

The Cosmological Vision of the Yoruba-Idààcha of Benin Republic (West Africa): A Light on Yoruba History and Culture

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Abstract The essay examines Idààcha cosmological vision as a kind of incorporation of Yoruba cosmology. It shows a process where the two strands, that is to say, knowledge and belief can not be readily distinguished. The divinatory traditional calendar is indeed based on a scale of fixed number values whose definitions are drawn from the concepts early traditional people have of the universe. Thus, the signification of the terms that designate entities such as angle, circle, center of the circle, midnight, time zone, the number of days in a week, etc., in the Yoruba dialect Idààcha, mirrors cosmological standards. These words constitute a landscape of memory shedding light on early Yoruba culture and history. Hence, Idààcha being a significant western periphery of the Yoruba region, we examine why its divinatory calendar would preserve an older spatio-temporal logic, beyond Ifè and Oyo revisionism in Yoruba history. Finally, the article points out that the translation of spatial and geometrical relations into temporal terms and vice-versa may suggest a new indexical approach to the study of cosmology in relation to the human body. As the body is in the mind, we say in relation to the human mind.

Resume L'article examine la vision cosmologique du groupe dialectal Yoruba-Idààcha comme un type d'incorporation de la cosmologie Yoruba dans la rationalisation de la vie sociale. Il met en exergue le lien à peine dissociable entre croyance et connaissance. Le calendrier est en effet construit sur la base d'une échelle de valeurs tirées de la vision cosmologique de l'univers. Ainsi, les significations, dans le dialecte Yoruba-Idààcha, des termes qui désignent les entités comme l'angle, le cercle, le centre du cercle, minuit, fuseau horaire, le nombre de jours de la semaine, etc., renvoient systématiquement à l'échelle des valeurs standardisées inventées par la cosmologie. Ces mots Idààcha qui « parlent » constituent un paysage de mémoire qui renseigne sur les symbolismes originels dans l'histoire et la culture

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Yoruba. Partant, l'article examine soigneusement la question de savoir pourquoi le calendrier divinatoire du pays Idààcha qui est un pôle significatif de la périphérie occidentale du pays Yoruba préserve une logique spatio-temporelle très ancienne par-delà Ifè et le revisionnisme oyo. Finalement, il conclut que la lecture simultanée des représentations spatiales et géométriques, en même temps comme des données temporelles, suggère une nouvelle approche de l'étude de la cosmologie en rapport avec le corps humain. Puisque le corps est dans le cerveau, nous dirons, en rapport avec l'esprit humain.

Keywords: /Mots-clés: *Cosmology in metrology, belief and knowledge, Yoruba history, spatio-temporal thinking* / Cosmologie en métrologie, croyance et connaissance, histoire yoruba, représentation spatio-temporelle/.

Introduction

This paper is in honor of and was presented shortly after the 2006 Total Solar Eclipse in West Africa. In connection with that particular historical and celestial event, one major theme is developed in this essay: the recovery of layers of historical memory in Idààcha practices and language forms to shed light, first, on Idààcha-Yoruba cosmological vision and second, on early Yoruba culture and history – Idààcha is a western dialect of Yoruba in the center of Benin Republic (Fig. 1). For this analysis, we use specific techniques of semantic reconstruction in Idààcha dialect of Yoruba and spatio-temporal encoding based on the mathematical foundations of – perhaps – an earlier form of Ifa divination. We examine different cases as kinds of incorporation of Yoruba cosmology into real life. Using Idààcha as a case study, we try, first, to show the intrinsic character of the human mind. We then give some epistemological conclusions and lessons to engage young African people and we suggest the importance of teaching African technology and particularly cultural astronomy in African classrooms. Secondly, we show why, Idààcha being a significant western periphery of the Yoruba region, its divinatory calendar would preserve an older spatio-temporal logic, beyond Ifè and Oyo revisionism in Yoruba history.

The Intrinsic Character of the Human Mind from a Case Study of Yoruba-Idààcha Cosmological Vision

Celestial observations and the associated beliefs and Deities are common to people around the world. The cosmologies of the Batammaliba from northern Benin and Togo, the Sotho, the Tswana, the Xhosa and the Zulu of south Africa, the Mursi of Ethiopia (Holbrook 1998), and of course that of the Dogon of Mali and the Yoruba of Nigeria, Benin and Togo, are not in anyway envious of that of Western people.

Let us take the example of the Yoruba. The 29th March 2006, day of total solar eclipse in West Africa, the Idààcha people chanted their ritual telling the sun to let the moon go. The traditional song says: “*ojurun (oju orun) mu osupa, bi alele e jo e [. . .]*”, which means: “*the eye of the sky (sun) has captured the moon, it will let her go when comes the evening. . .*”. The Idààcha eclipse song considers indeed the sun like a magnet which captures the moon and lets it go after some time. This sounds like the heliocentric conception model of the universe developed and defended by Galileo. From a comparative standpoint, the difference is that traditional Idààcha people’s knowledge is highly intuitive and oral, while the knowledge of Galileo is theoretical and highly developed and written.

