with a tall pedestal that lifts the body of the drum from the ground. Among the photographs I include in the catalog there are multiple drums from the Lagos Museum. Many could be described as “fixed *agba*,” as Ojo would state, which stay *in situ*. These large drums were not meant to be moved or taken on parade; it is feasible that those among the Ògbóni set *a* could be moved.

Ògbóni set *a* includes the drums with pedestals or tall ‘feet’. In Ògbóni set *b*, I give examples of the larger drums, or the *agba* drums. The smallest of these are short drums, which may be decorated with patterns, carved like a textile to be

seen as if two dimensional, and are usually absent of elaborate figures in a scene. There are exceptions, such as one shown in the photo that depicts a *gbèdu* drum with the face of a ram carved on the surface.¹³³ (See fig. 32) In both Ògbóni sets when three are played together they are best understood as, male, female, and Omele (small or child). This applies to the sound, in the way they are tuned, as well as to the size. This contrasts with other Ìgbìn drums, which have very specific titles. Ògbóni set *b* should not be thought of as a set restricted to three or four drums; certain groups that have the resources could have an unrestricted amount.

In Ògbóni set *b* drum 1 the symbol of the mudfish is combined with a fish-legged figure. (See fig. 26) The fish-legged figure and the combination of it with the mudfish is a part of popular imagery in Nigerian art. The mudfish can be seen also on Ifá divination boards. The symbol of the mudfish, which lives in Nigeria's rivers, is also the symbol for *òrìṣà* Olókun. "... the goddess of the sea."¹³⁴ This *òrìṣà* has several meanings: It indicates kingship and royalty. The mudfish is a powerful figure and its qualities overlap with signature meanings of Ògbóni. The animal itself is adaptable; it can live on land or in water. Since Nigeria's waters are rich with this animal it also signifies prosperity and wealth. This animal also exemplifies the ability to change forms or live in different realms; the Ògbóni are seen as strong and adaptable.

¹³³ For additional illustration see P. 24 of Moşunmola Omibiyi's article Nigerian Musical Instruments. Moşunmila Omibiyi-Obidike, "Nigerian Musical Instruments," *Nigeria Magazine*. No. 122-123, Lagos. (1977): 14-34.

¹³⁴ Peter McKenzie, *Hail Orisha! A Phenomenology of West African Religion in the Mid Nineteenth Century* (Brill: The Netherlands, 1997), 31, and Peter McClelland, *The Cult of Ifá* (Ethnographica Ltd: Great Britain, 1982), 23.

Expressive and highly decorative imagery such as this is more often carved on the largest drums. The large-scale drums are most often the ones that are carved with the symbolism needed for distinctive use in a temple or a house of a chief; for the most part in my research only drums like those in set *b* regularly had in their surface decoration a fish legged figure with arms that become mudfish.

Notes on Where the Ògbóni Drums are Used

Darius Thieme's research shows extensive similarities among the way Ìgbìn drum sets are played and grouped. Any Ògbóni drum may have medicine in it from the time they were made or for some it may be added during ceremonies or sacrifices; medicine can be blood, water, or tinctures. Historically anyone not initiated into or affiliated with the Ògbóni would never be permitted to see the drums. According to Thieme the royal drums would only be found in or next to an Ògbóni meeting or in an important Oba's (ruler) palace. Thieme states: "Their usage is usually restricted to specific occasions of importance on the royal calendar: a state funeral, an installation ceremony for a chief, an important religious or social ceremony, and possibly a major festival or similar occasion."¹³⁵ The royal drums would usually be those elaborately carved, large in size though at times short. In a set there may be one carved elaborately and two with more simple carvings; one may be kept without surface decoration and one may be anthropomorphic.

¹³⁵ Thieme, "A Descriptive Catalogue of Yorùbá Musical Instruments," 243.

I was introduced to a Washington, D.C. Yorùbá priestess, who has traveled to Òsùgbó, the current capital of Òşun State in Western Yorùbáland, on numerous occasions. We met shortly, prior to my trip to Nigeria. She laughed when I asked her if she thought I might have access to see the drums.¹³⁶ She further implied the extreme sacredness of the drum and its relationship to òrìşà Onilé and that the drums honor the Earth.

Òrìşà Onilé is referenced in the Ògbóni visual arts.¹³⁷ Onilé rules the “...Ògbóni society itself, which acts as a third force controlling and maintaining the balance of power between the king and the state.”¹³⁸ Onilé, like Èşù, takes many forms and is needed for the ancestors to accept Yorùbá prayers. Esther A. Dagan describes how “*agba*” drums were used to announce the society’s meetings and to announce when judgments were rendered against offenders of Onilé.¹³⁹ This is a perfect example of the confusion, which can come when reading about the role of the drum. Oba Laoye I observed: “In Yorùbáland during the passing away of an important person like an Oba [king] or an Ògbóni Chief, the *Agba* or *Gbèdu* (capitalization his) is played to announce his death.”¹⁴⁰

Ògbóni drums are made exclusively by and for the Ògbóni. Members of the Ògbóni cult are the artisans who craft the Ògbóni drums. Discriminating visual factors assert the drums’ character through the Ògbóni signature. Ògbóni drums

¹³⁶ I hope, in future projects, to do a formal interview with her when I move on to research on the ìgbìn in contemporary Ifè.

¹³⁷ Peter Morton-Williams. “An Outline of the Cosmology and Cult Organization of the Òyó Yorùbá,” 243-260.

¹³⁸ Esther A. Dagan, *Drums The Heartbeat of Africa*, 55.

¹³⁹ J.R. Ojo. “Ògbóni Drums,” *African Art*, (Spring 1973): 50-52. As quoted in Dagan, *Drums The Heartbeat of Africa*, 113.

¹⁴⁰ Laoye, “Yorùbá Drums,” 12.

usually combine numerous carving techniques and symbols. In figure 33 we see the marking of weaving, probably indicating royalty, with a dominating human face, and the Ògbóni “secret” greeting: right fist over left fist presented only to other Ògbóni members and always to the king. (See fig. 37 a photograph of Ògbóni members.) Symbols reserved for the Ògbóni were done to support the established class structure of wealth and privilege and helped maintain the innermost structure in government and sworn secrecy in the cult or society.

In certain cities the Ògbóni cult was feared. In the best circumstances Ògbóni established and functioned with an inner structure of checks and balances. However, outside influences sometimes broke the traditional structure. In certain cities they were the central government and in others they worked with the head chiefs. The “...*Ògbóni* society itself...acts as a third force controlling and maintaining the balance of power between the king and the state.”¹⁴¹ They may have been feared because of their power in the government and also because of their privately held meetings and rituals. “The Ògbónis are still an important religious group. They are concerned with the worship of the earth. In pre-colonial days, this automatically gave them certain judicial functions: the earth demands retribution for murder, and so the Ògbónis formed a kind of supreme court that dealt with all murder cases and all cases that might involve capital punishment.”¹⁴² Any offenders of Onilé were said to face the Ògbóni in court. The nature of the punishment is unknown, however, the Ògbóni are said to have held the final say

¹⁴¹ Ojo. “Ògbóni Drums,” quoted in Dagan, *Drums The Heartbeat of Africa*, 113.

¹⁴² Ulli Beier, *The Return of the Gods: The Sacred Art of Susanne Wenger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 22.

on decisions on whether or not a man's blood would spill. Information on their role in the state is more readily available than information on their religious and spiritual activities.

Today there are two types of Ògbóni societies in Yorùbáland; the original traditional Ògbóni group and the reformed Ògbóni fraternity. Oyeronke Olajubu said, "The aboriginal Ògbóni existed principally as a political organization for the maintenance of law and order in the society. They were the kingmakers."¹⁴³ The reformed Ògbóni Fraternity blends together aspects of Christianity and traditional heritage.

Ìgbìn for Obàtálá

The Ìgbìn set is best known as the drums for òrìṣà Obàtálá and is symbolic of òrìṣà Obàtálá's love for music. In Yorùbá lore it is said he had four wives who liked to play music for him. Legend claims that òrìṣà Obàtálá made drums for them to play because he became tired of their hand clapping.¹⁴⁴ The Ìgbìn drum ensemble is named after his wives -- *iyánlá, iya agan, keke* and *afeere*.¹⁴⁵ Oba Laoye I stated that mallets and sticks were used with the smallest drum in the set. Akin Euba argues that the design of these drums were already applied before the

¹⁴³ Oyeronke Olajubu, *Women in the Yorùbá Religious Sphere* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 22.

¹⁴⁴ Euba, *Essays*, 5.

¹⁴⁵ William Bascom. "Drums of the Yorùbá of Nigeria," 26. He uses similar terminology to address the "ìgbìn." For the open-ended log-drums or ìgbìn set Bascom names *iya ìgbìn* for the mother drum, and *jagba* and *epele* for the smaller two.

first migration of the Yorùbá to Ile-Ifè in the seventh century.¹⁴⁶ As such, the Ìgbìn are said to predate the tension drums. These drums have a history as long as the years since the Yorùbá were in Ile-Ifè.

Obàtálá is a creator god also known as the god of creativity and is implicated in many versions of the Yorùbá creation myth. He not only had a role in creating humanity but also is known for his creativity and is usually the *òrìṣà* of artists. One example of his role is that he embodies "...the dual relationship of the god of heaven and the goddess of Earth... [and] is symbolized by the halves of a whitened closed calabash among the southwestern Yorùbá, where the halves are called Obàtálá and Oduduwa."¹⁴⁷ Oduduwa is a male Earth god and the symbol for the first Yorùbá king. Obàtálá was said to have taken part in creation of man and lives in the sky.

Ipese for Ifá

The Ipese set is for celebrating and worshipping Ifá, also known as Òrúnmìlà. (Fig. 28) Ifá is a class of philosophy, which includes divination practices, and is infused with Yorùbá mythology, and is a part of Ifè across Yorùbáland. This philosophical aspect of culture is interrelated with well-known sects of *òrìṣàs* and Ògbóni. Many apply "Ifá philosophy" when resolving everyday issues. Others turn to Ifá only during deep hardships.

¹⁴⁶ Euba, *Essays*, 6. According to Akin Euba the design of these drums were already applied before the first migration of the Yorùbá to Ile Ifè in the 7th century.

