

BELIEF AND RITUAL IN THE
EDO TRADITIONAL RELIGION

by

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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this study is to describe the Edo traditional religious system. Four assumptions undergird the general theoretical framework of the study.

1. That the divinities are personified beings capable of responding to ritual action as well as manifesting themselves in culture.
2. That the interaction between man and divinity will be patterned after such relationships and obligations that characterize social relations.
3. That interaction with divinity will be related to the attainment of goals at different levels of social structural reference.
4. That the divinity-to-group coordination will reflect the conflicts and competition within the social structure.

I have first of all sought to determine what the Edo beliefs about divinity are, i.e. what personalized beings are believed to exist in the 'supernatural' or 'extra-social' world. This has been done through eliciting of statements from priests and other representatives of the divinities, through an analysis of some myths and songs sung before the shrines of Olokun and Ogun. Closely related to the discovery of how the Edo represent their divinities is the question of how these divinities are believed to manifest themselves in nature and culture. For if they are believed to be 'personalized' entities, then they will have intelligence, personality and speech.

When the researcher studies the ritual interactional process between man and the divinities, one of his interests will be to see how the man to

divinity communication process parallels the patterns of interaction on the social level. He will also be interested in what relationships there are between the goals an individual in the culture pursues at the different levels of social structural reference and the divinities as instruments to the attainment of this valued ends. Finally, we want to see whether there is any relationship between the ritual interaction with the divinities and the conflicts and competition within the social structure. If structural alignments in the social order are 'mirrored' in man's relationship to divinity in African cultures, then it could be hypothesized that changes within the social structure will also be reflected in changed or new relations to old or new divinities.

The 'multiplex' meaning of ritual may be taken for granted. Man's 'vertical' relationship with divinity cannot be interpreted as a cultural isolate, for belief and ritual intersect the socio-political structure and are related to the ecological environment. This study is limited to ritual as it pertains to divinity. For example, I have not been able to examine rites of passage in the Edo culture. If I had I would have discussed changes of role as involving incorporation into new groups which usually have personal beings behind them who keep the group flourishing or weaken it in response to breaches of group norms. Therefore rites of passage involve ritual in order to bring the new member under their control. The questions I bring to the study of ritual are of a different order.

I have chosen three broad categories as organizing devices: the Edo representation of Divinity; The Edo manifestation of Divinity; and the Edo response to Divinity. After giving a brief ethnographic introduction to the Edo, followed by an introduction to the structure of the Edo cosmology, I will examine the main divinities in the Edo cosmology, and conclude with an

overview of the Edo religious system.

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PREFACE

I am grateful to have been able to conduct anthropological research in Nigeria while teaching with Canadian University Service Overseas. Two weeks after I arrived in the Mid-West State of Nigeria in September 1966, riots broke out in a number of important northern cities including Kano, Jos and Gusau. These riots were followed by a massive exodus of Igbos back to the Eastern Region and the inevitable alienation of the Igbo elite. The Aburi talks in January 1967 did not alleviate the Igbo losses and sense of injustice. Four months later the Eastern Region seceded from the Federation under the military leadership of Odumegwu Ojukwu. After unsuccessful economic embargoes against Biafra, fighting erupted on the northern front near the university town of Nsukka.

Although there was considerable tension in the Mid-West I was able to continue my study of the Edo traditional religious system without interruption until Biafra invaded the Mid-West in August 1967 and occupied the cities of Benin, Sapele and Warri. I was evacuated by my organization from Benin and posted to the far north at Sokoto. Fortunately I was able to return to Benin in April 1968 to fill in some gaps in my research. It is important to keep in mind that this study was not done on a full time basis.

A NOTE ON THE ORTHOGRAPHY

R. Bradbury's orthography will not be used in this work. There is no official agreement on an Edo orthography but I will use one that is generally accepted by literate Edo.

<u>Bradbury</u>	<u>Welton</u>
ɛ	e (Open e as in get)
ɔ	o (Open o as in got)
~	n (Nasalization of vowel)
gh	gh (Voiced velar fricative)
χ	kh (Unvoiced velar fricative)
rh	rh (Aspirated r)
ʋ	mw (Bilabial fricative. This phoneme is nasalized when placed next to a nasal vowel)

The initial 0 in Oba is an open o, but it is becoming quite common to write Oba without the dot. I have followed this procedure.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO AFRICAN TRADITIONAL BELIEF AND RITUAL

African studies have advanced to the stage where certain truisms regarding the relationship between religion and the study of culture can be made. Among these we could include the fact that myth and mythological categories define a world-view which is reflected in the social structure; that the most important rituals centre around birth, puberty and death. The work of the Oxford School (Evans-Pritchard, Lienhardt, Middleton, Horton, Fortes) stands out from many others in their willingness to take primitive religious systems at their face value; that is, as serious attempts to provide a body of theory which will enable a man to gain understanding of the world around him (Horton 1962: 215). The Marcel Griaule School of French anthropologists (Griaule 1954, 1965; Dieterlen 1965), on the other hand, have been primarily oriented to the recording of informant's statements to portray the complexity of the symbolism and its association with every phase of the life and environment of the peoples studied. Both schools take primitive religion seriously; the fundamental difference between these two schools of thought (Horton calls them the symbolist and literalist approaches. See Horton 1962: 217ff) is that the 'symbolists maintain that statements about gods and rites devoted to them are now really what they seem to be: they really refer obliquely to events in the observable world of those who use them, or they "symbolize" these events...For the literalists, treating the gods as mere symbols for events in the everyday world denies what we know as a matter of observation--i.e.

that for the people who believe in them, they are really there. The "Literalists" see this approach (symbolist) as obscuring some of the most important facts about the gods. Thus, for their believers, the gods are often forces from which they do think they can get aid of various sorts; and for at least some people in every society, they are vital social partners in whom a great deal of emotion capital is locked up. Several well-known writers have taken this position in recent years' (Horton 1962: 217).¹

I. A GENERAL DEFINITION OF RELIGION

Although there are numerous problems connected with defining religion (See Titiev 1960, Goody 1961, Spiro 1966, Geertz 1965 and Horton 1960), every anthropologist operates with some conceptualization of what religion is. Since my study of the Edo religious system has been highly influenced by the "literalist" school of thought, particularly Horton, I will set out Horton's approach to the problem of definition in some detail. Horton (1960: 201-225) suggests that there are three essential approaches to the problem of defining religion: (i) religion is impossible to define, (ii) religion refers to a class of metaphorical statements obliquely denoting social relationships and claims to social status, (iii) and religion is the belief in spirits. Nadel (1954: 7-8) is an advocate of the first approach which suggests that because religion is very difficult to

¹See, for example, Evans-Pritchard 1956; Goody 1961 and Lienhardt 1956. Lienhardt writes: 'This, at least, is not to deny to foreign gods some sort of real existence; and tribal peoples do indeed represent their gods to themselves as real persons existing apart from men, not as figments of human thought and feeling.' (1956: 312).

define it should be left undefined. Horton says that it is necessary to specify those variables whose behaviour we have to try to explain; if not, it is possible to carry on an endless and entirely barren argument about whether a given item of human behaviour is or is not religious (1960: 201). Leach represents the second type. His view is that ritual action and belief are alike to be understood as forms of symbolic statement about the social order. Horton counters this argument by citing an example from the Kalabari culture and the New Testament. He notes that when 'a person is seen to be using prayer, sacrifice, or profession of belief in a god merely to make a statement about social relations or about his own structural alignment, Kalabari say that the one concerned "does not really believe" (1960: 203). And Christ condemned the Pharisees for using religious ritual as a status-symbol and pointed to their attitude as the essence of irreligion (1960: 204). Thus Horton is making the point that the 'religious' always define the 'religious' in terms of experience with divinity, and not simply in terms of what they do on socially important occasions. It is not hard to see that this approach to religion counters the Durkheimian, for as Horton states: 'Defining religious as structural symbolism comes to much the same thing as defining the substance "linen" in terms of its occasional use as a flag: the symbolic function is as incidental to the nature of the first as it is to that of the second' (1960: 204).

Tylor is representative of the last group. As is well-known, he defined religion in intellectualist terms as the 'belief in the supernatural' (For critiques of Tylor's definition of religion see Lienhardt 1956 and Evans-Pritchard 1965). Noting the potential dangers inherent in

such a definition, i.e. that the spirits will be thought of as a class of objects characterized by a specific mode of existence or in terms of specific conditions of knowledge relevant to the making of true statements about them (Horton cites data from Evans-Pritchard's discussion of kwoth (1956: 315-6) and his own data from the Kalabari),² Horton nevertheless suggests that with some modification Tylor's definition has some valuable applications. 'For the purposes of definition put forward here, it will be assumed that in every situation commonly labelled religious we are dealing with action directed towards objects which are believed to respond in terms of certain categories--in our own culture those of purpose, intelligence, and emotion--which are also the distinctive categories for the description of human action. The application of these categories leads us to say that such objects are "personified." The relationships between human beings and religious objects can be further defined as governed by certain ideas of patterning and obligation such as characterize relationships among human beings. In short, religion can be looked upon as an extension of the field of peoples' social relationships beyond the confines of purely human society' (1960: 211).

What is the usefulness of such a definition? After demonstrating that... 'there is no "something extra"³ which distinguishes all religious

²Many of the gods of primitive peoples could be cited as resembling the Kalabari Water-People in their thorough-going materiality (See Horton 1960: 205-6).

³This "something extra" has been called various things: awe before religiously charged objects (Marret 1914); the numinous (Otto 1923). D. Forde commenting on Marret's view states: 'He did not appreciate that their (objects) evocative power depended on their symbolic character, and was not led to explore the cultural and social contexts of the intangible entities' (1958: 4). See V. Turner's work (1967) for such an analysis of symbolism in its social and cultural context.

relationships from all secular relationships' (1960: 212), Horton states that... 'variables found useful in the analysis of man-to-man relationships will also be found useful in the analysis of man-to-god relationships' (1960: 212). First, the two poles of relationship in the sphere of interpersonal relationships: pure communion and pure manipulation will be paralleled in the man-god relationship. Secondly, a theory of god-to-group coordination replacing those derived from Durkheim can be elaborated from the definition as follows. There are three basic assumptions.

Assumption I: The individual member of any society pursues a given goal with several different levels of social-structural reference. A member of a given African community may actively pursue the goals of health, wealth and increase for the village as a whole, for the descent-group of which he is a member and for himself as an individual.

Assumption II: The religious relationships in which the members of a society are involved function as instruments to the achievement of their various goals.

Assumption III: In a society where the relations between segments of the total group are markedly competitive, the fact that a god and its cult are seen as contributing to the member's goals at the total group level of reference ipso facto implies that they cannot be seen as contributing to the same goals at the next lower level of reference, i.e. that of the segments. Conversely, where

relations between segments of a group are not markedly competitive,⁴ relevance of a god to a member's goals at their total group level of reference does not debar it from relevance to the same goals at the segment level of reference (Horton 1960: 213-4).

This approach to religion shifts the emphasis from traditional anthropological notions of religion. For Malinowski (1948) religion was ritual action oriented to non-empirical ends whereas magic had as its end some empirically discoverable goal, eg. better crops, rain, etc. As is well-known, Durkheim (1961) interpreted supernatural entities as symbolic expressions of the common sentiments that sustained the collective life of the society. Durkheim contrasted religion with magic by limiting magic to individual and isolative acts.⁵

However, if a large part of religious activity is an attempt to persuade or control these personified beings in similar ways as one would constrain or persuade a human being, then either an individual or collectivity could interact with divinity to attain particular ends. It is also worth noting that either religious or secular means might be used to attain any end in any social context. Within the framework of this study, then, magic is differentiated from religion not in terms of an individualistic act having an empirically definable end as opposed to a collective act having a non-empirically definable end but by the criterion that the

⁴The Kalabari, for example, are a competitive-type society where different segments of the society have cults distinct from all other levels in the system. The gods become human partners in the competition; or if what they want to do involves little competition, their world of the gods is likely to be more concerned with the collective welfare and harmony of all (Horton 1960: 215).

⁵See Ames 1963: 503-4 for a brief analysis of Durkheim's understanding of religion.

magician does not conduct transactions with personified beings, but uses 'things' believed to have some innate 'power' to achieve either empirical or non-empirical ends. This is not to say that religion and magic constitute two conceptual systems. Most cultures have unitary magico-religious systems rather than distinctly separable systems of magic and religion.

II. THEMES IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL BELIEF AND RITUAL

A. DIVINITY IN AFRICAN BELIEF

1. The One and the Many: The Problem Stated

The fundamental 'problem' with African cosmologies is to understand how the one (God) and the many (mystical forces, ghosts, ancestors, clan divinities and free divinities) can exist for the actors in a non-contradictory system.

It has often been said that the High God in African religions is an abstract sky god who has been pushed back into the farthest recesses of the universe and has little to do with man since his essential creative function has been fulfilled. This notion that Africans do not worship the high god is a common theme in the writings of earlier explorers. Frobenius writing in The Voice of Africa (1912) said: 'God is neither worshipped nor considered in any way but leads an entirely platonic and mythological existence.' Even G. Parrinder, writing as recently as 1949 says: 'The Yoruba call God Olorun...no cult is offered Him'...and he goes on to

describe Him as... 'His Supreme but unworshipped God' (Parrinder 1949: 26). Shelton (1964) writes that Europeans have overestimated the extent of this withdrawal. He points out that God is worshipped ritualistically; that He is immanent in lesser divinities; that He is involved in the continuous process of emanating all things which have a vital force, for forces ultimately come from God (Shelton 1964: 53). Countering O'Connell (1962), Shelton argues that God, insofar as he is separated from the affairs of men, is separated not because he is so pure but because he is vast and powerful--in fact, incomprehensible (1964: 54). With reference to the Yoruba of Western Nigeria, Idowu dispels the idea of the withdrawn high God. After noting that the orisha (lesser gods) do seem to be predominant in Yoruba religion, he says that the Yoruba do not erect temples for the high God: Olodumare. 'The Yoruba cannot conceive in what form the Deity of such attributes could be represented in images' (Idowu 1962: 141). Idowu also demonstrates that the Yoruba do worship Olodumare, not in temples but in the open.

The worshipper makes a circle of ashes or white chalk; within the circle, which is a symbol of eternity, he pours a libation of cold water, and in the centre he places a kola-nut on cotton wool. He then takes the kola-nut, splits it, and holding the valves firmly between the hollow of his palms, he stretches them up and prays to Olodumare, offering the kola-nut; then he casts the valves within the circle (Idowu 1962: 142).

Idowu concludes by stating that Olodumare is 'very real to the Yoruba, as one without whom nothing remains' (1962: 143). Shelton's material (1965) confirms Idowu's data. With reference to the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria, he shows that the 'High God is present in the lives of North Nsukka Igbo villagers insofar as the villagers consistently maintain that Chukwu creates and recalls the individual, the individual must possess chi to

be a person and to be alive (and chi is Chukwu within the person), and that the villagers consistently practise direct worship of and sacrifice to Chukwu. Such worship takes the several forms of daily prayers preceding the Arua ceremony, daily prayers at a household altar, annual festival worship, and irregular although frequent supplication and sacrifice to the High God' (1965: 18).

Research, then, has shown that the high god is neither 'deus otiosus' nor 'deus incertus.'⁶ He is worshipped ritually, at least by some peoples, and has not withdrawn from the affairs of men, even if he rules and intervenes through lesser divinities.

Two Sudanic cultures, the Nuer and the Dinka, provide excellent ethnographic material for the exploration of the relationship between the one and the many. The Dinka believe in a supreme being--Nhialic, the Creator, who is substantially identical to the Christian God and the Moslem Allah. Nhialic is one, yet there are clan and free divinities, with whom the Dinka are concerned in their practical life and of whom the Dinka may say ee Nhialic, 'it is divinity' (Lienhardt 1961: 56). These divinities and ancestral spirits may protect or injure people, as their whims dictate. Dr. Lienhardt expresses the peculiar unity of Nhialic in the following terms:

Divinity is manifold as human experience is manifold and of a manifold world. Divinity is one as the self's manifold experience is united and brought into relationship in the experiencing self. The Powers are distinct from each other, and from Divinity, as the experiences they image are distinct from each other and from the total experience of the world and the self.

⁶In his paper on 'The Withdrawal of the High God in West African Religion: an Essay in Interpretation', O'Connell argues that polytheism is not a late corruption of monotheism. He says that this view tends to confirm the misapprehension that the gods were once at forefront in an earlier period of time (1962: 69).

Divinity, then, corresponds to experience common to all men, and to the Dinkas' recognition that a single human nature and condition embraces all. Divinity is thus everywhere, and everywhere the same. The different names by which different peoples know it are matters only of different languages...Divinity therefore transcends the individual and social differentiations the Dinka know, as they recognize them in some ways to be transcended in a fundamental unity of human nature (1961: 156-7).

Noting that 'this unity and multiplicity of Divinity causes no difficulty in the context of Dinka language and life' (1961: 56), Lienhardt states that Nhialic unifies the diversities of experience taking place within the Dinka self in culture. Divinity and Macardit are not opposing or warring principles for 'Macardit is also Divinity, though Divinity is not Macardit' (1961: 159). The difference between Macardit and Divinity is not intrinsically in them but in the human experiences they image. Thus the free-divinities Deng, Abuk, and Garang correspond to fields of experience which are special aspects of the total to which Divinity corresponds (1961: 159).

The Nuer idea of god is very similar to the Dinka's. Like the Dinka, the political system is amorphous and segmental. And like the Dinka, the Nuer believe in one Spirit (Kwoth) as well as a corresponding multiple series of spirit 'refractions.' Kwoth is likened to the wind and is the willful creator and mover of all things. Evans-Pritchard (1953: 201) notes that: 'It is evident that Nuer distinguish between their different spirits...Nuer sacrifice to one or other particular spirit according to the circumstances.' He goes on to say that 'it is equally clear that we are dealing with a single conception, for all the spirits are, as Kwoth, beings of the same nature or essence. This problem of unity in diversity confronts not only the student of Nuer religion, but also students of many other primitive religions, and also those of

Ancient Egypt, the early Semites, Ancient China, and the Greeks and Latins' (1953: 201).

Evans-Pritchard explains the apparent contradiction in Nuer belief that any particular spirit is Kwoth but Kwoth is not any particular spirit. He suggests, like Lienhardt, that the Nuer aren't confused, and that 'if we think of the particular spirits as figures or representations or refractions of God, or Spirit, in relation to particular activities, events, persons, and groups...this is what "they are" among the Nuer' (1953: 202).

Evans-Pritchard attributes the 'refractions' of Spirit to segmentary nature of the Nuer social order.⁷ In an illuminating paragraph in his paper 'The Nuer Conception of Spirit in its Relation to the Social Order,' Evans-Pritchard sums up the structural dimension of Kwoth.

At one end Spirit is thought of in relation to man and the world in general, as omnipresent God. Then it is thought of in relation to a variety of social groups and activities and to persons: to political movements connected with prophets, and in a special relation to warfare, as spirits of the air; to descent groups as colwic and totemic and totemic-like spirits. At the other end it is conceived of more or less in relation to individuals in a private capacity as nature sprites and fetishes. God figured as the common father and the creator is patron of all men; figured in spirits of the air he is patron of political leaders; figured in colwic and totemic spirits he is patron of lineages and families; and figured in nature sprites and fetishes he is patron of individuals (1953: 211).

Summing up, every level of Nuer theory features the concept of Spirit.

At lower levels the concept is 'refracted' by various aspects of the observable world, and thereby acquires a variety of subsidiary attributes

⁷It is not suggested that the Nuer see their religion in this sort of way. Nevertheless, though they do not relate what we call the conception of spirit to what we call the social structure, the structural configuration we abstract by this process is of the same design as the symbolic configurations in which they think of their various kuth' (1953: 212).

which the anthropologist can interpret by reference to features of Nuer social structure, ecology, and so on. At the highest level--'unrefracted' Spirit--the concept emerges untrammelled by this pure concept. This progressive dematerialization towards Pure Spirit occurs because successive levels of Nuer theory are committed to explaining more and more in terms of less and less (See Horton 1962: 216).

When we shift our focus to the West African religious scene, the concept of the 'one and the many' does not appear to be as 'unified' as that of the Nuer and Dinka, i.e. the conception of Spirit is not simply broken up by the refracting surfaces of nature, of society of culture, and of historical experience. When Spirit in Nuer and Dinka belief passes into the cultural prism, it is refracted into its component parts while retaining its essential unity of oneness. In many West African religions, it is as if we were looking at the 'light' after it had passed through the prism and then making a statement about its nature. Rather than seeing 'one', we see only the 'many.' As I see it, West African religious systems (particularly the systems of the Forest Kingdoms) make a conceptual distinction between God and divinity: God is not any particular spirit, even though divinity may receive its vitality from the high god and further, be coordinated to segments of the social structure. For example, the Edo of southwest Nigeria would not say that Ogun=Osanobua, although they would say that Osanobua and Ogun are members of the same pantheon (Cf. the way the Dinka identify Macardit with Divinity). Let me try to illustrate the nature of the 'one and the many' in three West African religious systems that are not segmental, amorphous, non-hierarchically structured politically.

The Ashanti of Ghana are well-known through the writings of Rattray and E. Smith and in recent years, K. Busia. The Ashanti believe that 'there is the Great Spirit, the Supreme Being, who created all things, and who manifests his power through a pantheon of gods; below these are lesser spirits which animate trees, animals, or charms; and then there are the ever-present spirits of the ancestors (nsamanafo) whose contact with the life of man on the earth brings the world of the spirits so close to the land of the living' (Busia 1954: 191). The Ashanti believe that every lineage is protected by its own ancestors, although it is the dead rulers, the ancestors of the royal lineage, that guard and protect the whole tribe or chiefdom. As is well-known, the Ashanti chief is the symbol of the identity and continuity of the tribe, the stool being the symbol of his power (See Busia 1954: 200-205).

The lesser divinities do not seem to be 'refractions', although they do derive their power from the Supreme Being who was believed to be originally near. 'A god is but the mouthpiece of the Supreme Being, a servant acting as intermediary between Creator and creature' (1954: 193). In Ashanti the most important divinities are those that are the spirits of the river. The gods also require temporary abode and a priest, the god sometimes speaking through the priest, sometimes by displacing his personality (1954: 193-4). The importance of the ancestors in Ashanti will be examined later.

The Fon conception of Divinity does not lend itself easily to simplification. In the Fon cosmology, the androgynous divinity, Nana Buluku, is believed to be the originator of 'creative stuff.' The dual creator, Mawu-Lisa is the one who ordered the natural world and the world

of man. Mawu-Lisa are at the head of the group of sky-gods who are their offspring, as are also the other gods, of earth, and etc. (1954: 218). The actual preservation of the world is secured by the vodun, the offspring of Mawu-Lisa (1954: 222). The vodun each rule a particular domain. For example, Sakpata ruled the earth; Sogbo the atmosphere. There was subdivision within each of the domains of the vodun (1954: 222).

I have already alluded to Dr. Idowu's study of Olodumare, God in Yoruba Belief. The Yoruba, as has been stated above, believe in the existence of Olodumare who is first above all divinities (1962: 50). He is the Disposer Supreme to whom belongs the ultimate sanction of anything proposed, the acceptance of any act of worship, the blessing of any enterprise, and the credit for the success of any priest's mediation or performance (1962: 52). Yet the cults or worship of the orisha (lesser gods) dominate in the Yoruba religion. Each of these orisha has its own sphere of influence (Ogun, Orunmila, Shango, etc) and all acknowledge Olodumare as the ultimate authority.

The Nuer and Dinka religious systems bear the 'impress of the social structure' (Evans-Pritchard 1953: 211), that is, there is a relationship between the structural configuration of divinity and the structural configuration of the social order. Students of the Fon culture of Dahomey have shown that the identity of the divine and human patterns of organization is seen again in their hierarchical and specialized character. Herskovits has observed: 'Dahomean cultures are based on control by an officialdom, which, under the monarch was of an essentially hierarchical character similar to that ascribed to the gods' and 'just as each principal chief who governed a region had minor chiefs under his direction who were

responsible to him, so each pantheon-head has minor deities under his control who are responsible to him' (1938: 294). In a paper in African Worlds: Studies in the Cosmological Ideas and Social Values of African Peoples Mercier has written:

There is a remarkable correspondence between the government of the universe and that of human society, between the structure of the world of the gods and that of the world of men. These two essential aspects of the cosmogony are complementary and comparable: the king, who sustains society, is naturally compared to the divinities who sustain the world (1954: 233).

Although Idowu is not a social scientist he does show how the Yoruba concept of Olodumare parallels the social structure. Dr. Idowu says that the Yoruba by not going to Olodumare directly are reflecting their social pattern.

In Yoruba etiquette it is considered a thing "not done", for a young person to approach an elder directly when he wants a special favour. Even a son may not go directly to his father to beg for a great favour, or to apologize for an offence...It is an observable fact that it is not the custom of the Yoruba to treat familiarly with their king... For example, the Oni of Ile-Ife in consequence of his status, used to be held in so much reverence, that it was utterly impossible for any except the very few who were highly privileged to behold his face or the gates of his palace...his voice came to them through a gradation of civic officers with whom they were in close touch through their own ward or family heads (1962: 141).

In sum, we have seen that the conceptualization of the 'one and the many' varies according to the nature of the socio-political structure. Although this does not enable us to state precisely what the nature of Spirit is, we do see how the idea of Spirit takes various forms corresponding to departments of social life (See Evans-Pritchard 1953: 214). Nor for that matter can the high god's withdrawal be explained solely by referring to the social structure as Idowu does. The Igbo of southeast Nigeria, for example, do not have a hierarchically structured political system (See Uchendu 1965: 39ff), yet the high god is as remote from

their affairs as the Yoruba or Ashanti high god. However, Uchendu does say that:

The organization and power structure of these nature gods mirror Igbo social structure. Like the latter, the native gods are not conceived of as forming a hierarchical pantheon. There is no seniority or authority implied in the conception of these minor deities (1965: 95).

The Fon and Yoruba gods are definitely placed in a pantheon having higher and lower members.

In attempting to answer the question of why there is a correspondence between Divinity and the social order, I think that there are at least three answers. First, in some cultures the mythological categories provide a model for ordering 'reality' on the social level. Thus the structure of the cosmology mirrors that of the social order.⁸ Secondly, if Lienhardt is right when he states that 'the Powers may be understood as images corresponding to complex and various combinations of Dinka experience which are contingent upon their particular social and physical environment' (1961: 170), then man's experience in a hierarchically structured social order will be mirrored (imaged) in the Divinity-realm. This might help us explain the difference between the Nuer/Dinka and Fon/Yoruba/Ashanti conceptualizations of Divinity. And thirdly, following Horton, Divinity in its diverse manifestations may be coordinated to units within the social structure because relationships with the extra-social world of Divinity provide the opportunity to attain particular group-oriented ends that might be unattainable through other means.

⁸See M. Griaule 1954: 83ff for a study of the intricate relationship between myth and social organization.

2. Cosmological Ideas Viewed as an Explanatory System

Recent studies of cosmologies (Middleton. Lugbara Religion; Lienhardt. Divinity and Experience; Fortes. Oedipus and Job in West African Religion and Horton. 'The Kalabari World-View: an Outline and Interpretation') show that the gods of a given culture do form a scheme which interprets the vast diversity of everyday experience in terms of a relatively few kinds of forces. In Middleton's work (See 1960: 230-70) 'we find a theoretical model in which the ancestors, embodying the forces of the established order, are in balanced opposition to the adro spirits which embody the forces of the extra-social' (Horton 1962: 215-6). Commenting on Lienhardt's work on the Dinka, Horton suggests that the Dinka world-view... 'is a system of theory which attempts to provide a basis for understanding a vast number of observations, about relations between different aspects of society, relations between the established order and what is external to it, relations between the individual and the group and so on. Lienhardt lays particular emphasis on the way the Dinka gods serve to demonstrate the unity which lies behind the apparent diversity of the observed world. He shows how they form a theoretical model which enables the Dinka to see the various eventualities of the world around them as due to the operation of a small number of underlying principles in a fairly simple way' (Horton 1962: 215).

The importance of this argument is that African cosmological ideas are seen as reflecting the African's quest for meaning: he builds models that become maps for experience in a particular ecological and social environment.

To say of the traditional African thinker that he is interested in supernatural rather than natural causes makes little more sense, therefore, than to say of the physicist that he is interested in nuclear rather than natural causes. In fact, both are making the same use of theory to transcend the limited vision of natural causes provided by common sense (Horton 1967: 54).

Thus the divinities are not merely capricious beings--they have their appointed function in the order of observable things. The religious expert can know what spiritual entities are behind observed events (Horton 1967: 52). And since theory places things in a causal context wider than that provided by common sense, the fact that Africans go to diviners becomes explicable. For the diviner refers to an unseen entity and also relates the patient's condition to a whole series of disturbances in the social field. The diviner uses ideas about this agency to link disease to causes in the world of visible, tangible events [Horton calls this the converging-sequence theory (1967: 170)] .

To the question of why Africans draw analogies between puzzling phenomena and the familiar, Horton argues that, in contrast to Western society where order, predictability and simplicity are in things, in traditional societies of Africa, we find the situation reversed. The human scene is the locus par excellence of order, predictability, regularity. In the world of the inanimate, these qualities are far less evident...And here, the mind in quest of explanatory analogies turns naturally to people and their relations (Horton 1967: 64-5). He is arguing, then, that African traditional belief draws on persons as explanatory devices, i.e. gods, and in doing so omits certain qualities of human beings in the model. With reference to the Kalabari, Horton suggests that the ancestors, heroes and water-spirits are a triangle of forces. The ancestors underpin the life and strength of the lineages, bringing

misfortune to those who betray lineage values and fortune to those who promote them. The heroes are those forces underpinning the life and strength of the community and its various institutions. And the water-spirits are the owners of the creeks and swamps, the guardians of the fish harvest, the forces of nature. On the other hand, they are the forces underpinning all that lies beyond the confines of the established order (1967: 67). Thus the Kalabari are able to explain diversity of experience as well as conflict and cooperation with reference to these three forces. Middleton also shows that the contrast and opposition between adro and the ancestors provides the Lugbara with a theoretical scheme enabling them to comprehend a whole series of oppositions and conflicts manifest in the world of their everyday experience.