Again, from the Yoruba Idààcha people, the reading of eight consecutive time zones from midnight, *iwon ri iwon ogun mejo* which means “*the adding of measurement*” (Measurement has seen measurement and so on eight times, the process giving finally a total accumulation of eight measurements) is reminiscent of the practice of the Italians who also used to count 24 hours consecutively and not twice a dozen hours. The practice is also that of the moderns astronomers like Ptolemy who counted “24 hours consecutively between two middays” (Arago 1854). If midnight which is said to be called in Idààcha *iwon ri iwon* (measurement has seen measurement eight times) has been taken as the beginning and at the same time as the finishing point of the whole day, in other words, a time which goes from the unit time zone *iwon* (the base of the measurement) to eight units *iwon ri iwon ogun mejo* – measurement added eight times (Fig. 2), the modern astronomer Copernicus, the Egyptians, Hipparchus, the ancient Romans, the French, the English, the Spanish did the same way in fixing also midnight as the beginning of the civil day (for more details about *iwon ri iwon*, see Sègla et Boko 2006).

Let us give again another example: in Europe, it is speculated that the observation of the seven visible celestial bodies – five visible planets and the sun and moon – inspired the Gregorian week of seven days. But for all the Yoruba, the original and founding myth says that the world had four corners at the time of its creation. This is the bases of their week of four days. It is what the Yoruba call *orita* – the crossing road. In Idààcha, the same idea is more mathematically explicit (Sègla 2003). The conception is indeed unusual. According to the legend recounted by an Idààcha man in Magoumi in Benin Republic, a Yoruba Idààcha man, who wanted to avoid having his four sons each hide in a corner of the rectangular *ogba* (hut), preferred to build a hut that was circular *agbo*, a word associated with the expression *ilé eniyan merin* or in a shortened form *amerin* (Idààcha),

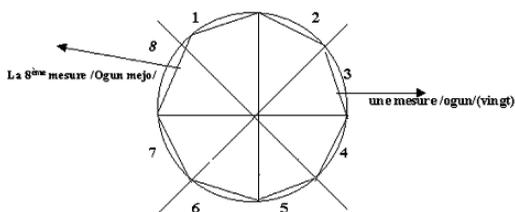


Fig. 2 Iwon ri iwon – measurement has seen measurement eight times consecutively

meaning *house people four*. In this way, the father ensures the unity and power of his family. In fact, for the man from Magoumi, the four corners of a rectangle are gathered together at the center of the circle. This is also the origin of the name given to the center of a circle *eerin* which means *four*. In traditional Yoruba enumeration, the series *one, two, three, four, five, six, etc.* corresponds to the sequence of cardinal numbers *ookan, eeji, eeta, eerin...*. The equivalent numeric adjectives are *mokan, meji, meta, merin...*, which are noun-phrases containing a verb. The verb that acts in them is *mu*, which means *take* or *separate*. Thus the sequence is *mu ookan (take one), mu eeji (take two), mu eeta (take three), mu eerin (take four)*. . .etc. The imagining of the circle in the language system starts from the conception of the rectangle with its four corners. Thus taking these corners away one by one, the figure of the circle is like *four corners dissolved in the center* (Fig. 3) or *four corners taken to the center, amu eerin* (Idààcha) meaning *having taken away four*.

It is this idea that is intuitively present in Yoruba cosmological belief. According to that belief, the universe is round, and its creation starts with four corners, the four points of the compass encoded in the language system as *igun merin (angles four)*. A belief that inspires the Yoruba traditional calendar with the four-day market cycle and the Yoruba four-day week, each of the four days having been given the name of the four most important deities in Yoruba history who created the universe, Orunmila (the supreme God that is in the sky), Obatala (the first Yoruba aborigine king between 2000 before common era and 500–700 common era), Oduduwa (the king that founded the dynastic power in Ilé-Ifè between the Vth and the VIIIth century CE) and Shango (the king that represent the founding and the power of Oyo). Moreover, in the expression *igun merin, angle four*, *igun* is a noun in which, the verb *gun* expresses the idea of *meeting* or *bringing together* and so, *igun* signifying *corner* expresses the notion of making two walls meet making a right angle. Thus, in Yoruba, *igun* is in principle a right angle, and indeed the traditional Yoruba house is rectangular *ogba*, with four right angles. Here we see how the conception of the circle is obtained starting with the center defining the totality, meaning the circle and all his other elements in the “*powerful*” center. The traditional organizations of a Yoruba village and the family group can serve as a social illustration. The chief of the family group whose house is situated generally at the center of the family compound, in a Yoruba town or village, is indeed *baale agbo ilé chief circle houses*;

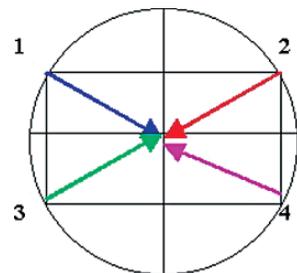


Fig. 3 Orita (crossing road)

the wives of the chief having their rectangular houses on a perimeter that forms the circumference of a circle *agbo ilé*. This shows how the mnemo-technical device of geometrical and spatial order is also a landscape of memory.