¹⁴⁷ Henry Drewal, John Pemberton, with Roland Abiodun, *Yorùbá: Nine Centuries of African Art and Thought* (New York: The Center for African Art and Harry N. Abrams Inc. Pub. 1989), 123.

Obtaining the knowledge of Ifá is extremely complicated; diviners who are priests dedicate their lives to obtaining the wisdom of Ifá. There are many ranks for priests, the higher the rank the more access he has to Ifá philosophy. Ifá also refers to Òrúnmìlà, the òrìṣà of knowledge. The diviner-priests or *Babaláwos* have access to what is most often referred to as the Odu of Ifá. Each of the Odu has a distinguishing sign, which the *Babaláwo* recognizes. The Odu are comprised of 256 figures or patterns, which appear after throwing palm nuts or a divining chain on the dust of the divining tray. These patterns refer to a vast collection of verses. “The immediate dramatic shape of the Ifá rite is relatively simple and the ritual precedes the occasional rhythm of a gong or drum.”¹⁴⁸ It is the diviners or the Ifá priests who are the drummers for the Ifá cult.

The Ipese drums are those used in the Ifá cult. They hold a constant place in Ifá history practice. The drums’ expansive role includes peoples use of it as a tool in order to maintain connections to god and individual philosophical beliefs in the source of Ifè. Where the drum is utilized in various sects of society the practice eventually leads to an aspect of connecting to the ancestors and the spirit world. Especially important to keep in mind is how “ordinary individuals, though they consult Ifá constantly, have a more partial view of the cosmology determined by the particular powers and cults they are involved with.”¹⁴⁹ Many who practice

¹⁴⁸ John Pemberton. “Eshu-Elegba: The Yorùbá Trickster God,” 27.

¹⁴⁹ Barber, *Yorùbá Attitudes Towards Òrìṣà*, 724.

Ifá are also involved with other *òrìṣà* sects. Ifá priests in Ọ̀yọ̀ in particular, were intimately associated with Ẓàngó and Ọ̀gbóni.¹⁵⁰

According to Oba Laoye I, Ifá worshippers use the Ipese; the drums in the set are named *ipese*, *aran*, *afere*, and *agogo* for the iron cowbell. The *ipese* of the Ipese set is a pegged membranophone that is slender, conical, and tapering toward the bottom. (See fig. 38). The *aran* is also a pegged membranophone. It is squat, bulbous, and footed. The *afere* tends to be taller than the *aran* but the shape and style is much the same. The *agogo* is an Idiophone, a bell or gong. The *afere* tends to be taller than the *aran* but the shape and style is much the same.

Agere for Ọ̀gún

The Agere set is for Ọ̀gún. This term is sometimes confused with the Apinti set, which are considered to be made up of “talking drums.” The Apinti ̀gb̀n set are cylindrical wooden drums. They are played for *òrìṣà* Ọ̀ṣun (*òrìṣà* of the sea) and are played at Ọ̀ṣun’s festival in Ọ̀sùgbó.¹⁵¹ Drums of this same design are well known in Ghana as their famous “talking drum” Apinti. There is inadequate information available on the Apinti for Ọ̀ṣun. However they are mentioned here as they are in some of my sources, because they are so similar to the Agere for Ọ̀gún.

For Ọ̀gún, instruments other than drums are not played in an arrangement during ritual ceremonies. The drums for Ọ̀gún are usually short and not as

¹⁵⁰ McClelland, *The Cult of Ifá Among the Yorùbá*, 36.

¹⁵¹ Euba notes that the Apinti set is also for *òrìṣà* Ọ̀ṣun and may be arranged with the bell in this context.

elaborately carved as other drums in the ̀gb̀n set.¹⁵² In figure 21 we see figures gathering probably as an indication they will go to hunt or have returned from a hunt. It is possible that if these drums do have the symbolism for hunting that they were used to celebrate *òrìṣà Ògún*. Hunting tools and weapons would certainly have iron and Ògún is the god of iron. In figure 31 we see *gbedu* drum and the edge of a second one slighter larger in size. They are both squat—the smaller about 15 inches tall—and the Oba, or chief, dances beside the drums. The chief's drummers are here referred to as beating Ògún's rhythms and chanting praises. The "*gbedu*" have intricately carved diamond-like woven patterns. The shorter one we can see fully in this photograph and is void of figurative carving.

The Yorùbá Ritual Drum Connects Òrìṣà Groups

All of the ̀gb̀n drums are significant and may be used for purposes outside of the prescribed use outlined in the description of the drum sets. These other uses include the assorted worship inside of the varied Ògbóni practices, as well as cults or societies mentioned such as Orò, Egúngún, and in all *òrìṣà* worship. Each of these societies or cults plays a significant role in the daily lives of the Yorùbá. Government rule and the use of drums are interconnected: Ògbóni, Orò and Egúngún were involved if not central to rule of law, sanctioning of competitions, and mediating disputes. *Òrìṣà* worship is essential for Yorùbá society to function and is acknowledged in the chief's (Oba's) or king's court. Oba

¹⁵² Euba, *Essays on Music in Afrca*, 19.

might seek council at any time so a *Babaláwo* may reside in his palace. An example of the interconnectedness of the Ifa cult and the government.

The Yorùbá ritual drums are ever-present, though more subtle throughout documentation on *òrìṣà* worship. One example is a pair of *Ìgbìn*, which are in honor of Obalufon who is the god who invented weaving. (Fig. 38) This set of *Ìgbìn* drums combine the *òrìṣà*'s iconography and the typical design of the barrel shaped conical *Ìgbìn* drum.

This set for Obalufon is *Ìgbìn* for Obalufon, like the *Ìgbìn* for Obàtálá. Obalufon is actually another manifestation of Obàtálá. These drums with decorated surfaces were carved in registers. Above and below the carved narrative registers are carved patterns of woven-like detail textiles as well as interlaced chevrons, or a diamond shaped-diagonal, relief pattern. On the carved surface Èṣù takes the place of the area usually reserved for mudfish, which is a symbol for *òrìṣà* Olókun. The two drums are titled *agba* Obalufon¹⁵³--literally large drums for Obalufon in the Yorùbá town of Ila Orangun.

Èṣù is present in the carvings on many *Ìgbìn* drums. The meaning of this parallels the importance of his presence among all the *òrìṣà* cults or societies. On the drum for Obalufon we see that the characteristics of Èṣù are important. Èṣù assists in the carrying of messages and prayers within Ifá practices as well as individual *òrìṣà* worship. Èṣù is the mediator between the living world and the world of the ancestors.

¹⁵³ Pemberton, "Eshu-Elegba: The Yorùbá Trickster God," 27.

Ògbóni members, especially the eldest among them, may not be concerned much with Èṣù's activities. John Pemberton says: "Their lives are a confirmation of both their fortunate pre-natal destiny and of the efficacy of the ritual way of Ifè. ... They are the ones who have acknowledged the way and the power of Èṣù."¹⁵⁴ Understanding Èṣù is being aware that he can make himself known in daily domestic Ifè as well as in the economic Ifè such as in the market. Èṣù teaches lessons outside of ritual space.

Èṣù was a part of most sacred ceremonies. The Ògbóni were so in a different capacity. They were so intrinsically a part of the structure of Yorùbá society that their culture was considered to be a part of every ceremony, from members being a part of *òrìṣà* groups to *òrìṣà* groups heeding to the Ògbóni when planning celebrations and activities. Whether the Ìgbìn drum belongs to the Ògbóni cult or to Ifá we know in texts that the Ìgbìn appears at irregular intervals. This study on the drum families should clarify the broader meaning of all the single membrane conical drums and their use in Yorùbá societies.

The Ògbóni are fully aware and mindful of the importance of Èṣù and his significance during Ifè's journey. Journey is an important theme for this research. I look at it in terms of ritual, spirituality, and in terms of growing old and wise. Each person's experience of "journey" is individual; a person starts from inside where he or she is knowledgeable of self. It can continue on, for example, from the movement one takes after the end of a workday, toward a space preparing for a

¹⁵⁴ Pemberton, "Eshu-Elegba: The Yorùbá Trickster God," 70.

festival. Journey can also be referred to as a liminal transition from secular to sacred.

Chapter 4 Yorùbá Carving

The Yorùbá arts embody liminality, ancestor worship, and the potential for communication between mundane and sacred spheres.¹⁵⁵ The sculptor interprets connections between myth and symbol and at the same time adheres to prevailing styles and conventions. Figures are carved stylistically and the proportions are treated very similarly among the various techniques. Generally in figurative work various artists treat human proportions the same way, as if there is a Yorùbá canon. “Sculptures should make readily visible important detail, striking a balance between the conspicuous and the obscure.”¹⁵⁶ Robert Ferris Thompson’s statement helps to explain the tradition of enlarging the most important part of the sculpture. When this is a human figure usually it is the head that is larger. This also applies to qualities of line and selected shapes, which may be emphasized.

Kevin Carroll’s *Yorùbá Religious Carvings* offers his readers intimate examinations of several artists’ lives, bringing us closer to their religious and social Ifè. There is a particular focus on artists in northeastern Yorùbáland. Carroll showcases Areogun-yanna, born north of Ekiti circa 1880. In a set of carved wooden doors, “Doors at Ijero” cult members are depicted in their intersections with both mundane and ceremonial Ifè.¹⁵⁷ We see a man riding a bicycle in one

¹⁵⁵ In prior chapters I have noted that liminality is, briefly, the transition from the secular space and consciousness to the spiritual. Liminality always indicates a sacred dimension and the containment of secrets.

¹⁵⁶ Thompson, *Black Gods and Kings*, chapter 3 page 2.

¹⁵⁷ Kevin Carroll, *Yorùbá Religious Carvings; Pagan and Christian Sculpture in Nigeria and Dahomey* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1967), 53.

frame and (three frames below) a woman making an offering in a bowl held above her head. See fig. 39.

