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THE HORSE AND RIDER IN YORUBA ART: IMAGES OF CONQUEST AND POSSESSION

I - For more than two hundred years, the kingdom of Oyo (i.e. Oyo-Ile, Old Oyo) was the dominant Yoruba-speaking state of the savanna establishing its authority from the middle Niger to the coast by means of the effective use of cavalry. The Fulani jihad of the early nineteenth century, likewise dependent upon cavalry, came from the north and brought about downfall of Oyo, establishing the emirate of Ilorin and initiating a series of wars that engulfed the Yoruba-speaking region, with kingdoms forming temporary and shifting alliances in pursuit of the conquest of or defence against others, and with new cities and states arising from the demise of older kingdoms and the displacement of peoples. The use of cavalry was not a military option to the kingdoms of the forests, of course. Nevertheless, throughout the Yoruba-speaking region the image of the warrior on horseback, whether Muslim conqueror or local hero, is established as one of the key icons within the sculptural traditions as we know them in works of art of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Moreover, the rider controlling the horse provides a means of conceptualising the relationship between deity and devotee within the pre-Muslim and pre-Christian religious traditions of the

Yoruba peoples. However, the essential thesis of this paper is that the sculpted images are not overtly intended as representations of the conceptual images even though both subsist within a common context of experiences and memories of events in the past. Indeed, the equestrian image of deity and devotee is not visually realised in art until the works of the Yoruba/Chinese/Cuban artist Wilfredo Lam, who, in the 1940s, wrestling with his own sense of cultural identity, having returned to the Caribbean from Paris, endeavours to illustrate that moment of transformation when a devotee becomes the horse ridden by a deity.

II - Any discussion of the people, the events, the circumstances and the practices conventionally described as Yoruba must take account of the fact that the use of that word contemporary with our own times is a modern usage, a usage, indeed, that more-or-less coincides with the inception of colonial rule, a usage that served to contest and subvert that rule. Moreover, at the present time there are five universities in what we have come to identify as the Yoruba-speaking region; and there is a literature and a press in both Yoruba and English, including, of course, the Nobel prizewinner Wole

Soyinka. The modern sense of unity and ethnic identity is manifest in the evolution of a common language, Standard Yoruba, and in a common sense of history. It so happens that the initial motivation for a Standard Yoruba was provided by the needs of Christian evangelisation in the mid-nineteenth century, with the work leading up to the first primer of the Yoruba language written by the Reverend (later Bishop) Samuel Ajayi Crowther of the Church of England, who had been taken into slavery but was now returning to evangelise his countrymen (Awoniyi 1978); and it was another Yoruba Church of England clergyman, the Reverend Samuel Johnson, who wrote the first history (1921), a book that remains a standard work; and in which he distinguishes the "Yoruba proper", i.e. the Oyo Kingdom, from all the rest. In due course, this evolving sense of unity and identity gave birth to an Ife-centred cultural association, the Association of the Children of Oduduwa, which in turn led to the formation of the Action Group in 1950 as one of the three major political parties that brought Nigeria from colonial rule to Independence in 1960 (Peel 1989, Moraes Farias & Barber 1990, Picton 1994, etc.).

This sense of unity and identity was, then, an evolving phenomenon; and well into the present century, communities of people beyond the Oyo kingdom that we now identify as Yoruba-speaking would have denied that they were Yoruba, preferring instead their local names: Egba, Ijebu, Ekiti and so forth. Similarly, the Yoruba diaspora identified itself in different ways: Aku in Sierra Leone (probably from the verb, *kì*, to greet, which in grammatical context, elided with the initial vowel of the next word, becomes *kù*), Nago in Brazil (probably from Anago, the southwest Yoruba-speaking re-

gion from which many of the slaves would have come in the latter years of the trade), Lucumi in Cuba (of still uncertain etymology). Nevertheless, this phenomenon was not simply the invention of a couple of church of England clergymen; for all Yoruba kings traced their ancestry to Oduduwa who climbed down from the sky at Ife to make the world. The mythic status of Ife notwithstanding, however, that from the sixteenth century onwards the kingdom Oyo was the major power in the area due to its strategic location controlling savanna routes to forest and coastal trade, with the aid of cavalry, a lesson learned early in its history as a result of confrontation with the Nupe (Ajayi & Smith 1971, Law 1977, etc.). The other focus of unity, more restricted in a geographical sense, but of equal ideological importance, is the role of the Lagos Yoruba intelligentsia in contesting colonial rule even before the very foundation of Nigeria (Ajayi 1961).

Christian missionary activity begins in this area of West Africa during the first half of the nineteenth century and is clearly linked with education, history and literature (Ajayi 1965). Islam had been present for a century or more previously and was more obviously linked to trade (Gbadamosi 1978). Both religions gave a sense of access to a world beyond the local community, in contrast to the local deities whose cults were locally-oriented such as Oshun, the river that runs beside Oshogbo, or Shango the mythic king of Oyo manifest in thunder and lightning, or Oduduwa the ancestor of all kings at Ife, or Orishanla, his elder brother who moulds the human form, or Ogun, his son, who brought iron weapons; and yet in so describing these deities, one must not ignore local variants, e.g. other local thunder deities side by side

with Shango, other river deities such as Yemoja the incestuous mother of all the gods, especially towards the west, or a series of "white" deities associated with Orishanla, or sex changes through space such as the female Oduduwa again in the west of the region. In central and western Yoruba, the generic term for these deities is *òrìsà*, whereas from Ife eastwards the generic term is (or was) *ebora* or, if it was somehow manifest in sculptured form, *imonlè* (and it is for this reason I use the term "deity" throughout). Three deities seem always to have had more central roles in mediating the relationship between people, deities and other metaphysical agencies (such as spirit-doubles, witches, and ancestors). These were Ifa, manifest in the system of divination, Eshu, the trickster, and Osanyin, the deity controlling the efficacy of herbal medicines (including those with one established contact with, and prepared one's-self to be possessed vehicle of a deity). Given that the cult of a deity was intended to satisfy all the needs of its devotees, the local religious environment was already sufficiently pluralistic such as to ease the advent of Islam and Christianity in their various manifestations.

In any case, within the cult traditions, there was regional divergence not only in terms of the individual identity of particular deities, but also in the manner in which they might be said to provide and fit within a coherent ritual and cosmological programme. For example, the very notion of the inhabitants of a town, each participant in the cult of one deity or another, the whole comprising a functionally related pantheon, could be regarded as the "classic" model characteristic of the Oyo kingdom and its immediate environs; whereas, as one moves east, the kingdoms of Ekiti, for example,

although Ifa and Eshu remain constant presences in the local ritual scene, neither their cults nor those of other deities in the area necessarily work in the same corporate manner as in the Oyo kingdom in providing for a distinct social grouping within a town, though some do.

Moreover, we know little or nothing of the ritual practices of this region prior to missionary reports of the nineteenth century (Peel), so that while we can identify regional differences of cult and cosmology from which we can infer the fact of development through time we know nothing of such development prior to a century that was, without doubt, a century of radical change.