But how came this to be? In fact, these different concepts and representations of Yoruba people – the Idààcha in particular – have a cosmological origin. It is that cosmological vision that gives Figures 2, 4 and 8 sacred status placing them in the center of all Yoruba cognitive activities. A type of priest, Babalawo – *owner of secrets* – in Idààcha country speaking old Idààcha – a dialect closed to the original Yoruba language “Ifè tutu, Icha tutu” – described the rituals sequences before a divining process (Sègla et Boko 2006): the diviner, before divination, refers to the *air* to announce an imagining body in circular movement. This is symbolized by the divinatory chain that the diviner turns around a vertical axe. He then marks the center of the imagining circle. The divinatory chain with 8 cowries, each of them having a concave and a convex face, is then put down following the vertical axis in the center of the circle. The diviner recovers the chain with the bag that was used to contain the chain before. By this way, the diviner looks for *heat*, in another word *fire*. Then, the diviner continues the ritual in putting a little water at the four corners of the circle, in front, behind, at the right and the left of the divinatory chain set down at the center. This manner, he called for *water* and by referring to the four cardinal points, he signifies that the body in movement is *earth*. And finally, the chain being always at the center, the diviner calls for the cosmos spirit to complete the process of *Eeji-Onilè* which means *the two that possess the world*. The diviner says: “I have now got the four necessary elements on earth. May God give me the four counterpart corresponding elements which sit with Orunmila or Olodumaré in the sky.” At that stage, the diviner can throw down the divinatory chain and identify a configuration for interpretation (Fig. 4).

The divinatory traditional calendar is so based on two forces – as is also the divinatory Ifa system: first, there are the earth forces with four (4) signs (fire, earth material, air and water) and second, there are cosmic environment forces also characterized by symmetric correspondent signs of that of earth counterparts in the sky. It is the elements of that couple *Earth-Sky* which interacts with each other and gives indication to the diviner for predictions. The association of the two gives meaning to the Yoruba expression *Eeji-Onilè*, *the Two that own the Earth*. In comparison,

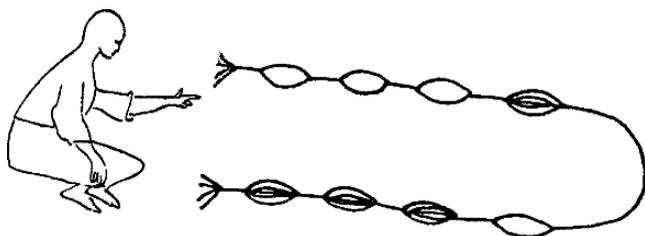


Fig. 4 The divining chain

Swerdlow (1998) reported a similar practice among the Chaldean. Swerdlow who reported Oppenheim (1974) wrote that

The principles of divination from natural phenomena are set out in a text of the Neo-Assyrian period, [...] as “A Babylonian Diviner’s manual”, containing catalogues of two series of ominous signs on the earth and in the heavens, both astronomical and meteorological, that explains the relation of signs in the heavens and on the earth to each other [...] The signs in the sky just as those on the earth give us signals [...] their good and evil portents are in harmony (i.e., confirming each other). The Sky and earth both produce portends; though appearing separately, they are not separate (because) sky and earth are related. A sign that portends evil in the sky is (also) evil on earth, one that portends evil on earth is evil in the sky [...]. These are the things you have to consider when you study the two collections. (Swerdlow 1998: 3–4).

In the Yoruba case, the signs of the sky and that of the earth forming the *Eeji Onilè* reflect and clarify the duality inherent in Yoruba system. Four signs on earth and four signs in the sky interacting is the reason of the presence of eight cowries on the divining chain. In fact, for all the Yoruba, Morton’Williams (1964) has reported that

The House of the Sky is the domain of the supreme God, Olorun Olodumaré (Olorun means ‘Sky-Owner’) [...]. The Earth is the domain of the Goddess Onilè, Earth-Owner, who is sometimes simply called Ile [...]. Life in the third cosmic realm, Ilé aiye, the house of the World, is good only when good relationships are maintained, with the gods and spirits of the other two [...]. (Morton-William 1964: 245–246) (Fig. 5).

This cosmological conception and vision of the Yoruba people – the Idààcha in particular – is incorporated in real life: we already described before the day and the night equally divided into four (four time zones) and the whole day divided into eight parts. The week has four days, the month has seven weeks of four days. A particular use of this principle in Yoruba-Idààcha country is the mortuary ceremony

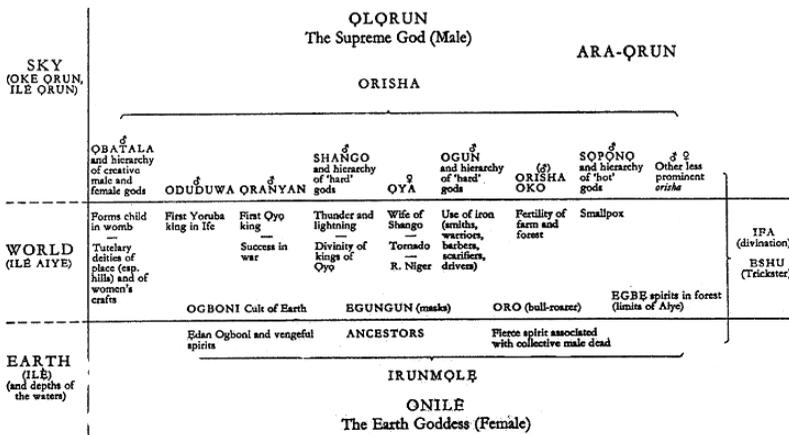


Fig. 5 Eeji onilè(the two that own the earth): Cosmological model of the Yoruba, from Morton-William (1964: 249)

which takes place the day of the sixth market after the death of a dead person, *oja mefa* (market six), in other words, six weeks of four days after the death (Fig. 6).