For the Yorùbá the most important human feature is the head, which they consecrate as the seat of reason. In “Doors at Ijero” (Fig. 39) certain heads with crowns are equal to the size of those figures’ entire torso leaving their legs to one-fifth the size of the body. This emphasis is further displayed when the head is carved with as much detail as the full body and its size is equal to the rest of the body. This is also in three-dimensional carvings such as the Yorùbá house posts (Fig. 40) and anthropomorphic drums (Fig.41). Some heads of figures are emphasized by the special attention given to their hair alone. These characteristic hairstyles often resemble crowns; hairstyles worn by certain devotees can be distinguished by the style of the coiffure or adorned headdress. A special coiffure is used, for example, for the devotees of the ancestor god or *òrìṣà* Ṣàngó and the *òrìṣà* Obàtálá. In carvings special headdresses are done for all royalty including the Ògbóni.

Mythic imagery such as the origins of the *òrìṣà* and *òrìṣà*-related social practices are popular themes in Yorùbáland. A female figure carrying a calabash bowl on her head is a metaphor for the connection between *òrìṣà* devotee and the spiritual world, and can also be a literal representation of a sacred offering. A woman kneeling while holding a calabash symbolizes reverence to Òṣun.¹⁵⁸ Carroll argues that for the Yorùbá, the carved surface is a powerful social canvas on which to recount important habitual and historically notable activities. Carroll’s

¹⁵⁸ Carroll, *Yorùbá Religious Carvings*, 2.

analysis of “Doors at Ijero” housed at Ijero, (Fig. 39) Ekiti, identifies an equestrian-soldier and a boy holding a pipe to his mouth as indicators of Èṣù’s divine presence.¹⁵⁹ A panel such as this might include a range of important symbols in a narrative space capable of documenting a successful journey with its many activities or maybe the settling of a new town. The artist has space to be stylistically expressive and as detailed as he likes on the most important figures.

These doors may have originally been a part of a shrine or a meeting place for governmental officials. Although many important religious figures are represented, Carroll notes, these scenes were not secretive but were meant to be seen by the public. Carroll leaves unanswered the questions of the interrelationships between images and the manner of reading the carvings. Questions that might help us better understand the scenes should be considered: How did society or religious changes affect symbols in pictorial carvings? In what particular ways were people meant to interact with these works?¹⁶⁰

We do not know the identities of the artists who carved the drums that are the focus of this thesis. Our purpose is to ascribe an interpretive meaning based on what is known about the contexts in which the drums were used and inferences drawn from published research on similar carved reliefs. There is not enough time here, but works like Thomson’s *Black Gods and Kings*, could allow one to make

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 53.

¹⁶⁰ A book such as *The Gelede Spectacle, Art, Gender, and Social Harmony in an African Culture*, by Babatunde Lawal, (University of Washington Press, Seattle and London: 1996), is the best way to unite the sculptural form and its prescribed setting. So much of African art needs to be looked at in an anthropological, physical-cultural perspective. This book describes its art works within the structure of the ceremony in which they are used; active photos and descriptions of the events are included. This is the sort of publication I had hoped to find in order to understand the highly sculptural ìgbìn drums.

claims about the region from which a particular drum may have originated; his examples are shown by comparison.

Signs and Symbols

In *Yorùbá Sacred Kingship; A Power like that of the Gods*, John Pemberton and Afolayan illustrate “Palace Veranda Panels” by Ila Orangun, which is offered as a celebration of the rebuilding of society. (Fig. 42) They were carved while reconstruction and redevelopment were taking place following the 1927 war. Pemberton and Afolayan identify the subject matter as the Festival for the Ancestors and the relationships between important figures during that festival.

One can identify the many activities that take place at the ancestor festival by properly identifying the signs and symbols on the set of antique doors. The king, whose connection with the ancestors is the most powerful of all the people, is located in the center of the central door. He is at eye level and his proportions are larger than all other figures. We see abundance, propagation of *Ilfè*, hunters, and drummers. The placement of these figures is even more significant as the authors note that the social sphere is ordered in the same way: the palace is at the center of town. Within the palace, the king is in tune with the houses and shrines before him. The carving is a powerful assertion that the festivals, town activities, and governance are in harmony and that living energy or *ase* is therefore created and regulated. For regenerating and conserving Yorùbá ontology, all this must be in balance.

In these *Veranda Panels* the king's head is under a structural covering like a canopy. (See fig. 42) He is also crowned. This royal scene draws attention to the king with the help of the carving style; because it is carved in a deeper relief than the surrounding figures, the deep shadows amplify its salience. Drums and drummers are positioned behind the king. There are also drummers in the scene above the king. Pemberton and Afolayan identify the drums there as *Ìgbìn* drums. (See fig. 42, upper, central scene.) This is quite significant because the panel is a record of a specific event and there are very few resources that note quite specifically when and where *Ìgbìn* drums were used.

These panels were probably meant to be seen by the public. Afolayan and Pemberton describe the lower panel where scenes of drummers and dancers are depicted on the drums as well as "...the priest of *òrìṣà* Obàtálá and *òrìṣà* Osoosi, [are] dancing before the *Ìgbìn* drums of Obàtálá..." just as these performance would take place among the activities in daily *Ìfè*.¹⁶¹ Scenes of a king's procession including a drummer are not rare, but those with the *Ìgbìn* are. Often in carvings the drummer, in front of or following the king, holds a *bata* or *dun dun* drum. Customarily drummers are like "... the priests of the *òrìṣà*, they are privileged, for they are thought to be possessed of unusual powers."¹⁶² It is also not uncommon for drummers to be priests.

Carved symbols commonly seen on the *Ìgbìn* include intertwined snakes, zigzag like weaves, and infinity symbols. There are see zigzag weaves on several

¹⁶¹ Funso S. Afolayan, and John Pemberton III, *Yorùbá Sacred Kingship* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 95.

¹⁶² *Ibid*, 97.

drums including figures 43 and 44 as well as the infinity symbol in the center of figure 19d. Certain carved surfaces intentionally interlock, as another signature of Yorùbá treatments of the significant. For example, Fraser observes that “the logic of existence is that there is an interlocking interdependence of all things in the continuing struggle of Ifè and death.”¹⁶³ A stylized human, like the Èṣù faces at the head of divination trays, sometimes become “dompteurs,” a body that grabs its own legs. This becomes a particular theme in many Ijebu carvings.

The dompteur holds its own legs or mudfish-like appendages sometimes with a mudfish tail also. Hans Witte has conducted extensive research on symbolic imagery in the Yorùbá cosmos. In his article “Ifá Trays from the Osogbo and Ijebu Regions” he addresses many icons, which are also prominent on many Ìgbìn drums.¹⁶⁴ Witte reminds us that the mudfish has the ability to live on land in the dry season. Often this is the central figure in an area of designs and geometric shapes as in the central body shown in figure 44, which has a human face, with fin-like rays projecting from its head; these rays are intended to convey the presence of the supernatural. This body is as unique as a female holding her extended fish feet. A dompteur can be as elaborate as an Èṣù figure with snake legs twisting and knotting out and around the body – detailed and decorative.

¹⁶³ Douglas Fraser and Herbert Cole, *African Art and Leadership* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1972), 363.

¹⁶⁴ Dr. Hans Witte, *Earth and the Ancestors: Ògbóni Iconography* (Amsterdam, Holland: Gallery Balolu, 1988).

Signifiers and Social Practices

Semiotics offers some constructs useful for a preliminary deciphering of the symbolic system of drum carvings. The drum is the signifier; the signs carved on its surface implicate metaphor and meaning. With or without determining their precise meaning in their original context, these signs are best understood in terms of the phenomenology of their use and interpretation in their traditional context.¹⁶⁵ Today, the highly decorated drums can be seen in museums, but very few are ever observed in their actual ritual context. Much of this is due to secretive traditions meant to preserve the culture and shield the uninitiated from what they are not prepared to witness.

Signs and symbols on many of the drums illustrated are connected to the—*òrìṣà* gods and spirits in the Yorùbá canon. Some *òrìṣà* were once humans and became godly upon dying and are given a human face. Others are given animal features and some no image at all. “Though art associated with *òrìṣà* is often religious it is not held to contain a spirit, and is never worshipped as a spirit. *Òrìṣà* art is most typically symbolic of the spirit; *Ògbóni* art in context is saved and worshipped as the actual vessel of the spirit.”¹⁶⁶ When Dennis Williams compares *òrìṣà* and *Ògbóni* art, he summarizes the content of the *òrìṣà* art as “descriptive” and “humanistic.” All forms are abstract and “architectonic.” Meaning *Ògbóni* art

¹⁶⁵ A complicated term which, also describes a movement in thinking or philosophy, strongly developed by Edmund Husserl, German Philosopher. Phenomenology is that which makes up a human consciousness, from one individual’s to a small collective. “Consciousness, as phenomenologists tell us, exists only as intended awareness through the agencies of the perceptions.” Robert Plant Armstrong, *Wellspring: On the Myth and Source of Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 25.

¹⁶⁶ Williams, “Iconology of the Yorùbá,” 139.

has content that is “archetypal” and “hieratic.” The form becomes “iconic” and “linear.” Williams notes that while *òrìṣà* carving is typically visual and lives in the actual and concrete world, Ògbóni art is typically conceptual and relates and represents the world of the spirit and of existence: geometric shapes, patterns, and abstractions.

Many of the most elaborately carved works belong to the Ògbóni or Oshugbo sects who have historically been the rulers of many Yorùbá towns and cities. *Òrìṣà* are connected to most aspects of society especially those set in a ritual context. All arts of the Ògbóni principal culture are associated directly with royalty and are generally housed in palaces and shrines. Membership in the Ògbóni cult consists primarily of male elders. When the Ògbóni are the rulers of a city or town, a slightly different system is established. In either case, the broader society depends on this cult for certain social responsibilities, as is the case with other specialized “cults.”

Societies and cults together contribute to the normal functioning society. The Orò are responsible for being the police in certain cities, the Ògbóni, the judges, the Egúngún who help mediate disputes and facilitate relationships between the living and the ancestors, and the Gelede who maintain and develop “... social strategies for promoting community peace, happiness, and togetherness (*asuwada*).”¹⁶⁷ Community members acknowledged the important role each society held. Yorùbá consciousness embraced the interconnectedness between spiritual and secular in part due to Ifá philosophy.

¹⁶⁷ Lawal, *Gelede*, 16.