To encapsulate this complex and shifting consortium of historical, social and ritual events and practices within the single term, "Yoruba", is patently unsatisfactory; and yet we depend upon its "shorthand" usefulness. (One also uses it in respect of, and out of respect for that modern sense of unity and identity that is so manifest a part of contemporary Nigeria.) In this paper I travel widely across the area we now identify as Yoruba, and through several centuries: where the account relates to the kingdom of Oyo, and perhaps the adjacent communities within its hegemony, the term "Yoruba" is appropriate, of course; but when it is used of places beyond that domain, especially to the east, the word is no more than a cipher for all those complexities and divergencies hinted at in the foregoing paragraphs.

III - With few exceptions, Yoruba ritual traditions have an originary mythic focus in a given place. Shango, as already mentioned, was a king of Oyo. The *làbà sàngó*, an appliqué leather bag used to con-

Plate 1 - ère aláàfin sàngó, image of the king of Oyo (as) Shango, wood, chalk-whitened with indigo-stained cap, said to have been brought from Oyo-Ile and therefore pre-1835, National Nigerian Museum, Lagos, H 96.5 cms. (Photo by Frank Willett)



tain highly-charged material emblems of the deity, an essential item of cult practice where-ever devotees of Shango are to be found (Wescott and Morton Williams 1962), can only be obtained from high priest of the temple at the site of Shango's apotheosis in the Koso ward of Oyo. Also within that temple Philip Allison (1961) was told that there was a series of sculptures each in the shape of a warrior on horseback, known generically as *ère aláàfin sàngó*, literally "the image (*ère*) of 'he-who-has/owns-the-

palace' (*o ní ààfin*), Shango", i.e. the image of Shango, the owner of the palace; or "the image of the owner of the palace of Shango": it can be understood in either way. The intention, of course, is to establish the mythic genealogy and likeness of the king to and as the vehicle of Shango; and *aláàfin*, "the owner of the palace", is the title by which the king of Oyo is known. At the installation of the Alaafin, and during a period of seclusion within the Koso temple, the new king was crowned in secret with a simple leather crown, which thereafter rested on the head of the image newly carved to represent him as Shango, while he would subsequently receive a beaded crown for public ceremonial. One imagines that there should have been as many images in the temple as there had been kings of Oyo, but only two were shown to Allison, one of which (plate 1) he was allowed to purchase for the collections of the National Museum, Lagos; and Allison was told that it had been brought from Oyo-Ile at its destruction (and, by implication, reinstated upon the institution of the new city and temple in 1837).

In order to understand this intriguing visual metaphor of the Alaafin as Shango as warrior mounted, with his spear, on horseback, I turn to another equestrian image:

A Tapa man [*tápà* is the Yoruba word for Nupe people] is exhibited as a horse-rider, with the horse also present, acted by an adult dressed in an overall, to which a tail, testicles and a wooden mask with bit and reins are attached. The horse is kept horizontal by prolonging the "fore legs" with sticks. The horse rears and bucks so that the Tapa man can only keep his seat for a few moments. The horse then gallops alone among the spectators, who laughing and screaming run to all sides, until some brave

man is able to catch it. All the time, the drums imitate Tapa music.

The drama refers to the Tapa [i.e. Nupe] military superiority obtained through cavalry. By scattering the spectators, the drama also refers to how the Yoruba were put to flight by northern invaders. (Götrick 1984, pp. 91-92)

This quotation comes from one of the very few published studies of popular drama in the Yoruba-speaking area of Nigeria. This particular dramatic episode was noted in 1976 in Ibadan, a city with its origins in the nineteenth century as settlement of refugees from the wars that engulfed the region throughout most of that century, that for a short period was the seat of the Bashorun, the senior titled man of the Oyo kingdom next to the Alaafin himself, but which later broke away to form an independent warrior state. The conjunction of these two equestrian images, that contrast of the "classic" and the "popular", is presented here because of the manner in which an episode in popular dramatic sequence encapsulates a history that might serve to explain the sculpture.

Among the cults associated with the Oyo kingdoms, in addition to Shango, there is a tradition of ancestral masquerade, *egúngún*, in which the deceased are impersonated in the course of their post-burial rites. Some deceased people, through the agency of Ifa divination, also make it known to their descendants that they wish to be commemorated in masquerade in a more permanent way, with a mask commissioned for use by the experienced performers initiated within the local Egungun Association. Some of these, coming out year after year, may be literally prehistoric in regard to the individual whom they manifest and whose identity has become submerged in

a magical efficacy that is frightening and yet effective in its potential to harm and to heal.

Alongside these ancestral presences, however, there is another group of performers known as *apídán*, "we who perform tricks", or *aláàrinjò*, "we who walk and dance", or *agbégijó*, "we who carry wood [i.e. masks] and dance"; and this is not a recent development, for the first description of Apidan theatre were provided by Hugh Clapperton and Richard Lander of a performance in Old Oyo in 1826. Although in theory an aspect of the Egungun Association, and thereby manifestations of the deceased, Apidan performers comprise distinct organisations that not only leaven the appearances of the ancestral presences, by providing entertainment in the form of a series of dramatic episodes such as that described here, but also maintain a separate identity touring the towns and villages of their locality providing entertainment independently of the ancestral presences. The *dramatis personae* includes, variously, hunters, animals, drunkards, prostitutes, policemen, foreigners of all sorts: Hausa, Damhomeans, Europeans (sometimes including Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip - see Beier 1969; also Drewal 1978); and all more-or-less ridiculous. These are performances to make you laugh; fearful things, authorities without local precedent - all are subject to ridicule. The horse in the episode described, after all, throws off his rider, which in effect destroys the effectiveness of the horse in military strategy and turns it into a figure of fun.

The apparent referral to Nupe cavalry is ironic: the Nupe are the people whose lands straddle the middle Niger to the north and north-east of the Oyo kingdom, and while there must have been Nupe warriors in the

forces of the Fulani jihad, and of the Emirate of Ilorin that the jihad established, the dramatic episode described by Götrick, while it could be about events in the previous century (it is certainly not about anything within living memory), it might as well be about long-standing antagonisms between Oyo and Nupe, beginning several centuries ago, at a time before the kingdom of Oyo obtained the cavalry with which it established and maintained its control over savanna/coastal trade routes and its hegemony over the peoples from the middle Niger southwards.

IV - For those for whom Yoruba history is an unfamiliar narrative, an explanatory note is required; for the contrasts between ruler and ruled, horsed and unhorsed, Nupe and Yoruba, Oyo and other "Yoruba-speaking" communities, local cults and world religions, and (paradoxically) Islam and other religions (and, in due course, deity and devotee), need to be firmly placed (insofar as that is possible) in relation to each other.

I have already noted that in the histories of the region there is a polarity between the mythic status of Ife, where Oduduwa, ancestor of kings, climbed down from the sky to create the world, and the historic dominance of Oyo among the kingdoms founded by the descendants of Oduduwa. Standard Yoruba emerges around Oyo in the nineteenth century, while in the twentieth there is a shift, leading to the formation of a pan-Yoruba political identity, back to Ife as the mythic source of all that had come to be known as Yoruba (and the process goes on, for in 1995 the Ooni [king] of Ife will ceremonially welcome back representatives of the Yoruba diaspora scattered throughout the Americas).