More interesting, all the traditional ceremonies in Idààcha [the ikodun (annual harvest ceremony to celebrate the sufferings of the year), the *oja mefa* (the mortuary ceremony), the *eru gbigba* (the acquit-ment ceremony of the dead person) or the *ode gbigbe* (the hunter ceremony to acquit the dead person who has been a hunter in his life)] are regenerative rituals that recreate original time (*titi lailai ati lailai*) (*lost in the past and deeply lost in the past*). This has been also an observation by Horton (1970) in his work about Africa. Horton has given it the qualification of “rites of recreation” or the “return to the beginning” (Horton 1970). Even the most fundamental Yoruba deities and the secondary deities are derived from the diagram of worldly creation Orita. In other words, they are all derived from two and four. The most fundamental deities are 4^2 or $2^4 = 16$, and the secondary deities are 32, 64, 128, 256 ($2^5, 2^6, 2^7$ et 2^8). The scale of sacred Yoruba values, 1, 2, 4 and 8 ($2^0, 2^1, 2^2$ et 2^3) and 16, 32, 64, 128, 256 ($2^4, 2^5, 2^6, 2^7, 2^8$) are the products of the divining chain giving a total of 256 divination chapters which are all coded linguistically in Yoruba language. It is not only an incorporation of cosmological standards for the rationalization of life but the system affects also the intellectual activity. Indeed, the Yoruba mental model built from cosmovision is a generative scheme that has founded the twenty base oral numeration system which was originally a five base system. The five base system moved then further to twenty base by the incorporation of the cosmological mental model (Sègla 2004b). It is the same principle that founded the binary and hexadecimal code bases in Ifa. Indeed, in Ifa, it is the divining chain as a medium and form of inscription that gives a place value numeration system. Because the cowry shells appear on two sides of the divining chain and are aligned, viewed from the left to right and from bottom to the top, there is a resource for the hexadecimal system to occur. The 256 Yoruba linguistic codes in Ifa are thus all hexadecimal and at the same time they are convertible to binary codes (Sègla 2004a). In the computer machine language, a structurally identical system represents all numbers and all alphabetic characters that is also the base of high modern computing. Of course, the US army developed and used the same principle to improve its computer data system and organization in the sixties. It is the same principle which is nowadays generalized and is at the basis of the Great Computer Data and Audio revolution.

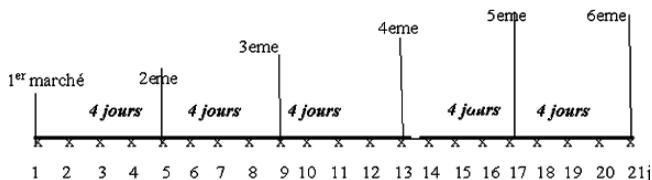


Fig. 6 Oja mefa (mortuary ceremony: market six), from Sègla et Boko (2006: 23)

Idààcha Divinatory Calendar – a Spatio-temporal Logic Beyond Ifè and Oyo Revisionism: A New Light on Yoruba History and Culture

Considering several data gathered from Idààcha, we affirm that this essay addresses earlier pre-colonial constructions in a divination calendar rather than echoes of European contact. We maintain that study of Idààcha divinatory calendar gives evidence of a pre-Ifa divination system that remained immune from Ifa hegemony, sharing claims of aboriginal status with a cluster of associated cults; or evidence of archaic ritual language forms, echoing earlier spoken dialects that resurface in the voices of possessed devotees in Idààcha land. But, does a simpler divinatory matrix imply earlier history? Many parts of Yoruba land have nowadays divination with (*obi*) (*kola nuts*) and cowries. Does this imply an earlier form? Indeed, if formal correspondences between 2's, 4's and 8's do not in and of themselves prove anything, what is a proof is the straight path that Idààcha divinatory calendar draws towards Yoruba past, reaching the aborigine original Obatala period in going through cosmological and spiritual sacred Ilé-Ifè. To maintain why Idààcha is a significant western periphery of the Yoruba region and why its divinatory calendar would preserve an older spatio-temporal logic, beyond Ifè and Oyo revisionism, we give two series of arguments: First, we take into account the considerable debate concerning the sacred status of Ilé-Ifè in relation to the Oduduwa migration or conquest, on the one hand, and the rise of the Oyo Empire, on the other hand. Robin Horton (1979) covers a lot of important ground and makes an “elder statesman” argument that we address, engaging the positions of Akinjogbin (1980), Atanda (1996), Olomola (1976) and Shaw (1980) on the fact that a pre-Oduduwa ancient and aborigine period exists in Yoruba history. Akinjogbin (1980), when reconstructing the oral tradition of origins (Ikedu) confirms a later Oduduwa conquest of Ilé-Ifè. We also mention Obayemi (1979), Apter (1987) who cautiously reviewed the historical problematic of the Pre-Oduduwa Yoruba “base-line”, highly mythic and hypothetical, as is the Ilé Ifè's enduring sacred status well illustrating a cosmological and spiritual origin of Ifè – *Oduduwa coming from the sky, from the earth or from the ocean to create Yoruba cradle in Ilé-Ifè*. We also cite Samuel Johnson's *History of the Yorubas* [1948(1921)] in relation to the rise of the Oyo empire and to colonial discourses of Yoruba nationhood and imputed migrations from Egypt or Mecca denying the cosmological origin and therefore the sacred status and spiritual dimension of Ilé-Ifè. Indeed, Oyo neglected, ignored and contested the ideological and cosmological text that Ifa represents in Yoruba history and that Ifè was taking care of as well (Apter 1987). In situating the political and historical contextualization of these three great Yoruba periods (Sègla et Boko 2006), it appears that Oyo is a revisionist vision in Yoruba history while Ifè remains its spiritual and ideological virgin version permanently in opposition to Oyo. Not surprisingly, Oyo empire and colonial Oyo have been for long dominated by conquerors and looters who were, somehow, very less interested in intellectual and cultural matters. [For more detailed analysis on these three periods, see Sègla et Boko (2006) and Apter (1987)]