Ògbóni iconography is easily recognizable by its depictions of rulers flanked by cult members using hand gestures like the clenched fist, left hand over right, and visual representations of the *edan* bronze castings. They are a pair of cast figures, on average measuring about a foot long, and are mostly worn over the shoulders connected by an iron chain. Only the most elite Ògbóni or Oshugbo people or those who have spiritual powers may wear or carry these *edan*. Denis Williams conducted interviews in Iwo from which he learned the *edan* bind the members to secrecy. They represent the earth *òrìṣà* Onilé, and they symbolize “the union of heaven and earth on which all human existence is based.”¹⁶⁸

Williams argues that the arts of the Ògbóni are either purely decorative or purely aesthetic. “Their works are not standardized either regionally or across greater Yorùbá land. The subject matter may be a standard throughout Yorùbá country but the artists have varied styles and technique.”¹⁶⁹ Typical carvings may even be revised from one creation to the next.

Williams makes it known that the African artist is in contact with the vital forces of nature and the ontological beliefs of his community and that these factors are fused in their work. The actual is self-transcendent; when the artist starts, the work is connected to higher powers. Williams declares that “there is no object; there is only Ifè indwelling in an infinite multitude of forms around him, severely controlled by the pantheon of the *òrìṣà* who manipulate objective matter

¹⁶⁸ Williams, “Icon and Image,” 236.

¹⁶⁹ Denis Williams, “The Iconology of the Yorùbá Edan Ògbóni,” *Africa*. Vol. 34 No.2 London University Press (April 1964): 242.

by virtue of its being possessed by spirit.”¹⁷⁰ The elders work with the artists to insure that the translation of signs and their context are accurate. R. F. Thompson’s position is that “the Ògbóni member is the man turned inside-out, revealing the odd, left, inner side to his existence.”¹⁷¹

The Ògbóni are considered by members of their community to possess a high level of cosmic knowledge and a superior understanding of human consciousness. However, the *òrìṣà* often speak through the Ifá system of philosophy and their translator is the Babaláwo, healer, herbalist, and priest, one who can translate messages and read into that which is not “seen” in everyday Ifè.

Specific Art Works with *Òrìṣà*

The *òrìṣà* dominate within a Yorùbá religious system in which there are 401 divinities.¹⁷² Many are represented in woodcarvings associated with various masquerades, ceremonies, kingship regalia, and divining tools. The *òrìṣà* and their symbolic representations are carved on ritual bowls, plaques, drums, masks, doors, house posts, maternity or fertility figures, chairs, and stools. Carvings often represent figures of religious significance integrated with the community: divinities with cult members or pious community members and laypeople together. They often reiterate folkloric narratives about daily Ifè. This portrayal is facilitated by the

¹⁷⁰ Williams, “Iconology of the Yorùbá,” 246.

¹⁷¹ Thompson, *Black Gods and Kings*, 6/2.

¹⁷² Abimbola, *The Ifá Divination System*, 9.

inclusion of honorable rulers, compelling geometric symbols, symbolic tools, objects and or weapons, as well as animal representation.

Where divinities are represented, it is an indicator of a home where they may frequent or reside. Their presence in an architectural carving thus provides a partial meaning as well as an indication of the function and affiliation of the site where they may have been used. Figures in the amalgam of woodcarvings are displayed with or as divinities (many of whom were once mortals) who are not worshipped in this form but rather used to demarcate a celebrated entity, to serve as a vehicle for communication with them, and/or serve as a tool to invite their memory and presence, and to assist in materializing their wisdom and strengths. Èṣù, like an *òrìṣà*, is a messenger that acts between god and humans, Èṣù is known to stir-up trouble and also aid in the ability to fix problems. Èṣù is easily identified and is more frequently seen than Obàtálá and Oduduwa.¹⁷³ Unlike Obàtálá and Oduduwa, Èṣù is not a deified ancestor.

The scenes and icons on the *Ìgbìn* drum directly and indirectly embody mythology, religious practices, and history. The most omniscient one, “God” or *Ọlọrun- Ọlódùmarè* owner of heaven, Obàtálá-*Ọrìṣàálá* the creator, *Ọrúnmìlà-Ifá*, god of wisdom and *Ifá* philosophy, and Oduduwa the great goddess and queen of Yorùbá descendants are not represented in these carvings.¹⁷⁴ There may be indicators of their significance, or even a symbol that can be associated with them, but there is no human figure that represents them. These *Ilfè*-giving entities are a

¹⁷³ Caroll, *Yorùbá Religious Carvings*, 52.

¹⁷⁴ For in-depth descriptions of creation and Yorùbá cosmos and Yorùbá concept of God see: McKenzie, *Hail Ọrìṣà!*, 508-12, and Drewal, Pemberton and Abiodun, *Yorùbá: Nine Centuries of African Art and Thought*, 13, and McClelland, *The Cult of Ifá Among The Yorùbá*, 44.

part of a type of order within which the *òrìṣà* help maintain balance in the world and market place. Obàtálá is both an *òrìṣà* and a symbol of creation. God (Ọlórún-Ọlódùmarè), owner of heaven, the creator of the physical body and creativity, the god of wisdom, and the goddess of all the Yorùbá descendants reveal purpose and meaning to devotees and practitioners.

It is fair to say that the *òrìṣà* and Èṣù who is like an *òrìṣà* and identified as such at times, hold important roles among the themes of the Yorùbá decorated membranephones. “Èṣù, the *òrìṣà* who is messenger of the gods, the guardian of the ritual process, the bearer of sacrifices...”¹⁷⁵ This is a major aspect of the personality of Èṣù, and explains his association with the drums. On the Ìgbìn drums in the collection of the National Museum and Ibadan Museum Èṣù’s visual representation and characteristic symbols are prominent. The presentation of a soft human organic face floating, without a ground or body, much like those on divination trays, represents Èṣù.¹⁷⁶ According to Babatunde Lawal, “Èṣù activates the face, the site of perception and communication, reflecting the feelings of pain and pleasure, joy and sorrow, hope and despair, and other passions associated with temporal existence and behavior.”¹⁷⁷ Èṣù has many characteristics and the related role most central to the Ìgbìn is that of divine messenger, a reflection of self-respect, discipline, and the heavenly assistant to all the *òrìṣà*.

¹⁷⁵ Pemberton and Afolayan, *Yorùbá Sacred Kingship*, 135.

¹⁷⁶ For a discussion of realistic carvings and representational art among the Yorùbá please see Babatunde Lawal, “Aworan: Representing the Self and its Metaphysical Other in Yorùbá Art,” *The Art Bulletin* (September 2001): 498-526.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 500.

Òrìṣà Ṣàngó, the once great king or Alaafin of Old Òyó, is also prominently represented in the arts. Ṣàngó's imagery prompts remembrance of all male elders. He is represented as an equestrian, a hunter, and one who holds power over lightning and thunder. *Òrìṣà* Ọya is his wlfè. She is identified with the wind. Ṣàngó's devotees, priests, and priestesses are frequently represented with the female devotees often shown seated or kneeling with a plate or calabash held above her head. Ṣàngó is divinity of storms and Yemoja of the waters. Iconography associated with them both are seen together in carvings.

The fish-legged or self-drompting figure sometimes holds mudfish, human heads, or percussion instruments. (See fig. 43, 44) She is *òrìṣà* Yemoja less frequently but sometimes associated with *òrìṣà* Olókun. Yemoja is associated with rivers, and is the celestial wlfè to *òrìṣà* Ògún. When she is associated with streams she may be called *òrìṣà* Ọṣun.¹⁷⁸ You may see this figure with fins reminiscent of a mermaid; she is also more currently named Mammy Water and similarly seen in Benin art.¹⁷⁹ See figure 45b for a good example of a modern Mammy Water.

In carvings the *òrìṣà* and human figures are usually all framed within a single scene. It may be a decorative border at the edge of an entire work or maybe a boundary set in between numerous scenes on one work. In many of the drums seen in my photographs, we see different styles of border patterns. For example,

¹⁷⁸ McKenzie, Hail *Òrìṣà!*, 437.

¹⁷⁹ The Benin people, south and east of the Yorùbá, share similarities in artistic content. See Herbert Cole and Douglas Fraser's *African Art and Leadership* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1972).

see the zigzag or woven-like lines in figures, 30, 33, 46, 47. Note the crosshatching design beneath the main scene.

Hans Witte mentions the presence of ancient diviners who are, in Ijebu, invoked during divining sessions and that they are represented in the divining trays interlacing pattern in the border. In the cloth and adornment worn by priests and kings we often see these patterns, as well. Design choices in a work of art can correspond to social order and the way society is viewed. Background or border patterns on woodcarvings could represent aristocracy and the way they interact with the rest of society.

... the structure of the arts and the structure of society are homologous and reflect Yorùbá aesthetic preferences but, more importantly, that these structures are concrete manifestations of Yorùbá conceptions of the nature of existence and being.¹⁸⁰

The discussion of these patterns and their significance continues in the catalog section.

Artistic Powers of the Drums

The drums convey through their service design symbolic knowledge. The artist who created the shrine drums may have had fewer constraints than the Ògbóni court drums. When an Ògbóni court drum is brought into an Ògbóni house the members celebrate their traditional practices throughout history.

¹⁸⁰ Margaret Thompson Drewal and John Drewal. "Composing Time and Space in Yorùbá Art," *Word and Image; African Art and Literature*. Vol.3 No. 3 (July-September 1987): 225.

The drums also refer to cryptic symbols -- symbols hidden within other signifiers, which exist and have value. Whether or not they are made known has a lot to do with the context the drum is offered. For example, a symbolic object connected to ritual is buried when a new shrine is built. "...Ile, the earth principal itself, is buried in the floor of the shrine and the Onilé, which could be any object at all is placed on it as a focus marking its existence: it may be a pebble, a cowrie shell, a figurative bronze casting."¹⁸¹ Other earth elements are traditionally offered to Ile and buried in ceremony such as snails, tortoises, and pigeons. Denis Williams states: "These substances are gathered into four calabashes previously used in the ritual and buried in the circumferential relationship to the sacrifice."¹⁸² The site is then known as an Ile.