In Part II of his paper 'African Traditional Thought and Western Science,' Horton contrasts traditional thought with Western by suggesting that the traditional African thought is characterized by a closed system mentality. There is a lack of awareness of alternatives, beliefs are sacred with the subsequent anxiety over any threats to the system (Horton 1967: 156). Some of the differences connected with the presence or absence of a vision of alternatives are in the magical attitude to words; ideas-bound-to-occasions versus ideas-bound-to-ideas; unreflective versus reflective thinking; protective versus destructive attitude towards established theory; divination versus diagnosis; absence versus presence of experimental method; the confession of ignorance and beliefs about coincidence, chance and probability; protective versus destructive attitude to the category-system and concepts of time (Horton 1967: 158-177). Horton concludes his essay by noting that 'the concept of the "closed"

predicament not only provides a key to understanding of each one of the above salient traits of traditional thought; it also helps us to see why these eleven traits flourish and perish together. The closed system cracks when presented with alternatives'(1967: 180).

We have now added another dimension to our understanding of Divinity in African belief. Religious categories have a philosophical and epistemological significance, providing the traditional African with models to interpret the 'reality' that confronts him in culture.

3. The Significance of the Ancestors in African Religious Systems

The remarks that follow are primarily based on M. Fortes paper 'Some reflections on Ancestor Worship in Africa' (1965: 122-141). For analytical purposes I have chosen to examine the role of the ancestors in African traditional belief apart from Divinity, although in my study of the Edo I do not make any conceptual distinction.

It has long been recognized that ancestor is a conspicuous feature of African religious systems having a remarkably uniform structural framework. An ancestor is a named, dead forbear who has living descendants of a designated genealogical class representing his continued structural relevance. Ancestor worship is rooted in domestic, kinship and descent relations and institutions.

Fortes states that there is much more to ancestor worship than its utility as a means of mapping out and providing a charter for a genealogically ordered social structure (See Bohannan 1953 and Evans-Pritchard 1956: 162). Fortes differentiates between ancestor worship and customary

beliefs and practices concerning death, the soul, ghost, spirits and the afterlife. R. Bradbury's paper 'Father and Senior Son in Edo Mortuary Ritual' (1965) has shown that death alone is not sufficient condition for becoming an ancestor. Citing material from the Tsonga (Junod 1927: 347ff), Fortes notes that they distinguish between ghostly dead without offspring and ancestors who have offspring.

A very important part of Fortes' summary of ancestor centres around the idea that ancestor worship is a representation or extension of the authority in the jural relations of successive generations; it is not a duplication, in a supernatural idiom, of the total complex of affective, educative, and supportive relationship manifested in child-rearing or in marriage, or in any other forms of association, however longlasting and intimate, between kinsmen, neighbours or friends. He illustrates this proposition by citing material from the Ashanti where even though the father-son relationship is of high affectivity, only the mother's brother has a stool dedicated to him becoming the ancestor for purposes of worship. In a matrilineal society it is only those members of a lineage who have been invested with authority, that is, jurisdiction in the lineage, as lineage heads or as holders of office in the external politico-jural domain, who become permanently enshrined in stools of worship.

The ancestors are approached ritually by sacrifice, libation and prayer. In Tallensi culture only a son can offer sacrifices to ancestors, and he can do so only if his relevant parent is dead. Thus it is usually the surviving senior son who is responsible for ritual tendance and service of the ancestors. His is the responsibility for initiating, supervising and taking the leading part in the mortuary and funeral for his parents. To refuse the ancestors is to invite disaster. According to Fortes the

behaviour of ancestors is standardized regardless of their lifetime behaviour: all ancestors exact ritual service and propitiation in accordance with the same rules of unpredictable and more commonly persecutory rather than beneficent intervention (See Krige 1943: 232). When the persecuting ancestor intervenes they are believed to have acted rightfully and not wantonly. Thus the ancestors are thought of as an ultimate judge and mentor whose vigilance is directed towards restoring order and discipline in compliance with the norms of right and duty, amity and piety.

The ancestors are related to the social structure. E. Colson writing on 'Ancestral Spirits among the Plateau Tonga' shows how the Mizumu 'reflect the ideal organization of Tonga social structure' (Colson 1960: 372). Although Fortes does not regard ancestor worship as exhaustibly specifiable as a purely jural institution (See footnote 6, 1965: 137), he does correlate it with rules of conduct which serve to entrench the principle of jural authority together with its corollary, legitimate right, and its reciprocal, designated accountability, as an indisputable and sacrosanct value-principle of the social system. The ancestors symbolize the continuity of the social structure, and the proper allocation, at any given time, of the authority and right they held and transmitted. Fortes notes that the Ashanti held to the notion that the Stool was the sacred vehicle of the presence of the ancestors and both the source and symbol of politico-ritual office (See Busia 1954), from the kingship down to the headship of a local lineage. It is the experience of filial dependence as recognized and interpreted by the culture which provides the material for the code of symbolism and ritual by means of which

reverence for authority can be regularly affirmed and enacted. For it is in this experience that the beliefs and sentiments of respect, reverence and worship are inculcated. Fortes has argued along similar lines in an earlier essay Oedipus and Job in West African Religion. He states that 'the worship of the ancestors is in essence the ritualization of filial piety' (1959: 29). The genesis of the Tallensi belief, then, is 'in the relationship between parents and children in societies with a social organization based on kinship and descent' (1959: 78).

4. Witchcraft and Sorcery in African Belief

The fullest study of witchcraft in Africa is Evans-Pritchard's epochal work Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande. Lienhardt as well as others have noted that Europeans have had numerous problems understanding this phenomenon particularly because it seems remote from our own modes of thought (Lienhardt 1954: 99). Evans-Pritchard demonstrated that in order to understand this belief-system we must begin by making some assumptions which the Azande make (Evans-Pritchard 1962: 98-102). We have to assume that a man's death or misfortune demands specific explanation; that human beings without any physical act can injure each other; that a possible way of accounting for death or suffering is to say that someone, some human witch, is responsible for the death; that it is possible that oracles can reveal truth when other means fail.

Most anthropologists today accept Evans-Pritchard's classic distinction between magic and sorcery. He defined a witch as one who has believed to be able to harm others mystically and illegitimately by means

of psychic emanations from an inherent physiological condition that was transmitted biologically. A sorcerer, on the other hand, was believed to harm others mystically and illegitimately by practicing destructive magic, that is, by performing rites, using medicines and making these effective or possibly selective by using more or less formal spells or addresses. The witch seems to be more deliberate and vengeful in his intentions whereas a witch is driven by an uncontrollable urge which may even operate against his better nature.

In recent years there have been a number of important works that have given more attention to the structural and normative significance of beliefs in sorcery and witchcraft in contrast to Evans-Pritchard's study of the logical interrelationships of beliefs in magic, witchcraft and sorcery among the Azande. In a paper 'Witchcraft in four African societies,' Nadel argues that witchcraft beliefs and practices are related to specific anxieties and stresses in social life, even the precise nature of the social causes of which they are symptoms. He identifies two basic types of witchcraft. The Nupe of central Nigeria identify their witches as openly and successfully setting aside the social values and thus denying the state of society desired and thought good. On the other hand, the Mesakin identify a witch as a person who cannot live up to the social values yet cannot openly rebel against them; the attacks upon witches are attacks upon the victims of the ideal society (Nadel 1952: 29). Nadel's interpretation leans heavily on the 'scape-goat' theory also utilized by Kluckhohn (1962) and Whiting (1950). He concludes his paper by suggesting that witchcraft beliefs are causally as well as conspicuously related to specific anxieties and stresses arising in the marriage relations in Nupe,

and the relationship between mother's brother and sister's son in Mesakin. It should be noted here that witchcraft cannot be 'explained' simply by saying that it is a kind of prelogical mentality, that is, that witchcraft is because there are inexplicable things in culture.

One of the most important works on witchcraft and sorcery is the collection of essays edited by Middleton and Winter, Witchcraft and Sorcery in East Africa. The editors hypothesize that between societies that utilize either witchcraft or sorcery beliefs in making accusations but not both, there are certain significant structural differences. They state that 'witchcraft beliefs are thus utilized in societies in which unilinear kinship principles are employed in the formation of local residential groups, larger than the domestic household, while sorcery beliefs tend to be similarly utilized when unilineal principles are not so used' (Middleton 1962: 12).

V. Turner in his paper 'Witchcraft and Sorcery: Taxonomy versus Dynamics' (1967) offers a number of sharp criticisms of this work. First, he advocates an extended case method approach, noting that only 49 pages of 299 are taken up with case material. For Turner it is necessary to set any given accusation into the widest possible context. This includes knowing the structure of groups and subgroups to which the accuser and accused belong and their extant division into transient alliances and factions on the basis of immediate interests, ambitions, moral aspirations. It would also include as much of the history of these groups as would be considered relevant to the understanding of the accusation by leading actors within the field situation. And it would also include demographic data about subgroup and factional fluctuations over the relevant time period, together

with information about the biological and sociological factors bearing on these such as epidemics, rise and fall in the death and birth rates, labour migrations, wars and feuds (Turner 1967: 115). The fact that A accused B would then be seen as the product of a complex interplay of processes and forces, among which the norms governing behaviour between members of a single kinship category constitute only a single and possibly minor class (1967: 115-6).

However, the crux of Turner's critique is that 'witch beliefs can no longer--if they ever could--be usefully grouped into two contrasting categories, witchcraft (in its narrow sense) and sorcery' (1967: 118). According to Turner, when Evans-Pritchard made his classic distinction he 'clearly intended to confine it to Zande culture' [See Evans-Pritchard 1927: 21] (1967: 118).

Witchcraft, in short, may be unconscious and involuntary, though it is often intentional, inherited, and inherent. Sorcery is always conscious and voluntary, and is taught and often bought. Witchcraft operates directly and sorcery indirectly through spells, rites, and medicines. This dichotomy, verbalized and explicit among the Azande, is not made in many societies. Rather, these possess a wide range of beliefs about the types of persons who seek to harm their fellows by non-empirical means (1967: 119).

Barrie Reynolds' well-documented material from the courts of Barotseland, Zambia shows that the single term muloi was used for all evil practitioners (1963: 14-47). Turner says that this data raises the whole question of what is meant by "inheritance." Citing material from the Lunda, Turner states that the 'Lunda or Luvala witch is not born a witch but has witchcraft "thrust upon her," usually late in life' (1967: 120).

Turning to the material in Witchcraft and Sorcery in East Africa, he further demonstrates how difficult it is to use Evans-Pritchard's distinction. Contrary to Winter's argument (1962: 292) that the behaviour of

witches it the "exact reverse" of that of other people, Turner states that 'it certainly has some "inverted" features, but others are rather caricatures of normal behaviour. The world of witchcraft, as it appears in tribal beliefs, is not the "structural" world upside down in in mirror image. It is the world in decay, where all that is normal, healthy, and ordered is reduced to chaos and "primordial slime." It is "anti-structure"--not inverted structure' (1967: 125).⁹

His major criticism, then, is that 'there is yet no standard usage of these terms' (1967: 125). He suggests, for further researchers, that a 'holistic labelling approach to the definitional problems discussed in this article is likely to sidetrack investigation from the study of actual behaviour in the social field context to an obsession with the proper pigeonholing of beliefs and practices as either "witchcraft" or "sorcery." In sum, the anthropological analysis of witchcraft and sorcery has been able, using Evans-Pritchard's model, to lead us to the point where we see the declining adequacy of present theoretical frames' (1967: 112). Unfortunately I have been unable to explore or test Turner's ideas in my field work among the Edo.

B. RITUAL IN AFRICAN RELIGIOUS SYSTEMS

Ritual can be viewed at many levels. One of the most influential works on the sociological significance of ritual is that of Van Gennep's Rites de Passage. His problem was that in tribal society there seemed to

⁹My initial reaction to Edo witchcraft was that it was anti-value and not anti- or inverted structure.

be on the whole greater ritualization of transitions in social status, and greater ritualization of social relationships in general, than there was in modern society (See Gluckman 1962: 2). Van Gennep correctly noted that changes in social relations involving movements between groups, or alterations of status, in semi-civilized societies with their conceptions of magico-religious bases for groups, disturbed both the life of the society and the life of the individual, and the function of rites of passage was to reduce the harmful effects of these disturbances (See Gluckman 1962: 3). Radcliffe-Brown (1952: 136-9) employed the term ritual to cover magico-religious phenomena in general. This gets us to the crux of the problem for ritual is usually given a wider significance than that of identifying it with the magico-religious. Nadel (1954: 99) uses the category ritual inclusively and relates it to any type of excessively formal action, while religious ritual covers acts where the means-end relationship is deemed inadequate by empirical standards. According to Monica Wilson ritual can be distinguished from ceremonial. A ritual is a 'primarily religious action...directed to securing the blessing of some mystical power...Symbols and concepts are employed in rituals but are subordinated to practical ends' (1957: 9). And ceremonial is 'an elaborate conventional form for the expression of feeling, not confined to religious occasions' (1957: 9). Goody would apply 'ritual' to all categories of action which Wilson calls 'conventional', and 'religious' would cover activities addressed to 'some mystical power' (Goody 1961: 159-60). Evans-Pritchard also said that 'ritual' is distinguished by the fact that it refers to some 'mystical notions,' which are 'patterns of thought that attribute to phenomena supra-sensible qualities which, or part of which, are not derived from observation

or cannot be logically inferred from it, and which they do not possess' (Evans-Pritchard 1937: 12).

Gluckman in his paper 'Les Rites de Passage' admits that 'ritual, that is to say, is associated with notions that its performance in some mysterious way, by processes out of sensory control, affects the well-being of the participants: it is believed to protect them or in other ways achieve their well-being' (1962: 30), but his interest lies elsewhere. He is primarily interested in how 'tribal societies have...worked their roles and relationships into their rituals.' Gluckman's purpose is to discover why tribal societies with all their uncertainties about growth become 'inextricably involved in social relationships themselves; and it is this ritualization of social relations which is my problem here' (1962: 33). His thesis is that 'the greater the secular differentiation of role, the less the ritual; and the greater the secular differentiation, the less mystical is the ceremonial of etiquette; the greater the multiplicity of undifferentiated and overlapping roles, the more ritual to separate them' (1962: 34). Although this thesis is illuminating,¹⁰ with Forde (1958), I express a certain disquietude at the tendency of some anthropologists to interpret rituals in social structural or psychological terms alone. Forde argues that beliefs and rites

...are by no means always evoked by concern for a particular social pattern, but may be stimulated by other conditions of the human environment through the values and hazards attached to material resources and techniques, the incidence of disease and other risks to health and life...While beliefs and cults focus on material needs and physical well-being may be associated with or lead to the further development of patterns of social organization, such as priesthoods

¹⁰ Horton says that 'those who follow Gluckman are unable to see such beliefs as having nothing more than a sort of all-purpose social glue' (1964: 87).

or institutions deriving from the prestige of a sacred chiefship, it is important to recognize that it is the ecological factors, stemming from biological and physical conditions, and the character of particular techniques, that have called them into being and sustain their significance (1958: 7-8).

Ritual, as Gluckman has said, has a 'multiplex' meaning, and in this study of the Edo I am concerned with ritual interaction between man and divinity. One question I try to answer is why it should be that entities with the characteristic properties of the mystical are invoked as a link between fluctuations of the social order and fluctuations of nature (See Horton 1964: 87). We have already noted the African tendency to 'define' social units in religious terms.

P. Bohannan has a convenient summary of the two fundamental aspects of African ritual. He suggests that African religion has two fundamental event sequences.

One is the sequence of ritual that follows the seasons and has definite associations with the economic life of people, and in many cases with the political life as well; there is usually an accompanying sequence of ritual that follows the life cycle of maturing human beings. The second system centres in a sequence of ritual that is triggered off when misfortune appears in the community, either in the form of illness and death or of drought or epidemic. The two events may be closely interlinked, because the appearance of misfortune may be attributed to failure to carry out properly the ritual for keeping the forces of the firmament in good working order (1963: 337).

The first cycle would fall into the category of rites of passage; the second into what Turner has aptly called 'rituals of affliction' (1967: 9-11). He states that misfortune, women's reproductive disorders and various forms of illness are associated with the action of spirits. These rituals are devised to propitiate and to get rid of the spirit that is thought to be causing the trouble. I mention only in passing that rituals of affliction are central in the Edo ritual life.

Sacrifice¹¹ is central in African rituals of affliction. In the recent works of Evans-Pritchard (1956), Middleton (1960) and Lienhardt (1961) sacrifice and its relationship to concepts of divinity and human personality, its symbolic force and its sociological nature have been demonstrated. In Divinity and Experience (See chapter 6), Lienhardt shows that sacrifice includes a recreation of the basis of the local corporate life. He emphasizes that sacrificial rites do not automatically operate in order to achieve some specific end. For Lienhardt sacrifice and prayer are related to the measure of control that man can assert over experience. And the symbolical manipulation of sacrificial rites demands the presence of those who share the common values which give them meaning, eg. the clan-divinities. In an essay 'Belief and Knowledge' he states:

In Dinka sacrifices I have seen, two separate victims may be offered, one to the totemic spirits of the clan providing the sacrifice, and one to the god in the sky who watches over all the human creation. It is as though the act of sacrifice itself, turning man's attention to a kind of being different from and superior to their own, also suggests, besides local ties and loyalties, a widening circle of common human concerns (1964: 452).

From this point of view sacrifice to a common god is a sign and a strengthening of the common life. From other points of view it has other meanings (1964: 452).

Evans-Pritchard makes a distinction between collective and personal sacrifices. 'The primary purpose of a collective sacrifice is to confirm, to establish, or to add strength to a change in social status...' (1956: 199). The act of sacrifice does not automatically expiate a fault.

¹¹Lienhardt states that: 'Many different kinds of sacrifice have been distinguished--sacrifice as a gift to the gods; as a sign of communion with them and a way of gaining strength from them; sacrifice as atonement, as self-abnegation, as immolation or destruction for the divinity, and so forth' (1964: 451).

'Kwoth or a spirit, is not constrained by the sacrifice to grant the favour asked for. An animal sacrificed to Kwoth is his animal anyhow and what he gives the suppliant in return is a free gift. Nevertheless the Nuer feel that the recipient of a sacrifice is at fault if he does not fulfil its part of the bargain' (1956: 222).

To sum up, we can say that the act of sacrifice, whether private or public, is believed to have efficacy as part of an exchange between man and divinity. That is one meaning; the other is that sacrifice strengthens the common life, affirming lineage, clan and cultic loyalties.

III. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF THE EDO TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS SYSTEM

Due to the circumstances under which my research was conducted I cannot offer a complete and comprehensive analysis of the Edo traditional religious system. My collection of myths, for example, is in no way complete. The complex of rituals centring in the Oba and hereditary nobles are outside the scope of this study, although I do touch on the Igwe. Questions such as V. Turner raises in his paper 'Witchcraft and Sorcery: Taxonomy versus Dynamics' are crucial, but I was unable to get the kind of information needed for a 'process theory' analysis. So, following Horton's approach to the study of African religions, I have chosen to look at religion from a literalist perspective. This involves the following assumptions.

1. That the divinities are personified beings capable of responding to ritual action as well as manifesting themselves in culture.
2. That the interaction between man and divinity will be patterned

after such relationships and obligations that characterize social relations.

3. That interaction with divinity will be related to the attainment of goals at different levels of social structural reference.
4. That the divinity-to-group coordination will reflect the conflicts and competition within the social structure.

I have first of all sought to determine what the Edo beliefs about divinity are, i.e. what personalized beings are believed to exist in the 'supernatural' or 'extra-social' world. This has been done through eliciting of statements from priests and other representatives of the divinities, through an analysis of some myths and songs sung before the shrines of Olokun and Ogun. Closely related to the discovery of how the Edo represent their divinities is the question of how these divinities are believed to manifest themselves in nature and culture. For if they are believed to be 'personalized' entities, then they will have intelligence, personality and speech.

When the researcher studies the ritual interactional process between man and the divinities, one of his interests will be to see how the man to divinity communication process parallels the patterns of interaction on the social level. He will also be interested in what relationships there are between the goals an individual in the culture pursues at the different levels of social structural reference and the divinities as instruments to the attainment of these valued ends. Finally, we want to see whether there is any relationship between the ritual interaction with the divinities and the conflicts and competition within the social structure, for we have seen that in some cultures such as the Kalabari, the divinities assist segments (eg. lineage or clan) of the social structure. If structural

alignments in the social order are 'mirrored' in man's relationship to divinity in some African cultures, then it could be hypothesized that changes within the social structure will also be reflected in changed or new relations to old or new divinities.

The 'multiplex' meaning of ritual may be taken for granted. Man's 'vertical' relationship with divinity cannot be interpreted as a cultural isolate, for belief and ritual intersect the socio-political structure and are related to the ecological environment, as Forde has pointed out in his 1958 study of Yako religion. This study is limited to ritual as it pertains to divinity. For example, I have not been able to examine rites of passage in the Edo culture. If I had I would have discussed changes of role as involving incorporation into new groups which usually have personal beings behind them who keep the group flourishing or weaken it in response to breaches of group norms. Therefore rites of passage involve ritual in order to bring the new member under their control. The questions I bring to the study of ritual are of a different order.

I have chosen three broad categories as organizing devices: The Edo representation of Divinity; The Edo manifestation of Divinity; and The Edo response to Divinity. After giving a brief ethnographic introduction to the Edo cosmology, I examine the main divinities in the Edo cosmology, and conclude with an overview of the Edo religious system.

CHAPTER II

ETHNOGRAPHIC OUTLINE OF THE EDO¹

The Edo proper (Bini) of the Benin Kingdom are broadly coterminous with the present-day Benin Division. The Edo language and dialects belong to the Kwa group of Western Budanic Languages.

The present day Benin Division covers 4,000 square miles and has a population of just under 300,000 Edo and non-Edo. The Benin Kingdom consists of the capital, Benin City, and several hundred villages which may either form separate units vis-a-vis the central authority or be coordinated in village-groups of sub-chiefdoms. Villages everywhere break down into wards, of which there may be several tiers, and these in turn are made up of one of more extended families with patrilineal nuclei. The degree to which local groups larger than the extended family are associated with lineages appears to vary considerably.

A second characteristic feature of Edo social organization is the stratification of the male population into age-grades organized on a village wide basis. In most areas authority is vested very largely in the senior age-grade (usually called edion) and, subject to certain qualifications, the oldest man is the village headman. This pattern of authority may be upset by the presence of title-associations or of individual titled offices. Another characteristic of the Edo-speaking peoples is their marked

¹The following material is taken from R. Bradbury. The Benin Kingdom and the Edo-speaking Peoples of S.W. Nigeria, pp. 18-60. London: International African Institute, 1957.

patrilineal bias in their kinship and lineage organization with a strong emphasis on primogeniture. The senior surviving son of a dead man is regarded as the chief heir to his property and the successor to whatever offices, privileges, and duties he may have had.

The Benin Kingdom is comparable to the Yoruba and Dahomey kingdoms to the west while the remainder of the Edo-speaking peoples are, in their political and social organization, more akin to the Igbo and Ijaw peoples to the east and to the south. In terms of social and political organization, as well as geographically, the Edo-speaking peoples stand in an intermediate position between the smaller scale societies of eastern Nigeria and the more highly organized political groups in the west.

I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE EDO

A. LOCATION AND NOMENCLATURE

The Benin Kingdom is regarded as being coterminous with the present-day Benin Division. The authority of the Oba (king) was recognized in this unit in 1914. The total area of the Benin Division is about 4,000 square miles and the population according to the 1952 census was 292,000. Bradbury states that there is no satisfactory vernacular term to designate the Benin kingdom or its people. Benin City is called Edo by its inhabitants and in certain contexts individuals from all parts of the kingdom will refer to themselves as oviedo (child of Edo of oviOba (child of the Oba)). But the same individual may speak of himself as 'child of' his village or village-group or of the region of the kingdom in which he lives.

The major regions are defined in terms of the main rivers; for example, iyek-Ovia, iyek-Orhiomo and iyek-Ogba refer to the groups on the farther side of (iyeke--'at the back of') these rivers from Benin City. The word 'Benin' is of doubtful origin, but is popularly used to describe the capital city, the kingdom. The term 'Bini' is commonly used to describe the people of the Benin kingdom. However, I will refer to the Bini as Edo, but will use Benin City to describe the capital city, as this is widely accepted by Nigerians and is used in official publications.

B. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The Benin country is a low-lying plain covered with porous Benin sand. The country rises to the north around the Ishan plateau. The area is drained by a series of deeply-entrenched rivers and small streams flowing in a general north-south direction. Generally the Edo villages avoid close proximity to these streams though the Urhobo-Isoko and Kwale build on their banks. The natural vegetation of the area is tropical rain forest, with a good deal of swamp vegetation in the south and west. There is an abundance of good timber in the area and there is a thriving mill at Sepele. Rubber plantations have also been planted in the area.

C. DEMOGRAPHY

Apart from the capital, Benin City, which today has a population of approximately 75,000, the people of the Benin kingdom live in several hundred compact village settlements ranging in size from 20-30 to more than

5,000 inhabitants. Approximately one fifth of the people are concentrated in Benin City.

D. TRADITIONS OF ORIGIN AND HISTORY

According to Edo mythology, the Benin kingdom was founded by the youngest of the children of Osanobua (the high god). With his senior brothers, who included the first kings of Ife and other Yoruba kingdoms and the first king of the Europeans, they were sent to live in the agbon (the world). Each was allowed to take something with him. Some chose wealth, material and magical skills or implements but, on the instructions of a bird, the youngest chose a snail shell. When they arrived in the world they found it covered with water. The youngest son was told by the bird to upturn the snail shell and when he did so sand fell from it and spread out to form the land. So the first Oba of Benin became the owner of the land and his senior 'brothers' had to come to him and barter their possessions in return for a place to settle. Hence, though he was the youngest son, he became the wealthiest and most powerful ruler.

The semi-mythical rulers of the first dynasty are known as ogiso (ogie--ruler/king; iso--sky). The names of a number of them, some of them women, are remembered, as are some of the titles of chiefs of their court, the original site of which is still pointed out within the walls of the present town.

The present Oba, Akenzua II, is according to tradition, the 35th of the dynasty whose beginning is variously dated from the late twelfth century to the beginning of the fourteenth century. The 15th Oba in the

generally accepted list is said to have been reigning when the Portuguese first visited Benin in 1485.²

The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were apparently the period of greatest expansion and it was during this time that the great warrior kings, Ewuare, Ozolua, Esigie, Orhoghua, and Ehegbuda reigned. Catholic missions were established by the Portuguese early in the sixteenth century. Firearms were introduced about the same time and seem to have led to an increase in warfare whose purpose was the capture of slaves for export. Esigie, in about 1515, was accompanied by Portuguese missionaries in a campaign which drove the marauders from Idah to the north back across the Niger. Churches were built by the Portuguese in Benin City. This raises the question of Christian influences on the Edo conception of Osanobua and the other divinities. The Portuguese remained the most influential power in the area until the second half of the seventeenth century though English and Dutch traders had begun to visit Ughoton and Benin City long before this. There were missionaries in Benin about 1688, but they were apparently based at Warri.

Benin was ravaged by a civil war in 1702 and from this time forward written accounts of Benin describe periods of fluctuating power and prosperity disturbed by civil wars which appear to have been caused by disputes over the succession of the kingship. Between periods of dissension the kingdom seems to have shown remarkable powers of recovery and in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there was renewed expansion which led

²'According to tradition, it was in the reign of the fifteenth Oba, Ozolua, that European visitors had first set foot in Benin City. As this event probably took place in 1485, it is unlikely that the dynasty was founded later than the early fourteenth century' (Bradbury 1967: 1).

to the reconquest of the Yoruba town Akure and Ekiti country. The history of Benin, then, is one of alternating periods of territorial expansion and contraction in accordance with the degree of authority at the centre.

The key date in the history of Benin is 1897. This date has given the name 'City of Blood' to Benin. Oba Ovoramwen feared the increasing influence of the Europeans in the Delta and thus forbade all external trade. Apparently he did sign a treaty allowing the Europeans to trade, send missionaries and to accept British protection. He did not, however, adhere to this treaty and after the massacre of members of a British trade mission in 1897 British troops attacked and captured Benin City. Ovoramwen was deported to Calabar where he remained until his death in 1914. His son was then installed as Eweka II and he in turn was succeeded in 1933 by his son, Akenzua II, the present Oba. The Oba's official sphere of authority was limited in 1914 to what had then become the Benin Division.

II. MAIN FEATURES OF THE ECONOMY

A. AGRICULTURE

The basis of the subsistence economy on which the villages depend and the activities associated with its cultivation determine the pattern of the agricultural year. The Edo practice shifting agriculture, and land is rarely brought back into cultivation until it has been fallow for at least seven or eight years and the period may be as long as 15-20 years. Clearing of the plots begins in February or early March. The clearing is usually completed by the end of March and is followed by the tilling of

the ground. Planting begins in April after the seed-yams have been brought out of storage and often continues into the early part of May. The seed yams are pressed into the sides of the holes from which the earth has been removed and the loose soil is pushed back over the top of them. The period following the planting is relatively inactive but towards the end of May it is necessary to insert poles to support the growing vines. This corresponds with the beginning of the rains.

The Edo recognize three types of yam: white, red and water which mature in that order over a period stretching from mid-September to November. Yam farming is essentially men's work though the women usually assist in weeding and planting and the whole labour supply is mobilized for the harvest. The Edo intercrop planting corn, cocoyam, ocra, rice, groundnuts, peppers, melons, gourds, beans and other vegetables round the tree stumps left in the farm, along the boundaries and in other spaces. These crops are generally owned and always planted, tended and harvested by the women, though some men give their wives seeds to plant for their own profit. When the yam harvest has been reaped the farm is usually replanted with corn and cassava. These and other crops, such as plaintain, which may still be growing on the old farm, are gathered as they become ripe and the plot gradually reverts to fallow.

B. TREE CROPS

The kola and the oil and coconut palms are the most important trees. Kola and coconut are planted, owned and inherited by individuals. All men and some women have kola trees which are placed along the main paths. The

kola is ubiquitous in all southern Nigerian cultures, being essential as a symbol of hospitality and an indispensable item in every ritual offering. Oil palms are held collectively by the village community and any member of the village may reap their fruit or tap them for wine.

C. CASH CROPS

The main sources of monetary income for the village Edo are rubber and cocoa, which are grown on small-holdings as well as in plantations, palm products from plantations and timber. Most Edo householders own a few hundred rubber trees which are tapped each morning by adolescent boys and young men and even by women when the market price is high. Extensive plantations of rubber, cocoa, coconuts and oil-palms are owned by individuals (mainly wealthy and titled men in Benin City) who employ paid labour: a considerable proportion of whom are Igbo migrant workers. The commercial extraction of timber is mainly in the hands of European firms, although a few local individual and family concerns can be found.