Regarding the frontier line between the ancient period and the Oduduwa period, we cite Obayemi (1979):

The Oodua-Obatala legends, the Igbo-Ifè rivalries [...] answer unequivocally in favour of the “imposition of a new order from outside”, of Oodua landing from “orun” on Ora Hill and from there encroaching upon, overthrowing and being resisted by the bearers of the indigenous culture, the Igbo culture with its artistic florescence, under the leadership of Obatala. Dynastic Ilé-Ifè was the fusion, the compromise of the two. The Oodua-obatala legend, following the archaeological reconstruction would then be telling us of the pangs of integration of two systems – an “indigenous” one with its multi-settlement character, with the new socio-political monolithic dynastic culture, with its idea of a nucleated settlement (a city wall).

According to Obayemi (1979) and on the basis of archaeological findings around Ilé-Ifè, the Igbo, from the actual Ile-cha and the Ifè who spoke the same language (the ancient original language Ifè-tutu or Icha tutu) continued to live together after the establishment by Oduduwa of the new dynastic political order V-VIIIth century at the latest (Horton 1979). However, dispersions, at the same period, from Ilé-Ifè and Ilé-Icha to the East and to the West are plausible. To the West, we have in mind here very ancient Yoruba kingdoms like Igede, Popo, Ketu, Chabe, Iloji and Ifita which already existed from the X–XIth century at the latest (Dunglas 1957), (Igue and Yai 1973), (Gayibor 1985), Eades (1980). To take it briefly, giving archaeological data and glutto-chronological analysis results, Yoruba language differentiation as a distinct group from that of the Kwa would take place near by 3000 BCE, somewhere in the actual region of Niger-Benoue-Congo (Horton 1979). More ever, some independent groups developed an original proto-Yoruba language near by 500 BCE (Horton 1979). These groups were probably those who spoke original language Ifè-tutu or Icha-tutu. Horton (1979) thinks that dispersions of proto-Yoruba from there to the south and to the west would have begun already 500 BCE. These dispersions have continued reaching their highest point at 500 CE – at the time the actual Yoruba population has been constituted and completed. It is these dispersions that have been accelerated by the new dynastic political system introduced by the dynastic king Oduduwa near VIIIth–IXth century (Obayemi 1979). One can then say that the Yoruba kingdoms at the West of Ilé-Ifè like Igede, Popo, Ketu, Chabe, Iloji and Ifita existed already from the IXth century at the latest. Ifita (Ifè ita) which means *the Ifè of abroad, the Ifè of the west* has given rise later to the kingdom of Idààcha from the XV–XVIth century under the pressure of the Fon raids and invasions (Fig. 7).

Second, we supplement the semantic reconstruction of Idààcha root-morphemes in divinatory calendar with other linguistic data, that is, oriki (litanies, – *erikin* in Idààcha)-, oral histories, hunter’s chants which tell of various migrations to see how local Idààcha historical consciousness agrees with our claims. And interviews with diviners illuminate the fact that the spatio-temporal metrics of the divinatory paradigm *Eeji onilè (the two that possess the universe)* makes local sense. We hear for instance from different Olorisha and Aworo and from the Ogboni elders (adepts of secret cults, secret holders) in Idààcha, and their esoteric well confirms claims about the earth – the Edan Ogboni captures the pairing of the owners of the earth very nicely. They all are those who are original owners of the land before the

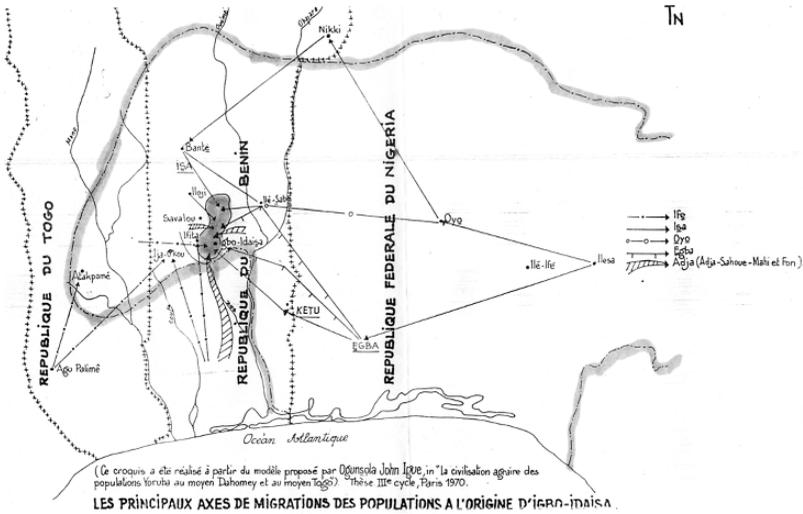


Fig. 7 Main migration axis at the origin of the foundation of Idààcha

dynastic Ifè Egba Omojagan immigrants arrived from Ifè – In fact, the Omojagan are those who rule the dynastic power nowadays in Idààcha country. We also see the major Orisha cults in Idaacha, and what visions of the past they perpetuate, that is Obatala orisha cult or locally called Baba n’la or Ocha. Here are below some of selected linguistic data about such claims:

Leading by a so called *Oba Ayaba Oké* (Adédiran 1984), the litany (*oriki or erikin in Idààcha dialect*) of the first Ifita says they had simply emerged from the earth on Ifita neighboring mountains. Parts of the Ogoja litanies – one of several Ifè ifita lineages in nowadays Idààcha – is told and explained by Bara Boko¹ (Boko 1997):

- “- Tete ase ti wa li eyinode
- Ifita ti wa li itemu li ijemu
- Ifita ti wa li ajiwo li ajite
- Atilese a san li isuyi omo ase mu. . .
- Omo eweka si a ni onia ku
- Omo atilese li Oke Ejofa.”

Which means:

- Before everything, there is the principle of creation out of time and space
- The Ifita existed long time before at the worldly creation
- The Ifita appeared on at the same moment with the earth and the sky. . .

¹ By Bara Boko, 102 years old, Dassa-Zoumé, 16th august 1993.

- Descendants of those who came out directly from the earth on Ejofa mountain. . .

The Ifè and the Icha in nowadays Idààcha country preserv the consciousness of their oriental origin from Ilé-Ifè by giving the name of *Odi Ifè* to nowadays Idààcha area, Odi Ifè meaning *the opposit of Ifè, the Ifè of the west, the sunset Ifè*. The litany of the *Agenu*, one of the Ife pre-Oduduwa lineage still living at Ifita near by the city Igbo-Idààcha tells it. It is racounted and explained by Allagbe Ogugara Mathieu Ogija²

- “- [. . .] Omo Agenu kee je Ere [. . .]
- Omo a bi ko je gbomsa [. . .]
- Omo Agenu li Iwudu li Odi-Ifè”,

Which means:

- [. . .] Descendants of those who dont eat the boa because it is their father
- [. . .] Descendants of those who dont eat gbomsa fruits [. . .]
- The Agenu are from the village of Iwudu in Odi-Ife.

Of course, the Ife and Icha lineages in Idààcha name the East as *ese ocha, ese baba n’la*, that is to say, the leg of the deity Obatala or Baba n’la. As to the West, they name it as *ese buku*, that is to say, *the leg of the deity* Nana-Buku. It is so surprising to see that while the pre-Oduduwa people in Idààcha worship *Baba n’nla (Ocha, Obatala)*, the same are less interested in Oduduwa who is nearly non-existent. They also ignore Shango and they adopt Nana Buku, the deity they appropriated after their later contact with the Akan people of the West (Badjagou 1986). How to explain such jumping in their history from Obatala to Nana-Buku without Shango, the terrific king and deity of Oyo if not their intimate, considerable and strong links with the original aborigine Ife. The apparent solid attachment with aborigine pre-Ifè is locally expressed by the following litany:

- “Ilé-Ifè, Ilé Owuro,
- Ilé-Ifè Oodaiye, nibiti ojumo ti mo wa,
- Ilé-Ifè ori aye gbogbo” . . .

Which means:

- Ilé-Ifè where the worldly creation took place and from where came the first light,
- Ilé-Ifè, the country of past times, the house of the beginning (aurora),
- Ilé-Ifè is the place of worldly creation of the whole universe.

² By Allagbé Ogugara Mathieu Ogija, 69 years old, in the village Itangbé (Dassa-Zoumé), 26th august 1993.

Other litanies are chanted by worshipers and devotees of earliest traditional Yoruba cults in Idààcha like *sapata* or *sanponan*, *omo-olu*, *osumare*, *iji*, *baba-n'la* and *ogun*. That is the case of the descendants of the pre-Oduduwa who came from Ile-Icha through Oyo and living nowadays in the areas of Kamate – that is the Isagule-, in the areas of Oké n'la – that is the Ayangi of Oké n'la -, in the areas of Chachégun – that is the Isasiogun (*the Icha have avoided the war, have won the war*) – and in the areas of Ichopa with the Omo-Icha d'Ichopa. Morton-William (1964), in his studies concerning Yoruba cults has given a particular attention to the languages very close to original Yoruba languages Icha-tutu and Ifè-tutu. Indeed, Morton-William (1964) believes that the secret Yoruba cult named *Oro* in Oyo is not under the contrôle of the Oyo themselves but rather under the leadership of the very old Yoruba community groups called the *Jabata* (*Sapata*). Morton-William (1964) could therefore write that “*Jabata is said to be a community of Sa (Sha) Yoruba origin, a western Yoruba people now mainly in Dahomey*” (Morton-William 1964: 256). The Omo-Icha in the actual city of Ichopa (Soponta in nowadays Benin Republic) in Idààcha country are of those people Morton-William is talking about. The litany of the Omo-icha lineage in Ichopa today still keeps in mind the memory of their coming from Oyo under the leadership of the great hunter *Oba oli Iso Erin*, the chief hunter who drove them out of Oyo where they had been before the main persons in charge of the secret cult Egungun. Their litany chanted and explained by Baso Ogunlaye Joseph tells the story³:

- “- Omo iba liiso, Omo oloke,
- Omo Oba pasan li Eyo
- Omode ekiri meji l'owo
- Omo adara e ba onia gbe
- Omode afunwe tee l'ori oke
- Omo sebusebu ire omi ko dun sa
- Osese omi ko dun pa.
- Omo adara aa je onia aa f'abere ta eyin.”