Lorraine Daston writes, "Things communicate by what they are as well as by how they mean."¹⁸³ She continues by explaining, the relationship of things and their properties, the complexity of a thing and: "... the mode of thinking with things, how things helpfully epitomize and concentrate complex relationships that cohere without being logical in the strict sense..."¹⁸⁴ She compares and contrasts, as a science, ways in which attempts can be made at knowing the absolute perception and essence of a thing. This is pertinent because all viewers, with varied backgrounds, may instinctually have knowledge of the *Ìgbìn* drum and its relationship to the culture. Those with Yorùbá spiritual training may have the

¹⁸¹ Williams, "Icon and Image," 236.

¹⁸² Ibid, 236.

¹⁸³ Lorraine Daston, *Things That Talk: Object Lessons from Art and Science* (New York: Zone Books 2004), 20.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 20.

highest perception and intrinsic knowledge of the object as well as knowing what is true about it and what is never documented; this is always a factor in Yorùbá Arts.

Yorùbá drums exist in an indeterminate realm between reading texts and icons and aural messages - either with the ears or with the intellect, and understanding between the familiar and the unknown. Many of the images on the drum refer to this transrational realm. "What is unseen yet acknowledged intellectually and emotionally by spectators must be considered part of the expressive quality of the work of art."¹⁸⁵ While the drum itself is a vehicle for spirits to come and go from the place we are most familiar, it also signifies a possibility for possession and trance, for uplifting voice and prayer, and shifting consciousness.

The carvings under scrutiny in this study have the ability to provide a sensible bridge between invisible and visible domains. I have borrowed the term liminality to describe functions of the drums to bridge this type of threshold. The drums and their music allow for a collapse of the normal sense of time and space and a change in the Yorùbá person's ability to order their world, and examine their relationships to others, time, space, and the ancestors.

¹⁸⁵ Drewal and Thompson Drewal, "Composing Time and Space in Yorùbá Art," 229.

Catalog of Figures

Fig 44 Shrine Drum

This drum has many traditional Yorùbá symbols and is considered anointed. Here the central figure is fishtailed and its arms become mudfish. The perimeter of this *gbedu* shrine drum or *agba*, literally big drum, is a decorative woven pattern and a ridge to separate it from the central panel. In the right image, we see the fish tailed mermaid like figure with mudfish hands, rays emanating from the head like a crown, with large triangular eyes. In the left image we see two shrine attendants both carrying swords. There are no exact measurements available but the drum is approximately 3 1/2 feet tall.

Specifically connected to this carved drum is the Gbedu Drum from Ijebu.¹⁸⁶ (See fig. 43)This plate is a great resource for identifying the drum in the photograph I took at the Lagos Museum, unfortunately the artist is unknown. These drums share qualities with other Ijebu styles as well. These two drums may have been made by the same artist, however we are not able to see completely around either of these drums. The carving styles are similar.

The central figure, may be Olókun and is known as an agent who's power (*ase*) creates a space where it is then able to cross invisible borders, really those impassable to humans.¹⁸⁷ New image fig This agent, accompanied by various symbols carries messages to the ancestors like Èṣù . It is in essence an ancestor.

¹⁸⁶ Abiodun, Drewal, and Pemberton, *Yorùbá Art and Aesthetics*, pg 58.

¹⁸⁷ The same imagery is seen on the Oshugo or Ògbóni shrine doors in *African Art that Conceals and Reveals*. Mary H. Nooter, *African Art that Conceals and Reveals*, 145 Catalog # 58.

Fraser notes that this central figure has many functions throughout Yorùbá societies. He contends that its importance would be predominant in Şàngó cults as well as at king's courts where it might be intended to represent Oduduwa.¹⁸⁸ In *African Arts* J.R.O. Ojo writes on a set of Ògbóni drums from Ifè now in the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, they are carved in a stylistically "Ògbóni technique." (See fig. 32) This can be compared to a much more geometrically designed surface carving but with a similar central figure as the one in figure 36. J.R.Ojo contends the motif is Onilé, the earth mother. The relief style most often associated with Ògbóni is geometric, short chiseled patterns. Those better known with Òsùgbó in the Ijebu region have more curved features.

24 Ògbóni Drum

The typical Ìgbìn structure applied in figure 33 is a much lighter drum than the large shrine drum like figure 44. Figure 33 has been lifted from the ground level by carving three pedestal legs in a simplified shape of a female. Ìgbìn, which are made specifically for Ògbóni, have three legs. Others more likely for the *òrìşà* have four legs or a completely round pedestal footing. Figure 33 shares carving styles with the drum published in Robert Farris Thompson's *Black Gods and Kings*.¹⁸⁹ (See fig. 46)¹⁹⁰

In Fig. 33a we see a male holding his left fist over right. This gesture indicates that it was made for Ògbóni, as this is one of the secret greeting symbols

¹⁸⁸ For a more detailed review of this iconology see: Fraser, Douglas and Cole, Herbert M. "The Fish Legged Figure in Benin and Yorùbá Art" *African Art and Leadership*, 261

¹⁸⁹ Thompson, Robert Farris. *Black Gods and Kings* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1971).

¹⁹⁰ Other drums with this shape and structure are depicted in Frank Willet's *African Art*.

among members. In 33b we see the central figure, which is a human face surrounded by a mandorla, as explained at the start of chapter 3. The horizontal facial markings on both cheeks indicate a Nigerian ethnic group. Those markings that are more angular tend to signify Yorùbá. According to Samuel Johnson three parallel markings or keloids indicate Òyó ethnicity.¹⁹¹

The carved scene shows an Ògbóni tradition of saluting the Earth and the Ancestors. In figure 33d we see a child being held in reverence of the earth just as it is in Thompson's close-up of an Ògbóni drum we see a child being held up-side-down and close to the earth in reverence, another action saluting the earth. The child is being held by his feet to enable the mother or devotee to give praises and according to Thompson, so this mother can greet the earth while lifting her child three times in salute of the earth.

The woven like diamond patterns carved, as a border above the scene and a less detailed pattern below is representative of the seat of authority. The egg shaped illuminated area around the central face is traditional in carvings for Ògbóni, according to Frank Willet. He asserts that anyone who weaves creates volume beyond human understanding. The lower portion of the drum is made to represent woven patterns and represents wisdom and understanding.

In 33c we see a man holding a dog by his collar. All carvers and blacksmiths traditionally worshipped the god Ògún, several symbols are attributed to him include the dog and carving tools. In the first panel you can see a snail shell. It is at the ground level and is a cone shaped shell. The *òrìṣà* represented by

¹⁹¹ Johnson, *The History of the Yorùbás; From the Earliest Times to the Beginning*, 76.

the snail, is Obàtálá. The snail (ìgbín) is patient, cool, and fluid. “Within the calm movement of this animal we find the concentration of the moral interests of the Yorùbá, the water of understanding, the white blood of the mollusk, the pouring of patience on the world.”¹⁹²

Fig 30 Ògbóni Drum

Figure 30 shows a pegged cylindrical drum is supported by three feet, which are figurative torsos. The female torsos have conical upright breasts, the wrists are secured in an upraised salutary position and the hands are clenched. The procession in the main scene leads to the royal figure seated, some devotees face outward and others walk toward the central face with the mandorala. Devotees praise the ground and Onilé, and praise the ruler, who is seated while holding a staff, probably an Ògbóni chief.

The well-known carver George Bandele, Ushe-Ekiti, Nigeria carved the Ògbóni drum in figure 47, published in Carroll's *Yorùbá Religious Carving*. This work shows significant Şàngó iconography where the main figure probably a devotee holds Oshe and Shere.¹⁹³ Oshe is a rattle used along with drumming. Together these instruments evoke Şàngó. The Shere is a dance wand also known, as Şàngó Axe.

The figurative scene, in figure 33, from the Lagos Museum shows the symbol of the left fist over the right, a secret sign among Ògbóni members. Cross

¹⁹² Thompson, *Black Gods and Kings*, 6/4.

¹⁹³ Corroll, *Yoruba Religious Carving*, 33.

hatching serves as a decorative background and as a symbol of royalty.

Depictions of woven textiles that mimic the diamond shaped-weave at the top of the drum are found throughout Yorùbá art, also noted with figure 33. Figure 47 and figure 33 are similar in design. From the drumhead to the feet, they both have a top border that mimics a woven pattern, then a scene of human figures, which hold *òrìṣà* symbolism, then another border that frames the scene and ornamental figures that act as pedestals or feet for the body of the drum.

The woven pattern or cross-hatching that makes small diamond shapes could be an indication of the ‘wrong’ side of the cloth, or ‘opposite’ according to Thompson in *Black Gods and Kings* is one of the “basic symbols of the power of the earth.”¹⁹⁴ The concept is said to be “extremely Ògbóni” and that the inside of a textured robe touches the sweat of the wearer and “the dust of the ground simultaneously, and yet the wrong side of the cloth spread across the earth touches the power of the earth or covers the heart of the human wearer. This tremendously powerful symbol fits the inverse of propriety which is the soul of the Ògbóni cult.”¹⁹⁵ The carved woven pattern is a theme on most drums, across stylistic schema, identified as Ògbóni, gbedu, or agba drums.

Fig 19 Ògbóni Drum

The Ògbóni drum in figure 19 includes figures carved in high relief; their human shape and qualities are pronounced. We can see three figures give the

¹⁹⁴ Thompson, *Black Gods and Kings*, P. 6/2.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 6/3.

secret Ògbóni symbol, left fist over right, and there are numerous royalty symbols. One includes the ìbó, or "... interlaced pattern, which in the first series is represented in the most simple form of a figure eight."¹⁹⁶

Numbers are significant in Yorùbá philosophy. When four and three are combined this represents the combination of òrìṣà Ṣàngó with Ifá and the earth, Ilè. According to Denis Williams in *Icon and Image* variations of form on ritual drums or Ṣàngó staffs is indicated by the interrelationship of two or more cults. Williams describes Ògbóni art as an "epiphany; an immateriality made manifest. An instinct and pervading presence of eternal spirit to which the initiate addresses his real, his abiding self, with exactly the same sense of reality as he addresses his material brother."¹⁹⁷

The central figure on Fig 19c is female and wears a four-pointed crown. This figure holds a figurative staff in each hand. These are either the Ògbóni édan or Ògún iron staff. The combination of motifs included in one ritual drum concentrates spiritual meaning. For the devotee it is a single focal point for worship of a number of particular òrìṣà. "The Ògbóni have a cult house (Iledi) in which they meet. Both men and women are members. The female members are called Erelu and they represent the interest of the women of the town. The two leading officials are the Oluwo (lord of the Mystery) and the Apena (maker of the

¹⁹⁶ Hans Witte. "Ifá Trays from the Osogbo and Ijebu Regions," *The Yorùbá Artist* Abiodun, Rowland, Drewal, Henry John, and Pemberton III, John. *The Yorùbá Artist: New Theoretical Perspectives on African Arts*. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 66.