Ife is, of course, the site of a substantial corpus of works of art in brass, pottery, stone, glass, and built form (especially as manifest in potsherd paving of the interiors of buildings) dated variously within the first half of the second millennium AD (Willett 1967). The existence of this material encourages us to presume that Ile-Ife was a place of some importance, and we may surmise that this was based upon the control of savanna/forest trade; but we have no evidence of this other than the works of art. At any rate, if Ife was indeed a place to be reckoned with, by the sixteenth century it had been very certainly eclipsed by two dynasties both claiming descent from Oranyan, a mythic descendant of Oduduwa. To the south-east there was the non-Yoruba kingdom of Benin, which by the late fifteenth century the Portuguese found to have embarked upon a confident programme of economic and political expansion; and to the north-west there was Oyo, or, to be precise, Oyo-Ile, otherwise known as Old Oyo.

Oyo-Ile was located in a fertile position, a relatively short distance from the middle Niger. In addition to its rich subsistence base, it was, at the height of its powers by the eighteenth century, the centre of trade routes, exercising control southwards through two hundred miles to the coast, and linked via the middle Niger to the great trading centres of Mali and the upper Niger, and thence across the Sahara. Oyo-Ile was an important centre for the production of wood sculpture, brass casting, wrought ironware, and textiles, and it mediated trade in forest goods from the south and savanna and trans-Saharan goods from the north; but:

...the most significant imports were horses which formed the basis of the political power of Old Oyo. Before horses were intro-

duced, Oyo was a small kingdom struggling with Borgu and Nupe for a foothold in that very strategic centre near the Niger. Then, probably about the middle of the sixteenth century, Nupe conquered Oyo. (Ajayi & Smith 1971, p. 3)

Law (1977, p. 59) places these events rather earlier, circa 1500, however. Nevertheless, Oyo-Ile was deserted and a new capital founded, and perhaps a new dynasty (Law 1977, p. 42). In due course a subsequent Alaafin, Orompoto, reorganised the army making use of cavalry:

In his reign Oyo regained the military fame that it had lost. He was swift in action, darting upon his enemies as an eagle upon his prey, when they least expected his approach. He used all skill to conceal his movements from the enemy. His rearguard consisted of 1000 foot and 1000 horse, for each of whom he provided a broad *gbaju* leaf to sweep and obliterate the footprints of his army on the march, the horsemen tying the leaves to the tails of their horses (Johnson 1921, p. 161).

Around 1600, in the reign of Abipa Ogbolu, the fifth Alaafin following the Nupe conquest, Oyo-Ile was resettled. Thereafter and throughout the seventeenth century the power of Oyo increased; and cavalry, armed with spears and with poisoned arrows, were fundamental to this expansion:

A European trader towards the end of the seventeenth century wrote that the coastal people feared Oyo horsemen so much that the very mention of their name made them tremble. (Ajayi & Smith 1971, p. 4)

By the reign of Alaafin Abiodun in the late eighteenth century Oyo was:

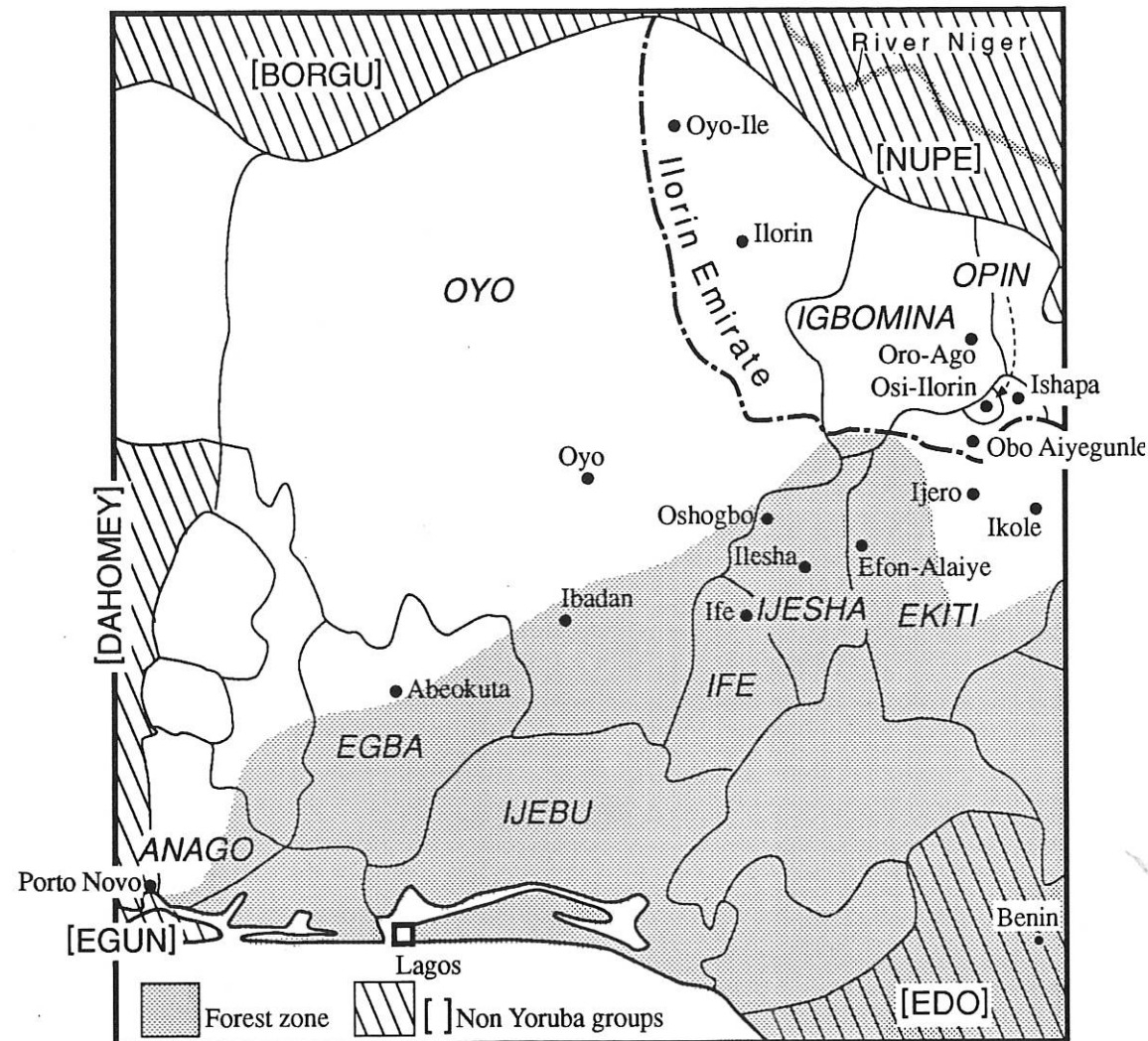
...one of the most powerful and wealthy kingdoms in Africa... It was one of the major achievements of the Alaafin Abiodun towards the end of the eighteenth century, that, in the face of the expansion of Da-

homey, he had reorganized the 200-mile-long trade route to the sea... When Abiodun died, c. 1810 [Akinjogbin, 1967, gives the date of Abiodun's death as 1789, and this is accepted by Law, 1977], he left Oyo an extremely prosperous kingdom with an empire which had been brought under a remarkable degree of centralized administration. (Morton Williams 1967, pp. 39-41)

The empire of the Alaafin extended in a more-or-less southwestern direction, from the middle Niger to the coast dominating the central and western parts of the region we now identify as Yoruba-speaking, together with non-Yoruba peoples to the west, including, from time to time, the kingdoms of Dahomey. This is, of course, within that part of West Africa where the savanna extends all the way to the coast. Some 50 to 60 due miles south of Oyo-Ile, however, one meets the savanna/forest margin extending (for a while) in a south-west to north-east direction (plate 2). Oshogbo, for example, an Ijesha town in origin, was just within the forests, as were Ile-Ife, Ijebu to the south, and all the Ijesha, Ekiti, and other communities to the east of Ife. The forested countryside and the prevalence of the tsetse fly rendered cavalry of no use, and the Alaafin did not bring these areas into his empire. (Indeed, throughout much of the period in question, the kingdoms of Ekiti and other easterly groups found themselves, from time to time, within the sphere of control by Benin.)