D. HUNTING, GATHERING AND FISHING

Most men have dane guns and hunt the bush-pig, and various kinds of buck such as the dyka. The collection of wild bush products and of the snails and tortoises which form an important part of the protein diet is in the hands of the women. The Edo depend on the Urhobo, Ijaw, and Itsekiri for the exploitation of the rivers.

E. LIVESTOCK

Goats, sheep, dogs, and fowls are ubiquitous and are all important as sacrificial offerings as well as for meat. However, they are rarely killed except for sacrificial purposes. Cows are killed only as sacrificial items, particularly during the Igwe Festival held around mid-December.

F. MARKETS AND TRADE

Most villages have markets which belong exclusively to them or are shared with one or more neighbouring villages. Markets are held every four days; the women handling all kinds of foodstuffs and other native products while both sexes engage in the modern trade in imported goods.

G. CRAFTS AND INDUSTRIES

Most of the important indigenous crafts of the Benin kingdom were in the hands of special ward-guilds in Benin City. There were guilds of blacksmiths and brass-smiths, wood and ivory carvers (one group), leather workers, weavers of special embroidered cloths, drum-makers, locksmiths. Some of these still function. Much has been written about the origin of Edo brass casting. Formerly the whole production of the brass-smiths was at the command of the palace, consisting very largely of ritual and ceremonial objects. Today a number of brass workers, under the guidance of the tutelary spirit Ogun work on Igun St. in Igun ward producing

imitation works mainly for European workers, visitors and teachers.

Wood-carving is a thriving industry in Benin City. Traditionally carved staves (ukhurhe), which are symbols of the divinities worshipped by village communities were the most important objects. Important title holders in the capital and hereditary village chiefs could obtain ukhurhe and wooden heads as alter decorations and other ritual and ceremonial objects. The Oba had control over all ivory in the kingdom and nearly all ivory carvings appear to have been for his personal use. Today, however, a number of men working in their own shops with apprentices or in larger cooperatives produce 'airport art' for the tourist market.

Carpenters (onwina) who produced mortars, door-frames, roofing beams, drumparts for the Oba's court formed a special group located in a number of scattered villages outside Benin City. Pottery for both ceremonial and utilitarian purposes was formerly produced by only two villages, Use to the west of Benin City and Utekon to the north.

III. SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND POLITICAL STRUCTURE

A. DOMESTIC AND FAMILY GROUPS

Households in Benin City and the villages³ vary in size from a single (usually impotent) man to a joint family of approximately twenty. The following types of family can be recognized:

³Present day family groupings in Benin City do not differ markedly from those in the villages, although in the past the households of important title-holders were considerably larger.

1. The nuclear or compound family consisting of a man and his wife or wives and their children, who may occupy a house or be located in rooms of the man's father or senior brother.
2. The joint family consisting of an elderly man with his wives and unmarried children, together with one or more unmarried sons with their wives and children and, in some cases, younger married brothers. Most married men prefer to move out of their father's house before or soon after the latter's death. Recently married sons may stay until they have some children.
3. The extended family, occupying several, usually neighbouring houses, made up of a man and his married brothers and sons with their wives and children, and, possibly, the sons and unmarried daughters of his deceased elder brother(s) with the latter's wives and children.

Residence after marriage is virilocal. A man will bring his first wife to live in his father's house who will remain there until the birth of one or more children. An only son, however, may remain with his father until death.

None of the types of family listed above necessarily corresponds to an economic unit, for either production or consumption. The most common farming unit consists of a man and his wife or wives and any children who are old enough to assist.

Each of the types of family listed above is a quasi-political unit in that its members are under the immediate control, for certain purposes, of the oldest male who can apply sanctions against them. The three kinds of family form a hierarchy in so far as the head of the nuclear or compound

family may be under the authority of the head of a joint family or compound family may be under the authority of the head of a joint family who may in turn be subject to the head of his extended family. The headmen of the various kinds of families settle disputes between their dependents and punish them for misdemeanours. The headmen of joint and extended families, as members of the senior age-grade with an effective voice in the village council represent their dependents vis-a-vis the village community and can be held responsible for their behaviour.

The main support for the authority of the family head lies in the relation between the living and the deceased patrilineal ancestors of the family head (See the description of the Eho Festival in Chapter VIII). The welfare of the senior son and his siblings and the wives of the agnatic descendants of himself and his brothers is believed to depend upon the goodwill of the deceased father and his lineal ancestors who punish wrongdoing with sickness, death and other catastrophes. As the intermediary with these ancestors the senior son thus has access to powerful supernatural sanctions.

The rights and obligations consequent upon common membership of domestic and family groupings are conceived in terms of a master-servant relationship. In relation to the family head or the household all his dependents are servants. Children are thought of as the servants of their father, wives of their husbands, junior brothers of their seniors, and younger of older women. Thus in each household or family there is a series of hierarchies which determines the moral rights and obligations of the members towards each other.

B. AGNATES AND OTHER KIN

The rule of descent is patrilineal. Children are affiliated to the lineage of the 'pater' from whom they inherit and to whose title, if any, the eldest surviving son succeeds. The widest effective patrilineage is usually that which corresponds to the extended family and is thus, as will be seen from above, only three generations in depth. Bradbury suggests that the poor development of the lineage system appears to be correlated with a number of economic and political factors.

1. A system of land tenure in which kin groups do not lay claim to tracts of land. Each adult male is dependent upon the village community as a whole, rather than upon his own kin group for land on which to farm or build.
2. The unitary character of the village community in general which is expressed in the three-tier age-grade system that cuts across kin groups and makes age, rather than lineage affiliation, the criterion of authority. The unity of the village is illustrated by the fact that a man who wishes to build a house calls upon the village as a whole rather than his own kinsmen to assist him.
3. Low-marriage payments. In order to obtain his first wife a man is dependent only upon his father and possibly his paternal grandfather, while the acquiring of subsequent wives is his own responsibility.
4. The rule of primogeniture by which a senior son inherits his father's house and most of his property and, where applicable,

his title; thus the benefits of inheritance are restricted within the narrowest limits. The Edo value generosity and a senior son who doesn't distribute some of his 'wealth' is looked down upon. In accordance with this principle, the system of ancestor worship is such that there is a tendency for a new set of shrines to be set up in each generation so that there is a constant hiving-off of ancestor-worshipping units, i.e. of ritually and politically effective corporate lineages.

5. A title-system in which titles are either hereditary by primogeniture or are not hereditary in any sense. This is marked contrast with the Yoruba where most titles are associated with lineages and may be obtained by any male member.

Agnation, then, determines the line of inheritance and succession, membership of wider domestic and family groupings of a village community. In Benin City, and a few villages outside, it determines membership of the dispersed clans or quasi-clans to one of which every Edo belongs.

Strong ties of affection exist between a person and the maternal kin. Within the compound family stronger ties usually exist between full siblings than between those who have different mothers.

C. VILLAGE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

The village is the basic political unit in the Benin kingdom. Generally speaking it is the widest unit for age-grade organization, the minimal land-holding unit, the smallest group which can have a hereditary

chief, the smallest tribute unit, and also the cooperative unit for house-building.

Each village is a compact settlement though most are divided into wards (idunmwun) which may be separated from each other by small patches of bush. Each ward consists of one or more extended families living in close proximity and recognizing the authority of the oldest man, or, in exceptional cases, of a hereditary chief. Wards consisting of a single extended family are typical.

In the Benin villages the male population at any given time is horizontally stratified into three age-grades. The iroghae is entered by boys in their early teens and they perform various communal tasks such as clearing paths to the streams. The ighele, which is disappearing in modern villages, is the grade of adult men who perform the heavier and more skilled communal tasks. They were formerly the executive arm of political and judicial authority within the village and the potential fighting force. The edion are the elders who are exempt from communal labour and who form the village council for political and judicial purposes. In other contexts the edion refer to the collective dead of a village or other corporate group.

D. AUTHORITY IN THE VILLAGE

There are two kinds of village headman, hereditary and non-hereditary. The non-hereditary headman (odionwere) is found in all villages and age is the principle factor in his appointment. Not all villages have an hereditary headman (onogie) and, on the other hand, the holder of such

an office may rule over a number of villages which thus constitute a chiefdom; conversely a ward within a village may have its own onigie. The office ideally passes from eldest son to eldest son like all hereditary offices in the Benin kingdom.

In villages without enigie (pl. onigie) meetings of the village council take place either at the house of the odionwere or in a special meeting-house, ogwedion, which contains the shrine of the collective dead (edion) of the village. Every village has an ogwedion located in a cleared space at the entrance to or in the middle of the village. The village council is made of the onogie (where present), the odionwere and the members of the edion age-grade. Apart from its judicial functions the council discusses such topics as the collection of tribute (formerly), or, nowadays, of tax; the organization of collective tasks and of cult festivals; the performance of sacrifices for the good of the community and the delegation of representatives to consult diviners on behalf of the community or individuals within it; relations with and instructions from the central authority; contributions to funds both for public purposes and to assist members of the village who are in difficulties; and, at the present day, the building and upkeep of schools, and dispensaries.

E. CHIEFDOMS AND VILLAGE-GROUPS

Petty chiefdoms consisting of two or more villages owing allegiance to a hereditary chief are found in most parts of the kingdom but are most characteristic of its eastern region. In the centre, north, and west there is a tendency for villages to be independent of each other and to

deal as separate units with the central authority in Benin City. At the present day there is a tendency for hereditary chiefs to lose their authority in villages which are tributary to them, and for each village to become an autonomous unit within the kingdom.

F. THE POLITICAL STRUCTURE OF BENIN CITY

Though the internal organization of Benin City and the central state organization is very complex, a brief outline will be sufficient for our purpose. Benin itself is divided into two halves. In one half (Ogbe) live the Oba and his court and the palace chiefs and in the other (Oren' okhwa) the town chiefs. The two halves are further divided into more than forty wards. Each of the members has special duties to perform to the Oba. Leadership in the ward is ascribed on a variety of principles. Some have odionwere who are chosen in the same way as those in the villages, others are headed by hereditary or non-hereditary title-holders or by leaders (ikao) appointed by or with the approval of the Oba.

A. There are three orders of chiefs who stand out from the rest in terms of rank and degree of authority. They are:

1. The Uzama n'Ihiron--the seven Uzama--whose titles, in order of rank, are Oliha, Edohen, Ezomo, Ero, Eholo n'Ire, Oloton, and Edaiken. All seven titles are hereditary; the first six descend on the death of the holder to his eldest surviving son who must, however, be ceremonially installed at the Oba's palace. The chief duty of the Uzama as a body is the installation of the new Oba.

2. The Eghaevo n'Ore are the town chiefs as distinct from the palace chiefs. There are nineteen Eghaevo n'Ore titles.
3. The Eghaevo n'Ogbe or palace chiefs are the senior officials of the Oba's household. There are 29 of these titles and none is hereditary.

There are three palace associations (otu-eguae). Each has special duties which its members perform in the royal household. For example, the members of Iwebo are in charge of the Oba's wardrobe and the state regalia, and make repair of the coral bead garments and ornaments which are the mark of high rank.

B. The Palace as a Political and Ceremonial Centre

The Oba's palace (eguae Oba) was the centre of the political and ceremonial life of the Benin people. Its internal organization was complex and its population large, consisting as it did of the Oba and his many attendants and his numerous wives and children.

C. The Oba

The most important aspect of the Edo political structure was the divine kingship. The mystical aspect of the divine kingship provided the ideological keystone of the political system. The continuity and integrity of the polity depended upon two things. First, the commitment of all sectors of the population to the belief that their well-being depended on the proper deployment of the Oba's own 'divine energy', and of his ritual authority as the intermediary with his predecessors; and secondly upon their acceptance of the need for the king, chiefs, and people to cooperate in

ensuring that these functions were fruitfully deployed. Every title had its ritual roles and the higher a chief's rank, the more indispensable his ritual functions (Bradbury 1968: 200). The Oba had to maintain a balance between the competing groups and individuals within the political elite.

Political roles in the Benin Kingdom have never been conceived of in terms of the representations of descent groups (1968: 195). What constituted the enduring framework of government was 'an elaborate configuration of unitary and segmented orders, graded associations, and tiered and opposed hierarchies, with the politico-divine kingship at its centre (1968: 197). This, then, was the arena in which the political game was played. This opposition within the Edo political structure was ritualized. For example, the Uzama or hereditary nobles had their role sanctioned in that they had to worship before the shrine of the edion-uzama, the collective predecessors. Bradbury states that this was essential for the nation's well-being (1967: 13). Even the opposition between the Oba and the Uzama was given ritual expression in the iron rite which formed part of the festival of the Oba's father (Ugie-Erha-Oba). This rite takes the form of a pantomimic battle in which the Uzama, after challenging the Oba by showing him his archaic crowns, is defeated by the Oba's loyal warriors (1967: 15).

The Oba's relationship to the town chiefs was also played out in ritual.

For example, when the Town Chiefs, swords in hand, danced homage to the king they were shadowed by his palace retainers, swords upraised as if to strike them down should they attack him. Unlike the Uzama, who were the hereditary nobles, the Town Chiefs were commoners who, by their enterprise and the Oba's favour, had risen to positions of power. The Town Chiefs also had to perform a rite known as zematon,

which was an act of purification and a renewal and release of the Oba's mystical power. That it had to be performed by the four Eghaevbo is one manifestation of a constant motif in Benin ritual, namely that the Oba and the Edo are in a relationship of mystical interdependence. In many contexts, this mutual dependence is expressed through acts of ritual communion between the Oba and his predecessors, on the one hand, the and people and their dead, on the other; but the notion underlying the zematon is that the mystical power of the living king has its complement in the living community (1968: 25-6).

Thus even though there was a sense in which the Oba was opposed to the Uzama and Edion-Edo to Edion-Oba, the divine king united these opposing forces in himself. The best interests of all lay in the maintenance of a balance of power between the Town Chiefs and the Palace (1967: 27). The divine kingship, therefore, played a significant role in unifying not only the factions and oppositions within the political structure, but also bound the diversity of divinities and cults into one system. For the worship of past kings was interwoven in contrapuntal fashion with the worship of various categories of the dead, at all levels of the social system. And the local cults of nature and free divinities were incorporated by organizational and mythological techniques into a state pantheon in which the Oba as "king of dry land" was identified with Olokun as "king of the waters" (1967: 32).

To sum up, mutual ritual obligations, sanctioned by the general world-view, served to counter disruptive tendencies in the pursuit of conflicting political interests. Every political role implied ritual roles. The distribution of rights, and privileges among the complex hierarchies of officialdom received constant expression in an endless series of palace rituals. The continuity of the state and the sanctity of its institutions were reiterated in ritual by linking each significant office and institution with the king who had created it or shown it special favour, and by giving

it a part to play in the rites addressed to him.

In the modern political era, the Oba and his palace do not play as significant a part in politics as they used to. As Bradbury has said: 'After 1951 the political struggle lay between named, enduring local parties affiliated to nationalist parties contesting for power at the regional and federal levels' (1968: 250). In the modern era, then, the Edo political system has shifted to a party-based system where power is determined largely by knowledge of modern political techniques and skills patterned after Western models. Formerly most of the Oba's time was taken up in state rituals, of which the most important were the annual sacrifices to his ancestors and to his own head. His head is equated with his good or bad fortune and with the well-being of the kingdom, and the sacrifices to it are followed by the treatment of all parts of his body with medicines designed to strengthen him the coming year. The most important state ritual takes place around mid-December at the Oba's palace (Igwe Festival). Apart from the state rituals in Benin City the Oba maintains control over the cults of hero-divinities. These cults are directed to the spirits of former heroes in the state and in a few cases to particular aspects of past kings. The dates of annual festivals in their honour must be approved by the Oba, who frequently provides regalia and sacrificial offerings and in the case of the more important ones sends someone to represent him. He fixes, too, the dates for the performance of the annual rites in connection with domestic cults at all of which the final prayer is for the Oba himself.

Succession to the kingship is by primogeniture, the senior son validating his claim by performing his father's mortuary rites and having

himself installed by the Uzama at the site of the palace of Eweka I. The Oba's court was formerly most elaborate, with hundreds of retainers living in the palace. Economic support for the palace organization and state rituals came from a variety of sources. Regular tribute of food-stuffs was levied twice yearly on all villages in the kingdom and in tributary areas and the Oba could call upon any village to provide labour for such tasks as building and repairing the palace.

In the last analysis the basis of the Oba's power appears to lie in the traditional mystical values attaching to the sacred institution of kingship and to the eguae (palace). Individuals all over the kingdom claim to belong to one or other of the palace associations and the highest position to which anyone can aspire is to be 'next to the Oba.'

D. Administration of the Oba's Territories

The whole territory ruled by the Oba both inside and outside the Benin kingdom was formerly divided into a large number of tribute units. A chiefdom, village-group, village, ward, and any combination of these and even collections of individuals dispersed between the different wards of a village might constitute a single unit. The traditional administrative system is now defunct, though in the few cases where tribute units were associated with hereditary titles some ties of loyalty remain.

E. The State Council

In the past most of the day-to-day administration of the kingdom appears to have been conducted by private consultation and negotiation between the Oba and the senior title-holders. For more important matters,

such as the promulgation of new laws, the decision to conduct wars, the fixing of important festival dates, the creation of new titles, the raising of special levies, and the taking of ritual measures to prevent epidemics, etc. a full council was called. Today Benin is administered by a number of Ministries: Finance, Local Government, Community Development, etc. The Oba and his court now function more as guardians of the spiritual order and spiritual well-being of Benin, than as administrators of the economic and political affairs of the kingdom.

F. Land Tenure

All the land of the Benin kingdom is said, by the Edo, to belong to the Oba. But such statements refer primarily to his position as the political ruler of the territory rather than to his actual control over the use of the land. The land is vested in him as trustee for the whole people and his ownership of it in this sense is symbolized at the installation of each new Oba when after a mock battle to capture the city Chief Ogiamwen put oil into his palm. Today as the president of the Native Authority, he exercises control over the occupation and use of land and resources in Benin Division by strangers.

Outside Benin City the village is the typical land-holding unit, though in many cases no boundaries between the territories of different villages are recognized. No rights in fallow land are recognized. It reverts to the community once a man has cleared land, planted it over two or three years. An Edo who wishes to farm on land of a village other than his own must seek the permission of the onigie or odionwere to do so. In practice, farms seem to have been established in two main ways. First,

they could make an arrangement with the headman of an existing village to station their farm-workers there and to farm on the village land. Alternatively a wealthy chief with many slaves might clear virgin forest outside the control of any village and establish a camp there to house his slaves and other dependents. They too were allowed to cultivate on their own and the slaves or their children would eventually purchase their emancipation and the camp would develop into a village with the usual type of village social organization.

The cultivation of permanent crops has brought about some changes in the traditional pattern of land rights though, theoretically, it has not resulted in individual ownership of the land. Wealthy men have large rubber and oil-palm plantations and villages have been encouraged by the Administration to establish communal labour plantations but these were eventually converted to individual ownership.

Traditionally the allocation of house sites in Benin City was in the hands of the Oba, who would, however, usually consult the chiefs or elders of the ward in which the proposed building was to take place. To-day an Edo who wishes to acquire a site must seek the recommendation of the elders of the ward in which it is located after having it surveyed and a plan made by the Native Authority Surveyor.

IV. THE LIFE CYCLE

A. BIRTH

For the birth of her first child a woman often returns to her mother

and she may do so for subsequent ones. When she is known to have conceived her husband may offer sacrifices to her father's and his own ancestors and to other spirits or divinities under whose protection the child is believed to be. The woman is treated with certain medicines, wears special amulets and dresses her hair in appropriate patterns. The child is washed with sand and palm-oil to ensure that it will not smell when it grows up, and with water, and the mother herself is washed in the backyard. The umbilical cord is planted in the ground with the seed of the kola or coconut tree in the hope that the child will grow like the tree. The placenta is buried inside or outside the house and great care is taken to make the hole big enough for it to spread out evenly.

About three months after the birth and woman washes, puts fine clothes on herself and the baby, and takes it to the market where she makes offering to the edion of the market. Shortly afterwards she takes the child to the river and makes offerings to the divinity associated with it.

B. NAMING CEREMONIES

The rites accompanying the naming of a child (izomo) vary considerably, but normally take place on the seventh day after the birth. In the morning the father or his father or senior brother presents the child to his ancestors, making offerings and praying that it will grow up safely. The baby is usually lowered a number of times over the altar of the ancestor. In some cases a special medicine is prepared some of which is rubbed on the child and the rest included in an amulet which it will wear throughout

its life. In many families the women of the household call in their neighbours to hold a dance the same evening. The senior woman present prays to the collective ancestor spirits for the child's well-being and its head is touched to the ground seven times in token of its submission to them. Names are given by the father and by anyone else who cares to do so. Yams which were placed by the child's head on the bed on the day of birth are divided between the women present, the head of one of them being reserved to the woman who first washed it.

C. INFANCY TO ADOLESCENCE

Up to the age of six or seven boys and girls play together. At seven or eight the boys begin to accompany their fathers regularly to the farm and gradually learn male skills. Girls go with their mothers and elder sisters to the farm to fetch water and wood and to market; they quickly learn to carry small loads on their heads. The circumcision of boys takes place in infancy or early childhood. This is still practised by all Edos. Clitoridectomy of girls also took place at infancy, but its practice is falling into abeyance. There are no puberty rites for either sex.

D. MARRIAGE

The traditional process of marriage was as follows.

1. Imwu-omo: the 'asking for the child.' When a baby girl is born suitors may begin to approach her parents for her hand, sending

to them a log of wood and a bundle of yams. When the father of the girl, with the approval of his own father or senior brother, has chosen a suitable mate, he informs him of the date of the formal betrothal. The suitor then prepares gifts which in some villages consist of a jar of palm-wine, two trays of sliced coconut with two kola nuts on each and 2s. These are taken to the altar of the girl's patrilineal ancestors to notify them of the betrothal.

2. After this has been done, the suitor must give service (uganmwēn) to his prospective parents-in-law, giving presents of yams to the father and mother each year, helping the former on his farm, providing the mother with firewood. Today these 'services' often take the form of periodic gifts of money and cloth.
3. The anyo-imiomō: the 'wine of receiving the child.' When a date has been fixed the suitor prepares more gifts of wine, kola, and coconut as further offerings to the ancestors of the girl to notify them that the marriage is about to take place and to ask for their help in making it a fruitful and prosperous one. At this stage the groom will make the marriage-payment to the girl's father, together with gifts for the mother and for the 'people in the house.' The marriage is sealed by the payment of 2s. which is called anyo-imiomō.
4. Irhioharie: 'taking the bride to her husband.' The latter's relatives and friends gather at his house to dance and sing. Meanwhile the girl is conducted by her brothers, sister, and friends, carrying her property, to the husband's house. On

arrival the bride, feigning shyness, is placed in her husband's lap by her brother. The husband's senior wife, if he has any, of some other woman in the house brings a bowl of water in which money or cowries have been placed and washes the bride's hands. This rite symbolizes the acceptance of her into the household and the money expresses the hope that the marriage will be a fruitful one. She is then led away to be bathed and to eat a solitary meal. The husband then entertains the bride's party and makes gifts to them, some for themselves and some to take back to his parent's-in-law. The bridal party leaves and the husband continues to entertain his own people with feasting and dancing.

Two days later the husband goes to thank the parents of his bride and is entertained by them. On the seventh day after the bride's arrival her mother comes to see her, and to demand the cloth on which the pair slept on the first night. If the girl proved to be a virgin the cloth is given to the mother and she receives presents in cash and is entertained by the husband.

The same day the bride cleans the walls of the husband's ancestor shrine and prayers are said for her. It is on this day too that she enters the kitchen and cooks for the first time.

Today, Benin child betrothal is dying or has died out. The general pattern of the marriage ceremony remains, with alterations depending on one's allegiance to one of the many Christian denominations in Benin City. A woman can divorce her husband simply by repaying the marriage-payment in the Native court or by finding a lover who is willing to pay it for her.

The husband will usually make a claim for refund of the additional money that he has spent on her.

E. DEATH AND MORTUARY RITES⁴

Mortuary rites differ according to clan, locality, and the status and rank of the deceased. For the Edo the ideal is that the parents should predecease their children and senior siblings their juniors. Children of the deceased should perform the mortuary rites, with the senior son playing the leading role, and no person plays an active part in the rites for someone junior to himself. In Benin City, at the present day, most burials take place in the public cemeteries and only very prominent people may be buried, with the Oba's permission, in their houses. No person other than the Oba may be buried in the Ogbe section of the town.

When full mortuary rites are accorded they take seven days in the case of ordinary people and fourteen for the Oba and some important chiefs. They may be performed immediately after the decease or, if the senior son is too young or cannot afford the necessary expense, be delayed indefinitely. Some mortuary rites may take place twenty years after interment. The following is a description of the main stages of the mortuary rites for an ordinary adult man with sons.

1. When a death is confirmed the people in the house and other relatives and friends begin to weep and wail. The body is taken outside

⁴For a detailed analysis of Edo mortuary rites see 'Fathers, Elders, and Ghosts in Edo Religion,' in Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion (ed. by M. Banton), pp. 127-153. A.S.A. Monograph No. 3, New York: Frederick A. Praeger.

and washed, then laid on a bed inside the house. The hair and nails are cut and if the mortuary rites are not to take place immediately, are preserved by the senior son, usually in a block of 'chalk.' A goat is sacrificed and the body annointed with blood. The corpse is then adorned with bracelets of cowries and a white cloth and a feather is stuck into the hair. If the grave is in the cemetery the children of the deceased go there in procession with the corpse, singing seven special burial songs and scattering chalk, salt, and cowries on the way. A hen is killed and its blood used to wash from the feet of the mourners those impurities and ritual dangers associated with the grave.

If the full mortuary rites are to be performed immediately these rites constitute the first day. Otherwise the seven-day mortuary begins with only members of the deceased lineage performing the iwaorinmwini (the laying out of the corpse). The nails and hair which have been preserved from the dead man are tied, with chalk, salt, and cowries, in a white cloth into which a white feather is inserted. Over this bundle, which represents the corpse, a goat is slaughtered. The seven burial songs are sung and the body interred.

2. Izakhwe: the ceremonial procession around the town. The senior son slaughters a cow or goat on the threshold of the house for the erha spirits of the family on the third day. Then he and each of his brothers and brothers-in-law and, sometimes, his adult sons and daughters of their husbands, place themselves

at the head of groups of dependents and friends which march around the town in order of seniority of their leaders, to the accompaniment of burial and other songs in honour of the dead.

3. Isoton: On the fifth day there is another procession. This time the leader of each group has a box (okun) decorated with a red cloth and bradd adornments which represents the prosperity of the deceased and the respect accorded him. The leader takes with him offerings (oton) the main components of which are a goat, a calabash of oil, basket of cocoanuts, seven kolanuts, a mat, and a white cloth. On return to the house each mourner presents his oton to the assembled elders of the lineage, who inspect them to see if they are complete; if not a sum of money is offered in as a substitute.
4. Ikpowia: A dance begins on the evening of the following day which will continue until daybreak. A person, chosen by divination, is dressed up in fine clothes to represent the deceased. During the night he sits on a bench in the house while all his descendants come, and, through a spokesman assures them that the deceased will continue to look after them from erimwin (the spirit world) as he has done on earth. This done 'the father' dances with his children for the last time.
5. At dawn the people, led by the father, go in procession to a nearby area of bush where a framework of sticks, covered with a cloth, has been erected. When the structure collapses, its components are thrown away. This rite, known as the isuerhanfua

(throwing away the sticks), symbolizes the final disposal of the remains of the deceased and the casting off of ritual impurities associated with death from the mourners. The subsequent state of ritual purity is expressed in the song 'It is cool like the bush near the river' which accompanies the homeward procession. As the mourners reach the house a mortar is fired to induce the 'father's' spirit to come home and his representative traces a line with powdered chalk to the shrine where he will be worshipped.

6. A few hours later the senior son and his father's senior surviving brother perform the rite known as ukonmwēn (planting) in which carved sticks (ukhurhe) are placed upright on the alter of the deceased. A goat is sacrificed and other offerings made and the 'father' is asked to continue to come there and eat with his 'children' who come in their turn to pray for themselves, their spouses, and their dependents.

Apart from these mortuary rites which are the concern of the deceased's siblings and descendants his membership of other kinds of groups is also signified after his death. Thus a goat must be presented by the senior son to the people of the village for sacrifice for the edion spirits and to the members of any cult-group or title-association or order of which he was a member. The mortuary rites of the Oba follow the same general pattern but are much more elaborate.

CHAPTER III

THE STRUCTURE OF THE EDO COSMOLOGY

I. INTRODUCTION

As we have seen in Chapter I, writers such as Evans-Pritchard (Nuer Religion) and Lienhardt (Divinity and Experience) have analyzed the cosmologies of the Nilotic Nuer and Dinka respectively. Both peoples believe in a supreme Divinity as well as other divinities.¹ These divinities, however, are not seen as beings having a separate existence, but as refractions of the one spirit who is pervasive in the world.

The various divinities in the Edo cosmology are not simply refractions of the attributes of a universal spirit. They are categories of being having a separate existence who can be differentiated from each other.

The Edo world is bipartite. Osanobua is believed to be the founder of the divinity-order (erimwin) and the creator of the world of man and nature (agbon). All of the divinities live in erimwin and communicate with man who lives in agbon. The Edo cosmology is hierarchically structured. The status and role of the divinities is believed to have been set by Osanobua who has created all things. He has delegated varying degrees

¹ I will use the term divinity throughout this work. Many writers use other terminology such as gods, spirits, deities and super-human beings. By divinity I will mean any of the Edo entities believed to dwell in erimwin.

of power to the divinities, giving them particular spheres of influence in agbon. In the provided chart (Diagram 1), it can be seen that some divinities are attached to a particular social unit, defined by membership in a lineage or village-unit. Other divinities are free. The usage of the term free does not mean that they are not served by a cult; it is just that the cult is not coterminous with a predetermined social unit. Esu and azen are also free, but are not served by any cult.

Each of the divinities has his allotted place in the cosmology. According to Bradbury (1957: 52) there are four categories of being in the Edo cosmology.²

1. Divinities who have never been incarnated as human beings.
2. Spirits of the departed.
3. Hero-divinities associated with natural features of the environment.
4. Personal spirits and powers.