¹⁹⁷ Williams, *Icon and Image*, 246.

way) and they are in charge of the cults' judicial functions."¹⁹⁸ These two figures are represented in Fig. 19c. They flank the central figure that may represent Oduduwa, the king of Ifè.

Throughout Yorùbáland there is a belief that the concentration of the power of an individual is in the head; it is the seat of reason, power, and character. "The emphasis on the head (Ori) in Yorùbá figure sculpture goes beyond its biological importance as the seat of the brain, which controls the body. It also reveals the anthropomorphic nature of Yorùbá cosmology, which identifies the Supreme Being, Olódùmarè. As the head of a pantheon of deities called *òrìṣà*, who act as the agents enabling power (*ase*)."¹⁹⁹

The symbolism of the plank – like rectangular shape on this pattern is very rare. (Fig. 19b) (See similar symbol on Fig 43) As a metaphor it may represent a ladder that reaches into the sky or heavens. It may be symbolic of the physical space in the shrine between members and ritual figures. Denis Williams draws examples of ladder pattern, which serve as tattoos on a young initiates front.²⁰⁰ When I inquired about this symbol Yorùbá art historian Babtunde Lawal stated: "Nonetheless, most informants agreed that the three layers on the symbol allude to the significance of the number 3 in Ògbóni/Òsùgbó rituals. Hence the popular saying: 'Agbagba meji lo mo idi eeta' The symbol may thus double as a decorative motif (*ara*) or ornament (*ise ona*) and a signifier, alluding to the power of

¹⁹⁸ *Exhibition Guide: Music, Dance, and Yorùbá Culture*. National Commission for Museums and Monuments Nigeria, Co. April 2002 pg 42.

¹⁹⁹ Sieber and Herreman. "Hair in African Art and Culture." Lawal, Babatunde. *Orilonise: The Hermeneutics of the Head and Hairstyles among the Yorùbá*. Pg 93.

²⁰⁰ Denis Williams, *The Iconology of the Yorùbá Edan Ògbóni* pg 148. "Africa" vol 24 April 1964.

'threeness' in Ògbóni/Òsùgbó iconography. The Yorùbá word for a symbol is 'ami' that is, a sign or signifier that conveys much more than meets the eye."²⁰¹

Fig. 45 Ìgbìn Drum

The drum in figure 45 has the iconography to indicate combined meaning between the spirit of the waters like Yemoja, and the spirit of the land like Şàngó, and Ògbóni. The numerous figures may describe events at a festival or maybe scenes from a devotee's or priests everyday Ifè. The connection regarding Şàngó is supported by Peter McKenzie's statement that whenever activities for Şàngó transpired then drumming would be nearby.²⁰²

The two drummers on the lower left scene, Fig. 45a are not dressed for drumming in the company of the king. It is more likely this was for ritual and prayer in the shrine or temple. In Yorùbá scholarship, there are many references to drumming as part of the ritual action. The two male drummers seem to have cloth wrapped around the hips. The gesture of the hands in movement was carved with extreme care of detail.

In an informal discussion on men who worship Şàngó it was brought to my attention that the men are known to wear skirts in rituals where women were not permitted. As noted earlier the symbolic calabash being held above the female devotee's head, as an offering gesture, connects with the worship of Şàngó. In Thompson's *Black Gods and Kings* he discusses the concept of devotees holding

²⁰¹ Source: Informal conversation between Babatunde Lawal and Tamara De Silva.

²⁰² McKenzie, Hail Orisha, 77.

the calabash, like we see in the fourth panel top register: (Fig. 45d) Similar *òrìṣà* worship to what is here represented on the drum: “The image of a woman supporting a bowl for ritual emblems and equipment was collected at Ibadan, but is attributed on style to the townesh of Ikire. The sculpture comes with an *òrìṣà* Ogiyon cult designation. Ogiyon is the name by which Obàtálá is known at Ejugbo and some other places.”²⁰³

Alternately, symbolism of the calabash offering above the head includes Èṣù priestesses, whom carry calabash like the one here depicting a woman layered with clothes and with a gourd above her head. We know Èṣù has a presence whenever the *òrìṣà* are given praises.

In figure 45b the fished tailed figure looks like mermaid attributed to the spirit of Yemaya or Olókun. The figure on the lower right scene has hands touching the ground and on the left a figure reaching for another figures feet, both characteristically Ògbóni. They signify praises to the earth and honor to the wisest elders.

In figure 45c we see two human figures each with a mortar and pestle. A ritual for Èṣù, John Pemberton notes, includes a song made for him: “Èṣù is a snail-shell dancer he spins rapidly, he knows dancing well, he doesn’t join in singing. If there are no drums he will dance to the pounding of the mortars.”²⁰⁴

²⁰³ Thompson, *Black Gods and Kings*, Pg 16/2.

²⁰⁴ Joan Wescott in Pemberton's “Eshu-Elegbara; the Yorùbá Trickster God.”

Fig 21 Ìgbìn Drum

The elements of the carved scene on the drum in figure 21 convey motion and action. We see a string of figures dancing and interacting in movement. Notes from the Ibadan Museum placard stated briefly that this drum originated in Ijala, Yorùbáland, and was used by hunters. Symbols here may indicate the presence of *òrìṣà* Oko or *òrìṣà* Erinlẹ̀ and also *òrìṣà* Obàtálá. In Otta there was a known festival for *òrìṣà* Erinlẹ̀: “In September 1855 a procession of women, children, and a few men with drums took place at Otto.”²⁰⁵ In this procession Erinlẹ̀, or Eyinle, was worshipped as a god of the stream. Peter McKenzie also mentions a festival for Erinlẹ̀ at Òsùgbó in 1875 and again noted: “This male god is a hunting and river deity, and is said to originate from a poor hunter who drowned in a river near Ilobu.”²⁰⁶

For further research one might study Ògbóni staffs. Henry John Drewal’s *African Artistry; Technique and Aesthetics in Yorùbá Sculpture* shows numerous staffs apparently belonging to various Ògbóni and Oshugbo societies in Ijebu and Òyó.²⁰⁷ Although it is difficult to decipher the actual staffs in the hands of numerous figures on this drum they may be indicative of Obàtálá embodied. For instance, according to Thompson: “...when Obàtálá is confronted by evil beyond all patience and reconciliation he knows what to do: he receives, as a rainbow, weapons from the sky: he sits massively on the earth to wage war: he grasps a spear. The martial dimension to Obàtálá is perhaps signaled by a small image of

²⁰⁵ McKenzie, Hail Orisha, 123.

²⁰⁶ Ibid, 492.

²⁰⁷ Henry John Drewal’s *African Artistry; Technique and Aesthetics in Yorùbá Sculpture*.

a man holding a miniature iron sword blade in his right hand and a staff or club in his left. It is alleged the piece comes from Ikire, and the former owners had identified the sculpture as for *òrìṣà* Nla-i.e. Obàtálá.”²⁰⁸ The largest of all the faces and heads here is also the least realistic; there are two that are similar, one in figure 21c and the other in figure 21d. Possibly the large eyes and face in figure 21d represents the presence of an *òrìṣà* in the activities of the scene.

Figs. 10 and 11 Ìgbìn Drums with Èṣù Iconography

In Thompson’s *Black Gods and Kings* he presents a cross section of Yorùbá carvings inclusive of Ibeji figures and divinations trays. Thompson’s research shows a tray from Ketu State. Many styles and probably just as many artist and artist guilds are represented. The divination tray cataloged as X70-129 (fig. 49) has the face of Èṣù carved in a style similar to the Ìgbìn drum figures 10-13 from the Lagos Museum.

These drums are grouped together because of the similarity of carving techniques. The faces on all four drums have had similar treatment to the eyes, nose and lips. The inflated checks on each face are also similar. The eye sockets are carved deep enough to make a shadow as a subtle brow, which flows right into the forehead. The figure is most likely Èṣù.

“In the coastal area, Elegbara seems to have been often preferred to Èṣù as a name for this *òrìṣà*. Another name of Èṣù -Elegbara was Agba, The Old

²⁰⁸ Thompson, *Black Gods and Kings*, pg 16/2. (Thompson’s Plate 4 and 5)

One.”²⁰⁹ McKenzie writes about his reading on the letters written by Egba pastor at Badagry, Samuel Pearse. McKenzie explains that Pearse experiences the Ifè of the *òrìṣà* first hand. According to McKenzie: “Èṣù -Elegbara at Iworo had clearly absorbed part of the power of Onilé and had become also a powerful earth *òrìṣà*.”²¹⁰ This would explain the extensive Èṣù depictions on these ̀gbìn drums.

Èṣù and Ifá have numerous connections. “A good portion of all the sacrifices made through Ifá to any of the Yorùbá gods is given to Èṣù. Èṣù therefore, be regarded as the closest god to Ifá in the Yorùbá pantheon.”²¹¹ Èṣù is a messenger and a protector and also is associated with the head. If you can be clear about your knowledge and focus then Èṣù cannot trick or confuse you. Margaret Thompson Drewal speaks of Èṣù’s relationship with ̀rúnmílà or Ifá from a discussion with diviner Ositola who began by conveying the story when ̀rúnmílà slipped and fell in public: “Things had been going amiss; it was one of those kinds of days that is often associated with the workings of Èṣù, the unpredictable trickster/messenger, who in the story was instrumental in transforming ̀rúnmílà’s disgrace into fame and fortune.”²¹²

Èṣù also carries sacrifices. In *Yorùbá Sacred Kingship*, Pemberton and Afolayan speak of the priests of Èṣù and Ifá preparing for Odun Orò and Odun Oba, festivals for the memory of past chiefs, fathers and mothers as well as celebration of spirits. “Before leaving the palace on the following afternoon, the Babaláwo offered a sacrifice to Èṣù at the palace gate, petitioning the friend of

²⁰⁹ McKenzie, Hail *Orisha!*, 44.