To return to the two images with which this discussion began, in the equestrian sculpture of the Alaafin-(as)-Shango, together with the popular dramatic episode of the Nupe man thrown by his horse, we have traces of all those events that brought Oyo to the use of the cavalry that secured the fortunes and powers of the kingdom

Plate 2 - The location of relevant Yoruba cultural/linguistic groups in the 20th century, the southern boundary of the Ilorin emirate by the mid 19th century, and the approximate inland limit of forest. NB: the empire of Oyo at the height of its authority in the late 18th century incorporated riverain Nupe Communities to the



that reached its apogee in the reign of Abiodun; but by the time of his death all this was to change (Ajayi 1974).

V - One of the dominant themes in the history and sociology of the Oyo kingdom is the relationship between the Alaafin and the Oyo Mesi the highest-ranking titled men of the non-royal lineages of Oyo, led by the Bashorun. The Oyo Mesi are responsible for the appointment of the king from among the eligible members of the royal lineage,

south of the Middle Niger Providing access to West African and trans-Saharan trade, the savanna Igbomina, as well as the Egba and peoples to their west and southwest providing access to coastal trade at Porto Novo (Artist D. Simmonds).

and could, in certain circumstances, order the Alaafin to commit suicide. Prior to Abiodun's succession, a series of weak kings had been dominated and destroyed by Bashorun Gaha. Abiodun, however, secured the destruction, throughout the kingdom, of Gaha and his lineage and influence. Thereafter, Abiodun dominated the kingdom and brought it to the height of its authority. At his death, however, the Oyo Mesi chose as his successor someone over whom they could reassert their own authority.

The choice proved disastrous, and in a series of blunders the authority of Oyo was destroyed. Through the reigns of six kings, only one of whom died a natural death, the Fulani jihad established the Emirate of Ilorin in the north-east of the kingdom; prolonged wars between Oyo and Ilorin resulted in the displacement of vast numbers of people southwards; conflict broke out between vassal states, Yoruba and non-Yoruba, within the hegemony of Oyo and on its marches; the cities of Abeokuta (c. 1830) and Ibadan (c. 1829) were founded, each to become important military players in the wars that ensued; the last Alaafin prior to the destruction of Oyo-Ile was forced, at his accession, to go to Ilorin and submit to the authority of the Qur'an, though he was later to die in 1835 in battle as the city of Oyo-Ile itself was destroyed by Ilorin for ever (Morton Williams 1967, Akinjogbin 1967, Ajayi 1974, Law 1977, etc.).

The present city of Oyo was founded to the south, though still within the savanna, c. 1837 by Atiba, a son of Abiodun; and although he tried to reassert the authority of Oyo-Ile, Ibadan was to form an independent state and to do battle with most of its neighbours. Indeed, the southwards advance of the Fulani jihad was finally halted about 1840 by the forces of Ibadan, outside Oshogbo, a city of Ijesha origin just within the forests. The armies of Ilorin led by Ali Balogun Gambari (Ali the Hausa war leader) were encamped to the north-east of Oshogbo, which was located in a position judged to be of strategic importance for furtherance of the jihad. Oshogbo appealed to Ibadan for assistance, which by this time was already a city of increasing military power. The Ilorin forces were largely dependent upon cavalry, and armed with spears, whereas the Ibadan soldiers were

on foot, armed mainly with swords: only their leaders were on horseback. The Ibadan army attacked at night to the surprise and consternation of Ilorin, and the Ilorin dependence on cavalry and spears in thickly wooded countryside made both escape and counter-attack difficult. It is said, in addition, that Oshun, the deity of the river to the south of Oshogbo, had disguised herself in order to sell the Ilorin army poisoned food, dysentery thus adding to their inability to respond to the surprise attack. Many prisoners were taken back to Ibadan; and many horses were also captured, but there was no incentive in tsetse-infested forest environment to develop a local cavalry. The tails of the horses were cut off for ritual and/or decorative use while the horses themselves were, in due course, eaten.

Ali Balogun Gambari was among those who escaped from Oshogbo, however, and, ten or so years later, at the head of his cavalry, he extended the Emirate of Ilorin eastwards across the northern parts of Igbomina and Ekiti, also incorporating Opin, the small group of villages so important in the history of Yoruba sculpture (Picton 1994a/b). In due course, Ibadan also extended its own authority eastwards across Ijesha to Ekiti; but in 1878, when the forces of Ibadan were largely preoccupied with hostilities to the west, against Abeokuta, and to the south against Ijebu, Ekiti people murdered the Ibadan political agents in their towns. They were soon joined by the people of Ila, and Ijesha, and, supported by the Emirate of Ilorin, they initiated a series of wars that moved back and forth across the eastern part of the Yoruba-speaking region until the treaty of 1886 negotiated at Kiri-ji on behalf of the Governor of Lagos. (Indeed, it was only through a series of peace treaties initiated and negotiated by or on

behalf of British Governors of Lagos that in the 1890s these wars were finally brought to a close, thereby bringing the Yoruba-speaking region into the British Empire).

One episode in the war at Ikirun in 1878 that opened the Ekiti/Ibadan conflict is worth recalling. Commanding the Ibadan army with the Balogun was a reckless young man, Ilori, who had been appointed the Osi (i.e. third in command). Johnson notes:

...that he was scarcely ever sober... The free use of spiritous liquors was considered at this time the acme of pleasure and the mark of greatness... He emptied a bottle of gin before ordering his horse to be saddled long before daybreak... The Osi's route lay for about three miles along the highway to the north, then it verged towards the right nearly at right angles along a farm road... About three miles along this farm road the Ilorin camp could be descried on the left hand side, situated on a hill on the other side of a morass, but approachable by a ford which lay about a mile further on, which point was more directly near the Ekiti camp. Those of the Osi's men who had gone before went straight along to this ford, but the Osi wishing to take a short cut to the Ilorin camp left the road and went by a bush path and through farms with the intention of attacking the Ilorins on both sides at once. This after-thought he never communicated to those before... but at best he was not a good rider, and his head had become muddled by drink. The horse soon got entangled in a yam field and fell down, and the illustrious Ilori [i.e. the Osi] was taken alive to the Ilorin camp. (Johnson 1921, pp. 427-430)

Notwithstanding this temporary setback, the Ibadan army was on this occasion victorious; but as for Ilori the drunken Osi:

The Ilorins in their flight did not forget their illustrious captive... a man with a drawn sword rushed upon him and put him to death before he made good his own escape. (Johnson 1921, p. 434)

Horses were a means to military efficiency in the right hands and under the right conditions; and to this we can, in part, attribute the success of the kingdom of Oyo to the early nineteenth century, and the success of the Ilorin Emirate thereafter; until, that is, they approached Oshogbo. The armies of the forested parts of the Yoruba-speaking region made little use of horses, and if at all only as markers of military rank; for the closer one got to well-wooded areas as savanna gave way to forest, and provided a habitat for tsetse flies, neither the horse nor the weaponry favoured by cavalry, spears and poisoned arrows, would prove to have any military effectiveness. Indeed, in the hands of an inept rider, the horse could prove to be a fatal liability. The significant point, then, is that the horse as such is little more than a source of meat and horsehair; but in the hands of a skilled horseman (in the right environmental conditions) the horse could enable the display and exercise of power and authority that, on the evidence of Oyo-Ile and Ilorin, none could withstand.