Which means:

- Descendants of Iba li iso or Baso, descendants of masters of high-nesses,
- Descendants of the chief Egungun of Oyo
- Descendants of great hunter, they always have two pieces of dry meat in their mouth. . .
- Descendants of those who own the deity Majufe and are always white dressed
- Descendants of those who know that it is not easy to run in water, even slowly (in slow strides). . .

³ By Baso Ogunlaye Joseph, 72 years old, an Omo Isa, 4th september 1993.

The other layers of historical memory in Idààcha are the Ogboni elders. Within the Ogboni or Oloro in Idààcha, we have the amule or the Oji (*the possessors of the earth*), the ile (*the earth people*) of ilule, the Ikona or the Igangan, the Omo-iroko and the Omo-ayan or the Mamahun. Members of secret associations and priests of secret cults, they are omnipotent during king intronisation or king mortuary ceremonies. The litany of the Oji or the Amule lineage in Idààcha can express that very nicely:

- “- Omo Oji li Kere,
- Omo isa Omo Ikee [. . .]
- Omo a mu ile fu se odun da,
- Omo oloro ko ro li ile. . .”

Which means:

- Descendants of the Oji in the village of Kere from Iloji,
- Descendants of the Icha from the Ikee group [. . .]
- Descendants of those who know how to use the sand to replace gun-powder,
- Descendants of secrets priests who never tell their secret. . .

The Igangan or Ikona, the Isesin or Aghenu are good hunters very close to spirits, to nature and to ancestral lands. They have wild life and good habituation to wild animals, some of which are their totems. Their housing and living conditions remain nearly unaltered. They live in hamlets somehow. The litany of the Isesin is explicit on that⁴:

- “- Bi osan pan ka ma te li ilaju li Isesin Ilagbe
- bi o ko ri ejo e ri agema
- Omo a mu ekun digbaro.
- Omo a mu ekun laye se aja. . .
- Omo Asipa eru li Ijaoku li Ikunu.
- Omo eru meji li ajiba.
- Omo eru li Agalaju li Isesin.
- Omo osan pan ko oja iku li Isesin.”

Which means:

- It is forbidden to enter the Isesin houses at midday,
- Anyone would try it will meet a misfortune, a snake or a chameleon
- Descendants of those who have panthers as guards. . .

⁴ Recounted by Karita Hélène, an Isesin, 65 years old, in the village Kèrè (Dassa-Zoumé), 18th and 26th august 1993. Explained by Obalé Lucien, Chief of the Isesin lineage.

- Descendants of those who use panthers in place of dogs
- Descendants of Asipa, the terror of Ikunu in Ijaoku.
- Descendants of the two terrors of the wilderness, the hunters Oba Etan and Soaketodogu.
- Descendants of those who are able to cause death every time they want. . .

Like all the pre-Oduduwa people in Idààcha, the Igangan or the Ikona work outside the political order but surrounding and controlling it at the same time. Part of the Ikona or Igangan litany expresses it⁵:

- “- [. . .] Omo efan dundun abe ira
 - Ikona ko kale kin olu
 - Ikona ko dagoo itannan ko wo odi Jagun [. . .]
 - Omo aa se awo li iwanriwan ogun mejo
 - Omo a je ohun oro maa bu f’aya.”

Which means:

- [. . .] Descendants of the black buffalo under the Ira tree
- The Ikona who worship the divinity Arigbo can not kneel down when greeting the king Jagun.
- The Ikona enter the palace without submitting themselves to the protocol [. . .]
- Descendants of those who accomplish rituals and sacred ceremonies in midnight
- Descendants of those who eat offering sacred meals which can never be sent to women at home. . .

In summary, we have described and illustrated what Apter (1987), in Yoruba history, has called the “*euphemism of conquest*” which consists of a tacit distributing and sharing role between the dynastic groups and the autochthonous pre-dynastic groups. About Yoruba “*euphemism of conquest*”, Apter (1987) citing Lloyd (1955) wrote the following:

“Yoruba ideas of legitimate authority require a king to rule by virtue of his royal genealogy and reputable judgment, not by the military power of his ancestors. For this reason, conquest is rarely mentioned in the founding myth of kingdoms. Instead, a common euphemism of conquest is that the original ruler of a town invited the conqueror to assume leadership while he devoted his whole attention to town rituals.” (Apter 1987: 8).