²¹⁰ McKenzie, *Hail Orisha!*, 27.

²¹¹ Abimbola, *Ifá*, 10.

²¹² Thompson Drewal, *Yorùbá Ritual*, 31.

Òrúnmìlà and messenger of the gods to aid the Oba in his celebration of Orò.”²¹³

There are places to praise and worship Èṣù such as shrines throughout Yorùbáland. His presence is especially acknowledged at cross roads, literally and metaphorically. It is not uncommon for devotees to leave sacrifices for him in the road. The most common symbol for Èṣù is a stone or rock. “At the shrine of almost every compound in the Yorùbá town of Ila-Orangun, a chunk of red laterite rock (yangi) protrudes from a hollow in the base of the wall on the right side of the passageway.”²¹⁴

Fig 48 Ìgbìn Drums for Èṣù and Ifá

The Ìgbìn in figure 48 contains three different angles of the same drum. This is among many rare drums in the collection at The Lagos Museum. Notes in the museum placard state that it was used at Iledi during an Ògbóni Festival and that it originated in Ijebu-Remo. This drum is approximately four feet tall. The repetition of faces reminds us of the faces of Èṣù also known as Elegba on divination trays. He is the messenger god and also trickster god. He is Ifá’s companion. The cowries successfully separate the faces; they provide a border that allows space for each to have individual attention.

The image of the cowry shells on the drums can be compared with a similar image on the divination tray in figure 49. Each are carved in low relief and can be perceived as a pattern. The string of cowries, according to Thompson is the

²¹³ Pemberton and Afolayan, *Yorùbá Sacred Kingship*, 176.

²¹⁴ John Pemberton, “Eshu-Elegba: The Yorùbá Trickster God” *African Arts* October 1975 vol IX, no 1.

diviner's chain, one that can be made of eight halves of seed shells or pods. On this drum the seeds or cowries are equally spaced. Thompson states that, most often with the diviner's chain, "the middle section of the chain is long while the other sections are of equal short length so that, when the instrument is held in the middle by the diviner before a throw the four pods on each side will hang parallel."²¹⁵ Based on the surface carving this drum seems to be very much connected to Ifá and divination. Although research proves that Ifá and the Ògbóni have been connected, their relationship varies by town and the local culture.

Fig. 14 Ìgbìn Drums for Orò

The carved symbols on figure 6 have layers of meaning. In part the emblems celebrate the earth similar to the way an *oríkì* or praise poem can. For instance a portion of an *oríkì* helps to explain one of the symbols, as Lawal states: "earth, Ògéré, who combs her hair with a hoe." The drum is adorned with overlapping combs, which are also in triplicate, and as noted earlier the number three is significant to Ile and the comb signifies the importance of farming. The number three as suggested by Lawal, is associated with *àse*, "the power to make things happen."

In Fig. 14a the carver depicted three layers of combs, then a staff and a "Şàngó dance wand. In Fig. 14b, are symbols to communicate similarities within the Orò cult, with the earth spirit Onilé, and with the deified ancestor Èşù. Èşù the

²¹⁵ Thompson, *Black Gods and Kings*, 5/3.

divine messenger “mediates between the Orìsà and Ilè.”²¹⁶ In Fig. 14b the central Èṣù - like figure is flanked by bullroarers. This signifies a presence and importance of the Orò and the work this group does in the community, as well as their partnership with Ògbóni. In figure 14c a ‘staff of authority’ and four vertical-looped helixes are shown.

The Orò are responsible for bullroarers and for instilling many of the guidelines and laws established by the government and specifically by Ògbóni. The meaning and actual use of the bullroarer is to heed the warning carried by the messenger. Based on shape and apparent size, figures 14a/c would be identified as *Iya gan*.²¹⁷ This is a drum of the Ìgbìn drum set.

Fig 38 Ìgbìn Drum for Ifá

Fig. 38 is singled out because it does not conform to the shape of the previous drums. When compared to the drums in Laoye’s article, “Yorùbá Drums,” it can be confirmed as an Ipese in the Ipese set. This drum was used in worship by Ifá worshippers. The carved figures holding and ringing the idiophone known as the bell or iron gongs (Agogo) tells us that this drum is significant and that it is played with idiophones. According to Laoye, the Ipese set does in fact include Agogo.

In certain towns this drum could be played in a variety of arrangements. In Ede this drum is played as the leader for Ifá worship and in Ifè the Pere single

²¹⁶ Lawal, “New Perspectives,” 48.

²¹⁷ Laoye, “Yorùbá Drums,” 6.

membrane drum is the lead.²¹⁸ For Ifá worship in both settings at least one iron gong would be played. Ifá priests gather at least once every four days, which is the length of the Yorùbá week. The first day is known as divination day and on this day priests may chant praises and “...produce special dance music on the traditional Ifá drum ...”²¹⁹ This drum shows two sets of people on either side. Most likely the carver applied white paint to all but the short, pedestal. This is also the usual color for priests to wear in ritual settings, on their cloths as well as head coverings.

Fig 23 Ìgbìn Drum

This male anthropomorphic drums shows emotion and the figure is static; when seeing the drum in person I noticed the shrugged shoulders. This body language portrays little energy. The carving was done with care and details given to the softness of a human face. There is a light patina of white covering the surface.

Kevin Carroll published many anthropomorphic Ìgbìn drums in *Yorùbá Religious Carving*. This shape for the drum is a choice shape for sound and artistry. For the Yorùbá the anthropomorphic Ìgbìn can be played with shrine drums but not royal court drums. Mostly the anthropomorphic drums are for the *òrìṣà* and used for *òrìṣà* prayers. It is usually completely out of the norm to see a Nigerian modern musician include an Ìgbìn drum with his repertoire. (See fig. 50)

²¹⁸ For further detail on the musical arrangements see Darius Thieme, “Descriptive Catalogue of Yorùbá Musical Instruments.” PhD diss., Catholic U Press, 1969. p 256.

²¹⁹ Abimbola, *Ifá: An Exposition of Ifá Literary Corpus*, 15.

In “Interlink; The Nigerian-American Quarterly Magazine,” there is a snapshot of four musicians rehearsing for a play. The now well-known ethnomusicologist Akin Euba is among them. In the center of the group is a male anthropomorphic Ìgbìn drum. Only the drumhead, head and arms of the figure of the drum are shown.²²⁰ It is one that is more simply carved and may have been placed with the musicians for religious purposes.

Artist Areogun-yanna carved many Ìgbìn drums in his time. Kevin Carroll reproduces four, two female and two male. Carroll notes that the artist was a member of Ògbóni as well as a number of other religious groups. There is unfortunately no mention of the drums meaning to the artist. Two of the drums are shown with *òrìṣà* symbols. (Fig. 41)

Fig 51 Ìgbìn Drum for Obàtálá

This drum is in one of the main halls of the Ibadan Museum of Unity. It sits next to other anthropomorphic drums carved in similar styles. The artist who may have carved figure 51 may have been the famous carver Olowe of Ise. In *Yorùbá Arts and Aesthetics* by Abiodun, Drewal and Pemberton Figure 6.5 shows a direct comparison to this drum. Both carvings show similar almond shaped bulbous eyes slightly stretched horizontally. Olowe of Ise is also featured numerous times in *Yorùbá Nine Centuries of Yorùbá Art*. This publication displays his carved veranda posts.

²²⁰ Interlink; The Nigerian-American Quarterly Magazine vol 3 *Toward a Lively Performing Arts Pavilion*. Oct. Nov. Dec. 1967 pgs 28-33.

Like many Yorùbá figures the head is slightly exaggerated rather than in proportion to the body. It is tilted forward, and very stylized. The nature of this positioning of the head is important. Often when the head is situated this way it is meant to suggest a specific gesture. It is a subtle and somewhat humble way to show honor to the earth. Babatunde Lawal makes a similar note in terms of what he calls an Ògbóni characteristic gesture; when portrayed in sculptures it is meant to honor the earth. In this figure is male that has an elongated torso and head.²²¹ The figure is looking down with his large sensitive almond shaped eyes. It is a well-known Ògbóni piece and shares a certain surface texture, line work, and finish with this Ìgbìn.

Figure 51 is a carefully carved woman and child. The drum sits on top of the surface of the head, closing in the barrel of the drum. On the foot of the drum there remains carving marking left by the tool and the same at the top on the drum piece. The drum itself is simply decorated with a checkered pattern with a large diamond shape added to each side.

²²¹ See male Ògbóni member in Lawal, Babatunde. *New Perspectives on Edan Ògbóni*. African Arts Winter 95

Conclusion

In my thesis I have sought the social and religious significance of the Yorùbá ìgbìn drums and their surface decoration. For purposes of simplification of this analysis, the well-known Ògbóni drum has been considered as a prototype. It is extremely important, however, to think of the ìgbìn as a class or family of drums as they are understood by Yorùbá religious specialists and laity. The ìgbìn drum family constitutes a distinct genus or kind. This distinction is not limited to their similarity of shape and construction, but extends to the artistic treatment of their carved surfaces and the kind of cultural information relayed by these carvings.

This paper does not address all the situations in which the ritual drums are used. The ceremonies and rituals described here examine the ìgbìn drum family in “symbol situations.”²²² Such a level of analysis presents a temporal cross section of events, which may appear as static snapshots but are better understood as triggers for dynamic and continuous activity.

The scenes carved into the bodies of the ìgbìn drums represent temporal slices of ritual function that can be viewed as a blueprint for conducting the ceremonial activities depicted in the reliefs. I first considered ritual as a primary, relative term, and discussed the meaning of ritual in terms specific to Yorùbá culture. From my elaborations of ritual activity in context certain significant patterns emerge. For instance, the centrality and dominance of the carvings of

²²² Susanne Langer’s strongly influenced the ways I have begun to formulate some explanations of symbols and signs. FULL CITATION *Philosophy in a New Key A study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969).

Èṣù and Olókun parallels the importance of these two mythic personalities in the rituals for which the drums are played.