VI - One might think that it would be hardly surprising that Yoruba sculptors have made use of the rider and horse as subject matter; except that it can never be taken for granted that people necessarily represent in visual form the things that have the most dramatic effect upon their lives. Indeed, the very opposite is often the case. For example, the deities of the Yoruba kingdom of Oyo, and its vassal communities, are not represented in visual form; and even in those unusual examples of a sculpture named as a deity it is not as an icon but rather as a presentation of certain attributes; and this is the case even when the sculpture is in some way the medium of devotees' rela-

Plate 3 - Figure sculptures, wood with sheet-metal eyes, in the shrine to Erinle at Ilobu. The figure second from left is *elésin*, the horseman, and represents the mythic founder of Ilobu. (Photo by John Picton, 1964)



tionship to their deity. The sculpture of the Alaafin-(as)-Shango is a case in point. Shango's presence in his cult is manifest in the *edùn àrà*, the later stone age polished stone axe blades that turn up in the process of farming, relics of earlier inhabitants of the region, or marking the site where the earth has been struck by lightening (depending on your chosen frame of reference). These form the central focus of ritual attention in any Shango shrine or temple. The sculpture, on the other hand, is about the Alaafin as also a manifestation of Shango, and the heir to a kingdom which, as it happens, owed its authority to the determined use of cavalry; whereas the very person of Shango himself belongs to a prior mythic time.

Another example of these questions of

sculptural identification is provided by the figures in the shrine to Erinle at Ilobu, just to the north-west of Oshogbo. Erinle ("the elephant of the earth") is a hunter-deity associated with a river of the same name, whose cult is found particularly within the central and south-western parts of the Yoruba-speaking region, and who is the principal deity of Ilobu. (In every Yoruba community, the ritual calendar is based around one particular deity with whom the community enjoyed a particular mythic relationship: e.g. Shango/Oyo, Oshun/Oshogbo, Ogun/Ire-Ekiti, Orisha-Okò/Irawo, etc.) At Ilobu, Erinle's shrine contains four sculptures (plate 3): two equestrian warriors with spears, one larger than the other, a man smoking a pipe, a woman presenting an offering. The names of these sculptures, as

given to me thirty years ago, were: *elésin*, the horserider, the larger of the two horsemen (and note the emphasis on the rider); *amùnkòtò*, the pipesmoker; and *àbátòn*, "I-wish-we-might-spread-far", a male name (Abrahams 1958, p. 51) given to the smaller horseman, and to the woman with an offering. *Elésin* was said to represent the founder of Ilobu, guided to its present site by, and in that manner identified with, Erinle (as the Alaafin is identified with Shango). The figure was dressed in a shirt with a turban and the large-sized northern basketry hat made to be worn over a turban, providing the image with a northern/Islamic appearance at variance with the deity himself. At the feet of the horse there were segments of kola, perhaps offered to the deity following divination. All four sculptures, however, had blackened mouths as a result of offerings of food, sacrificed to Erinle and applied to the mouths of the images as part of the sacrificial procedures (see also Beier, no date).

To the availability of a sculpture of an equestrian figure for interpretation in terms of historic (and/or mythic) referral, and/or in drawing upon that history as a source of visual metaphor, can be added a further consideration; for the cults of deities within the Oyo kingdom and its neighbours invariably entail possession and mediumship. In the course of initiation, the deity will take possession of his/her new devotee; and at the annual festival celebrated by devotees on behalf of the community one or more people will be possessed by the deity. In the case of Oshun, for example, a young virgin girl is chosen annually for this role; and, in the case of Shango, there is a particular order of possession-mediums. This capacity for possession by one's deity could also have political utility. Morton Williams

notes (1964) that the agent of the Alaafin of Oyo within a vassal kingdom was often a Shango possession-medium; for to be possessed by a deity is to be that very deity in person. Thus, when possessed by Shango, the agent of the Alaafin was himself Shango and thus of greatly superior status to the vassal king, and with the authority to admonish him.

Now, the point of all this is that the Yoruba term for the possessed medium of a deity is *elégùn*, which derives from the verb *gùn*, to climb up or on to something, to mount and ride a horse, or bycicle. In other words, the *elégùn*, is "he/she who is mounted/ridden": the deity is the rider, and the possessed medium is the horse that the deity has mounted. It will be evident that *elésin* (he/she who owns [i.e. rides] the horse) and *elégùn* (he/she who is mounted/ridden) are parallel terms; rider and ridden; and the question thus arises - is the sculpted figure of rider and horse essentially about the relationship of deity to devotee at the moment of possession?

The evidence, such as it is, of the manner in which images are named and used suggests not, or at any rate that such is not the overt and explicit intention motivating the carving of an equestrian figure. Yet the image of the rider and horse here entails a context of ideas and practices, with dimensions, memories, implications and presuppositions that are historic, social and ritual, in which the rider of the horse figures as an agent of domination, militarily in the history of the Oyo kingdom and ritually in the local understanding of its cult practices. Moreover, the fact that the deity dominates the devotee as the skillful rider dominates the horse is a presupposition that might seem to be emphasised through Yoruba sculptural style wherein the rider is, more

often than not, shown larger than, indeed out of all proportion in relation to, the horse. The problem here, of course, is that artistic styles (in the sense of regularly occurring configurations of formal elements) have histories, just as ideas, rites, and so forth have histories; and although at any given time those histories seem (because, of course, they are) functionally inter-related, it would be unwise to assume that one can reduce the complex to any one of its parts.

Thus, while it is possible that a sculptural style, in which the rider is shown so much larger than the horse he is riding, could be motivated by ideas about deity and devotee, there is no necessary connection in the histories of things, nor is there any overt evidence (that I am aware of) either for or against the utility of sculpture in reinforcing such ideas as a point of reference in local discourse. Thus, although I am not aware of any equestrian figure explicitly intended in its making as the representation of possession by a deity, I could not deny the possibilities of its availability for such interpretation in local discourse, even though one has no evidence for this.

VII - The image of the rider and horse is commonplace within the sculptural traditions of the Yoruba-speaking region; for in addition to the free-standing figure sculpture of the Oyo kingdom and surrounding areas (see plates 1-3), the equestrian warrior is sometimes carved as the pedestal of the bowls in which, particularly in the central and western areas, divination apparatus is kept (plate 4). In the Ekiti kingdoms to the east, where the sculptural tradition habitually takes on a larger scale, but where the rocky terrain adds to the difficulties of using cavalry, the rider and the horse is nev-

Plate 4 - Bowl for keeping the palms kernels used in Ifa divination, wood painted in local pigments and dyes, probably carved in Abeokuta, late 19th/early 20th century, British Museum, London, approx H 21 cms. (Photo by Pictorial Education)



ertheless among the subject matter for the carving of veranda posts, and for the superstructures of helmet masks; and in relief on door panels, and other forms that permit carving in relief such as the bowls carved either for the storage of divination apparatus or for the presentation of gifts.