Category 1

Osanobua, Olokun, Ogun, Ogiuwu, Obiemwen, Osun and Esu. Although none of these divinities has ever been incarnated as human beings, we need a further means of differentiating them. Olokun and Ogun are two of the most important divinities in the Edo religion. Both of these beings could be differentiated from the others by virtue of their ability to possess the priest (ohen). Osanobua has never been known to possess any man.

²I would accept this classificatory scheme with reservations. Bradbury's choice of 'incarnation' may be somewhat misleading. For incarnation implies that a spiritual being becomes man. No divinity in the Edo cosmology has ever done that; the hero-divinities were once men, later becoming spirit.

THE EDO COSMOLOGY

NAME OF DIVINITY	MEANING OF NAME	ATTRIBUTES OF DIVINITY	SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATION	SPHERE OF INFLUENCE	ASSOCIATION WITH FEATURES OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT	ASSOCIATION WITH UNITS OF THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE	CULTIC FOLLOWING	RELIGIOUS FUNCTIONARY (OHEN)	DIVINITY AS THE OBJECT OF SACRIFICE AND OFFERINGS
<u>Osanobua</u>	Creator of	Omniscient, omnipotent ruler of the cosmos	In the past Osanobua was represented by <u>Oba</u> -figures and a small heap of sand with a stick in its midst tied with a strip of cloth	Upholder of social and moral order in Edo kingdom	None	None	Yes	Yes	Yes only food offerings
<u>Olokun</u>	Divinity of the sea	Favoured son of <u>Osanobua</u> . Peaceable, gentle and good	An <u>Oba</u> -figure surrounded by servants the colour white	Giver of health, wealth and children	The sea	None	Yes	Yes	Yes
<u>Ogun</u>	Divinity of metal	Furious, temperamental and capable of destructive acts	Anything metal; the colour red	Arbiter of justice. tutelary divinity for iron workers	None	None	None	None	Yes
<u>Esu</u>	Divinity who does evil	Dirty, black and ugly. Capable of destructive acts	Thorn stick or a small wooden doll; the colour black	Disrupts individual and societal harmony	None	None	None	None	Yes
Hero-divinities	Names of hero-divinities are synonymous with a feature of the natural environment	Attributes vary from divinity to divinity	Varies from divinity to divinity	Welfare of particular villages	Particular features of environment particularly rivers	Served exclusively by village units	None	Yes	Yes
<u>Ogiuwu</u>	King of death	Formerly a furious being	None	Presents the souls of Edo to <u>Osanobua</u>	None	None	None	None	None
<u>Obiemwen</u>	-	-	None	Assists <u>Olokun</u>	None	None	None	None	None
<u>Osun</u>	Divinity of Medicine	-	None (?)	Empowers Medicines	None	None	Usually limited to domestic spheres	Some Villages have recognized <u>ohenOsun</u>	Object of sacrifice during annual rite (<u>ihuan-Osun</u>)
<u>Edion</u>	Collective predecessors of a group	Similar in attributes to the living <u>edion</u>	<u>Ukhurhe</u> staffs and brass heads	Welfare of the collectivity eg. village-unit	None	Served exclusively by collectivities	None	None Living <u>odionwere</u> performs priestly function	Yes
<u>Erha</u>	Named departed father	Similar in attributes to the living <u>erha</u>	<u>Ukhurhe</u> staffs and brass heads	Welfare of the patrilineage	None	Served exclusively by patrilineage	None	None Living <u>erha</u> performs priestly function	Yes
<u>Azen</u>	Being who has the ability to detach essence (orion) from body	Anti-social, Destructive and evil	Items associated with the left	Disrupt health and harmony of Edo	Meet in the iroko tree	None	None	None <u>Obonoyada</u> have special knowledge	Yes
<u>Ehi</u>	Spiritual counterpart who lives in <u>erimwin</u>	Similar in attribute to counterpart in <u>agbon</u>	None	Welfare of earthly counterpart	None	Served exclusively by earthly counterpart	None	None	Yes

Osanobua, Olokun, Ogun and Osun are all served by ohen. Esu is not. Yet of the four divinities just mentioned, only Osun is limited to a domestic sphere. Osun has not become the centre of cults appealing to a wide audience. Osanobua and Olokun are associated with everything that promotes harmony in the Edo culture. In contrast to the nature of Osanobua and Olokun, Ogun is temperamental and destructive. Olokun is never linked with anything associated with evil or death. And Esu is never linked with anything good. Thus, though all the divinities in category 1 have in common the fact that they were never human, their natures and attributes differ considerably.

Category 2

Spirits of the departed. This classification is useful and Bradbury makes the distinction between the collective ancestors (edion) and the individual ancestors (erha). Bradbury (1957: 56) distinguishes six collectivities: the collective ancestors of a group, a ward, an extended family, past worshippers of a divinity, a palace association and the edion of all Edo.

Category 3

Hero-divinities. By heroic is meant the demonstration of supernatural characteristics during life lived in agbon (the world of man and nature). The hero-divinities were recognized by the Edo but were not acclaimed. They were incarnated (transformed is probably more accurate) because of their supernatural powers. Ovia, Okhauhe, Ake, Odiggi are a few of such transformed spirits.

Category 4

Personal spirits and powers. This category provides the most difficulty in any analysis of the Edo religious system. The concept of a spiritual counter part (Ehi) is common to a number of cultures in West Africa. V. Uchendu in his ethnography The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria (1965: 16) mentions the concept of Ehi. M. Fortes has also written at length on this subject in Oedipus and Job in West African Religion (1959: 19-24). The Edo belief in Ehi can only be understood in the light of other data on the Edo concepts of the personality. Essentially every individual is thought of as having two parts: the living person in agbon and the spiritual counterpart Ehi who is in erimwin. An³ Ehi is believed by the Edo to intercede on their behalf before Osanobua. Sacrifices⁴ are offered to an Ehi as the Edo try to influence the direction of their life.

The Edo also offer sacrifices to their head (uhumwun). The head is recognized by the Edo to be the seat of judgment. A man is spoken of as having a 'good head' or a 'bad head' according to his fate or fortune in life.

The Edo also have another unusual sacrifice. The arm (obo) is believed to be the seat of the power of accomplishing things (etin). Bradbury states that its 'worship is particularly characteristic of warriors

³The indefinite article is used to indicate that Ehi is not a unitary being like Olokun or Ogun. There are many Ehi. Thus the expression 'Ehi did' could only be used by an individual Edo referring to his own Ehi.

⁴I will include non-blood offerings in the rubic sacrifice. There are a number of different types of sacrifice: meal or drink offerings, gifts, votive, propitiatory, substitutionary and preventive (See Idowu 1962: 118-124 for a discussion of Yoruba sacrifices).

but is also practiced by other wealthy and high-ranking persons' (1957: 58). In practice the Edo seem to be sacrificing to their uhumwun, but when I questioned informants I found that there is an actual entity in erimwin who is the recipient of the sacrifice. Of all the sacrifices made to the various divinities, those offered to an uhumwun and an obo are the most ambiguous.

Bradbury does not include the witches (azen) in any of these four categories. For my purposes I have found it useful to include them in the Edo cosmology. Although human by day, the azen participate in erimwin during the night. They move from one level of existence to another without being permanently fixed in either. This is not the case with the erha (spirits of the departed father) who now reside permanently in erimwin. The azen's ability to move from one level and back again will be seen as important when we examine the Edo interaction with the azen.

Classifying by Bradbury's scheme, then, omits the azen and does not adequately differentiate the divinities included within category 1. Nor does Bradbury include Esu in any of the categories.

II. CLASSIFICATION AND DESCRIPTION OF THE EDO DIVINITIES

A. OSANOBUA: THE SUPREME KING AND CREATOR OF ALL THINGS

1. Meaning of Name

There are many names for the supreme divinity. The minimal linguistic unit used by the Edo is Osa. When this is combined with descriptive

words, the Edo are able to characterize facets of his nature. The word Osanobua is now most commonly used for the supreme divinity and conveys the idea of one who is the ultimate source of all things in erimwin and agbon.

2. Attributes of the Divinity

Osanobua is the source of all life, the one who determines the ultimate destiny of the Edo, omniscient and omnipotent. He is in no way associated with anything evil.

3. Symbolic Representation

In the past Osanobua was represented by Oba figures and by a small heap of sand with a stick in the midst of it. In present day Benin, the outside of the Holy Aruosa (shrine of Osa) has the fluted pattern of architecture used only by the Oba. Above the entrance to the shrine are the ada and eben (ceremonial swords), also symbols of royalty. In one Olokun shrine (aruOlokun) Olokun was represented as a king surrounded by numerous attendants and images of other divinities. One of the representations, carved out of wood and placed near Olokun was that of Osanobua. Now all Edo believe that Osanobua is not subservient to Olokun. The placing of Osanobua in relationship to Olokun indicates who the Edo think is most important and most approachable in the solving of their problems. A number of proverbial statements are used to rationalize this fact. That Olokun seems to have superseded Osanobua in ritual focus is explained

by citing the Edo proverb: 'Happy is he whose child has been able to improve' or 'Happy is the child who has been able to surpass his father.' The statement Omosorhae-erihen sums up the Edo belief. 'Olokun assumes the power of god.'

4. Sphere of Influence

In the mythology Osanobua is pictured as a king, living in splendour with many wives and children: among his children are other divinities and the first kings of Ife, other Yoruba towns and Benin. Osanobua's children, the divinities, execute his purposes in agbon. Osanobua seems primarily concerned with the welfare of the entire Edo kingdom. It is inaccurate to think, therefore, that Osanobua is 'deus otiosus.' The Edo believe that Osanobua manifests himself not only through the creation of life, but also through his ministers: the lesser divinities.

5. Cultic Following

Historically there was no cult attached to Osanobua. But in recent years Osanobua has been served at the Holy Aruosa Church in Benin City.

6. Religious Functionaries

In contemporary Edo culture there are two ohen who officiate at the weekly services held at the Aruosa. They have been specially chosen for this task.

7. Osanobua as the Object of Sacrifice

In the past blood sacrifices were made, but in contemporary Edo culture Osanobua receives only thank offerings in the form of various foodstuffs and monetary donations.

Osanobua is not associated with any particular feature of the natural environment, nor is he identified exclusively with any units of the social structure.

B. OLOKUN: THE POWERFUL SON OF OSANOBUA

1. Meaning of Name

Olokun is identified with the sea (okun), that is with the great waters of the earth, which are said to have their source in the Ethiopie (Olokun) River near the town of Urhonigbe.

2. Attributes of the Divinity

Olokun is the favoured son of Osanobua and is conceptualized as peaceful, gentle and good.

3. Symbolic Representation

Where Olokun is represented by mud or wooden images, he is represented as an Oba with his retinue and wives. The colour white is associated with Olokun: the ohenOlokun must wear white and pieces of white chalk (taken

from the rivers) adorn the alters of Olokun shrines.

4. Sphere of Influence

Olokun is the bringer of children. Children (omo) are highly valued in the Edo culture. This can be illustrated by citing one of the names given to a Edo child: Emokpae=Emokpogbe. Translated this means: 'It is children who raise the prestige of the family.' Without children monetary wealth means nothing in the Edo culture. Olokun is also believed to be the bringer of wealth. Bradbury suggests (1957: 53) that the association of Olokun with wealth undoubtedly owes something to the coming of the European trading ships across the sea. Olokun is also believed to be concerned with the health of the Edo, one of the main concerns reflected, for example, in a name such as Egberanmwun=Egberanmwun osere. 'Health is supreme.' Olokun's sphere of influence is to purvey blessing to the Edo: health, wealth and children.

5. Association with Features of the Natural Environment

Olokun is said to dwell in the sea, that is, in the great waters of the earth which are said to have their source in the Ethiöpe (Olokun) River. Into this river, which rises near the town of Urhonigbe in the southeast corner of the kingdom, all the rivers of the world are believed to flow; its immediate tributaries are identified as Olokun's wives (Bradbury 1957: 53).

6. Association with Units of the Social Structure

There are only two or three villages who worship Olokun corporately. The town of Urhonigbe, the main centre of the cult, and Ughoton, the old port of Benin, have an annual festival in honour of Olokun. Otherwise, Olokun is worshipped by individuals before their own domestic altars or by a cult centering around an influential priestess or priest.

7. Cultic Following

Bradbury states (1957: 53) that every woman in a house has her own small altar. In a sense every woman who has her own altar installed is a priestess of Olokun. Some, however, are recognized to have more influence with the divinity than others and become the focus of a cult, which meets regularly to honour the divinity.

8. Religious Functionaries

The head priestess (ohen) of Olokun lives at Urhonigbe. Although it is true that many women have their own domestic altars, there are some women who come to be specially recognized as priestesses having influence with the divinity. Their altars will contain some item/s obtained from the main shrine at Urhonigbe and people will come to them for the ugiOlokun as well as for assistance in their affairs.

9. Olokun as the Object of Sacrifice

Olokun is the object of sacrificial offerings of a bloodless and

blood type.

C. OGUN: THE ARBITER OF JUSTICE

1. Meaning of Name

One who controls or rules metal (the god of iron).

2. Attributes of the Divinity

Ogun is of a furious, temperamental character. He is believed to be capable of destructive acts.

3. Symbolic Representation

Ogun is symbolized by anything associated with metal. For example, the aruOgun is covered with pieces of scrap metal. In some cases an aru will be demarcated by a single iron stake driven into the ground.

4. Sphere of Influence

The name 'pioneer divinity' has been given to Ogun. The Edo believe that it is Ogun who feeds the other divinities and makes the way clear for individual Edo to live harmoniously and successfully. All Edo know the power of Ogun who vents his fury on people guilty of unjust acts.

5. Association with Units of the Social Structure

Since Ogun is identified with anything metal, he has become the tutelary spirit of anyone in any way associated with metal work. The metal guilds in the old days worked under his guidance. And the present day smiths working on Igun Street in Benin City consider Ogun to be their tutelary divinity. They have an aruOgun in their forges; the aru being demarcated by a collection of scrap pieces of metal heaped together on top of an approximately 3' by 3' mud shrine. Informants have told me that anyone working with brass, bronze or iron does not need to sacrifice to Ogun with the help of a priest which is the usual pattern for the commoner. Truck drivers are quite often devotees of Ogun since their livelihood is dependent upon metal (their trucks), all of which Ogun is said to own.

6. Cultic Following

Ogun is not merely served by special categories of people within the culture. There are many Ogun shrines throughout Benin City. Like Olokun, various people will attach themselves to a particular ohen thus forming a cult. Most Edo non-Christians will have their own domestic shrine before which they will offer prayers to Ogun. The simplest aruOgun is an iron stake driven into the ground. However, most cults will have a shrine house.

7. Religious Functionaries

Ogun is served by ohen who are believed by the Edo to be chosen

by Ogun. Once chosen they undergo some training and then begin serving Ogun by performing sacrifices and the ugiOgun every five days.

8. Ogun as an Object of Sacrifice

Ogun is the object of sacrifices, both of a bloodless and blood type.

D. ESU: THE ENEMY OF OSANOBUA AND MAN

1. Meaning of the Name

I am not clear on the etymology of Esu. Generally, we can say that Esu means one who is associated with evil.

2. Attributes of the Divinity

Esu is dirty, black and ugly. He is believed by the Edo to be a capricious divinity who, unlike Ogun, enjoys destroying and harassing man.

3. Symbolic Representation

Esu is represented by a thorn stick, or a small carved doll, and is associated with the colour black. The aruEsu is painted black and many of the sacrificial items offered to Esu are black.

4. Sphere of Influence

As the enemy of Osanobua and the Edo, Esu is opposed to the harmonious functioning of the Edo culture. The Edo try to keep him at a distance and would never think of singing his praises. Sacrifices are offered to Esu in order to appease him, or to persuade him to work evil against an enemy. All non-Christian Edo will have an altar for Esu at the front of their house. The Edo say that the aruEsu is placed outside so that Esu will come to the aru, partake of the offering and go away leaving those inside the house unharmed.

5. Esu as the Object of Sacrifice

I have already mentioned that Esu is the object of sacrifice. Unlike the other divinities, Esu is seldom thanked for anything he might happen to do.

Esu is not associated with any feature of the natural environment, nor is he associated with units of the social structure. There are no cults following Esu and there are no trained religious functionaries to serve him.

E. THE HERO-DIVINITIES: TRANSFORMED HUMANS

1. Meaning of the Name/s

The hero-divinities are mythical or semi-mythical figures of the past who are believed to have turned into natural features of the environment

(usually rivers). The name of the divinity is usually synonymous with the name given to the particular feature of the environment.

2. Attributes of the Divinity/ies

Full data is lacking here; Okhauhe,⁵ for example, has similar attributes to Olokun although Okhauhe is believed to have a more furious nature.

3. Symbolic Representation

The different divinities are represented symbolically. Using Okhauhe as an example, he is represented symbolically with rocks taken from the Okhauhe River.

4. Sphere of Influence

The hero-divinities act as guardians of the village.

5. Association with Features of the Natural Environment

All hero-divinities are associated with some feature of the natural environment. Ovia, Okhauhe, Ake are associated with rivers.

⁵I was in the process of studying the hero-divinity Okhauhe but due to the civil war I was unable to conclude my research.

6. Association with Units of the Social Structure

The most important fact about the hero-divinities is that they are served almost exclusively by a village or a group of villages situated near the hero-divinity's place of transformation. Occasionally there is some cooperation between villages in the sense that the priest or their representatives from one village will visit another village serving the same hero-divinity when a festival (ugie) is in progress.

Bradbury gives a brief description of Ovia, one of the best known hero-divinities in Edoland. Ovia is said to be the mythical wife of a king who melted into a river out of grief at being accused by her co-wives of bringing ill upon her husband. Ovia is the name of the largest river in the Benin kingdom though many villages practicing the cult have no particular connection with it. It is popularly known as 'Ovia juju.'

One of the best known ceremonies associated with Ovia is the Ovia masquerade. Once a year most of the men in the village go into seclusion in the groves around the shrine for periods up to two months. They emerge periodically completely masked except for their feet. These marked figures are known as erimwin-Ovia and are thought to represent the spirits of the past worshippers of Ovia. Each masquerader impersonates his most recently deceased patrilineal ancestor. The first dance is held before the shrine of Ovia, the second and third in front of the houses of the two Ovia priests and the rest for the village as a whole or in other villages to which they have been invited.

The male worshippers are graded along lines similar to those of the village age grades though the personnel of the corresponding secular

and ritual grades is not necessarily identical. Women are barred from the Ovia groves except on two occasions. Their duty is to keep the men well fed and to sing at night and in the morning for their safety, for they are believed to be on the threshold between agbon and erimwin and therefore in great danger. It is the women who finally kill off the erimwin-Ovia by throwing cloths over their heads, thus ensuring the return of the men to the real world.

7. Cultic Following

The service of the hero-divinities is restricted to particular villages or contiguous villages near the place of the divinity's transformation. For example, there are no cults of Ovia or Okhauhe in Benin City. If an Edo wanted to interact with Ovia he would have to travel to the aruOvia located in the village serving that divinity. Ovia-worship, like the worship of Olokun and Ogun, is not confined to the yearly ugie. Every fifth day the priests go to the shrine to make offerings. Individuals go to them with requests that they make special prayers and, in particular, women who desire children seek their aid in making offerings to Ovia with promises to provide further sacrifices if their prayers are answered.

8. Religious Functionaries

Each hero-divinity is served by an ohen.

F. THE ANCESTORS: SPIRITS OF THE DEPARTED

Spirits of the departed fall into two classes. First, there is the domestic ancestor cult. Here it is the individual genealogically defined ancestor (erha/iyē) who is the object of ritual action. Secondly, there are the collective ancestors or predecessors of a group (edion).

I. The Erha

1. Meaning of Name

Erha is Edo for father and refers to the named departed father who now dwells in erimwin; iyē is Edo for mother. Of the two the departed erha is by far the most important.

2. Attributes of the Divinity

The departed erha is conceived as standing in much the same relation to his descendants as does the head of the extended family in agbon.

3. Symbolic Representation

The altar of the erha (aruerha) is decorated with Ukhurhe staffs and wooden or brass heads which represent the departed father. If a man dies who was also a senior son, an additional ukhurhe will be added to the existing altar, otherwise the living senior son will begin his own altar.

4. Sphere of Influence

The erha acts as the guardian of the lineage which involves punishing such offenses as incest, adultery, stealing and quarrelling.

5. Association with Units of the Social Structure

The erha are associated exclusively with the patrilineage. Bradbury notes (1957: 54) that in accordance with the rule of primogeniture, and since ideally every man should have a senior son, there is a likelihood of fission of the ancestor-worshipping unit. The effective ancestor-worshipping unit includes the youngest children and the surviving brothers and sisters of the erha--approximately two to four generations in depth.

6. Religious Functionary

The senior son of the departed erha is the one who performs the function of mediating the departed erha.

7. The Erha as the Object of Sacrifice

The erha are the object of blood sacrifices and food offerings.

II. The Edion

1. Meaning of Name

The collective ancestors or predecessors of a group are known as

edion. There are different kinds of edion but in this study we are primarily concerned with those edion who are thought to be the original occupiers of the village. The departed edion are those individuals who have achieved the title of odionwere. Unlike the erha, the edion are not named.

2. Attributes of the Divinity/ies

Like the erha, the edion are believed to stand in the same relationship to the descendants as the odionwere did to the village unit.

3. Symbolic Representation

The edion are represented by ukhurhe staffs and brass heads which are placed on the altar of the departed edion.

4. Sphere of Influence

The edion act as the guardian of the physical and moral well-being of members of the village.

5. Association with Unit of the Social Structure

The edion are served exclusively by the village unit. All villages have edion shrines (ogwedion). These shrines may also serve as community meeting places.

6. Religious Functionary

The odionwere is the one who mediates the departed edion just as the erha mediates the departed father.

7. The Edion as the Object of Sacrifice

The edion are the object of periodic sacrifices of a blood and bloodless nature and a yearly thanksgiving sacrifice.

G. THE AZEN: BRIDGE BETWEEN ERIMWIN AND AGBON

1. Meaning of Name

The meaning of azen is one who has the ability to detach his/her essence (orion) from the body in order to participate in erimwin.

2. Attributes of the Divinity/ies

The azen has the attributes of a highly anti-social being who is the antithesis of the Edo modal personality.

3. Symbolic Representation

The azen are not represented symbolically. However, things of the left are associated with them (eg. the left foot of a goat). And they are

identified with things that are repugnant to the other divinities and the Edo themselves.

4. Sphere of Influence

The azen disrupt the harmonious functioning of the Edo society. They attack the Edo at the value points in their culture (wealth, health and fertility).

5. Association with Features of the Natural Environment

The azen do not reside permanently in any particular area, but every village has its group of azen who are believed to meet in a particular tree during the night.

6. Religious Functionary

The obo noyada (One who goes to the junction) is believed to have special knowledge of the azen. His aid is sought in making sacrifices to the azen to persuade them to desist in their evil doing. The obo noyada could not be considered as a professional ohen.

7. The Azen as Objects of Sacrifice

The azen are the recipients of sacrifice and offerings which are usually placed at road junctions (ada) on the outskirts of the town.

There is no cultic following of the azen; they are not identified with any particular unit of the social structure and there is no aru associated with them.

H. EHI: DESTINY IN THE EDO TRADITIONAL RELIGION

1. Meaning of Name

The idea conveyed in the word Ehi is that of spiritual counterpart. Every living Edo has an Ehi living in erimwin.

2. Attributes of the Divinity

The Ehi has similar characteristics to his counterpart in agbon.

3. Symbolic Representation

An Ehi is not symbolically represented by the Edo commoner. However, Bradbury notes (1957: 58) that on state occasions the Oba wears an image of his Ehi in the form of a doll.

4. Sphere of Influence

An Ehi stands behind his counterpart in agbon, particularly when the latter is making his request to the creator. In this case, an Ehi ensures that his counterpart does not forget anything. His essential

function, then, is to intercede on behalf of his counterpart in agbon and to ensure that he fulfills his predetermined destiny.

5. Association with Features of the Natural Environment

An Ehi is not associated with any features of the natural environment.

6. Association with Units of the Social Structure

An Ehi's concern is totally oriented to his earthly counterpart. An Ehi is the ritual focus of individuals and never cults of collectivities.

7. Religious Functionary

The individual mediates his own Ehi. There is no shrine associated with an Ehi.

8. Ehi as the Object of Sacrifice

An Ehi is the object of both sacrifices and offerings.

I. THE WORSHIP OF OBIEMWEN AND OGIUWU

The worship of two divinities--Obiemwen and Ogiuwu--has fallen into

abeyance. Formerly Obiemwen was associated with fertility. My informant said that today Obiemwen works with Olokun as an assistant. No sacrifices are made to him. Ogiuwu (King of death) was served at a special shrine in the centre of Benin City by members of the Oba's retinue known as Ukebo. Sacrifices were made to Ogiuwu mainly by the Oba to induce him to 'delay.' Though Ogiuwu no longer communicates with the Edo, he still retains a position and function in the Edo cosmology.

Ogiuwu is the recorder of all deaths and the precise circumstances relating to death, dwelling in a place very dark and terrible to look at. His function is an important one--that of the presentation of a person's orion (the soulual part of the individual) before the supreme king, Osanobua. Ogiuwu has nothing to do with the actual event of death and would never be thought of as the cause of a person's death.

The Edo Cycle of Death

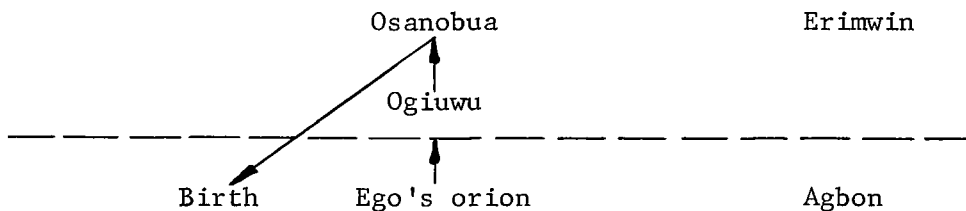


Diagram 2

When ego dies, the cause of his death will be discovered by divination. At death ego's orion will be taken by Ogiuwu who has recorded the nature of ego's death and presented to Osanobua. Osanobua will judge ego and will then send him on another mission into the world. The Edo believe in reincarnation: a person must complete fourteen cycles before he finally resides in erimwin permanently. Some Edo believe that ego's Ehi and

orion interchange at death and the birth of a child.

III. CLASSIFICATION AND DESCRIPTION OF SOME RELIGIOUS AND MAGICAL PRACTITIONERS

A. THE OHEN

We have already seen that professional priests (ohen) mediate Osanobua, Olokun, Ogun and the hero-divinities. In contrast to the erha and edion respectively, the ohen are chosen by their divinity. The priesthood may be inherited, but unlike the priestly function performed by the living erha and odionwere this is not a prerequisite. Consanguinity to a dead ohen is not enough; one must be 'chosen' by the divinity. Another differentiating factor may be that, with the exception of the ohenOsanobua, the ohen are serving divinities who possess and control them at given ritual occasions. The departed spirits never possess those individuals mediating them.

B. THE OBO NOYADA

Reference has been made to the obo noyada. He is believed to be in special relationship to the azen and, therefore, capable of influencing them. He also has a knowledge of herbs.

C. THE OBODIN

The curing doctor (obodin) must be distinguished from the ohen. An

ohen may have some knowledge of the use of herbs and medicines but this does not always follow. An obo (plural: ebo) or 'native doctor' may specialize in curing, divining and combating azen. His primary function, though, is to prepare medicines which are given to the patient to drink, rubbed on the body or inserted as talisman and carried about on the person. Some obo claim to be able to set bones. They also claim to have power to deal with leprosy, impotency, love affairs, eye sight trouble and success in trade.

D. THE DIVINER

The diviner is the axis figure in the Edo religious system. Bradbury subsumes the diviner under the rubric magic (Bradbury 1957: 59). There are 'magical' elements in divination, but I think that the diviner must be viewed as an integral part of the Edo religious system. The diviner is approached for three basic reasons:

1. To discover what divinity should be interacted with in order to achieve a particular end. The diviner will not only suggest an available divinity, but he will also tell the supplicant what items should be used in the sacrifice.
2. To discover what the cause of an unfortunate event is.
3. To discover the meaning of dream experiences.

It is the diviner who sets the Edo religious system in motion. Out of concern and anxiety to alleviate a distressful situation, the Edo will approach the diviner in order to discover which channel of communication is open to them, i.e. which divinity would be most open to hearing their

case and most capable of doing something about the problem. An unfortunate event such as the death of a child will cause the Edo to seek the diviner's interpretation. What divinity is associated with the death (probably either Ogun, Esu or the azen); what is the significance of the death and what must be done to regain the favour of the angered divinity. The meaning of dreams (is) also interpreted by the diviner. For in the Edo culture dreams are believed to be one of the means whereby divinity breaks into their consciousness. The diviner's function is to interpret the content of the dream: what divinity is symbolically represented, what he is saying and what response is demanded.

The most common type of diviner is the ogwega. He is trained to interpret patterns produced by the throwing of a necklace containing 16 shells with a concave and convex side. The possible configurations are numerous and each configuration is related to a particular problem and divinity, a solution being offered on the basis of the patterning of the divinatory apparatus. In the average village or town there will be many individuals who claim to divine, but only a few will gain a reputation as particularly skilful diviners. Others, the Edo feel, are charlatans.

The ewawa diviner works by casting a number of small figures of human beings, animals and inanimate objects on to a platter, interpreting the answer according to the pattern in which they fall (Bradbury 1957: 59). I have not observed this method, but Bradbury states that it was practiced by the ewaise who inhabited a number of wards in Benin City. They were among the Oba's official 'doctors' and were skilful in preparing medicines and in making charms. Diviners are usually skilled in the preparations of medicines.

Olokun ohen have their own system of divination (akpele) using cowrie shells. And kola-divination is practiced by the priests of Olokun and Ogun. This particular kind of divination is limited to the sacrifice performed before the shrine. The four-sided kola is used and according to its patterning, the priest will be able to tell if the divinity has heard the message and if anything has been omitted from the sacrificial gift.

Yoruba systems of divination have made some inroads into Edoland. Ifa divination, consisting of divination with palm-kernels, is associated with the worship of the divinity Orunmila. However, by far the most common type of divination in Edoland is the ogwega.

With this summary statement of the Edo cosmology in mind, I turn to the detail of Edo divinities.