And also the role the Ogboni elders (*Oloro*) play in Idààcha is the one that was assigned to the most ancient inhabitants of the lands in order to reward them from

⁵ By Karita Hélène. Explained by Ajasin Josué. Chief of the Ikona (Igangán) lineage, 85 years old, 26th august 1993.

losing the political power in Idààcha. Nowadays Idààcha, the power is in the hands of the Jagun who are Oduduwa lineage descent. The tradition in Yoruba history is maintained since the conquest at Ilé-Ifè by Oduduwa when the autochthonous Igbo people set up a secret cult called *Ogboni* in order to pursue the worship of their Orisa (deities). These rituals and traditions are still in practice in Idààcha country in memory of the pre-Oduduwa Yoruba founding myth who is Obatala, Baba n'la or Ocha. Obviously, the given above answers many questions about Idààcha and confirms well the essay's main assumption, that is, why Idààcha and its divinatory calendar would preserve a spatio-temporal logic beyond Ifè and Oyo revisionism. Let us look at these important questions, that is: why in the pantheon in Idààcha land, there is principally the deity Obatala also called locally Baba n'la or Ocha?; why the Oduduwa cult is less represented while Nana Buku, the deity they appropriated from their early contact with the Ashanti of the West is more represented?; why in Idààcha land is there the Ayira cult and not the Shango cult as in Oyo for the same deity (*deity of thunder*)? – Shango was a major king of Oyo, was a terrific king and has been associated with thunder; why the priests of the deity sanctuaries and the *Ogboni* elders in Idààcha are the owners of the lands or the first arrived in Idààcha, the Ifè and the Icha tribes? And why all the rituals, the cults and all the traditions in Idààcha accord with the symbolism of the crossroads, the diagram of worldly creation (*orita*)?

Epistemological Conclusions and Lessons

First of all, on the technical level, the Yoruba-Idààcha idea of reading spatial and geometric relations as temporal and algebraic terms – and vice-versa may suggest a new indexical approach to the study of Yoruba cosmology in relation to the human body and mind. These facts reported from Yoruba-Idààcha case studies demonstrate the intrinsic character of the human mind and they need to be known by African people, especially the young people by introducing disciplines such as cosmology and astronomy in school curricula in Africa south of the Sahara. The young students and the young researchers must know that they can mine the stock of traditional knowledge to augment the actual state of science and technology. For example, taking the Batammaliba of northern Benin and Togo or the Dogon of Mali examples, cosmovisions are set down – incorporated – in local everyday life. Indeed, they give inspiration to meticulous and ingenious traditional architecture and ways of local building techniques – structures, aeration, urbanism, design, etc. It is in these examples that young researchers should draw references for new technological innovation to improve housing accommodations for people in villages and in cities. Because, nobody sleeps very well now in these so called modern cement houses – they are in fact heating machines – inherited from the colonizers. In the same way, young philosophers, mathematicians and linguists should consider that African languages convey the same universal concepts though their particular contextualization – have

the same ability of conceptualization of new phenomenon – so that, if integrated in school curricula – the scientific cultural level of African people can be raised to that of those in the West. Socio-economical success in Africa south of the Sahara depends partly on how African rationalities will be restored and stabilized. In fact, like other studies presented at the Solar Eclipse Conference 2006 in Cape Coast, Ghana, and in light of this Idààcha case study, the cultural perspective on science and technology, and its development in a traditional society depends on anthropological research. It illustrates a form of rationality serving as an empirical basis for theoretical constructions and technological innovations resulting in the stability of traditional foundations.

On the historical level, study of Idààcha divinatory calendar gives evidence of a pre-Ifa divination system that remained immune from the current Ifa hegemony, sharing claims of aboriginal status with a cluster of associated cults; or evidence of archaic ritual language forms, echoing earlier spoken dialects of Ifè-tutu and Icha-tutu, that resurface in the voices of possessed devotees in nowadays Idààcha land.

Idààcha should be regarded as a laboratory for the study of the ancient original Yoruba languages Ifè-tutu and Icha-tutu to shed light on original Yoruba historical memory and culture. Obayemi (1976) describes the situation of some Yoruba peripheral regions like Kaba and Ikale in Nigeria, or Ifè in Togo as something that reminds the social political organization that has existed at the time before the establishment in Ilé-Ifè of the dynastic centralized political power. About that, Horton (1979: 95) exclaimed: “*It seems unlikely that the social organization and culture of this diaspora remained homogenous for very long.*” However, it seems to be the case. The absence of chieftaincy Oba or Oli Ilu (chief, owner of the land) in Ifè-Togo or in nowadays Icha land in Benin Republic would probably be due to the fact that “*euphemism of conquest*” did not take place at these places. And this would tell us why it is only the pre-Oduduwa lineage tribes who arrange common social life without any dynastic established political traditional power as is the case in Kétu, in Igbo-Idààcha or in Chabè. Anyways, the pre-Oduduwa relics or clusters seem to represent important layers of historical memory and moreover semantical truthfulness in Yoruba history and culture. More seriously, exploring the three great historical periods in Yoruba history, we ask which historical layer is the most important in Yoruba history – it is the pre-Oduduwa cultural baseline that Icha-Tutu or Ifè-tutu represents, or an Ifè-centric system that survived Oyo revision, or an Oyo-based system that survived British and French colonialism? Our conclusion is that, it is the Ifè centrist system that is primary, the pre-Oduduwa period that is secondary and the Oyo empire and colonial Oyo that is at the bottom. Finally, a case study concerning Idààcha that uses a technique to reconstruct some important elements in Yoruba history may suggest not only a new indexical approach to the study of Yoruba cosmology in relation to the human body but also may suggest the interpretation of Yoruba cosmology as a collective generative mental model.

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