Each form subsists within a distinct context of use, within which the rider and horse is one among a range of images (including for example, the mather and child) that might be used in its stead (or together with it according to the overall form of the sculp-

Plate 5 - Detail of a two-pannelled door, wood, carved in low relief in a particularly lively manner probably by Oshamuko of Osi-Ilorin in the 1930s, and showing at left, above, the colonial administrator with local militia and prisoners, and below, Muslim slavers preceded by a local hunter; at right, above, soldiers with prisoners, and below, a woman in labour (dimensions of each register approx 30 x 50 cms).



Plate 7 - Veranda post, wood, one of three at the home of Babalola Ogunlana, Ile Ogunshima, Ilemon ward, Obo Aiyegunle, carved by Areogun of Osi-Ilorin in the late 1940s. The alien identity of the figure is indicated by the headgear, representing the basketry hat worn by northern Muslims over a turban. (Photo by John Picton, 1965)



The present whereabouts of this door is unknown. (Photo by Kevin Carroll)

Plate 6 - Veranda post, wood, one of a series in the Ode Osoyinyin courtyard of the palace of the Alaiye of Efon-Alaiye, western Ekiti, carved earlier this century by Agbonbiofe Adeshina. The local identity of the figure is indicated by the cap. (Photo by John Picton, 1968)



ture). In some cases, the particular range available within the expectations of the tradition is only as realised in a given location. In other words, there are local differences of style, of overall form, and in the range of imagery; and these do not necessarily correlate. A full treatment of the image of rider and horse would, of course, demand that we take account of the entire range of subject matter, forms and functional complexes within which it is one among others; but even were the necessary documentation available, this would be an undertaking beyond the scope of this essay.

In any case, the pedestal bowls for divination apparatus, and, in the east, the door panels and so forth, portray a range of themes so diverse as to provide illustration of almost every aspect of life (including, of course, mothers and warriors: see be-

Plate 8 - The entrance to the palace of the Ajero of Ijero-Ekiti, the veranda supported by posts carved circa 1916 by Agunna of Ikole; wood with layers of weathered paint. (Photo by John Picton, 1968)

Plate 9 - The upper figure of the post at right in plate 8, showing the mounted warrior with spear in one hand, reins in the other. The interlaced motif around the head represents either a turban or an embroidered hat, each capable of suggesting northern identity. (Photo by John Picton, 1968)

low), a veritable local ethnography (plate 5). Sometimes, with sculptures dating to within the first twenty years of this century, we find the European administrator or missionary on horseback, sometimes together with and sometimes in place of the local warrior. In due course we find the warrior on horseback (perhaps in the aftermath of World War I) alongside the colonial administrator on his bicycle; and this development is sometimes found in Ekiti veranda posts also.

There are, nevertheless, three sculptural themes that do seem to be found throughout the Yoruba-speaking region and which are characteristic of each of the forms listed a couple of paragraphs ago: the warrior (almost always) on horseback (plates 6-7), the mother and child, and the supplicant woman with an offering as gift or sacrifice. With a few exceptions, these forms characterise the free-standing figures and the veranda posts (these sometimes with more than one figure, one on top of another). Having referred to the colonial administrator on bicycle as subject matter for veranda posts parallel to the warrior on horseback, another and more intriguing (and unique?) variation on this theme is provided by the two posts that once supported the veranda at the entrance to the palace of the Ajero (the local kingly title) of Ijero-Ekiti (these posts are no longer in Ijero, and their present whereabouts is unknown to me), carved earlier in this century by Agunna of Ikole-Ekiti. The lower figures in each post show seated women (partly obscured by the cement holding them in place); with, above them, at right, a more-or-less conventional warrior on horseback, and at left the figure of a diviner-doctor (also on horseback): he is distinguished from the warrior by the representation of his wrought iron staff of



Plate 10 - The post at left in plate 8. The central figures are flanked by screens of warriors and musicians. The birds above each figure are probably vultures ready to pick at the bodies of vanquished rivals, represented by the heads at the very top of the post. (Photo by John Picton, 1968)



authority topped by a bird - bird flight is, of course, a metaphoric index of the diviner's ability to mediate between seen and unseen domains (plates 8-11: this post is remarkable also for its innovative formal development, with screens of small figures at each side all carved from the one tree trunk).

This inheritance of subject matter seems easy enough to understand as representative of ever-present themes in Yoruba social life: the not-so-long-ago prevalence of warfare together with the imposition of an alien authority, a concern with child-bearing, and the necessity of sacrifice (and although as sculptural forms they seem standardised to us, we cannot be certain that the carving of specific examples was not motivated by particular individuals or events; nor can be certain that the apparent standardisation is anything other than our failure to "read" the relevant details of style). Thus:

Plate 11 - Detail of plate 10, showing the mounted diviner-doctor, the birds on his hat and staff (which are not vultures) indicating his role as mediator between material and metaphysical domains of agency. (Photo by John Picton, 1968)



Some women go to religious festivals in order to ask the deity being worshipped for children. Some go from one traditional deity to another both in their own ritual community and neighbouring ritual communities in order to offer gifts to deities believed to make women fruitful. Some drift from traditional deities to separatist churches, and to the various missions and university hospitals in order to be cured of their barrenness. (Ojo 1978, p. 461)

Moreover:

Ekiti and Igbomina territory was overrun by invaders from the fifteenth century onwards, when Benin troops are said to have first entered Ekiti... In later years, the area suffered most from the raids by Ilorin and Ibadan forces... By 1840, Ibadan soldiers... came face to face with Nupe cavalry whose "cavaliers were described as seated erect on powerful horses, their spears... of burnished brass which glittered in the noon-day sun" (1921, pp. 404-5). Johnson's flowery prose brings to mind some of the equestrian superstructures on Epa-type masquerade headpieces. (Ojo 1978, p. 463)

"Epa-type" is the usual manner of referring to the helmet-mask in the literature. It is one among divers mask forms characteristic of the Ekiti kingdoms, the Opin village group, and, to the west and east respectively, adjacent Igbomina and Yagba villages, with a helmet that envelops the wearer's head and a figurative superstructure carved of a single block of wood (very occasionally these masks can reach almost to five feet [150 cms] in height). From one community to another this same mask form may be known generically as *èpà eléfon*, *àgùrù*, or *egígún*; although sometimes very different forms may be attached to these same names. In my own research in this area, thirty years ago, I found that five themes predominated in the subject matter of Epa mask superstructures: the leopard, the ram, the dog, the mother and child, and the warrior (usually on horseback); although here and there I also found the palm-wine tapper, the priest, Eshu, and the hunter. I also found that the mother-and-child masks and warrior masks were named individually, names that might vary considerably from one community to another, while exploring a common thematic concern; and Ojo (1978) confirms this while also adding to the list.