CHAPTER IV

OSANOBUA: SUPREME KING AND CREATOR OF ALL THINGS

I. THE EDO REPRESENTATION OF OSANOBUA

There are a number of ways of deducing what a people believe about a particular divinity. Through an analysis of the mythology the researcher is able to dig beneath the complexities and even absurdities of myth in order to perceive what is the 'truth'¹ about a particular divinity. Fortunately there are a number of printed documents connected with the founding of the Holy Aruosa Church (See Oba of Benin 1946a; 1946b; 1946-8). These writings contain a number of Edo myths about Osanobua. I will attempt to analyze them as one means of arriving at the Edo representation of Osanobua.

Another important means of ascertaining what the Edo think about the High God is through an analysis of the names the Edo give to their children. M. Omijie writing in Nigeria Magazine's Literary Supplement (1968: 40) states:

Bini names reflect the Bini thought--especially since they express in most cases very many ideas, beliefs and maxims. Bini names are, therefore, expressed proverbially, and I choose to call them so for want of a better term: Proverb-Names.

¹Myths are man's attempt to get at the 'meaning of things'; to grasp the totality of experience. They are not trivial or absurd. Myth relates to that which is 'eternally true.' Paul Tillich (1957: 49) has written that myth 'is the combination of symbols of our ultimate concern... There is no substitute for the use of symbols and myths: they are the language of faith.'

Unlike North American names, African names have profound meaning and significance. K. Cragg, writing on 'Christian symbolism and the African mind,' has noted that 'names, in the white world, are no more than what men "are called." Not so in Africa where they are what men are' (1968: 150). For our purposes the name functions as a recorder of an individual's perception of the activity of divinity. A name will be given not only as a tribute to a particular divinity but also as an indicator that the divinity has spoken or intervened in Edo affairs. The name can be given to reflect an Edo's predicament at a particular historical time (eg. familial conflict) or certain problems related to the actual birth of the child. An analysis of Osa-names points to what the Edo believe is the nature of Osanobua as well as how the Edo interpret certain events as a manifestation of Osanobua.²

A. OSANOBUA AS HE IS PRESENTED IN THE MYTHOLOGY

1. The Story of Erhamwoisa³

There lived a powerful Divinity called Erhamoisa. His wife was called Obiemwen. They had many children namely, Olokun, Ogiuwu, Esu, Ehi.

²P. Berger (1969: 75) suggests that within experienced reality there are 'signals of transcendence' which point beyond man's "nature." In the context of this study particular events are interpreted by the Edo as 'signals' of a particular divinity's presence.

³I will try to follow the text given by the Oba in The Addresses of the Oba of Benin in connexion with the ARUOSA as closely as possible, but will paraphrase where necessary in order to have a grammatical text.

and so on. Olokun was very witty, good and kind; Oriuwu was very harsh, dreadful and irascible. Ehi⁴ was simple, good-natured and obliging: Esu was wicked and troublesome. The thunderous noise during a storm was believed to be the utterances of Ogiuwu. Ehi was Olokun's favourite and he, Olokun and Ogiuwu always moved and played with bows and arrows together. One day Olokun, Ogiuwu and Ehi began to shoot at a target (etee); excited by the number of scores he made Olokun ejaculated 'Menmwun Orirenfo N'Ovbierhamwoisa' meaning 'I have an intimate knowledge of God' or 'I am known by God as his Son.' When Ogiuwu made a score he, too, ejaculated 'Menmwun Orizeren N'Ovbierhamwoisa' meaning 'I am only known a little by Father God.' Ehi made a score but he declared himself to be 'Imarenhie N'Ovbierhamwoisa' meaning 'I am known not as a son of the Father God.' At that time Erhamwoisa sat down at Egun and He overheard them. The next day He called the three children and ordered them to go to the river to fetch water for Him. He gave to each a basket in which to bring water home. Before the children left for the river Olokun quickly made abanuri (a kind of picture) in the sand on the ground. He requested Erhamwoisa to remove the picture and keep it safe if it rained in his absence. Erhamwoisa always kept the rains in a big tank under lock and key. When there was a drought He opened the tank and it would rain. If it was too wet He locked up the rains in the tank. After the departure of the children to the river Esu went secretly to open the tank in which the rains were kept and it

⁴In this myth Ehi is conceptualized as a single divinity. This appears to contradict what most Edo believe about their Ehi. Possibly this myth refers to a period of time before the creation of the Edo. Or something has been lost in translation. At any rate, further research is needed into the Edo belief in Ehi.

rained very heavily. The picture made by Olokun in the sand on the ground was destroyed. Meanwhile the children returned from the river. Erhamwoisa then asked Olokun to produce the water he brought from the river. Instead of producing the water Olokun asked Erhamwoisa to give him the picture He asked Him to remove and keep safe if it rained. Erhamwoisa smiled and said, 'Didn't you know that the picture in the sand could not be removed?' 'Didn't you know,' reiterated Olokun, 'that a basket could not hold water?' Erhamwoisa smiled again and said, 'Olokun, really you are a know-it-all.' Erhamwoisa then asked Ogiuwu to produce the water he brought from the river. Ogiuwu produced the basket but only a few drops of water remained on the leaves which he put in the basket to prevent leakage. Erhamwoisa again smiled and said, 'Ogiuwu, really you don't know very much.'

Ehi told Erhamwoisa that he dipped the basket into the river but it did not hold water. Erhamwoisa smiled and said, 'Ehi, really you are very ignorant.' Erhamwoisa now decided to make gifts to the children; to Olokun he gave ukurhe and uwenrhiontan with a parrot tail feather on one end and said, 'Olokun, you must merely say your wishes, stamp and whip the ground with the ukurhe and uwenrhiontan and your wishes will be fulfilled instantly.' Olokun thanked Erhamwoisa and departed. The ukurhe and uwenrhiontan were the seals with which Erhamwoisa used to seal his orders and decrees. Esu was annoyed because Erhamwoisa gave the seals to Olokun. He went away angrily. Whenever Erhamwoisa called a meeting of his children Esu would not enter Erhamwoisa's house. Instead he would stay at the gate. Ever since men always put Esu at their gates. Olokun became wealthy and built a palace for himself. He was acknowledged to be greater than Erhamwoisa Himself. Of him it used to be said, 'Abiomo No

Somwan R'Erhamwoisa Nabiolokun' meaning 'It is natural to beget a child who may be greater than one, hence Father God begets Olokun.' Olokun was made the keeper of the sun. He commanded it to rise and set daily. Hence the saying 'Owen NO'riokun, Owen No Ko Kunde,' meaning 'Thou sun who proceeds to and from Olokun.' Erhamwoisa would not do anything without consulting Olokun. Both divinities were regarded as one and the same divinity and were always referred to as Osavbolokun.

The good naturedness and obliging habit of Ehi earned for him the post of a sponsor, defender, guide, mediator and advocate for all divinities and human beings at Eguasa and Egua'Olokun (Olokun's palace). Erhamwoisa, Obiemwen, Olokun and Ogiuwu were known as Ikadale enen no derinmwinyi (The four cardinal points that held or ruled the spirit world). Esu was known as okaighele erinmwini (The head of the working class⁵ spirits).

2. Osanobua as He is Represented in some Traditional Stories in

The Book of Holy Aruosa

In Book I, page 7 we learn that Osanobua received prayers and sacrifices. 'The king went to Aruosa at once with four kola nuts and made a sacrifice to Osanobua. He prayed in this manner. 'Osanobua, grant that I should have the upperhand over the rebel.' He broke the kola nuts and placed one piece on the altar.

In the story of Ogbeide (Book I, p. 8-11) we read of one Ogbeide who had exceptional knowledge of medicines. One day he went to the King's

⁵By 'working class' is meant those spirits who are inferior in prestige to the 'good' spirits.

palace and spoke to the King in this manner. 'O king, live forever!

Osanobua has asked me to give you and your people the following commandments. This is a typical example of the Edo belief that some individuals have special knowledge of Osanobua.

Included in Book I is a story of the creation of man and woman. The story seems to follow the Christian account of creation excepting that Osanobua consults his council of spirits (Obiemwen and Olokun) before creating man. Man is to be created to glorify and adore Osanobua even as the spirits. Although it is difficult to separate the Christian influences from the story there is a distinctly Edo belief in the myth. After creating the creatures, all the spirits beseech Osanobua: 'They and their children's children must revisit and re-inhabit the earth again and again fourteen times. At the end of the sojourn they must return to the abode of the spirits and stay forever in peace and happiness among the spirits. Then they shall become immortal and take their position among the spirits glorifying me forever. I shall assign a place for them in the abode of the spirits according to their good works and degree of purity, holiness, excellence and love for me and for one another while they lived on the earth. Each generation shall bring forth children, who have never visited the earth before, so that the world shall remain populated forever.' The Edo belief in reincarnation is found in this myth.

In Book II, page 5 we find a story about Ese who was very harsh, unkind and ungrateful. In this myth the following lines are found. 'In those days mortals used to visit Father God in the abode of Spirits in the Great Beyond for consultation concerning their difficulties. It happened that these two men went to the abode of Spirits in the Great

Beyond one day for consultation with Osanobua and when they got to the spot where mortals used to wait on Osanobua, behold, there were scattered here and there excrements... This nuisance was attributed to Esu. This corresponds with the Edo conceptualization of Esu today. It is also to be noted that the Edo once believed that certain individuals had the ability to go into the presence of Osanobua. Although there are none with this particular ability in contemporary Edo culture, the 'prophetic' tradition is still very strong. It is widely believed in Edoland that there are men with special 'spiritual' insight. These men will be 'chosen' by the various divinities.

3. Osanobua as He is Represented in the Okhauhe Myth

In this particular 'history' of Okhauhe, Osanobua is pictured as a great king with his aids (ukeken): Olokun, Ogiuwu and Obiemwen. Osanobua is depicted as having a harem, just as past and present Obas have many wives signifying their prestige, power and position in the political system. Okhauhe is the one who has supranormal powers and ascends into Osanobua's presence a number of times. Osanobua descends twice in this myth: once to Erie Street and once to the spot now claimed as the site of the present Aruosa.

Summary of Some Themes in the Edo Mythology

Osanobua is the creator of the divinities, who are conceived of as his children; animals and mortal man. Both man and the divinities have

received their life from Osanobua. In the Erhamwoisa-myth the present positions of Olokun, Ogiuwu and Esu in the cosmology are rationalized. Olokun has the special position as the powerful and influential son of Osanobua, i.e. he is one who knows Osanobua's ways and nature better than any other category of being. Esu's capricious and unruly nature is also rationalized. We saw, for example, that Esu did not want to associate with Osanobua and that he was associated with excrement. This is in line with our brief characterization of Esu as 'dirty, black and ugly.'

In the mythology Osanobua is in no way the withdrawn God. He was beseeched at the state altar where sacrifices and prayers were offered. At one time he appeared to the Edo king Ewaure and from time to time individuals emerged who had special abilities of prophesying or ascending into erimwin for special meetings with Osanobua. We might infer from these myths that since Osanobua descended to earth and man ascended to Osanobua in former times, that in the present era he is not as approachable or as easy to communicate with as he once was. Osanobua is also related to the Edo social order in another way. In the story of Ogbeide, we discovered that Osanobua gave a number of commands to the Edo. These commands are primarily concerned with sexual taboos but there are also regulations related to property rights, attendance at naming ceremonies and acceptable behaviour of youth toward adults. Osanobua is the upholder of the social order.

B. OSANOBUA AS HE IS REPRESENTED IN THE OSA-NAMES

1. The Omniscience of Osanobua

- (a) Osareren. Osanobua knows my feelings

- (b) Osarenghoe. Osanobua alone knows our inner minds.
- (c) Osarenvbagharu. Osanobua alone knows what we will do.

2. The Creative Power of Osanobua

- (a) Osagie. Osanobua has sent this child to me. The name Osareme also conveys the same idea.
- (b) Edosa. Literally: It is Osanobua's day. The reference to 'day' is to the special day of creation.
- (c) Osayinmwese. Osanobua has created me well.
- (d) Osayi. Osanobua creates (particularly children).
- (e) Osaguona. Osanobua is the great architect. 'Osanobua is wonderful inasmuch as he is able to create something that is able to cry.'
- (f) Osagiede. Osanobua governs or chooses the day of birth.

3. The Omnipotence of Osanobua

- (a) Osarodion. Osanobua is supreme in power.
- (b) Osakpolor. Osanobua is great; above all others in bestowing abilities.
- (c) Osaroghiagbon. Osanobua is the king above all the world.
- (d) Osaretin. Osanobua's strength surpasses all strength.
- (e) Osauyi. Osanobua commands honour.
- (f) Osayogie. Osanobua creates kings, i.e. Osanobua is above all earthly kings.

- (g) Osagioduwa. Osanobua is the foundation for all increases in wealth.
- (h) Osazuwa. Osanobua is worthy of honour and praise.
- (i) Osawaru. Osanobua must be obeyed.

4. The Intervention of Osanobua in the Edo Culture

- (a) Igbinosa. Osanobua is my refuge. He defends the defenceless and protects the life of anyone who is threatened by such as the azen.
- (b) Osazee. Osanobua has reconciled us.
- (c) Osaigbovo. Osanobua judges impartially.
- (d) Osayomobo. Osanobua has helped me gain this child.
- (e) Osamudiamwen. Osanobua stands by my side.
- (f) Osayemwere. Osanobua has remembered me.
- (g) Osarenoma. Osanobua is impartial. He alone chooses to whom and what to give.
- (h) Osazemwide. Osanobua decides the end of things. He is the final arbiter.
- (i) Osahon. Osanobua hears my prayer.
- (j) Osawemwegie. Osanobua has made me to laugh (at what he has done on my behalf).

5. The Sovereignty of Osanobua

- (a) Osabuohien. Osanobua is the final judge of things.
- (b) Nosakhare. Osanobua's decision is final.

- (c) Idahosa. I'm waiting for Osanobua's decision.
- (d) Orobosa. My plight is in Osanobua's hands.
- (e) Osazenaye. It is Osanobua who places me in a respected position.
- (f) Osayanmwo. Osanobua owns the child (acknowledgement of His ownership of all things).
- (g) Efosasere. Osanobua's wealth surpasses all wealth.
- (h) Osaghae. Osanobua is the final arbiter in our dispute.
- (i) Osakue. Osanobua has given consent so that I might have an issue.

II. THE MANIFESTATION OF OSANOBUA

The Edo interpret various events within their culture as the manifestation of Osanobua. Since Osanobua is believed to be the king of the universe and the upholder of the Edo social order, when harmony and health prevail in the nation; the Edo value system is preserved; and individuals gain help in desperate situations, Osanobua is believed to have manifested himself to the Edo. An in depth examination of Osa-names reveals something of the Edo experience of the presence and manifestation of Osanobua in their daily affairs.

A. PRESERVATION OF THE EDO VALUE SYSTEM

Excluding the Edo concern with children which I will consider in another section, basic Edo values are centred in the family. The Edo place a strong emphasis on the patrilineage. Edo families tend to be

large, and a rigorous rule of primogeniture creates conflict in the family. This conflict breeds an intense longing for unity. This stress on unity and strength is seen in the ogbe (unity) and omo (child) names which generally emphasize family honour and prestige. Other themes permeating the whole structure of Edo names are honour (uyi) and prosperity (uwa).

The name Osadolor means 'Osanobua has settled my dispute.' The parents who gave their child this name must have been quarreling which is a threat to ogbe within the family. But Osanobua gave them a child and in this giving cemented the disharmonious relationship. Although the name Osareren means 'Osanobua knows my feelings,' the name can be given in a situation in which the uyi of an individual is at stake. It appears that the pater had been accused of some particular dishonourable act, but was later absolved. And since a child was born during that period, this name was given to indicate that Osanobua is the ultimate protector of one's honour (uyi).

The name Osaghae is another name which is related to the theme of conflict in the family. My informant suggested that there might have been a serious conflict over, for example, matters of dowry, which resulted in serious quarreling. The name is given in tribute to Osanobua who is believed to have united the divided parties by giving them the coveted gift of a child. A number of the names indicate that a man and woman's failure to have children brought them considerable reproach. The name Osawemwegie, (Osanobua has made me to laugh) reveals that when all hope had been lost Osanobua granted a child and now his accusers are weeping and he is laughing. The point here is that a lack of children is the

antithesis of what the Edo believe is one very important aspect of a full and prestigious life.

B. DESPERATE CIRCUMSTANCES PARTICULARLY RELATED TO THE BIRTH PROCESS

Osanobua manifests Himself to the Edo primarily in the birth process. Without understanding the Edo idea concerning birth, it is impossible to understand how the Edo can relate the birth process to Osanobua.

The Edo believe that no birth can take place without Osanobua's consent. This is why there is a plethora of names with the theme of 'Osanobua's day; etc. At intercourse the 'blood' (esagien)⁶ comes from the man into the woman who is the 'container' for storing the 'blood' for future development. The woman is the caretaker for the 'blood' until it develops into a human being. According to the Edo, adultery is immoral because the mixing of 'blood' may result in deformed children.

Man is only the middle person: the one who conveys the 'blood of blessing' (esagienerhumwun) into the woman. Without Osanobua's consent one cannot get that pure 'blood' planted in the woman's womb. It can only come about at the full consent of Osanobua as the result of prayer. This idea is important for obvious reasons. The actual creative process, then, is Osanobua's responsibility.

It is important that an Edo woman avoid illicit sex relations.

⁶My informant translated esagien as 'blood.' This is not to say that he has identified semen with 'blood.' Implied in the notion of 'blood' is life-giving force closely related to the perpetuation of the lineage.

Menstruating women must try and behave responsibly in the house and if there has been any quarreling in the house it must subside. It is only after menstruation that the 'blood of blessing' can pass. In order to make certain the the 'good blood is coming,' the Edo must not quarrel for the evil spirits are always watching (particularly the azen). The Edo believe that it is an offense for a man not to sleep with his wife after the completion of her menstruation.

The lack of children is often attributed to adultery. The accused woman will be subject to interrogation at a family fathering. And a diviner may be consulted. Other causes for barrenness are natural causes, or the activity of evil forces. Crippled children are apparently 'caused' by the mixture of the esagien with another man's semen.

A number of the Edo names acknowledge this creative power of Osanobua: Osayamwen, Osayi and Osareme. The Edo believe that Osanobua is continually at work in agbon as the creative force.

But now I want to look at how Osanobua is believed to manifest himself in a more specific way to Edo who find themselves in a desperate plight.

The name Osayaede is given as praise to Osanobua for His gift of a child. Literally the name means 'It is Osanobua who controls the day of birth.' In the Ogiamwen household I questioned one mother who had given the name of Godwin Osayaede to one of her children. I discovered that when she was pregnant she had had considerable difficulty. At that time she had prayed in desperation to Osanobua not to let her die as she feared that her delivery would be a very difficult one. When she finally did deliver the child, she knew that Osanobua had helped in her plight.

Osanobua spoke to the woman by delivering her from her fear and difficulty. Many other names have the same theme: a person had used up all known resources and in desperation sought Osanobua.⁷

The name Osarobo means 'Osanobua is a doctor above all doctors.' One woman I interviewed named her child Olokunrobo. This woman didn't go before any of the other deities for help. She went to Olokun alone for help. Thus when her child was born she gave the name Olokunrobo to indicate that Olokun had heard her prayers; that she had relied on Olokun alone for the success of her delivery. Likewise when the name Osarobo is given it is given to indicate, not the mere fact of prayer to Osanobua for a child, but the intensity and degree of prayer before the high god.

In another case recorded in Chief Ogiamwen's compound, one woman named her child Susanna Osaretin. This name (Osanobua's strength surpasses all strength) was given to the child because by the time the mother delivered the child, nothing had happened to her. There were no sicknesses or difficulties from any of the forces that disrupt a successful delivery. This somewhat unusual event was interpreted as a manifestation of Osanobua: 'Osanobua has helped me obtain a safe delivery and has demonstrated his care for me.'

There are other names falling into this general category. Osayinmwese (Osanobua has created me well) could be given in a situation where a challenge had been made to one who seemed impotent. But now he/she has a

⁷ It may seem 'natural' to plead to Osanobua at a birth. All Edo women pray to Osanobua for children. However, they also pray to the other divinities. The point is that the lesser divinities will be approached with sacrifices and greater intensity than Osanobua. But if they fail, then Osanobua is approached as the final court of appeal.

child and is praising Osanobua who has 'created him/her well.' The birth of the child is interpreted symbolically: Divinity has manifested its presence in resolving a personal predicament. Again a particular event related to child-birth is interpreted as a message from Osanobua.

The name Osaigbovo (Osanobua does not envy) could have been given in a situation in which a man felt very unworthy to receive anything from Osanobua. But he received a child in his unworthiness. Two contiguous events--the man's inner state and the birth of the child--are interpreted as a sign that Osanobua has manifested himself and considered him even though he was not fit to receive anything. The name Osamudiamwen (Osanobua stands by me) also reveals the same belief that Osanobua is able to 'speak' to a man's forsakenness. This name is given when a person is conscious of a great deal of opposition from the human and superhuman levels. The name is given to praise Osanobua for standing by him, for if Osanobua had not stood by him, he would feel forsaken by men and the divinities. The opposition from his fellow Edo and harassment by the azen is interpreted symbolically. Osanobua had remembered: this is the message he has received. Again, one of my informant's friends had been praying for years for a child, but only recently did he receive a child. This long awaited conception was attributed to Osanobua who 'spoke' to him in his desperation. Hence he selected the name Osarenvbagharu (Osanobua alone knows our future).

In the Ogiamwen compound one woman gave her child the name Anthony Nosakhare. She was pregnant, but for some months the child would not

appear.⁸ This happened three times. She had prayed to Osanobua: 'If you give me a child I will not add any medication, i.e. I will trust solely in you.' This bargain relieved her from any blame if the child was 'spoiled.' She conceived shortly after and the name Nosakhare (Osanobua's decision is final) was given as a response to the activity and presence of Osanobua in the unexpectedness of the event.

C. HEALTH AND HARMONY IN THE EDO NATION

When there is general health and harmony in the Edo kingdom this is attributed to the goodness of Osanobua.⁹ There is obviously no way of proving or disproving this Edo assertion. Every year a thanksgiving sacrifice was given to Osanobua for the general protection of the Edo nation. It seems from historical examples that when the general welfare of the kingdom was threatened sacrifices were offered to Osanobua. In times of serious epidemics, for example, various items were offered to Osanobua. Threat of attack of an enemy could also have initiated a sacrifice at the order of the Oba.

Thus, if the condition of the kingdom improved, this event was interpreted symbolically to mean that Osanobua had heard man's ritually

⁸ The Edo believe that some evil forces can 'hold' the woman's child in the womb for periods up to three years.

⁹ In this respect it was in keeping with the Edo belief in Osanobua's interest in the welfare of the Edo nation for the Oba to cancel the yearly thanksgiving ceremony (Igwe) while Nigeria was engaged in a civil war. For one of the purposes of the Igwe is to seek Osanobua's general blessing.

communicated message and answered by intervening in their affairs.

Children are an index of social status in the Edo culture. They are the honour and glory of an Edo and the first need of any man. An Edo's importance at death is judged by how large the crowd is during the second burial ceremonies. Osanobua, the supreme king, is believed to manifest himself to the Edo in the mystery of the birth-process. As we have seen from our analysis of some Osa-names, Osanobua is responsible for the giving and taking of life. Man is only a partner in the creative process. I suggest, then, that it is primarily in this process (conception/pregnancy/safe delivery) that the Edo experience the manifestation of Osanobua. Thus every child that is born is a 'message'; a 'symbol'; a 'sign' that Osanobua is involved in Edo affairs in agbon, i.e. he is not 'deus otiosus.'

III. THE EDO RESPONSE TO OSANOBUA

As the upholder of the Edo social order, Osanobua is the divine protector of the Edo nation. He is also the creative or vital force pervasive in the universe; all births are attributed to his activity. Believed to have the most power of all the divinities, Osanobua is at least potentially able to help in crisis situations. All interaction with Osanobua tends to remain at a very general level; to maintain the welfare of the Edo nation. It seems that individual Edo pray as a matter of course to Osanobua for general blessing.¹⁰ This appeal recognizes Osanobua as the

¹⁰This is an example of a typical prayer to Osanobua.

Osanobua no miowianfan, erhavban norerimwin uyi orwue, imuetin yanruen, giemwin nagbon mavben, ghe gie su kevbin dan yo mwen khoe, gun mwento, ne vbin niroboyihia gha dinode men. Ise.

ground of all things. For without Osanobua's sanction the lesser divinities could not fulfill their particular functions. It is only when the other divinities seem to have failed that the Edo will appeal to Osanobua with a higher degree of intensity.

The Holy Aruosa as Response to Osanobua

The Edo have always had an altar (aru) to Osanobua. It was placed in a central place in the city and consisted of chalk and cowries. Everything was done in white. All that was required to represent Him were the ukhure, uwenrhiontan with a parrot tail feather on one end, a small pot containing water, chalk, ada, eben, and some pieces of white and red cloth (ododo).

It was at this aru that Osanobua was believed to have descended in times past. The ohensa made sacrifices under the instruction of the Oba at the aruosa. The Oba was the sole custodian of the aruosa appointing the ohensa and seeing about the sacrifices.

The purpose of sacrifice was for the general protection of the Edo nation. Every year via the sacrifice-media the ohensa on behalf of the Edo people, communicated the Edo thankfulness for the blessings of the past year. But the sacrifice had a dual meaning as the Edo also sought for

¹⁰. Translation of Edo prayer in footnote 10, on the previous page. Osanobua the saviour, our father who reigns in erimwin. Honour be to thy name. It is only thee in whom I put my trust. Let me prosper in all worldly things, Do not allow Esu to plant evil in my mind. Let me live long. Let all that I hope for be fruitful for me. Amen.

protection in the coming year. In times of serious epidemic the ohensa would try and communicate with Osanobua in order to avert the coming epidemic which might have been foretold by one of the Oba's court diviners. While in Benin City from September, 1966 to August, 1967, there were a number of occasions when directives came from the palace that an epidemic was coming. This led to the sacrifice of a number of items at the Ikpoba River.

The Oba Akenzua II (Akenzua 1946a: 1) states that the order of service at the aruosa was simple. The priest prayed, broke kola, and slaughtered animals, fowls and so on. He smeared the ukhurhe (staff representing the Oba's departed ancestors) with blood of the animals and then prepared a feast consisting of boiled meat, soup and pounded yam (eman). Small bits of these foods were placed on the altar and worshippers fed happily on the remainder.

The Oba states that everyone had an altar in his or her house where sacrifices were made, but the article for sacrifice depended largely on the social standing of the individual concerned. The articles required at the State Altar could be anything from kola nuts to bullocks, although Osanobua did not accept alcoholic drinks. The name Osaidayon (Osanobua does not drink) indicates that drinks were not used very often as sacrificial items. The symbols representing the Supreme divinity, Obiemwen and Olokun were usually placed near each other on the same altar in private houses but separate altars were built for each divinity and separate priests appointed to perform ceremonies for each. Few Edo have an altar (aruosa) to Osanobua in their homes any longer. For the majority of Edo, Aruosa is synonymous with the Holy Aruosa Church located on Akpavkpava Street.

In 1945 the Oba Akenzua II and the titled chiefs met to re-establish their forefather's simple way of worshipping the Supreme divinity. They claimed that Osanobua heard and spoke to the ancient Edos; that the Christian way of worshipping 'God' does not really bring any new information to the Edo. They also claimed that the ancient Edos actually worshipped 'God' before the white man came in the manner which has been stated above.

The traditional leaders of Benin claimed in 1945 that the Holy Aruosa or Edo national Church of God began in the reign of Oba Esigie in the early 1500's. It is said that the Portuguese Catholics came to Benin in the reign of the warrior Oba, Ozolua in 1481. He refused to allow them to stay. But in the reign of Esigie, the Catholics were permitted to establish a 'church,' traditionally believed to have been at the present site of the Aruosa Church on Akpavkpava Street. The churches were left in the hands of the native reverend fathers who, as tradition has it, introduced some indigenous practices into the services. Roman Catholicism was thus corrupted, eventually being replaced by a state altar at the location of the old church. On December 11, 1945 Oba Akenzua II of Benin decided to re-reestablish the Aruosa. In the small booklet entitled The Addresses of the Oba of Benin in connexion with the Aruosa, the Oba states the object of re-establishing the forefather's simple way of worshipping Osanobua. According to Akenzua II, the Edo have always worshipped Osanobua (who is identified with the Christian God) long before the coming of the white man. He states that the forefather's way of approaching Osanobua was in need of modernization. According to Akenzua II, it was not the content of their belief in Osanobua that needed changing, but the ritual approach

to Him. He said that there was now no need to sacrifice animals to the supreme Divinity, nor to represent Osanobua symbolically. Formerly Osanobua had been represented by the images of a king with attendants. My informant told me that the old ritual means of approaching Osanobua by sacrifice was childish; the Edo now having a 'larger' view of Osanobua. Osanobua was believed to be above sacrifice.

The general purposes for the re-establishment of the Holy Aruosa are threefold. First, to worship Osanobua in a simple, practical and undogmatic¹¹ way. Secondly, to make known to the world the meaning and significance of Edo national festivals; and lastly, to preserve Edo customs, traditions and tribal identity. The political and religious leaders obviously felt that the existence of their own cultural heritage was being threatened. The Oba concludes one of his addresses by emphasizing that 'he who finds no glory in the past achievements of his ancestors, may never leave anything in which his children may find glory.' The Holy Aruosa founders use the Christian churches as models for its ritual framework, but reject the Christian content. They have a church, an hierarchical priesthood, their own creed, a catechism, scriptures, hymns and a choir. But the founders have emptied the Christian 'church' of its content and substituted content taken from their own religious system. The Holy Aruosa Church is really only a modernization of the ritual approach to Osanobua. The founders were not organizing a dissident cultus, but were only modernizing the ritual approach to Osanobua: they did not ask for a radical break

¹¹By using the word 'undogmatic' I think the Oba has in mind the 'dogmatic' denominations who claim that only their way is right.

with the traditional religious system. Thus worship at the Aruosa shrine (church) falls within the Edo traditional religious system.

The church is organized with the present Oba as the proprietor and spiritual head. Needless to say, the impact of the movement derives from the Oba's position as the political and spiritual leader of the Edo, although his traditional political power has been considerably eroded. The Oba's eldest son is second in command, followed by the high priest and his assisting priest. The congregation consists of a choir with conductor, and members, including some children from one of the Holy Aruosa's five primary schools. The choir uses the traditional native beaded calabash and chant-response pattern in their hymn selections which have been drawn from the oral literature and traditional hymnology of the Edo. The congregation consists of a number of societies: aruosa nokhon, osa gbevborue, ohe nolobuse, osa ikede, each of which has its own function at different occasions particularly at the yearly Harvest Thanksgiving Service.