Èṣù's face always appears on divination trays and certain ìgbìn drums. Èṣù is central to Ifá. Thus, Èṣù and some of his traits appear on the drums: a messenger who maintains connections between the *òrìṣà* and their mystics or worshippers. Images for Olókun always correspond with royalty, transformative powers, and the great Nigerian rivers. Both *òrìṣà* signs and traits are needed to energize the drum and complete the message or meaning of the full surface carving. When the drum, for a particular *òrìṣà*, is acting in its capacity as a mediator of liminality, the symbolic carvings communicate this as well, and the participants will be compelled to consider the ritual and their relationship to the transition that they are witnessing. The drums are activating the space and enabling the participants to do their spiritual work.

When an object is designated as a “drum” it may be under-interpreted because the drum itself is a symbol. But the drum might best be described as a signal rather than a symbol.²²³ Applying Susanne Langer's concept of signal, the drum should direct participant's eyes to itself and activities where it is being used. It transmits information to receivers. Like a clock presents time a signal can present a segment in time. The image on the drum, as a two and three-dimensional representation, presents a continuous signal – the make-up of all its parts are transmitted as signals. Its sound and image presents a value of time (and a message for those who have been trained). A drum is implicitly a musical

²²³ Ibid, 30-32.

instrument. Images carved on its surface indicate the metaphorical meaning and purpose of the object itself.

The artist's carvings often convey the meaning of a moment in time like experiencing history, a myth, or a state tradition. I argued that Yorùbá art, specifically the highly decorated carved ritual drums, known as ìgbìn, express the Yorùbá desire to honor Ifè, family history, tradition, myth, and spirituality. This position is supported by my interpretation of Yorùbá symbols. I have demonstrated how symbolic information constrained by the carvings can convey specific social messages, for example, the history of the Yorùbá creation story or tales of famous royal lineages.

If I have focused on the relationship of ìgbìn ritual drums to the larger sphere of Yorùbá religious Ifè it has been to repair a frequent omission. Surveying the literature on Yorùbá carved, sculpted "bas relief"²²⁴ or low relief surfaces, the pervasiveness of the ìgbìn is extraordinary. Yet, the numbers of art historical studies in which the ìgbìn have appeared with little or no mention of its place within overall Yorùbá philosophy is a huge loss.

In the introduction I asked three questions with regard to ìgbìn drums: What physical and functional characteristics define the ìgbìn drum family? What are the meanings underlying the carved symbols? Why are the highly sculptural drums so important to Yorùbá ontology and understandings of temporality? I have addressed the first two questions throughout the thesis. The drum is important

²²⁴ Bascom, "Drums of The Yorùbá of Nigeria," 3. He speaks of bas relief to express the carved figures which project, most often only slightly from the background.

because of its role in “journey,” which is a recurrent theme in the ritual settings and artifacts in Yorùbá culture. The Ìgbìn have proven to be a central part of celebrations of the ancestors as well as funerals, and implementing state rule and personal conduct; “journey” is apparent in all of these activities and several artifacts explored in this text.

Temporality implies the paradigm by which the Yorùbá consider their lives. Within Yorùbá temporality there is an incongruity between physical and spiritual activity. What Yorùbá experience inside their consciousness and what actually takes place in the physical world are ordered by two separate clocks. Robert Plant Armstrong’s discussion of the “Affecting Presence” is relevant to the Yorùbá artist’s capacity to speak across physical, spiritual, and temporal dimensions. In the context of this discussion, he includes aspects of Yorùbá society and traditional beliefs:

And so there is a necessary oppositional complementarity between matter and energy which is the principle that defines the nature of the Yorùbá metaphoric process, rendering the [art] work into power-always immanent, sometimes weak, sometimes rampant. Form needs energy to function, while energy needs form to have locus and efficacy.²²⁵

After contemplating Armstrong’s construct I understand that the art of the Ìgbìn drum is a larger presentation of experience. This also brings to light a possible question for further exploration: Before the Ìgbìn are housed in museums should the drums be spiritually put to rest?

²²⁵ Armstrong, Robert. *Wellspring; On the Myth and Source of Culture*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1975, 29.



Fig. 24

Ìgbìn Set.

Source: Illustrations by Tamara De Silva

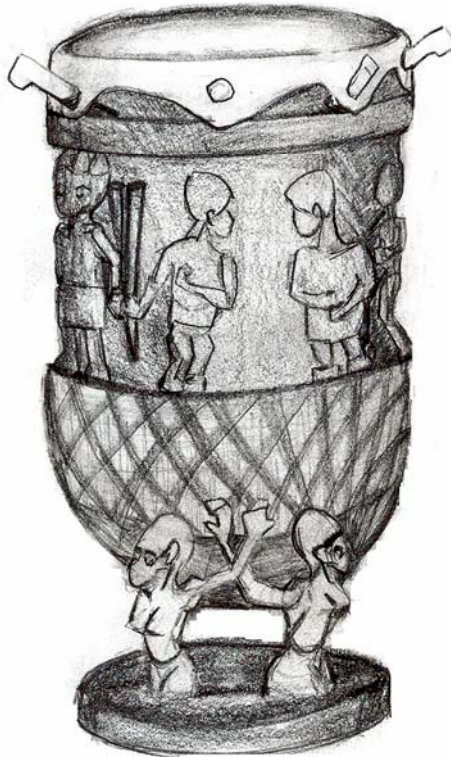
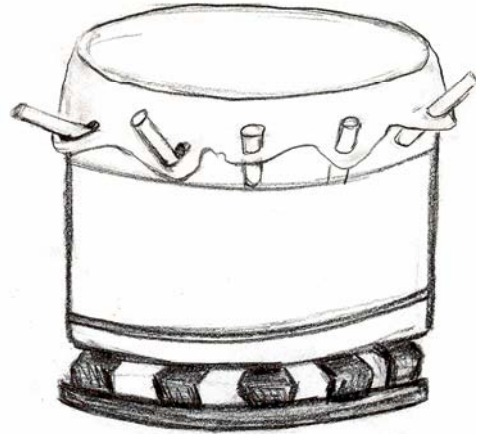


Fig. 25

Ògbóni Set A.

Source: Illustrations by Tamara De Silva



Fig. 26

Ògbóni Set B.

Source: Illustrations by Tamara De Silva



Fig. 27 Agere Set.
Source: Illustrations by Tamara De Silva

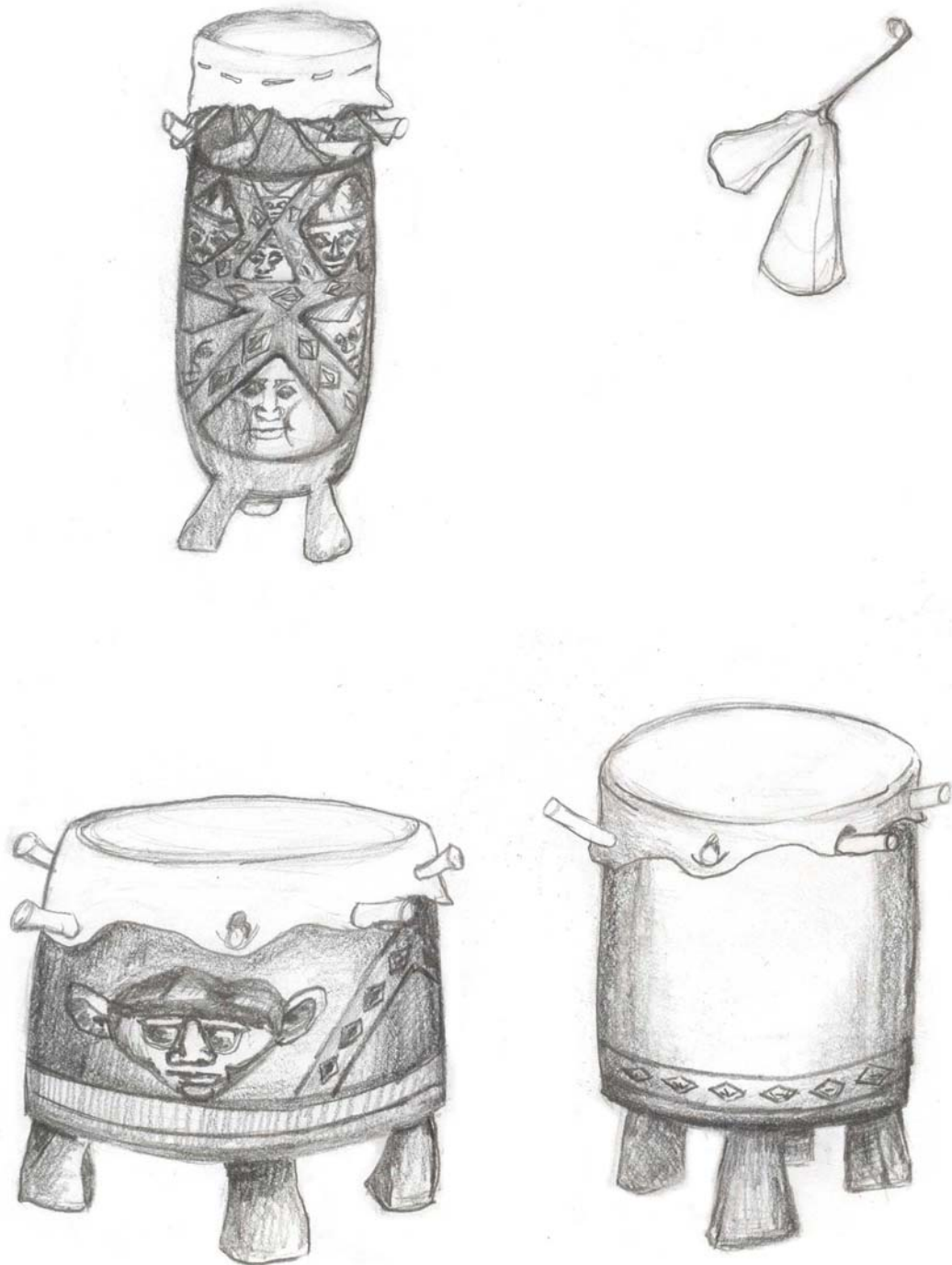


Fig. 28 Ipese Set.
Source: Illustrations by Tamara De Silva

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