For example, the names given to the warrior figures, mounted on horseback and armed with their spears, included:

Oràngún, the title of the king of Ila-Orangun (it could mean "he-helped-Ogun");

Olóyè, the titled man;

Elénpe, the Nupe king of mythic antiquity whose daughter was married to Oranyan and gave birth to Shango;

Jagunjagun, (literally "fight-war fight-war")

Ológun-máà-jà, "warrior do not fight" (i.e. one's own people)

Ológun-bá-an-jà, "warrior help them to fight" (i.e. our warriors)

Balógun, "leader of the warriors"

Elésin, "the rider of the horse"

Ògún, the god of iron (and not the same word as *ogun*, war/battle, from which we have *ológun*, warrior).

Some of these names were noted on veranda posts carved with equestrian imagery also. Ojo notes that this kind of subject matter, together with aspects of performance, in some sense enact memories of:

...the wars waged against the people of these areas by various armies (Benin, Oyo, Nupe, and, in due course, Ilorin and Ibadan) from as early as the sixteenth century to the closing years of the nineteenth century... This type of subject matter may be regarded as records of invaders... But why should such representations appear on masquerade headpieces used in ceremonies designed to solicit help from the gods? I suggest this is ritual role reversal... you identify the object that threatens you, and draw off its power to work in your own defence.

Not only were the Ekiti and the Igbomina at the receiving end of these invasions, but they did not have horses. (Ojo 1978, pp. 462-463)

It is also clear that we can identify the warrior figures on horseback carved upon the Epa-type masks as either Ilorin/Muslim or local (i.e. Ekiti, Opin, Igbomina) according to the differences signified by their headgear, the turban within a basketry hat or the leather war helmet respectively. Thus, plate 12 shows a pair of these masks at Ishapa, an Ekiti village in the east of the Ilorin emirate, carved by Fashiku the Alaye of Ik-erin, a nearby Opin village. The mask at left was called *omónbóni*, the title for a man with several generations of offspring begotten within his own lifetime, though why he should be shown wearing the basketry hat over a turban and veil, thus signifying

Plate 12 - Two èpà masks at Ile Awure, Odo Aga ward, Ishapa (an Ekiti village in the Ilorin emirate), wood painted carved by Fashiku the Alaye of Ikerin. The mask at left was called *omónbóni*, the title for a man with several generations of descendants begotten within his own lifetime. He wears the northern-style basketry hat over a turban and veil. The figure on the mask at right, *ológun*, the warrior, wears a turban. (Photo by John Picton, 1964)



a very definite Islamic identity, is unknown to me. The mask at right, was called *ológun*, the warrior, and he is on horseback wearing a turban, this likewise signifying Muslim identity. In contrast, plate 13 shows a mask at the Igbomina village of Oro-Ago, sadly in a condition of termite-eaten disrepair, with the figure here shown wearing the leather war helmet characteristic of local war leader. It was called *oori*, a name of uncertain reference (though a possible translation could be the Red-billed Wood Dove, which "...is fast and direct in flight in the open, but can dive and twist through the heavy, lower tangle of forest vegetation" [Abraham 1958, p. 482]: a fitting description of the war leader one might think.

Moreover, whatever we may note of the

Plate 13 - èpà mask surmounted by a horseman wearing the leather war helmet characteristic of Ekiti, Opini and Igbomina military leaders, wood (damaged beyond further use by termites) painted with red ochre, chalk and washing-blue, carver unknown, H 132 cms. (Photo by John Picton, 1964)



enactment of community concerns in these masks, this of itself, as Ojo notes, will not suffice to motivate and justify their performance, except at the level of carnival; and yet the leopard, the dog, the ram, the mother-and-child, and the warrior, are a regularly occurring set (the full significances of which are still not properly explored), and people offer blood and other sacrifices to these masks, i.e. to the helmets upon which the superstructure is carved. That these masks have healing energies is well-attested; and indeed, that may be their primary ritual motivation. For in the parts of Ekiti and Opini with which I was familiar, the cosmology and cult organisation described for central and western Yoruba does not apply, though certain deities (no longer

Plate 14 - *arúgbá sàngó*, "the (virgin) carrier of Shango's calabash", an altarpiece from a shrine to Shango belonging to Shangodiran, the Balogun (war chief) of Oyatedo, an Igbomina village near Oro-Ago, wood with red ochre, indigo dye and washing-blue. The bowl it supports contains thunderbolts. (Photo by John Picton, 1964)



identified, generically, as *òrisà*), such as Ifa, Eshu and Ogun are ubiquitous. Here, to carve an image is to create an *imonlè*, and by means of sacrifice to it a metaphysical energy can be generated and directed. The helmet of the Epa-type mask is, then, a case in point; but what purpose is served by the imagery of the superstructure, including, of course, the warrior, whether local or foreign?

If the energy source is embodied in the helmet mask in virtue of sculpture and sacrifice, and as these masks are prayed to especially for the healing of barrenness, then the mother-and-child could simply illustrate the effectiveness of these masks in realising pregnancy and successful childbirth; while the image of the warrior suggest a

Plate 15 - Detail of plate 14, showing the horseman at the door of the altarpiece, perhaps emblematic of the mediating energies of Eshu. (Photo by John Picton, 1964)



likeness between the energy of the real-life warrior and the energy of the mask. There is, of course, another kind of explanation altogether: that we are mistaken in regarding the mask-plus-superstructure as a single iconic entity; and that the figurative superstructures provide an entertaining display and have no other purpose. Neither of these explanations help us with the leopard, the ram and the dog, however.

VIII - Images emblematic of Eshu, the mediating trickster among the deities, are found from one end of the Yoruba-speaking area to the other, and they are manifestly different from other sculptured forms in scope, not least because almost all are male. They include the flute-player, the

Plate 16 - *al buraq*, the horse that took the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Jerusalem in the Night Journey, a popular print from Cairo, once widely available in West Africa. (Photo by Paul Fox)



pipe-smoker, and the man with an engorged penis, as well as the horserider, its emblematic status, distinguishing it from other equestrian images, sometimes indicated by backward-curving cap or crest and/or a series of magical-medicine calabashes around his cap: sometimes, however, this status is indicated only by its location within a visual programme (I have discussed elsewhere - see Picton 1994 - the implications of the juxtapositioning of the pipe-smoker and the colonial administrator).