Consecration is necessary to become an ohen in the Edo National Church of God. This is done in the presence of four traditional chiefs as well as the High priest. On the day of ordination, the novitiate will dress in ordinary clothes. He will be seated in the congregation. Then the high priest will call him four times. He comes to the altar. The high priest directs him to kneel down; this he does in a chalked circle, facing a traditional native lamp. Four titled chiefs are then called to stand at the cardinal points around the candidate. After he is consecrated by each chief (they move their hands around the novitiate in a circular manner while praying), the high priest takes the new ohen and garbs him in his new ceremonial garments. It is said that the ancient ohen dressed

in this fashion. The priest is next given his charge: 'You are made a priest to serve the living God (Osanobua) faithfully.' The new priest then utters a few words in prayer. After this is completed the congregation leads the priest home, singing songs of praise to Osanobua. On the following Sunday, the new priest must make a feast, where the Oba and chiefs will receive their status-alloted portion. There will be a great dance, and drumming; the celebration finally closing in prayer after a meal of rice, soup and beef. The priest is now ritually set apart to officiate in the Sunday morning services.

The Holy Aruosa is an impressive, cathedral-like structure, bearing the flutid pattern of the Oba's palace. Above the main entrance are the symbols of the Oba, the eben and ada. The service is opened with the choir singing as the high priest purifies the congregation by walking down the aisle while waving his hand slowly in front of him. After the song is finished the ohen says, 'When a wicked man turns from his wicked way, he saves a soul from death.' This is the call to worship. After ringing a small bell, the choir sings a song taken from The Book of Holy Aruosa, Book II. I will give a number of examples of songs sung before the Aruosa.

1. No tree is superior to Ikhimmwin,
Osanobua is supreme,
Of all the spirits, land and water,
Osanobua is supreme.
2. Enter thy shrine, my Osanobua,
Accept our offering,
For a king dwells always in his palace.

3. Let us pray that Osanobua may bless this day,
O Osanobua, bless this day,
A day to worship Osanobua and serve the King now dawns,
O Osanobua bless this day.
4. Of all spirits, Osanobua is supreme,
Osanobua, my Father, this is my thank-offering.
5. O Osanobua, giver of life's necessities,
Forget me not, O Osanobua.
6. Osanobua, bless me with children,
For young ones grow plentifully
Always around an old plantain tree.
7. To glorify Thee, Osanobua,
A day I set apart,
Grant me long life, O Osanobua.

As the hymn ends, the priest goes to the altar, decorated with a white cloth bearing the traditional Edo symbols, and prays for the whole nation with particular reference to the Oba and chiefs. The priest then comes down from the altar and rings the bell again. The choir sings, 'Let us worship Osanobua who discriminates against none, but provides for all.' Another bell rings and the first lesson is read from The Book of Holy Aruosa. I have already made reference to the collection of stories in these two booklets. I noted that in one sermon ohen Aisien compared Jesus Christ to Ogbeide. Comparing Jesus with Ogbeide (See Mark 8:22) he quoted, 'And there was a man called Ehien who had a son called Ogbeide. When a

child, Ogbeide became very versed in the knowledge of the medicinal qualities of herbs, and roots and leaves and barks of trees on this earth. His knowledge and wisdom was profound; he went about healing sick persons and his fame spread far and wide...' It is clear that the compilers want the Edo to draw lessons from their own oral tradition.

After the second lesson, which is preceded by a song, the creed is recited by all the members of the congregation. The substance of the creed is contained in a small book, published by Olowu Press, Benin City in 1946, entitled The Catechism of Aruosa. The creed is patterned after the Apostles' Creed, but the content is Edo.

I believe in Osanobua who made Heaven and earth and all things therein. I believe in the sanctity of His Holy Coexistents (Olokun, Ogiuwu and Obiemwen). I believe in the purity of His Holy Messengers who are the guides of human beings. I believe Osanobua made mortals and immortals to serve Him, worship Him, love Him, praise Him, adore Him in heaven and on earth. I believe I was born holy and pure and that the pious priest has made me holy and pure in the holy name of Osanobua. I believe I cannot stand before the Holy Throne of Osanobua, or become a member of the Holy Assembly of Osanobua in the last day, if I do not love my fellow creatures as myself, or do unto them as I would they do unto me. I believe that all diverse ways of serving Osanobua are acceptable to Him. I believe that prophets existed and will always exist in this world through whom Osanobua has revealed and will always reveal His majesty. I believe sins are punishable in this life and the hereafter.

The creed emphasizes a number of Edo conceptions. First, Osanobua is head of the Edo pantheon, just as the Oba is the ruler of the secular kingdom. The Holy Coexistents are Obiemwen, Olokun and Ogiuwu. What we have, in fact, is an attempt to organize the Edo divinities into a kind of trinity or partnership of the gods. Also note the claim that Osanobua has revealed Himself to the Edo directly. This is in line with Part I, Section A: Osanobua as he is represented in the mythology.

An elaboration of the creed is contained in part ii of the booklet

The catechism of Aruosa. Pseudo-Christian language is used to create categories of the supernatural world. The spirits are classified into five categories: holy guardian angel, holy messengers of Osanobua, holy attendants of Osanobua, holy angels and the evil spirits. These categories are interesting in that the Aruosa founders have sought to give a Christian aura to what is fundamentally Edo and traditional. The holy guardian angel is the anglicized term for Ehi. An Ehi, as we have seen, is the individual Edo's spiritualized other. The concept is not really equivalent to the Western idea of guardian angel. The term for holy messengers of Osanobua is ukosa which literally means 'Those who execute Osanobua's purposes.' The idea conveyed is that these spirits are followers of Osanobua, being close to Him, but not equal. Thus Ogun, Okhauhe, Ovia and the other hero-divinities are considered as ukosa. The word ikuekuen has been translated as holy attendants. There is some confusion here for the word ikuekuen connotes the office of the ukosa rather than a separate class of being. Odibo is the Edo word for holy angels. The odibo are the personal servants of Osanobua. For example, in offering prayer to Osanobua one might say: 'Odib'osa laho ghetueyimwen nokho ubegusas.' This means 'Servants of Osanobua do not say any word that will bias Osanobua against us.'

Erimwin dan is the expression for the 'bad spirits.' An understanding of erimwin is basic to an understanding of Edo religion. Erimwin is the spiritual world as opposed to agbon, the externally visible world. All departed spirits go to erimwin but if one has lived a good life he will go to erimwin esi. A bad life earns one erimwin dan, the place of the wicked. Esu is believed to be the head of erimwin dan which consists of the azen and

the departed spirits of the wicked. And Ehi, ukosa and odibosa are subsumed under the general category of the Holy Assembly of Osanobua which includes the Holy Coexistents as well. If one has lived an acceptable life while on earth, he may become a member of the Holy Assembly upon his death. Thus the edion are not excluded entirely from the Aruosa catechism.

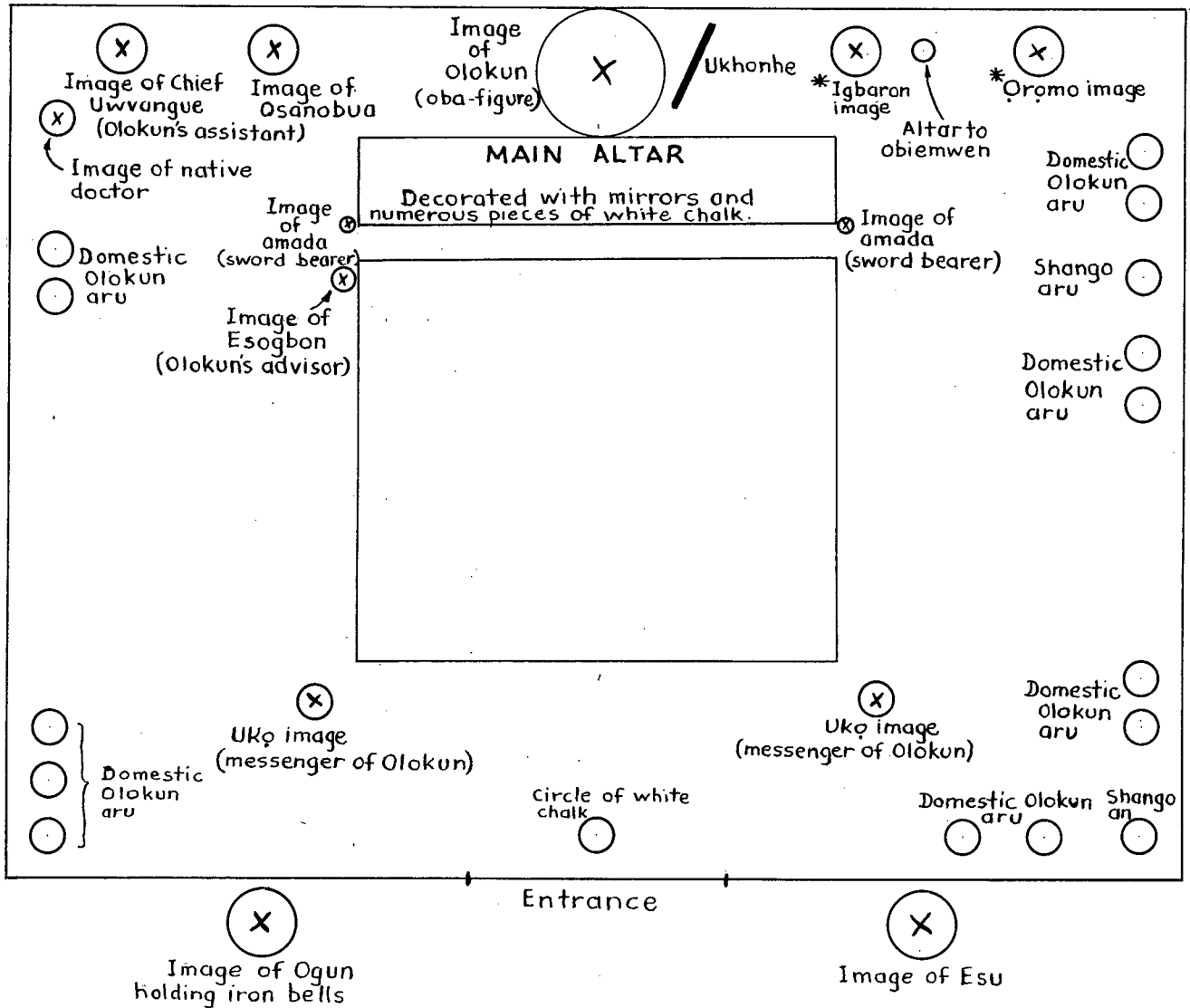
After the reading of the creed, announcements are made by the church secretary. This is followed by a brief sermon by either the ohensa, ohen or the church secretary. After he has finished preaching, the benediction is given.

The most important special days in the Holy Aruosa are the Harvest and Baptismal days. The Harvest Service corresponds to the yearly thanksgiving offering which was given to Osanobua for his protection and goodness over the past year. Various gifts are brought to the Aruosa and placed before the altar. These food-items are functional substitutes for animal offerings.

The eldest group in the Aruosa cult is called edion. There is a simple ceremony upon initiation into this group. The ohen will pray over them: 'For your love for Osanobua, love for your king and country, you are consecrated an edion, righteous elder of the Holy Church.' There are two other short ceremonies associated with baptism and a naming ceremony. On baptismal day the child will be brought to the Aruosa where the ohen will put native chalk on the candidates forehead and neck. The priest told me that is called 'whitewashing the candidate in the holy name of Osanobua.' When a new child is born the babe will be brought to the Aruosa. The ohen will take the child, take it before the altar, and pray: 'We thank thee, O Osanobua, for giving this child to them.' He then hands the child to its

mother and turns to the Aruosa. This ceremony is in no way a substitute for the Edo naming ceremony; it is kind of dedication-of-the-child ceremony.

Olokun Shrine



Note: *Igbaron and Oromo are hero-divinities. It should also be noted that this is a model of one Olokun shrine--others vary in detail.

Diagram 3

CHAPTER V

OLOKUN: THE POWERFUL SON OF OSANOBUA

Olokun is believed by the Edo to be the powerful son of Osanobua to whom has been delegated the supervision of wealth, health and fertility. Olokun can be viewed as the repository of blessing, serving as the source of such for those operating within the Edo traditional religious system.

Since Olokun is served by a priest who is believed to be in close or special relationship to him, I spent considerable time with a number of ohenOlokun discussing the nature of their divinity. One soon learns that there is a body of knowledge, a theology if you will, of Olokun. It is also possible to crosscheck the elicited information. For example, if an Edo says that Olokun is often approached by a barren woman for a child and I discover that numerous sacrifices have been made to Olokun for these purposes, then I can assume that the information elicited from the ohenOlokun is not spurious.

Another means of studying the Edo representation of Olokun is to analyze the mythology. I followed this pattern with Osanobua (See the Erhamwoisa myth). However, this by no means exhausts the possibilities of discovering 'truths' about Olokun. There are a number of songs that are sung before the aruOlokun. These songs suggest that there is a sophisticated body of knowledge about the divinity. I would even suggest that these songs be viewed as oral theology, serving as records of the nature and workings of the divinity.

I. THE EDO REPRESENTATION OF OLOKUN

A. OLOKUN AS HE IS REPRESENTED IN THE MYTHOLOGY

In the Erhamwoisa myth this theme emerges: Olokun is the favoured son of Osanobua who is believed to have superseded the Father and who can be approached in order to obtain favours from the Father.

The following myth was related to me by a leading ohenOlokun.

At first the whole world was river. Only Osanobua was alone in the world. Osanobua then decided that he wanted to make 'images' in his own likeness. So he decided to make 201 'images.' After the 'images' were made they all disappeared. After six days, Osanobua decided that he must create an inspector to guard the 'images.' Osanobua then made further images. The first 'image' he made was the devil (Esu) holding a thorn-stick in his hand. In the night he sent Esu to guard the 'images.' The first 'image' Esu detected trying to steal an 'image,' swallowed him. Fortunately Esu was able to escape through the spirit's rectum. So Esu went to Osanobua and told him that the person he detected was impossible to guard. So Osanobua himself decided to continue to guard those 'images.' Then Osanobua began to watch over those 'images.' Ile (Yoruba for earth) appeared, and tried to swallow Osanobua. Then Osánobua knocked Ile with the tail of an animal. Osanobua asked the spirit his name and the spirit said, 'Ile.' Ile confessed that the reason he stole was that he was hungry. Osanobua told Ile that from this day henceforth he would never go hungry. All living things would be given to him for food. Ile was not satisfied. Osanobua then asked Ile to be the land (Oto in Edo). Osanobua turned Ile into the land. This is the reason we are buried in the ground: Osanobua is giving Ile food. The ground is never satisfied. And after creating the land, Osanobua created Olokun. Osanobua created Olokun to be the first child to himself. Osanobua conferred power upon him. 'As I have power, so will you.' Olokun will not labour but will have food at all times. Osanobua created Ogun to help Olokun. It is only Ogun who kills; Olokun never kills.

The following themes are found in this creation-myth.

1. Olokun is the special son of Osanobua.
2. All the divinities are under Olokun's suzerainty.
3. Olokun is of a gentle nature and is never associated with anything evil or destructive (Olokun never kills).

B. OLOKUN AS HE IS REPRESENTED BY THE OHENOLOKUN

In an interview with a female ohenOlokun, Mrs. U. O., she stressed that Olokun is the god of the sea; the king of the waters. She said that just as a king has his palace, that is how Olokun is on the earth. She said that Osanobua had created Olokun and that Olokun has been given certain duties, one of them being to control all the other divinities on earth.

She said that by serving Olokun one finds life to be more successful and enjoyable. She admitted that Ogun is powerful but she stressed that Olokun supersedes and controls Ogun. She emphasized that Osanobua has given Olokun the control of wealth, good health and fertility. 'When somebody is referred to Olokun all that he/she will need will reach him.'

She associated Olokun with good, although in cases of stubbornness Olokun has the power to make that person suffer.

The leading ohenOlokun in Benin City told me that the only power Olokun has is 'to make things good and not bad.' He does not have power to destroy. This theme is predominant in the oral literature and hymnology of the Edo. Apparently, the only way Olokun destroys is to give an Edo a lot of money. The recipient will then proceed to destroy himself by misusing the newly acquired wealth. The head priest told me that Olokun is the favourite son of Osanobua; that Olokun has the power to give children directly to men.

The priest said that Olokun has many names. Among them are: Osanughegbe (Reflects like glass), and Orimwianme (One who comes from the sea). Since he is a great king, he has many titles. These titles are used in prayer in which Olokun's power and kingship are emphasized.

C. OLOKUN AS HE IS REPRESENTED IN THE OLOKUN-SONGS

In this analysis of Edo Olokun-songs, we will see that these songs contain information about the divinity. A newly initiated member of any Olokun-cult will soon know precisely who Olokun is, what he can do and has done for the Edo. I propose to analyze a number of Olokun-songs under the following general categories: praise, votive and didactic. It is difficult to categorize these songs precisely as some of them contain elements of each category. After giving each song with its translation, I will suggest the practical situation in which each song would be sung and the information revealed about the divinity.

I. Praise Songs

1. Uwu ghi gbe mwen; emiamwen ghi gbe mwen;
do, orimwian, orimwian do!

Death will not kill me, sickness will not kill me.

Hail, one who comes from the sea (Olokun)!

Confidence is being expressed in Olokun. Supplicants have faith that they can be delivered from bad spirits because of Olokun's goodness.

Information about the divinity: Olokun is able to deliver one from ill health.

2. Okun mwen m'lele, a gha lele ogie ai ghi vio oya.

I follow Olokun, for you cannot follow a king and be slighted. The situation is one of thanksgiving. The singer is telling Olokun that since he has followed him he has never been disappointed. The singer is also inviting other members to become constant worshippers of Olokun.

Information about the divinity: Here we see the high regard Edo have for Olokun. He is thought of as a king, a being of great power.

3. Ese ne Olokun ru me, ona re ese ne ghi fo vb'oto.

I will always remember what Olokun has done for me.

This song is offered in praise of Olokun for what he has done for the singer.

Information about the divinity: Olokun is the source of blessing for the Edo.

4. I ya nomo, do; I ya hehehe, I ya nomo, do!

Olokun giver of children, I salute you, I salute you!

This song is sung in praise of Olokun for performing this particular function for man.

Information about the divinity: Olokun is the source of children.

5. Gi ma d'ugi Olokun, oghogho ma ye

Let us celebrate the festival of Olokun for we are in absolute gladness of mind. We are all happy.

This song is sung during an ugiOlokun--the weekly thanksgiving ritual at the shrine of Olokun. There have been no setbacks; all has been successful.

This successfulness is attributed to the action of Olokun.

Information about the divinity: Olokun is worthy of being served because he has rained wealth, blessing and children upon the Edo.

II. Didactic Songs

1. A gha lele okhuo, a dee

If one follows the dictates of a woman, the end will always be

downfall.

The man making a prayer before Olokun must have been telling Olokun about some problem related to his familial situation. When Olokun descended upon the priest, it was revealed that this man was too dependent on women. According to my informant, the lesson here is that women should not be trusted completely.

Information about the divinity: Olokun has supernatural insight into the nature of Edo problems. He is also able to solve problems through his chosen media of communication, the priest.

2. I vbare, I vbare, I vbare, edionikaro.

I meet, I meet those who go before me.

This song is sung in remembrance of those who have departed and who were responsible for the priest's membership in the Olokun cult. Before the present priest served Olokun, others served before him. Those gone before (edionikaro) served Olokun faithfully. The most important lesson Olokun's followers learn is that the divinity's service must be upheld by those whom he chooses.

Information about the divinity: Olokun's orders must be carried out obediently so that his name will continue to be well praised.

3. U gha ru n'uwa, ghe mian mian mwen.

If I Olokun bless you, do not forget me.

This is a warning to man from Olokun. Olokun does not give things 'gratis.' Information about the divinity: Olokun responds to the Edo's cry for help, but he must be remembered by sacrifice and by obedience to the moral instruction given through Olokun's media of communication, the priest.

4. A gha h'uwa, uhunwun gua urorame' a gha mie ne ikinegbe gua onurho.

When you are seeking for fortune, you should prepare to undergo any condition, even passing through a small hold. When you have attained your object then you become so fat that the door will be too narrow for you to pass through.

This song will be sung in order to emphasize that the Edo have certain responsibilities and requirements to fulfill before Olokun will help them. And now that someone is in need, he should be obedient to the dictates of Olokun. When Olokun grants a request he must not be forgotten. Information about the divinity: Be prepared to carry out the dictates of Olokun. The Edo believe that Olokun is able to make one forget past sufferings.

III. Votive Songs

1. Ya ya ya o, ya y'uwa re o, ya ya ya o.

Olokun, please bring fortune to me.

This song will be sung when a man is before Olokun pleading with the divinity to rain fortune upon him. Fortune here includes children, wealth and protection.

Information about the divinity: Olokun is a source of blessing for man. He is interested in the welfare of the Edo.

2. Olokun aweru, ere eve ukpon I vie; emwen omo oda mwenOgbomwankan
ma I yo eguaosa.

It is Olokun who I have been told to worship. I'm worshipping Olokun not to get clothes, nor wealth, I'm badly in need of a

child. Anybody who laughs at me because I have no child was never there when Osanobua created me.

The suppliant is in serious need of a child and is earnestly beseeching Olokun.

Information about the divinity: This song reveals an interesting aspect of Olokun's interaction with the Edo. Olokun is here shown to be concerned with a problem on the human level that no one else is concerned about. Although no one else understands a person's plight, Olokun does, and is willing to help the person.

II. THE MANIFESTATION OF OLOKUN

Something of the Edo experience of Olokun is stored in their songs. These songs make it very clear that Olokun is in no way hidden from the Edo. He is a speaking and acting divinity; far more active than Osanobua, and not as remote. There are basically four ways in which Olokun is interpreted as manifesting himself to the Edo: through the dream-experience, through the possession-experience, through divination, and through particular events. A people must be culturally predisposed to interpret the random events of life as the manifestation of divinity. In order to do this, they must know what a particular divinity is capable of. As well as this, they must be prepared to interpret subjective experiences as the manifestation of divinity. With these principles as an interpretative basis, the complex interaction of personal need, subjective experience and unpredictable event become the stuff of the communication process.

A. THE DREAM-EXPERIENCE AS A MANIFESTATION OF OLOKUN

The dream-experience is a means of facilitating 'easy' communication between spirit and man. During sleep, say the Edo, Olokun can invade a man's unconscious. The recipient of the dream will experience Olokun symbolically. For it is the symbol that communicates and is axial in the interpretation of the dream's content. There appear to be two means whereby Olokun speaks to a man in the dream: in the white-symbolism to the ohen and in the garb of the ohen to a follower of Olokun. The content of the dream must be decoded by either an akpele or ogwega diviner. The common man does not have the special knowledge of dreams. He is aware that divinity is speaking but until the diviner decodes it, the message is not clear. An ohen having a dream does not always have to have the message decoded. The priest's decision to consult a diviner seems to depend upon the complexity of the dream.

Case 1

One night an ohen received 'signs' through Olokun. While asleep she saw Olokun appear along with a stranger. The stranger was speaking a foreign language. He implored her to teach him some 'medicine.' She employed an interpreter in order to determine what the man in the dream wanted. She discovered that somebody was going to visit her in the following day.

Although she was scheduled to appear at a meeting that morning at ten, she awoke and went directly to the shrine house to wait for the stranger. As soon as she entered the shrine, the children said that a

woman had come seeking help and had been waiting for some time for the priestess to appear.

Information revealed: Olokun has spoken through the dream-experience and given the priestess foreknowledge.

Case 2

Mrs. O. was formerly a trader in cloth. One time she was going to Lagos, the capital city, about 200 miles from Benin City. In the night Olokun appeared and instructed her to sacrifice a cock. She bought the cock without killing it. Later she went to the market and bought some cloth. She forgot to take her change from the cloth seller, an amount of three pounds. When she arrived home she quickly killed the cock and wrote a letter to the woman enclosing a shell from Esango (Edo for Shango, the Yoruba divinity of thunder). The enclosing of this shell communicates the message to the woman that if she fails to return the money she will be cursed in the name of Esango. The woman quickly sent the money. Mrs. O said: 'If you do what Olokun asks, things will always go well.'

Information revealed: Olokun communicates instructions to his followers. Note how various events are associated. She is told to sacrifice a cock in the dream and then experiences a misfortune in the market. After sacrificing to Olokun as she was supposed to, the woman returned the money. These contiguous events led to the acknowledgement by Mrs. O of Olokun's power.

Case 3

Mrs. O was asleep and began to feel pain in the neck. She then placed her head against the wall. In this dream Olokun commanded her to

stop carrying loads on her head. Olokun also told her to stop going to the market. At first she did not obey, but every time she arrived at the market she had very little success with her customers.

It seems that Olokun again told her that she should not carry any loads on her head. The reason given for this by the priestess was that the spirit of Olokun uses her head for his dwelling place. At the time of interview the priestess had not gone to the market for four years. She now lives on the donations received from the various people who seek her assistance.

Information revealed: The content of this dream is primarily didactic. Olokun spoke to her in the dream, the message being reinforced by the pain in her neck. At first she disobeyed the spirit, but this resulted in a lack of success in her business. This led Mrs. O to interpret her lack of success as further information from Olokun. She then changed her behaviour. She now appears to be quite successful in her new role as priestess.

Case 4

One priest told me that Olokun often wakes him up in the night. Whenever Olokun talks to him he will know by the nature of Olokun's dress plus the presence of Olokun's two sword-bearers (omada).

One night the priest dreamed of an individual who was going to be sick. The priest acted on the information given him and told that person to perform certain sacrifices. The person failed to offer the sacrifices and later became sick. The priest claimed that if the man had performed the ceremony he would not have fallen ill.

Information revealed: Olokun is communicating his concern for a particular

person and is foretelling an event. The content of the message is revealed to the priest through the dream-experience. The subsequent failure to sacrifice is linked with the foretold sickness. The priest's association of the subjective experience and external events confirms Olokun's original message.

Case 5

One night a priest dreamt of Olokun with his omada. These two kneeled before the priest telling him that he must travel to Urhonigbe, the headquarters of Olokun after making a sacrifice. This the priest did. Information revealed: Olokun not only reveals his own 'needs' to man, but gives advice to the priest.

Case 6

One cult member saw the priest in his dream. Olokun told him to go and talk to the priest. This he did. To his surprise he found that the priest was sick. He then sought out a diviner and was told to sacrifice a number of items to Olokun. The priest got well after the sacrifice was offered.

Information revealed: Olokun demonstrates his concern for his followers' health by manifesting himself in their dreams.

B. THE POSSESSION-EXPERIENCE AS A MANIFESTATION OF OLOKUN

Every five days (eken) the cults of Olokun congregate before the aruOlokun. This ceremony is called the ugiOlokun. The main focus of this

ceremony is the hoped-for descent of Olokun upon his chosen channel of communication, the priest. Accompanied by dancing, drumming and the playing of gongs and beaded calabashes, the song appears to assist Olokun to descend. The singing and dancing are preliminary to the desired possession-experience, for it is then that the people can hear their divinity speak, albeit indirectly. During the spirit's descent upon the priest, the priest will utter words which will bear upon the lives of the cult members. The Edo, as well as many other peoples, believe that the faculties of the priest have been taken over by the divinity. At the height of the possession-experience, the priest will not know what is happening or what sounds he is uttering. The priest's 'unconscious' state intensifies the cult's consciousness of the presence of divinity.

It is during the ugiOlokun that the channel of communication between Olokun and man is most open. The priest functions as the channel of communication at that particular moment when divinity descends. The ohen, therefore, is not the decoder of the message which has travelled from Olokun through the priest-channel to the people who must act upon the information revealed by the priest.

Olokun's descent is not predictable. By singing and dancing in a controlled manner the cult tries to set a ritually conducive atmosphere for the divinity's descent. But they never know when or if Olokun is going to descend. In order to be receptive to the divinity's presence, the priest must undergo a number of purification rituals. Thus the cult believes that the priest 'feels' the existence of Olokun in a mysterious and profound way. Because of the priest's special relationship to Olokun, he is chosen as the channel of the divinity's messages.

The possession-experience has another meaning outside the ugi-Olokun. The Edo believe that Olokun chooses his ohen by descending upon them. Thus this 'descent from divinity' is a prerequisite for the priesthood. An Edo could be descended upon at any time. Again the element of unpredictability reinforces the divinity's superiority over man, for man cannot manage or control these experiences. The priesthood may in some cases be hereditary, but each priest must nevertheless be specially chosen by the divinity. Unlike the ugiOlokun where possession manifests in glossolalia, when Olokun is choosing a priest other phenomena may be present as well. During the divinity's descent the candidate may utter a prediction which will later be seen to have been accurate. Possession by divinity may also result in speechlessness. One priest told me that on six occasions known to him Olokun rendered a person speechless. This was a sign to the priest that Olokun was speaking. He then prepared some leaves known as Olokun-leaves (eboOlokun) and bathed the victim. Shortly after they became well and are now serving Olokun. Another manifestation of the possession-experience is lameness. One housewife a priest knew suddenly became lame. She consulted a diviner and performed the necessary ceremony. She is now quite well and is also a priestess. A further manifestation of the divinity's descent is temporary insanity.

Olokun's 'descent' in order to choose an ohen can result, then, in glossolalia, dumbness, lameness and temporary insanity. In all of these unusual happenings instantaneity is the prevailing element in the experience. It is not just any sickness or lameness that indicates that divinity is speaking. The content (eg. lameness) of the experience does not communicate irrevocably that Olokun has chosen an ohen. Lameness may have a meaning--it is the diviner who will determine the nature and

significance of the experience.

C. DIVINATION AS A MANIFESTATION OF OLOKUN

The diviner is axial in the Edo religious system. It is the diviner's function to discover the patterns and meaning in sensory experience and random events. In the dream-experiences of the Edo, he will be sought for the interpretation of the content. Different symbols will be interpreted, as we have seen, as the manifestation of divinity. The complexity of the interpretative process must be emphasized. If (a particular divinity) is (believed to be) speaking through the dream-media, certain symbols (The presence of the sea, whiteness in any form, the presence of the ohen) will reveal to the diviner which divinity is speaking. Further details in the dream juxtaposed with the patterning of the actual divination will indicate what is the precise nature of the message. The ogwega and akpele diviners are consulted primarily by the commoner and not the priest, although in a difficult dream the priest would consult a diviner, who is working closely with him.

In the possession-experience the ohen functions as the channel and source of the divinity's presence. The diviner is not needed to decode the message because the cult read Olokun-words through the ohen. However, the diviner's ability to decode is needed when Olokun's descent manifests itself in lameness, etc.

The ohen use a minor form of divination to determine what Olokun is saying. During the sacrificial offering to Olokun, the ohen will 'play' the four-sided kola. By breaking the kola into four pieces and then

throwing it on the ground, he is able to ascertain whether or not Olokun has received the message. The patterning of the kola will indicate a simple 'yes' or 'no' response to the sacrifice.

Before going on to the next section, it should be noted that the diviner plays a key role here as well. It is the event which is a manifestation of Olokun's presence; the diviner's role is to give significance to the event.

D. THE EVENT AS A MANIFESTATION OF OLOKUN

The events which are interpreted as messages from a particular divinity correspond to the divinity's nature or capabilities. For a spiritual being can only manifest itself in such a manner as to be true to its being. At the general level, then, Olokun should be associated with events within his conceptualized spheres of influence: health, wealth and general blessing. Olokun, therefore, speaks to man in his experience of these blessings. To cite an example, if Olokun is not believed to have anything to do with evil and a person is killed by a truck, this particular event cannot be interpreted as the manifestation of Olokun. The event does not correspond to Olokun's nature. The argument may be tautological to the observer, but is comprehensible to those within the religious system.

Just as Osa-names reveal a response to Osanobua, the Olokun songs do likewise. For example, someone may have come to Olokun with a seemingly insoluble problem. Through the possession-experience the priest may have received a message from the divinity, taking the form of advice, revealing the nature of man's problem and what he should do about it. Conversely,

someone may have received a blessing from Olokun which has resulted in the composition of a song of praise or thanksgiving. Essentially these songs have risen out of the Edo interaction and communication with Olokun in experiences of life related to his sphere of power: the giving of health, wealth and children. These songs could, moreover, be thought of as man's attempt to communicate to Olokun: communication is a dynamic, two-way process. But I want to comment briefly on the song as showing how Olokun speaks to the Edo.

In the praise songs, it can be seen that Olokun is believed to have spoken to the Edo through the giving of certain blessings. For example, the song: 'I follow Olokun, for you cannot follow a king and be slighted' is indicative of the interpretation of various events in one's life as messages from divinity. Olokun is also praised in other songs for giving of children (Olokun, giver of children, I salute you, I salute you!); revealing the nature of one's problems (If one follows the dictates of a woman, the end will always be downfall); and contributing to the general welfare of one's life (I will always remember Olokun for what he has done for me).

III. THE EDO RESPONSE TO OLOKUN

A. THE INDIVIDUAL APPROACH TO OLOKUN

The Edo believe that prayer can be offered at any time to Olokun. But prayer is always more favourably received by Olokun before the aru. The Edo say that they cannot come before Olokun emptyhanded. If an individual

is praying to Olokun he will bring such non-blood items as white chalk, kola, cowries and white cloth and place them on the aru. Every aru has numerous banana shaped pieces of white chalk which have been placed on the aru while prayer was offered before the shrine. Before praying to Olokun, chalk is placed on the shrine.

The priest also prays to Olokun at non-ceremonial times. However, the priest has a special day when he/she sits in the shrine. The prayers before the shrine, if no immediate need is pressing are offered for general purposes.

1. That harmony will prevail in the family.
2. That one's wealth will increase.
3. That one's family will remain well and increase in number.

B. THE CULTIC APPROACH TO OLOKUN

The ugiOlokun has been alluded to a number of times. In this particular ceremony there are a number of ends sought by the members of Olokun. At the specific level, individual members have needs which are brought before the congregation. It is at this time that certain individuals will bring their sacrificial items to the priest. (The Edo believe that the ugiOlokun provides the proper setting for sacrifice). The ugiOlokun has a more general purpose. Each of the elements of the ceremony excluding the possession-experience--general prayer, dancing, drumming and singing combine to communicate a general message of praise and thanksgiving to Olokun.

The ceremony begins at dusk, for it is said that is when all spirits are retiring from their labour. The Edo believe that Olokun is travelling

around carrying out his functions.

Prayer and sacrifice are intimately related in the ugiOlokun. When there is to be a slaughter of some sacrificial item, the cult congregates before the shrine. Everybody puts their hands over their mouths and repeats the word Oraho seven times. This is the formal greeting to Olokun. Olokun is next called by his various titles.

- (a) Oba noso bahia (Olokun, king of all kings).
- (b) Ogie nomwen iyaghigho (Olokun, the king who has plenty of money).
- (c) Oba no rame nose noroke (Olokun, the king who lives in the sea and surpasses he who lives in the land).

After invoking Olokun, the priest and cult repeat the following prayer:

Ugbolu, atete were
Chegun mwen wu
Chegun mwen khuomwin
Gbaro ghe omo kevbe amwen ne
Gun mwen to, nevbe kpe
Kie odigho me, igbo aya rue vbodo mwan.

Translation:

Don't let me die, don't let me fall sick,
Look after my children and my wife,
Let me live long, open up the road of money for me,
For it is money one uses in doing
Whatever one desires.

The priest then takes the kola nuts and the chalk brought by the person who is offering a sacrifice to Olokun. He first touches his own head and the breast of the woman on whose behalf he is sacrificing with white chalk. If it is a male sacrificing, the priest will touch his head only. He then breaks the kola, divines and shares it with the members before slaughtering the sacrificial items.

The actual sacrifice is very simple. The sacrificial item is held

by the priest's assistant (a senior woman member of the cult) and its throat is cut by the priest. While the priest is sprinkling the blood he will be uttering a prayer: 'O Olokun, bless this woman or man who has brought this item. Bless them through their undertaking.' He places some of the blood on the head of the kneeling woman/man and on the members. Unlike the sacrifice before other aru, the blood must not touch the 'face' of the altar. One priest told me that the altar is considered sacred. The blood, therefore, is spilled only in front of the shrine. The head of the sacrificial animal is thrown to the right of the shrine and the decapitated body into the precourt. It will probably be eaten but this doesn't seem to be important to the Edo. The sacrifice is now complete. There are basically two types of sacrifice: thanksgiving and supplication. The thanksgiving sacrifice is interesting to us at this point because it is a response to what is interpreted as the intervention of divinity in the affairs of the Edo. The thanksgiving sacrifice flows out of the belief that Olokun has heard and responded to requests.¹ In the following sacrifices, the purpose of the sacrifice is that which has been given by the actors within the traditional religious system.

1. Thanksgiving Sacrifices

Case 1

Mrs. O. O. of Ekiadolor village made a sacrifice to Olokun with one

¹This is not to say, however, that the only interpretation of sacrifice is as gift, or as a part of the Edo appeal to divinity for some particular end.

she-goat, one white pigeon, one white cock, a quantity of cocoanut, cowries, chalk, ododo, kolanuts and wine. Her purpose was to thank him for fulfilling him promise to her. She had been declared a barren woman but succeeded in bearing a child. She had already made one sacrifice to Olokun to obtain her end and promised to make another if Olokun responded to her request.

Case 2

Mrs. O. I. of Eka Village made a sacrifice to Olokun with one goat, one pigeon, some white chalk, ododo and cowries. Her purpose was to thank Olokun for enabling her to conceive and deliver a male child safely, after she had tried all the other divinities.

Case 3

Mrs. I. O. of Igiuye Village made a sacrifice to Olokun ~~with~~ one white cock, one white goat, ododo, kolanuts, cowries and white chalk. Her purpose was to thank him for assisting her to conceive and deliver a male child after she had sought aid from other divinities. It is under these circumstances that an Edo could give the child the name Olokunrobo.

Case 4

Mrs. O. A. of Benin City made a sacrifice to Olokun with one guinea fowl, one white cock, ododo, kolanuts and cowries. Her purpose was to thank Olokun for the safe delivery of her child which the azen had been trying to kill in her womb. This woman had appealed to Olokun through prayer for assistance against the azen. When she delivered safely under these adverse conditions she knew that Olokun had acted on her behalf.

Case 5

Mrs. A. I. of Ukhegie Quarters, Benin City made a sacrifice to Olokun of one white pigeon and one white she-goat. Her purpose was to thank Olokun for her conception and successful delivery of a male child. All her other efforts to get pregnant had failed.

Case 6

Mrs. A. U. of Uselu Quarters, Benin City made a sacrifice to Olokun with one guinea fowl, some cocoanuts and kolanuts. Her purpose was to thank Olokun for allowing her trade to prosper. A diminishing trade had led her to seek Olokun's assistance.

Case 7

Mrs. O. E. of Siluko Quarters, Benin City made a sacrifice with one white guinea fowl, one white cock, some cocoanuts and one white she-goat to Olokun. Her purpose was to thank Olokun for giving her a child. She had prayed to Olokun for a child and when she finally conceived and delivered, there was a great merriment among the followers of Olokun because this woman, whose first name is Olokunrobo, was raised as an Olokun worshipper. Constant prayers and promises had been made before the shrine of Olokun. Now that she had delivered safely, this thanksgiving sacrifice was offered.

Case 8

Mrs. A. U. of Ugbine Village near Benin City made a sacrifice to Olokun with one white guinea fowl, 21 cowries, three lumps of chalk (orhue), one cocoanut, a piece of ododo and a piece of white drill cloth. Her purpose was to thank Olokun for helping her trade to prosper. This was not a

promised sacrifice; she came out of her own free will in response to Olokun's activity on her behalf.

Case 9

Mrs. O. U. of Oliha Quarters, Benin City made a sacrifice to Olokun with one white goat, one white cock, cocoanuts, cowries and a parrot feather. Her purpose was to thank Olokun for her daughter's conception and safe delivery of a child though she had heretofore been unable to conceive.

Case 10

Mrs. I. O. of Utoka Village made a sacrifice to Olokun with a white pigeon, white cock, white goat, kolanuts and a cocoanut. Her purpose was to thank Olokun for her daughter's safe delivery of a child. She had sought the aid of Olokun on behalf of her daughter. The child was named Olokunrobo (Olokun has played the role of saviour).

2. Votive Sacrifices

Case 1

Upon visiting an ohenOlokun to attend the ugiOlokun, I found that the ceremony had been cancelled. The reason given was that a wife of one of the cult members was undergoing a very difficult labour. Thus a sacrifice had been made to Olokun. It was assumed that bad spirits were the cause of the woman's trouble and that Olokun was quite capable of fighting against them. The ugiOlokun was cancelled because to invoke the spirit by dancing would obstruct his mission. I was told that there could be no merriment until success was achieved.

Case 2

Mrs. I.E. of Benin City made a sacrifice to Olokun with one egg, a broom, a three-sided kola and a piece of metal. This sacrifice was made on behalf of a son who was in the motor transport business. The named items were offered to Olokun to enable Mr. I.E.'s son's trade to flourish without impediment. These items are seldom offered to Olokun but the broom may symbolize the Edo desire to have evil influences 'swept away' and the metal may symbolize the lorry which is central to the son's business.

Case 3

Mrs. I.O. of Idumurvbioto Quarters, Benin City made a sacrifice to Olokun with one white pigeon, one white cock, one yard of white cloth, kola-nuts and cowries. Her purpose was to enable her daughter to have a child. She also promised that she would make a further sacrifice if Olokun granted her request. The diviner told this woman to approach Olokun with the aforementioned items to clear away the obstacles. A double sacrifice seems necessary in major cases.

Case 4

Mrs. O.E. of Ugbague Quarters, Benin City made a sacrifice to Olokun with one she-goat, one white guinea fowl, a cocoanut and some kola nuts. Her purpose was to obtain a child from Olokun.

Case 5

A woman in the Eghobámien household in Benin City made a sacrifice to Olokun with one guinea fowl. Her purpose was to enable her to travel safely to Lagos.

Case 6

A woman in the Eghobamien household in Benin City made a sacrifice to Olokun of one white she-goat. An akpele diviner came to the household for a visit. At this time he broke kola and divined with it. It was through the kola-divination that he warned the woman of impending danger to her son. The sacrifice was made to Olokun to ward off this impending danger; probably that of sickness.

There is another ceremony which takes place when an Edo receives a domestic shrine. The ukOlokun is a seven day ceremony which gives an Edo the right to have a shrine at which it is believed Olokun will presence himself.

In order to obtain a 'part' (domestic altar) of Olokun, an Edo must be 'chosen.' Olokun must manifest his desire to the chosen one by causing sickness, by disturbing his dreams (or speaking in them) and by inducing dizziness. These experiences will motivate the recipient to see a diviner who will decode these experiences. He will predict that Olokun is speaking and choosing him to have his own domestic shrine.

After leaving the diviner the initiate will consult the ohenOlokun. The priest arranges for the special ceremony to take place at the member's house. The first step in receiving a domestic shrine is the undergoing of a fourteen day purification ceremony. This precedes the actual installation of the shrine. During this two week period the initiate must abstain from sexual intercourse, manual labour and solid food. The initiate will also receive certain instructions as to the proper method of prayer before the domestic aru and the method of sacrifice.

After this two week period is over all of the Olokun cult gathers

at the initiate's house. A dance takes place before the actual ceremony. The old people present the kola and wine to the new member who will be clothed in white. The body will also be rubbed with white chalk and a parrot feather placed in the hair. The initiate then produces the sacrificial animals. Some leaves and chalk will be placed in a certain spot in the corner of the house. The ohenOlokun, before killing the sacrificial animal, invokes the spirit of Olokun to the altar: Olokun dore Olokun dore 'O come down Olokun, hear and partake of the sacrifice.' After the invocation, the sacrifice is made. This is followed by a feast of all the members of this particular Olokun cult. This ceremony is a response to the manifestation and the 'presencing' of Olokun at the domestic shrine. The sacrifice, then, releases 'part of the spirit of Olokun' for residence at the domestic aru.

The ehukpo is the yearly festival of thanksgiving to Olokun. Every Edo divinity must have a yearly festival. And Olokun is no exception. All members of Olokun must pay their yearly tribute. The ceremony follows the pattern of the ugiOlokun.

CHAPTER VI

OGUN: THE ARBITER OF JUSTICE

I. THE EDO REPRESENTATION OF OGUN

Ogun is the divinity of iron. Although Ogun is served by all Edo operating within the traditional religious system, he is served especially by iron and brass-smiths and, in the old days, was the special patron of warriors and specialist hunters. Ogun is also the focus of special cults who serve him primarily but not exclusively.

A. OGUN AS HE IS REPRESENTED IN THE MYTHOLOGY

This particular myth was related to me in an interview with an ohenOgun.

Ogun is above all divinities. Without Ogun the other divinities cannot eat. He occupies a conspicuous place among all other divinities. That is why when any other sacrifice is made that Ogun must have the first part of the offering.

Osanobua has created all spirits and one day he built a certain enclave for them to live in. At that time Ogun was the smallest child among the divinities. Osanobua tested them all by suddenly planting a very big tree in a large enclave. Osanobua said, 'Who among all the divinities will be the first to hew the tree down?' All the divinities attempted but failed. Ogun then decided to try, going with the aid of a heavy wind. Ogun used the wind because he knew what was needed to 'defeat the tree.' Later Ogun was hungry. The heavy wind said, 'Don't be in haste, I will help you.' The wind satisfied Ogun by blowing the tree down. And Ogun threw the wind into a nearby sea.

After this Osanobua was satisfied that Ogun was able to meet his demands. From that day henceforth Ogun was honoured because all of the other divinities had failed. Those divinities present at the contest were Ovia, Okhauha, Igbaron, Orhomo, Ikhokho, Eredo, Ake, Odiggi, Obiemwen, Erevbu and Imene.

The main theme emerging from this myth is that Ogun is believed to be the king of all divinities under Osanobua and Olokun. Upon asking the ohen where Esu was during the contest, he replied that it was through Esu's influence that Ogun was able to 'gain success' over that particular tree. Esu and Ogun had worked hand in hand to achieve the success.

B. OGUN AS HE IS REPRESENTED IN THE OGUN SONGS

1. Ogun onire Ogun nizide

Ogun ayagboro, Ogun orhievbare no mwanre.

Ogun who hails from Ire,

With Ogun one makes a farm,

From whence one feeds.

This song is sung to inspire the spirit of Ogun to be present at the aru. Information about the divinity: Ogun has his origin in Ire. He is the one who is primarily responsible for the food the Edo eat, for it is impossible to farm without using a cutlass. The Edo believe, therefore, that they could not survive without Ogun's assistance.

2. Ogun orodion Edionikaro,

Ogun orodion kevbe,

Olokun ya muebohia.

Ogun orodion agahadukpon

Aghabowa Ogun orodion.

Ogun is the first. Our ancestors know Ogun is the first of all divinities. Ogun supersedes Olokun. Without Ogun one cannot buy cloth, neither can one build a house.

This song is sung as a praise song to encourage Ogun to descend.

Information about the divinity: Ogun is being exalted above all divinities-- even Olokun. The Edo dependence on Ogun is again asserted. It is with money that the Edo buy the cloth that clothes them as well as the zinc for their roofing. The phrase 'our ancestors know that Ogun is the first' asserts that Ogun has been served by past generations and therefore should not be neglected now.

3. Iyaowa, Ogun oriodion itemwen avben Ogun orieme
Ogun rue se. Ete gharie aghiyobalore omoregbe
omwan. Irogbe agan nomabie Ogun rue se.

Ogun is foremost. I had no wife nor child previously. It is Ogun who has helped me to have them. O I thank you Ogun for all these gifts. One will not totally remember the pain endured when one has had a sore that is now healed. It is a child that is the crown of life. A childless person is loaded up with painful thoughts. I thank you again Ogun.

This song has arisen out of personal experience, and is sung to induce newcomers to follow Ogun.

Information about the divinity: In this song the ohen is praising Ogun for what he has done for him. Ogun has helped him in desperate circumstances. In the past he had suffered greatly; now he has forgotten the past and is enjoying life. Ogun is being praised for helping him obtain children.

4. Vbawogun ru eloghogun ikpon iyevben kevbe erhamwen.
Ogun ole ghimwen omo kevbe avben.

There is no assignment given to Ogun that he cannot

discharge without success. Nothing is impossible with Ogun.

I thank my mother and father--it is Ogun who made it possible for me to have issues.

Information about the divinity: Ogun is believed to have power to assist the Edo in various ways. But he must be trusted before he will clear the way to success. The singer of this song attributes the children he has to Ogun's power.

5. Urese Ogun. Olire Obo nisiokherhe obo me ni gha ro
ito gun. Ikedogha man ote bakua. Ighite vben avben ra
omo. Me atiere Oviarobo Ogun rue se.

I thank you Ogun who comes from Ire. It was one native doctor who is a celebrated man by the name of Obonisiokhere who predicted that until I became a priest of Ogun that my desires would not be granted. It was after becoming a priest of Ogun that I started to have issues. Before then I was living a woeful life. My name is Oviarobo.

This song reflects a particular experience of one individual.

Information about the divinity: This song reveals the close relationship that exists between the diviner and the priest. The diviner (also popularly called 'native doctor') revealed that Ogun wanted him to be a priest. This song also shows that Ogun has power and that his dictates cannot be ignored. There is an ironic note in this song, for his father worshipped Ovia and though Ovia's instrumentality his father gained him. But where is Ovia now? The priest is presently serving Ogun.

6. Kpenogun, Ogun olire. Obagha to kpere, Ewuakpe
norioba emwen omo evben avben Ogun orhi iyobone
ighoghore ighoghore.

O! beat the drums for Ogun of Ire. May the king reign
forever. King Ewuakpe¹ of Benin once has no wife or issue.

It was Ogun who made it possible for him to have them.

Beat the drum for Ogun! I am glad, I am glad.

This particular song is sung in remembrance of a particular event in history.
The priest told me that every ohen is required to tell the historical background of his divinity.

Information about the divinity: The purpose of this song is to show that since Ogun helped an Oba when he was desperate, how much more will he be likely to help the commoner solve his problems.

7. Kobo kobo nibadanuwa

No ba nobo nogbe.

I salute all native doctors and diviners. Anyone who fails to respect and obey native doctors and diviners-- may they be shortlived. Praise be to native doctors and diviners for any sick person must consult them (in order to be healed).

This is praise song: while we are praising Ogun, let us not forget the native-doctor. They play a significant role in directing needy people to Ogun.

Information about the divinity: Although nothing specific is said about Ogun, it is understood that Ogun and the native doctor and diviner work together.

¹King Ewuakpe came to the Edo throne in 1700 (Bradbury (1967: 2)).

8. Uzevbivbi nakpenogun kpema no Ogun. Ogun agbamu.

Gie gir akpemogun.

Beat the drum quickly for Ogun. Ogun the fearless divinity. Beat the drums quickly for Ogun, for Ogun needs quick action.

This song is sung to inspire the drummers to keep on drumming. Ogun's descent depends to a large extent on the beating of the drums, therefore the drummers are encouraged to continue until the divinity descends. Information about the divinity: A very important aspect of Ogun's nature is revealed in this song. Ogun is believed to be a furious, temperamental divinity. Not only does he descent quickly but he acts quickly. Therefore, everything that is done before the shrine must be done in haste. Ogun does not want any 'slowness'; only quick action is acceptable.

9. Irere nogunye. Irere nogunye I tuwaya notota.

Wado ikpeme. Iyare iyare.

I thank all who are present here including the drummers. May you all live long. In the name of Ogun of Ire, I thank all of you.

This song was created especially for my visit to the shrine.

Information about the divinity: Nothing specific is conveyed about Ogun. The priest is thankful to the drummers and dismisses the congregation in the name of Ogun.

C. OGUN AS HE IS REPRESENTED BY THE OHENOGUN

1. Ogun's Control over Metal

One ohenOgun informed me that without Ogun, the Edo 'could not pass through any road.' 'Money is needed to pave one's way in life--and Ogun is the divinity who decides this.' He also added that without money one cannot maintain a child. The ohen went on to say that Ogun continues to assist a man right to his last days. 'For it is with a shovel that man is buried.' Summing up, Ogun plays a very important part in the lives of the Edo as the guardian of metal.

2. Ogun's Power to Heal

Apart from the iron-association, Ogun has power to heal various kinds of sicknesses: lunacy, epilepsy and other diseases. One ohen informed me that many barren women had come to him and through the action of Ogun were able to conceive. One of the leading ohenOgun in Benin City ran a maternity clinic through the spirit of Ogun. Further, he claimed that many lunatics had been healed through Ogun's power, particularly if the cause of the lunacy was the evil spirits. Ogun helps in another way. With his object of creation (the cutlass), leaves are obtained to help the sick patient. Even the injections given in hospitals are made with a metal instrument. Ogun, therefore, has a part in modern treatments as well.

3. Ogun's Power to Administer Vengeance

A number of ohen said that Ogun's greatest power is his ability to

administer vengeance. In a robbery case, for example, Ogun will be sought to 'go and find out.' One case related to me by my informant illustrates this particular belief about Ogun's nature. My informant said that 22 years ago his wife left him. At that time the dowry was not paid back. In the meantime the woman married again. She bore four children but they all died. The deaths of her children led her to consult the diviner who said that her problem was attributable to Ogun. The diviner informed the woman that her trouble was related to her failure to pay back the dowry so many years ago. She was told that she had to bring a tortoise, cock and a hen to her former husband's house, make a sacrifice and return the money. My informant thanked Ogun for bringing back his property after so many years.

This particular case was given as proof that Ogun really 'works' on one's behalf. Twenty-two years ago he had consulted Ogun in order to regain his lost property. As the years went by he had given up all hope of regaining the stolen items. He hadn't seen the woman for many years. But the diviner was able to link his former wife's problem to the disruptive activity of Ogun--and this finally led her to return the dowry. Commenting on this case, my informant said that Ogun had actually shielded this woman from future evil.

According to native practice when Ogun wants to demonstrate someone's guilt, he causes the guilty party to become sick. The guilty one will then confess by walking about the market banging an iron gong (egogo) in order to reveal his/her guiltiness. I haven't seen any cases of this in Benin.

In the case of a motor accident where some people are saved and one man lost, it will be known that Ogun has claimed that person's life. At other times people will commit an offense. Ogun will be displeased and will be approached to punish the offender.

We can now make a number of general statements about the Edo representation of Ogun. Like the other divinities, Ogun has received his power directly from Osanobua. Next to Olokun in power and authority, Ogun's primary sphere of influence is to act as the arbiter of justice in the Edo kingdom. His secondary function is to serve as a pioneer divinity to remove obstacles and open up the way for material and spiritual prosperity for his worshippers. We have also seen that anything achieved through the instrumentality of metal implements or objects is attributed to Ogun.

Ogun is believed to be a furious divinity capable of destructive acts. If Ogun is not heeded, it is believed that he can be very 'wild.' He is the child of Osanobua who is bold, fearless and outspoken. Other divinities are dependent upon him. It is Ogun who makes the way smooth for the divinities in their spiritual encounters with men. An Edo proverb says: 'Any divinity who despises Ogun, grass will grow on his face.'

Ogun is believed to be omnipresent. However, he localizes himself at the various shrines in Edoland. As one informant succinctly put it: 'Ogun doesn't hear you in the open space.' And another informant said: 'A war general needs a place to gather his army.' Ogun is such a general and he receives the praise and supplications of the Edo before the various aru scattered throughout the Edo kingdom.

Numerous ohen serve Ogun. There doesn't seem to be a hierarchy of priests in the Mid-West, although some ohen earn recognition as outstanding and powerful priests. An ohen is selected by the divinity in a manner similar to Olokun. Once he is chosen by the divinity, he must undergo some instruction by trained ohen. The ohenOgun may also have a knowledge of herbs, medicinal charms of both a destructive and protective nature: to

prevent gun wounds, curse an enemy, win a lover, etc. Some of the obo (native doctors) in Edoland may be second class ohenOgun. Women are forbidden to be ohen of Ogun. The only women ohen are those serving the gentle divinity Olokun.

There are two types of aruOgun: domestic and communal. Most traditional households have a domestic aru (particularly if one of the residents of the household is a member of Ogun) where prayers are offered from time to time. These aru consist of a mud altar adorned with iron implements. In contrast to the domestic shrines are the communal shrines. The aru is enclosed in a small hut containing medicinal pots, skulls of previously sacrificed animals suspended over the altar. Rafia is strung across the outside of the shrine house to demarcate the shrine.

There are a number of moral requirements for any follower of Ogun. They must safeguard against stealing, avoid adultery, and avoid creating any disturbance to community security. If there are any differences among members, the ohen will sit in judgment over the matter. Bearing false witness against fellow members of Ogun is also forbidden.

II. THE MANIFESTATION OF OGUN

A. THE DREAM-EXPERIENCE AS A MANIFESTATION OF OGUN

The symbols which appear in the dream-experience of the Edo and reveal that Ogun is trying to break into their consciousness are two-fold: burning fire and metal objects. The appearance of these symbols will then lead the subject of the dream to consult a diviner who will interpret the meaning of the symbols and tell his client what action is demanded of him.

Case 1

C.M. dreamt that he saw a train containing many soldiers coming along the track. The train was suddenly engulfed in fire. C.M. went to the diviner seeking an interpretation of this unusual dream. The diviner said that Ogun was warning him that he should sacrifice to Ogun in order to avoid an accident.

B. THE POSSESSION-EXPERIENCE AS A MANIFESTATION OF OGUN

What follows is a description of the ugiOgun. Since the main focus of the ugiOgun, as with the ugiOlokun, is the descent of the divinity upon the ohen, I have chosen to include the description of the ugiOgun in this section on the manifestation of Ogun. It should be noted, however, that a number of elements in the ceremony seek to communicate various messages to Ogun. For example, if Ogun 'needs' a sacrifice it will be offered during the ugiOgun. Thus the ceremony itself finds actor and divinity in dynamic interrelationship.

Ogun Shrine and Ceremonial Area

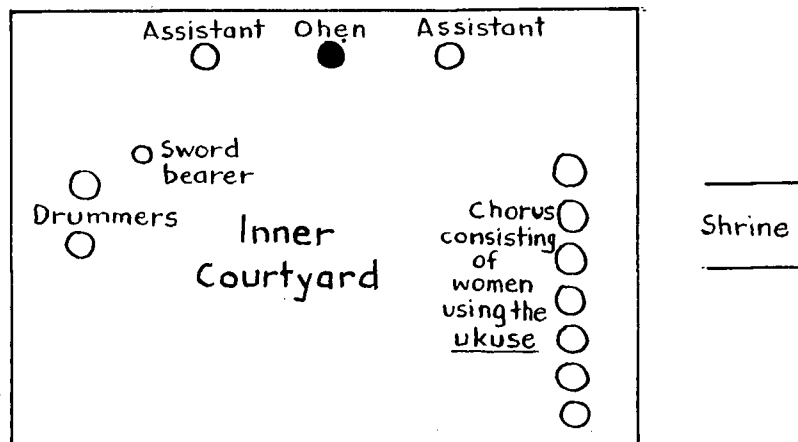


Diagram 4

The ceremony begins with the ohen seated at the front of the shrine holding the eben. Two women dance in front of the shrine, facing one another. The purpose of the preliminary dancing and drumming is to call Ogun down on the ohen. At first the priest is sitting calmly in front of the shrine, but slowly he begins to sway back and forth with the drumming continuing. He begins to bob up and down as the women continue to dance before the ohen. Gongs are handed to him while his assistants, seated beside him, hand him metal gongs (egogo) and sprinkle native chalk around the shrine. Some chalk is also rubbed on the face of the ohen.

Suddenly the dancing stops. At this point it is believed that Ogun has descended upon the ohen. The ohen now speaks to his congregation telling them that Ogun doesn't want any children to be sick nor does he want any pictures taken. He tells the congregation that Ogun paves the way for progress. Without him, the building of homes is impossible. Going on, the ohenOgun states that Ogun is the inventor of all machines. He reassures the cult that when the azen eat, Ogun feeds them (in other words, there is no need to fear them if you are serving Ogun). He concludes by saying that if any river is too deep, Ogun makes it easy to cross and that whenever there is a war, Ogun is the cause of it.

After making these statements, the ohen greets the people: Wakoyo. He says that if anyone is too poor or too rich it is through Ogun. Speaking to the elders, the ohen exhorts them to be attentive because Osanobua has empowered Ogun to be the leader of all divinities. The ohen backs up his command to the elders by noting that it is Ogun who causes death through the drivers of various cars.