As an example of this, and of the complexities that arise, I refer to a sculpture (plates 14-15) carved by an unremembered hand at Oke Onigbin circa 1940 (some twenty-five years ago, they said at the time of my visit in 1964). It was the centrepiece of a shrine to Shango, brought out for me to photograph by Shangodiran, the Balogun of the Igbomina village of Oyatedo, in

the Oro-Ago district of the Ilorin Emirate. The form is known as *arugbá*, "she who carries the calabash", and is among the furniture of Shango shrines characteristic of the Igbomina region and eastwards (it takes the place of the upturned mortar typically found in shrines in central and western Yoruba). The name refers to the role of the virgin delegated, in some cults (though not specifically Shango), to carry a calabash containing sacred emblems and who may experience possession by the deity thereby. In this example, the *edùn àrà*, the axes/thunderbolts, were kept in the bowl (carved with a leopard in relief upon its lid) placed upon the *arugbá*. Around the base of this sculpture there are figures showing aspects of cult practice, while in front of the figure there are what seem like door posts showing *edùn àrà* carved in relief; and upon the door that gives access to the

Plate 17 - *àdìrè olóba*, indigo-dyed cotton textile with, as its central focus, King George V and Queen Mary (the remains of lettering can be seen around the top of each medallion) taken from the jubilee souvenirs of 1935, with *al buraq* amongst the jumble of figures at each



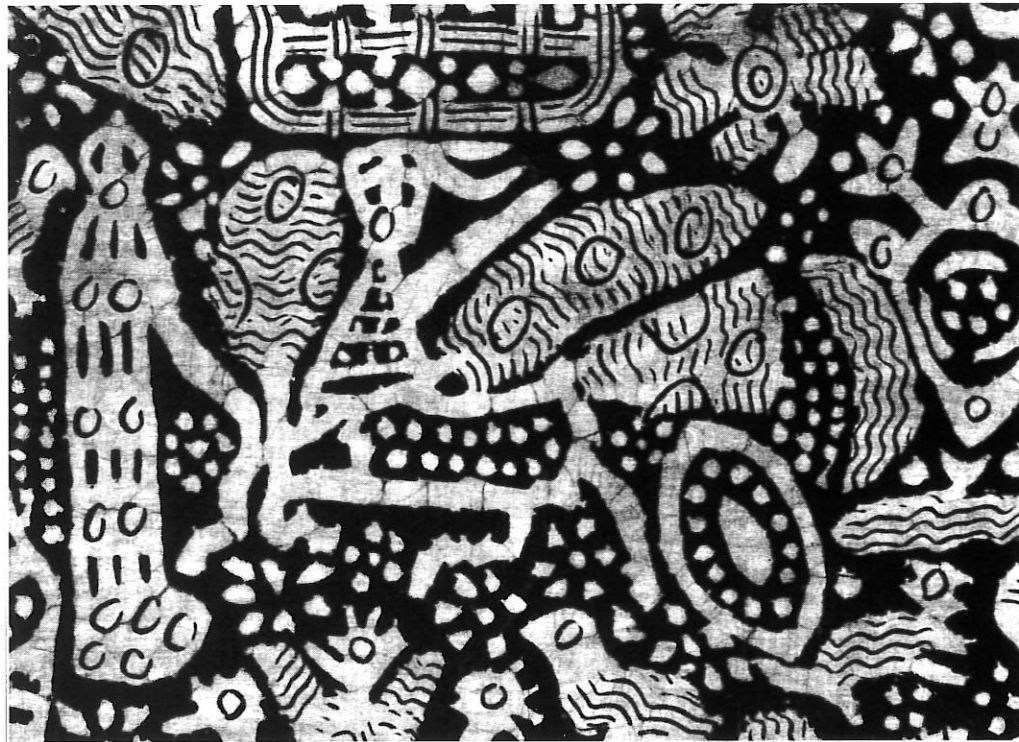
figure of *arugbá* herself there is a rider and horse. The role of Eshu as the messenger who facilitates our access to the deities is well-enough known; and in this case, the backward-curving cap together with his appearance at the door, an obvious locus of mediation (and Eshu shrines are often located near the entrances to houses and shrines, as well as in the market place) might seem convincing of an identification with Eshu.

IX - In the present century, however, a new image of the horse has appeared within the Yoruba visual environment (plate 16): *al buraq*, the horse with a woman's head, wings and a peacock's tail that took the Holy Prophet of Islam from Mecca to Jerusalem in the Night Journey. It is printed in Cairo on paper and was widely available in West Africa and throughout the Is-

lamic world. It was the source of the configuration of *àdìrè* designs, known as *olóba*, "that with a king". An image of King George V and Queen Mary, taken from the souvenirs of the 1935 Silver Jubilee of their accession, is placed at the centre of a tightly packed field of imagery that includes *al buraq*, and the minaret (plates 17-18; see also Jackson 1970). The relationship of horse and rider here is completely reversed, of course, in contrast to the theory of possession by a deity, and to the manner in which Yoruba sculptors had presented the horse as subordinate to its rider, a supposition based partly upon the placing of the human figure in relation to the horse within the constraints of the block of wood, and more importantly upon the manner in which images are named and used.

We are, of course, thereby brought back to the underlying proposition of this paper,

Plate 18 - Detail of a textile very similar to plate 17 showing *al buraq* and the adjacent minaret. Originally these textiles were produced using sheet-metal stencils, but were then copied, as in this case, freehand. In the process the direction of image of *al buraq* has been reversed. (Photo by Paul Fox)



namely that while a historical context, in which the rider in control of the horse is a dominant figure, provides for both visual and conceptual images, the former do not necessarily provide a visualising of the latter. The naming and contexts of usage of equestrian warrior figures indicate that, while these images signify attributes of energy and mediation, whether of people or (sometimes) of gods (if indeed they entail concerns that are more than "merely" decorative), sculpted images within the traditions embodied in works of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are not intended as overt representations of deities in possession of devotees (though one cannot deny the possibility of an image being incorporated *ad hoc* into a discussion about that relationship). Indeed, it is not until we cross the Atlantic to discover the work of Wilfredo Lam, the Cuban artist of mixed

Yoruba and Chinese parentage, that we discover the attempt to render the deity/devotee-as-rider/ridden relationship in overt and explicit visual form. In the early 1940s, with the outbreak of hostilities in Europe, Lam returned to the Caribbean from Paris having encountered an interest in Africa among Picasso and the surrealists, and in reckoning with his own sense of cultural identity he endeavoured to illustrate that very moment of possession when the devotee becomes the horse ridden by the deity (Merewether 1992, p. 23).

X - For the archaeologist, as for the historian, the visual arts may seem to be useful sources of illustration and information about times and places distant from their own. Moreover, in the selection of material for visual presentation we expect the artist to reveal something of the presuppositions

current in his/her own time and place; and, whatever the problems inherent in this expectation, it enhances the illustrative and informative capacities of the work of art. I have noted that, while in some areas of their visual culture Yoruba artists seem to have provided all the illustrations one might need for an account of their social life, in others certain themes predominate to the exclusion (in practice, so to speak) of the greater part of the available subject matter; and this is a problem still to be reckoned with. The sculptures of riders and horses, if we must encapsulate them within a form of words (and in doing so we inevitably diminish the richness of social life), could be said to have enabled a knowledge about the relationship of authority between ruler and ruled, through the experience and remembrance of events in the life-histories of the communities to which these sculptures once belonged; and these experiences and memories have at the same time motivated an understanding of the relationship between deity and devotee. On the other hand, in the absence of some recognition of all the contextual (personal, social, ritual, aesthetic, historic) implications and presuppositions accruing to the rider and horse, just about all that one might safely infer from the sculpture alone is that, once upon a time, an artist must have seen something that looked like a horse, and that there is evidently a preoccupation in art with the skillful representation of men with spears on horseback (and with mothers and children); but, of course, these sculptures were never intended as sources of information for people ignorant of their originary circumstances. People engage with art and in doing so they engage with one another and with the world, and in commenting on this we must recognise a disjunction between

art as art, that context of practice wherein we find the artist and patron, and art (treated) as information, wherein we find the archaeologist and historian; and we must acknowledge the role of the art historian as mediator between these two contexts of practice - if, that is, the history of art is to be more than just history with pictures.

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