Next the ohen begins to sing: Daghome, daghome. This is a war song

sung by the members of the Federal Army. All of the members join in the singing of this particular song. As he sings the ohen begins to shake his head, occasionally smiling. He then says: Iyeghede tuwa. 'I salute you wish the Ighede drum.' The ohen then raises his hand to stop the dance, stating that he has respect for all ohen: Kobonimade nuwa, nomaduaogunnugungbe. 'Ogun must be recognized by all diviners. Any diviner who does not recognize Ogun will be killed.'

The ohen rises and states: 'No other power has a wider chest than Ogun. Even the wizards and witches are under him because he feeds them all. Ogun uses his chest in beating the drums.' This particular statement praises Ogun for his boldness, the Edo idiom for boldness being 'wide chest.'

After these statements of doctrine, the ohen circles the floor as the drums continue to beat. The spirit of Ogun has now fully descended upon the ohen. Jumping up and down, he hits his chest faster and faster; he hits his head with the egogo, not appearing to feel the effect of this. Suddenly he stops with his head bobbing slightly, although the drumming and singing continues. All pause momentarily to praise Ogun. Next the ohen selects one boy from the congregation. It is believed that the spirit of Ogun has now taken control of the ohen's faculties; that it is the divinity speaking to the assembled members of Ogun.

The ohen tells the boy that he should sacrifice a cocoanut and a half-cooked yam to Esu because 'bad spirits' have been plotting to kill the boy. The ohen informs the cult that in seven days the boy would have been killed. The yam should only be half-cooked and part of it should be given to Esu. At this precise moment a woman steps out from the dancers and confirms the whole incident. She says that six days ago her husband

had consulted the diviner and was ordered to kill three goats to the 'bad spirits' in order to dismember the children. The ohen replies telling the woman that Ogun will waive all of this.

After this event, the ohen paces around the floor and informs the cult that 201 spirits came to him but only 100 were able to dance with him. He then conveys further information about Ogun to the cult. He says that a person who is underfed will not work very well. Without hard work, one cannot obtain food. According to the ohen, Europeans know the value of Ogun because they have pilots and many engineers and are thus lifted above Africans by Ogun.

The ohen shakes his gong in the direction of one of the women present at the ceremony. She steps out of the line and kneels down. The information conveyed to her is that she should not be too quick in acquiring wealth. Then the ohen again begins to knock his head with the gongs beating his chest while jumping up and down. The drumming starts again and the ohen speaks to another woman. He turns to the drummers and tells them to beat the drums continuously.

At this point in the ugiOgun, a man comes to the back of the courtyard and the priest wants to know the reason for his coming. The man says that he has come to seek redress. Before turning his full attention to this man, the ohen dances again after charging an old man up near the front of the courtyard a shilling. Money is also demanded of me. There is general dancing as the money is taken to the ohen who is now swirling round and round, hopping on one foot as well as hitting his head with the egogo.

All of the cult rise to dance with the ohen. This appeared to me

to be the most ecstatic moment in the whole ceremony. The woman holding the ukuse (beaded calabash) stood and moved in around the ohen. Word was brought to me that Ogun had accepted my gift. The ohen turned to me and informed me that I should take precaution as this is a time of year when many thieves are loose. He then told me that Ogun goes everywhere and has power to go through the ohen to forecast anything.

After this conversation with me, his full attention was turned to the man who had just entered the room. This aspect of the ceremony is important because the ohen gave the impression that Ogun had given him supernatural insight into the nature of the man's predicament. The ohen first tells the man that he has come on behalf of his son who had been affected mentally due to the evil action of his second wife. Apparently the man's second wife wanted to have her own son to be the sole inheritor of the father's property. The ohen predicted that it was his second wife who was the cause of the problem; that he had lost his bicycle and other belongings; that the stranger was here because the diviner told him to come.

The stranger confirms the ohen's statements and kneels begging the 'god of iron' to help him. The ohen informs the stranger that Ogun will help him although Ogun is annoyed with the man for leaving his case so long. He should have come to Ogun earlier. The ohen then tells the man that it is the azen who have been hindering his progress. But Ogun is going to release him since Ogun can release those tied by evil spirits. The ohen advises the man that Ogun is only interested in those who are brave. Ogun does not like laziness or disobedience and is annoyed with him for his late arrival before the shrine. But Ogun will help him.

Ogun is believed to be speaking to this man through the ohen. The second wife has been used by the azen as the channel of evil action. And in order to alleviate his situation he should make a sacrifice to Esu of one he-goat, an empty sack containing some edible things and an egg. These items were to be dumped in the river near an anthill close to the stream on the man's property. My informant told me that the ohen had never seen the man's property, but had been given this supernatural insight through Ogun.

The ohen also advises the man to go to a mango tree on his farm and pray there to Ogun. The man was assured by the ohen that Ogun would punish the woman, but he was warned that he should not take any 'bad money,' drink any palm wine, take any kola or smoke a cigarette offered to him by any persons from the door next to him. The reason given by the ohen was that the enemy wants to 'pass through a friend next door to him.' Finally a general song is sung and the ceremony was over.

Summarizing some of the elements of this ceremony, we can first say that the actors believe that the main purpose of the ceremony is to persuade Ogun to descend. This is induced by the drumming and dancing of the members who are participating actively in the ceremony. When Ogun descends, the ohen then becomes the media of communication between divinity and man. Previous to the descent, the ohen had conveyed information to the cult but it was information of a doctrinal nature and not information related to the life-situations of the members. It should be noted that the ohen spoke to a number of the cult, exhorting and warning of danger to come. The information revealed was of a prophetic nature, i.e. the ohen warned of impending danger. In one case, the woman seemed to confirm

the ohen's prediction. The case of the stranger is an interesting one because it illustrates a common Edo belief: that the ohen and diviner have the ability to 'see into the future.' There is scarcely an Edo who would deny that they have these special abilities.

Like the other divinities, Ogun is also honoured in a yearly ehukpo. The general pattern of the ehukpo is similar to the ugiOgun; the main difference being that a sacrifice is always offered at the ehukpo whereas this is not the case at the ugiOgun.

C. THE EVENT AS A MANIFESTATION OF OGUN

Although I have already touched on some of the events which are interpreted as the manifestation of Ogun, I will try to summarize them briefly. When we are considering just how Ogun manifests himself through various events, it is important to state once again that the diviner is the one who will interpret the various events as being the manifestation of Ogun. Like all divinities Ogun manifests himself to the Edo by causing various types of sickness. The most common event associated with Ogun is the accident--particularly those accidents associated with metal: motor accidents, shootings, knifings, etc. This type of accident shows that Ogun is annoyed with the Edo. Anything that is used by the Edo to do violence is related to the influence of Ogun. One informant explained the present difficulty in Nigeria in terms of Ogun's anger and unhappiness with the corruption in the country.

III. THE EDO RESPONSE TO OGUN

There are a number of factors motivating the Edo in their response

to Ogun. The Edo know what Ogun is capable of doing for them and he is used instrumentally to achieve particular ends. However, this is not a one-sided relationship because the Edo know that Ogun acts furiously and that if he is not satisfied by sacrifice and proper behaviour, his fury may be directed upon them.

Individual Edo come before Ogun to have him destroy or create confusion in their detractors or to cause a 'bad situation' for their enemy who has stolen some of their property. In situations such as these, the actor is conscious of loss and states explicitly what he wants Ogun to achieve. I was told by one informant that one must not lie to any divinity or one's desire for revenge will backfire. The Edo believe that Ogun, due to his impartiality, makes a thorough investigation before seeking revenge.

Another factor motivating the Edo to approach Ogun is their desire to know the reason for their distressful condition. For example, a woman who has been having considerable problems with her conception might seek Ogun's protection or assistance, particularly if the woman's problem has been divined as the result of the activity of Esu or the azen. Other distressful situations might be a declining trade or troubled dreams.

Collectively, the Edo come before Ogun to praise him for activity on their behalf. The ugiOgun provides them with the opportunity to express their thankfulness in a formal, ritualized manner.

In conclusion, then, whether or not the individual Edo knows exactly what the source of his problem is matters little. Ogun is the arbiter of justice who is communicated with in order to clear away obstacles which are believed to be blocking a full, satisfactory life.

A. SACRIFICE AS RESPONSE TO OGUN

The essential means of communication with Ogun is through sacrifice. Other elements such as dancing and prayer will be commented on later. Like the other divinities, Ogun prefers certain animals. In Ogun's case, it is the dog. One ohenOgun informed me that if one wants to get a message through to Ogun quickly, the best means of doing it is to offer Ogun a dog. There are other items used in sacrifice to Ogun: tortoise, cock, snail, obobo, oil and iron implements.

Sacrifice to Ogun follows a very strict pattern. The ohen enters the aru and sprinkles chalk on the inside of the shrine and rings the gongs to gain the attention of the divinity. He then prays:

Ogun onire, tuore nudorievbye, Ido rue bavbengbemwen

Kevbe omo odigho vbe odo mo me

Simwin emwanhia no dogun mwen dugie rue

Ogun who hails from Ire, descend to take the offering I'm making to you. I come to offer this sacrifice to you on behalf of myself and children. Open the gate of money and children for me. Safeguard the life of the people gathered to help me during this celebration.

This prayer varies according to the suppliant's need. It should also be noted that the ohen will sacrifice on behalf of the suppliant, the nature of the sacrificial items varying according to the diviner's recommendations.

After this prayer, the ohen sprinkles some more chalk around the shrine. Four kolanuts are placed on a plate, and then taken and held over

the shrine. Some feathers are taken from the cock and placed at the foot of the shrine. The feet of the cock are untied, the kola nuts taken and broken into four pieces before being displayed. The ohen divines with the kola saying: 'The kola must speak for what he asks to be done.' The kola is displayed seven times on the floor of the shrine. Another prayer is offered:

Ogun zevbe rue re.

Ogun, take your kola and accept what offering I'm making to you.

If the Kola says 'no,' there must be something added. This could mean finding another item to offer to Ogun besides the present one.

The core of the kola is placed on the altar which is said by the priest to be for Osanobua. Then the broken Kola is passed to each of the ohen's assistants who partake of it. Another prayer is made and the remaining bits of kola are thrown on the shrine by the assistants of the ohen.

At this point a horn is blown invoking the divinity. The cock is taken in hand by the ohen. First he throws some of the cock's feathers around the shrine, then he kills the cock without a cutlass, breaking the neck with his hand. Blood is sprinkled on the aru. It is imperative that the cock be killed quickly as Ogun demands quick action. I was told that part of the ohen's training is learning how to wring the cock's neck quickly.

The sprinkling of the blood is the focus of the sacrifice. After this is completed, the ceremony is almost finished. More chalk is sprinkled around the shrine and kola nuts are distributed to those who have

gathered outside the shrine. A libation of gin is spilled on the altar and a prayer repeated (a repetition of the first prayer offered to Ogun). When asked why he poured gin on the shrine, the ohen told me that it is Ogun's drink. The ceremony is brought to a close with a libation to Esu who is commonly believed to work hand in hand with Ogun.

Case Studies in Sacrifices made to Ogun

For analytical purposes I have divided the sacrifices into three categories: votive, thanksgiving and propitiation.

1. Votive Sacrifices

Case 1

Mr. I. O. of Evboriarie Village made a sacrifice to Ogun with one tortoise, and one cock. His purpose was to persuade Ogun to obstruct² the witch who had been disturbing his sleep every night. Ogun can do this for, generally he is a remover of obstacles.

Case 2

Mr. I. O. of Ugbogui Village made a sacrifice to Ogun with one cock, some cowries, roasted yam, oil and one tortoise. His purpose was to persuade Ogun to obstruct the witch who was disturbing his sleep.

²One of the ways Ogun obstructs the activity of a witch is through violent murder.

Case 3

Mr. E. I. of Iguosala Village made a sacrifice to Ogun with one dog, one tortoise, some kola nuts and cowries. His purpose was to persuade Ogun to obstruct the witch who had caused the abnormal development of his wife's foetus.

Case 4

Mr. I. O. of Ugbogui made a sacrifice to Ogun with cowries, oil, roasted yam, tortoise and a cock. His purpose was to persuade Ogun to obstruct the witch who frequently caused his wife to undergo irregular menstruation. Mr. I. O. first approached the diviner who related the woman's problem to witchcraft activity. The diviner then told Mr. I. O. to approach Ogun to clear away this particular trouble.

Case 5

Mr. I. O. of Ogbesasa Street in Benin City made a sacrifice to Ogun with one cock and one tortoise. His purpose was to obstruct the witch who had caused his transport trade to decrease. He promised to give Ogun one ram and a dog if his desire was granted. The obstacle Mr. I. O. faced here was the loss in his transport business. He approached a diviner who told him that he was a victim of witchcraft activity. He divined that Ogun should be approached for assistance. He was to make a first offering to be followed by a further sacrifice if his wish was granted. My informant told me that the witch confessed and died a very painful death on a bush path. I don't know if the business recovered.

Case 6

Mr. O. U. of Benin City made a sacrifice to Ogun with one dog and

one tortoise. His purpose was to persuade Ogun to kill the man who had committed adultery with his wife, but had refused to perform the traditional ceremony of appeasing his departed father's spirit with one goat and some kolanuts. Mr. O. U. had approached the guilty party requesting that he perform the ceremony. The adulterer refused and this led O. U. to seek the aid of Ogun for retributive purposes.

Case 7

Mr. O. E. of Benin City made a sacrifice to Ogun with one black chicken, one roasted yam and oil. His purpose was to kill the thief who stole his goat which he had tied in his compound intending to offer it to his erha during the Eho festival. He approached Ogun without consulting a diviner as he was a member of the Ogun cult.

2. Thanksgiving Sacrifices

Case 8

Mr. I. E. of Ova Village near Benin made a sacrifice to Ogun with one ram, one cock, a tortoise, a dog, obobo, some cowries and roasted yam mixed with oil. His purpose was to thank Ogun for detecting and killing the azen who had been divined as responsible for the frequent miscarriages of his wife. The witch confessed before her death that Ogun was going to kill her since she was responsible for preventing the man's wife from conceiving.

Case 9

Mr. E. E. of Evbokuden Village made a sacrifice to Ogun of one cock, some cowries, one tortoise, oil, kolanuts and one dog. His purpose was to

thank Ogun for enabling his son to win a case of theft which had landed him in the magistratè's court. The father made the sacrifice on the son's behalf as the fulfillment of a promise. In court cases, the first appeal to Ogun is through prayer. If the wish is granted, then a thanksgiving sacrifice is made to Ogun.

Case 10

Mr. O. U. of Ubine Village sacrificed to Ogun with one dog, one tortoise, some cowries, chalk and a piece of red cloth. His purpose was to thank Ogun for helping him recover from the clutches of a witch who had been undermining his progress in his trade. The witch confessed at her death that Ogun was going to kill her for her wickedness. Mr. O. U.'s obstacle to successful living was his declining trade.

Case 11

Mr. O. I. of Utekon Village sacrificed to Ogun with a dog, tortoise and some kolanuts. His purpose was to thank Ogun during the yearly sacrifice to Ogun.

3. Propitiation Sacrifices

Case 12

Mr. O. U. of Benin made a sacrifice to Ogun with one dog, one roasted yam, oil and some cowries. His purpose was to ward off any danger on his way to Lagos as he was a trader who had great distances to travel. His problem was that he had been involved in several motor accidents. This led him to consult the diviner who said that he should appease Ogun.

Case 13

Mrs. O. E. made a sacrifice to Ogun with one cock. Her purpose was to save her sons from any motor accident. Previous to the sacrifice some members of the family had been injured. Desiring to know the cause of the accidents, she discovered through the diviner that Ogun needed something from her. Other sacrifices were also made to Orunmila and Esu.

B. ELEMENTS IN THE UGI OGUN VIEWED AS RESPONSE TO OGUN

I have mentioned that there are other elements that could be viewed as a response to Ogun's manifestation and presence. Prayer is offered to Ogun regularly by his followers. If an Edo is a member of the Ogun cult, then he will pray every morning before his domestic shrine, asking for general protection throughout the day, and blessing upon his family. When an Edo is conscious within himself of a special need, he will come before Ogun to help him overcome his problem. In case 9, for example, we saw how Mr. E. E. first prayed for a particular end and after it was granted, offered a thanksgiving sacrifice. However, the sacrifice to Ogun is usually motivated by a trip to the diviner who indicates what Ogun is in need of in order to get him to act on one's behalf. And it is common for the supplicant to offer one sacrifice with the promise of another to follow if the request is granted. We have also seen that prayer is an integral part of the actual sacrificial process. The ohen offering the prayer does not adopt what Western man believes is a prayerful posture, but utters words to Ogun in the course of his ritual duties. With singing the Edo honour Ogun; with the dance and drumming they communicate their desire to

invite him into their midst. Finally, by carrying out the dictates of the ohen, believed by Ogun's followers to be the mouthpiece of Ogun, the Edo responds to Ogun by obeying moral rules, conceived of as originating in the purposes of the divinity.

CHAPTER VII

ESU: THE DESTRUCTIVE ENEMY OF OSANOBUA AND MAN

I. THE EDO REPRESENTATION OF ESU

A. ESU AS HE IS REPRESENTED IN THE MYTHOLOGY

According to the venerable Edo historian J. Egharevba,¹ Esu is the premier of the next world (erimwin); with power equal to Osanobua, the creator. Erimwin and agbon were divided between Osanobua and Esu and because of this confusion Esu caused people to fear him more than Osanobua. According to Egharevba, Esu is evil, causing death and war. Mr. egharevba related the following myth.

Orunmila had a slave who was very poor at a certain time. He tried his best and bought a slave to help him. He did not tell Esu who remained quiet. Esu went in the night and killed the slave. The next morning Orunmila began to lament bitterly over the death of his slave. He had no one to help him although people did come to console him. Finally Orunmila spoke to Esu and found out that he wanted a goat. Esu took the dead slave of Orunmila and dressed him up as a man. He made the slave sit on a stool. Every market person who passed saluted the slave not realizing that he was dead. After some time one very rich woman named Ighu came by carrying many goats. Ighu saluted the slave and began to beg Esu for the assistance of the slave. Esu agreed to carry the dead slave for her, but the woman insisted on carrying him herself. She finally won and carried the slave to Orunmila who saw the woman and asked her to marry him. Orunmila thanked Esu warmly for his kindness and noble deed. Ever since Esu has never failed to consult Orunmila on any point.

¹See J. Egharevba. A Short History of Benin. Ibadan: University Press, 1953.

A comment on Orunmila is necessary here. Idowu writing in Olodumare, God in Yoruba Belief (1962: 80) states:

The baba'lawo (priests) usually hold the view that Esu was created to be the right-hand divinity to Orunmila. It is his duty to run errands for Orunmila; he must be always in attendance upon him and act under his orders...it is the duty of Esu to bring some calamity by way of punishment upon the recalcitrant.

The Edo do not believe that Esu was created to be the right-hand divinity of Orunmila. Although the Edo belief in Esu parallels the Yoruba belief on some points there is a distinctiveness to the Edo concept. The Edo conceptualize Esu less as a trickster and more as the arch-enemy of Osanobua. However, since the Edo trace their origin to Ife and have a deep sense of cultural affinity with the Yoruba, it is not surprising that Egharevba makes reference to Orunmila in this myth. He is simply expressing that aspect of Esu's character which is held in common by both the Yoruba and Edo.

The Erhamwoisa Myth

In this myth Esu is described as being wicked and troublesome. In the myth there is a contest between the divinities Ogiuwu, Olokun, Ehi and Esu with Olokun winning. Esu is extremely annoyed at Olokun's success. This leads to his estrangement from Osanobua. Subsequently whenever Osanobua called a meeting of his children Esu would adamantly refuse to attend, choosing to remain on the outside instead. The Edo say that this is the reason for the presence of aruEsu outside the main entrance to their compounds.

B. ESU AS HE IS GENERALLY REPRESENTED BY THE EDO

The Edo believe that Osanobua has created Esu to declare war and for general destructive duty. He is the arch enemy of Osanobua, the anti-thesis of goodness. The Edo say: 'Esu waniren ya ghare ototo Osanobua renghiyadierimwin erhenya.' 'Esu chooses to be in 'hell' rather than serve Osanobua.'

Esu is believed to be very black and ugly. He wanders up and down, restless and destructive. An illustration of Esu's destructive nature occurred during my observation of the ugiOgun. The ohenOgun, during his possession by divinity, told one woman that Esu was going to kill her child; that unless she made a sacrifice to Esu within seven days her child would die.

Since Osanobua's actions are above blame, Esu is believed to be one of the causes of evil, along with Ogun and the azen. The main difference between the actions of Esu and Ogun is that Ogun usually destroys with a purpose (vengeance for an unjust act) whereas Esu destroys because he enjoys doing this, i.e. evil for its own sake. However, this does not mean that Esu is not approached for just ends (see the votive sacrifices). Esu doesn't seem to have power to cause harm to a total community. The Edo say: 'Esu kosua vbohoho.' 'Esu cannot have influence over the whole people.' He has power to harm only one person at a time.

Esu is in league with all the other evil beings. One notes, for example, the presence of Ogun and Esu altars at the entrance of the aruOlokun (see diagram 3). For example, any sacrificial offering to Ogun must be shared in part by Esu. Esu is also closely associated with the

azen, who are believed to fear Esu.

As I have already mentioned, the aruEsu is found at the front of the main entrance to Edo compounds. The altar is painted black and is adorned by thorn sticks or roughly hewn wooden dolls. There are no ohenEsu; individual supplicants offer sacrifices before the shrine without the assistance of priests.

II. THE MANIFESTATION OF ESU

- A. Sudden drastic changes in behaviour or physical health are attributed to Esu who is capable of disrupting normal behaviour patterns. For example, if without good reason a person takes a stick and starts chasing a dog around the compound, the Edo might say: Esu suare. 'Esu is pushing you.'
- B. Insane behaviour, popularly termed 'madness' by the Edo, is attributed to Esu. Many of the madmen roaming the streets of Benin are believed to have bad heads--the victims of Esu's destructive activity. Not all cases of madness are attributed to Esu, for the azen can cause madness as well.
- C. Esu manifests himself in response to messages sent to him through the sacrifice media. Particular problems will lead the supplicant to sacrifice to Esu. If the supplicant's desire is granted (eg. a thief is killed, a witch is destroyed or an enemy eliminated) their deaths are interpreted as the manifestation of Esu's power and presence.

III. THE EDO RESPONSE TO ESU

Esu is not worshipped by the Edo. Some people are inclined to call any interaction with Esu as 'devil worship.' This is hardly accurate with reference to the Edo who through ritual means try to keep Esu at a distance. The presence of the aruEsu outside the door of Edo compounds is symbolic of this fact: Esu is not one to be honoured or praised, nor is he a being to be neglected. Unlike the other divinities, Esu is not approached for general blessing.

The fundamental means of interacting with Esu is through sacrifice. The ritual sacrifice is set in motion through the diviner. Esu is not the recipient of prayer. Esu is believed to have his favoured items and they are consistent with Esu's nature. Esu is dirty, black and ugly and a number of sacrifices correspond to his nature. For example, if a chicken is offered to Esu it will be black. This could be contrasted with the chickens offered to Olokun which are always white. Blackness is associated with evil and white with goodness in the Edo symbol system. If Esu is given a yam, then it must be burnt. Since Esu is opposed to the Edo's progress and is the antithesis of the Edo modal personality, the burnt yam² symbolizes the distance and opposition of man and Esu.

There are three types of sacrifice offered to Esu: propitiation, votive and thanksgiving. The first type of sacrifice is offered to Esu in order to placate him. The second is contractual--to persuade the

²The Edo would never eat a burnt yam.

divinity to carry out a particular job. And the third type of sacrifice, also contractual in nature, is given in gratitude after the job has been completed. The thank offering has elements of gratitude; however, it may be analogous to hiring a gunman to do a nasty job. He is hired to do a job with the promise that if he succeeds, more will come. The sacrifice to Esu may flow out of a grateful heart, but certainly not a loving one.

A. VOTIVE SACRIFICES

Case 1

Mr. I. O. of Benin City made a sacrifice to Esu of a black chicken, one thorn-stick and a burnt yam. His purpose was to persuade Esu to kill the man who had stolen his goat. He had gone to the diviner and was told to appeal to Esu to bring retribution upon the thief.

Case 2

Mr. E. U. of Awo Street in Benin City sacrificed to Esu with one he-goat, thorn-stick, some roasted corn mixed with oil³ and a roasted yam. His purpose was to persuade Esu to kill the witch whom the diviner had told him was responsible for the sudden ruin of his trade as a transporter. He had sustained considerable loss of money as his vehicle was damaged beyond repair. In this state he appealed to Esu.

³ Idowu has an interesting comment on oil in the Yoruba sacrifice. He states that Esu does not like oil and 'anyone who brings it near him is therefore asking for trouble upon himself or anyone else' (1962: 118).

Case 3

Mrs. I. O. of Evbimaa Village made a sacrifice to Esu with one thorn-stick, one roasted cob of corn, one egg, and a black chicken. Her purpose was to find the thief who had stolen the bags of rice and onions she had prepared for sale in the market. This particular sacrifice was made to urge Esu to quick action.

Case 4

Mr. I. E. of Iguosa Village sacrificed to Esu with one he-goat and one burnt cob of corn with some oil. His purpose was to persuade Esu to kill the man who had committed adultery with his wife.

Case 5

Mr. E. A. of Benin City made a sacrifice to Esu with one black chicken, one thorn-stick and some cowries. His purpose was to cause a lorry of his rival transporter to collide on the road. He promised to 'thank' Esu with one goat if he succeeded. My informant, commenting on this particular sacrifice, said that nothing more than spite was involved here.

Case 6

Mr. I. E. of Benin made a sacrifice to Esu with a black chicken, one thorn-stick, one egg and one burnt yam. His purpose was to ask Esu to cause the quick death of a thief who entered his shop in the night and looted him of his wares. He promised to offer one big he-goat to Esu when the thief was destroyed.

Case 7

Mr. T. O. of Benin sacrificed to Esu with a he-goat. His purpose was to avert an impending attack from an evil man. The sacrificer had seen something strange in a dream which led him to seek the diviner's interpretation. The diviner said that Esu needed a goat in order to prevent this man from attacking him. This sacrifice was part of three sacrifices made concerning this particular problem.

Case 8

Mr. J. E. of Benin sacrificed to Esu with a he-goat. His purpose was to alleviate what was troubling his son. This sacrifice was part of a series. One sacrifice was offered to Orunmila to save the boy from sickness, as blood was found in his urine. Esu was sacrificed to in order to drive away the cause of the sickness, which might have been due to azen activity.

B. PROPITIATORY SACRIFICES

Case 9

Mrs. J. E. of Benin sacrificed to Esu with a goat. Her purpose was to placate Esu who was divined to be the cause of her son's conflict with another member of the family.

Case 10

Mr. J. E. of Benin sacrificed to Esu with one he-goat. His purpose was to prevent any bad people from joining him at his job. Since it was divined that Esu might trouble J.E. at his job as native magistrate, Esu was propitiated, i.e. given something to keep him at a distance.

C. THANKSGIVING SACRIFICES

Case 11

Mr. A.I. of Ite Village near Benin made a sacrifice to Esu with one he-goat, one snail, one thorn-stick, palm oil, seven cowries and a small roasted yam. His purpose was to thank Esu for assisting him to catch a thief who had been coming into his yard to steal food. All previous efforts to catch the thief had failed but Esu was approached to hasten the death or arrest of the thief. The thief was caught and Esu received this 'gift.'

In case 5 it is worth noting that if his rival is killed, Mr. E. A. will give Esu a thanksgiving sacrifice. The same is true in case 6.

These sacrifices do not in any way indicate the frequency of the different types of sacrifices (votive, propitiation, thanksgiving). Every divinity is offered votive type sacrifices; the nature of the request varying with the capabilities and sphere of influence of the divinity. All divinities are propitiated or appeased since all divinities are capable of being displeased with Edo behaviour. But Esu, due to his capricious and destructive nature, is far more likely to be propitiated than, for example, Olokun. The Edo thank Esu for a job well done. This, too, is consistent with the Edo concepts of sacrifice.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ANCESTORS: SPIRITS OF THE DEPARTED

It is necessary to distinguish between two kinds of ancestors who once lived in agbon but who after their deaths reside in erimwin. The first category of departed spirit are the individually named ancestors with specific genealogical reference (erha and eye) and the collective unnamed ancestors or predecessors of the members of a corporate group (edion). The concept of edion is not confined to the collective ancestors of a village community. In some villages each ward has its own ogwedion. The family and household has its edion too, for whom a cow or goat is sacrificed during mortuary rites and to whom libations of palm-wine and pieces of kola-nut are often offered. In most community shrines of hero and other divinities there are subsidiary altars to the edion, that is to the past worshippers of the divinity. And the palace-associations, too, have their edion altars at which offerings are made regularly, for example, at promotions and the investiture of new title-holders. The Uzama have their edion altar housed in the compound of their leader (Oliha). Finally there are the edion of the whole Benin nation (edion-Edo), represented by a carved staff which is in the keeping of the Esogban, the second-ranking Eghaevon'Ore who is also known as odionwere-Edo. Sacrifices are made to edion-Edo in times of national catastrophe. (Bradbury 1957: 56).

There are a number of very complicated rites associated with the ancestors of the Oba. Bradbury states (1957: 55) that 'in the past all the famous Oba had separate altars, each housed in a large walled compound...

In the past there were two separate annual series of rites (ugioro and ugigun) at which sacrifices to individual Oba were performed on every fifth day. Each series was brought to a close with a public festival in honour of the reigning Oba's father (ugie-erhoba) at which twelve human beings, chosen from the prison in Benin City, where the worst criminals were confined, were sacrificed...The actual rites in honour of the past Oba were directed by special priests from the group known as Ihogbe who also officiate at the annual sacrifices to the reigning Oba's head.'

This particular study will be limited to the individually named ancestor (erha) and the collective unnamed ancestors of a particular village (edion).

THE ERHA

I. THE EDO REPRESENTATION OF THE ERHA

The word erha means father. When a man with no children dies, he is usually accorded only a perfunctory burial. He is not incorporated as a father (Bradbury 1966: 133). If a man leaves only daughters, the senior daughter's son, or her husband acting on her behalf, may undertake to bury him. Normally it is the senior son who bury (re) and plant (ko) his father, i.e. convert him into a ancestor and dedicate an altar to serve him. If the departed erha is not interred, i.e. the second burial is not completed, the father's ghost may commit acts of aggression against his former dependents, making them sick, causing them to have accidents or to lose their money. They are pacified by sacrifices made over the right foot of the heir.

When the erha is properly buried, the departed erha takes his place in erimwin where he assumes the guardianship of his son's lineage. The father's shrine (aruerha) then becomes the scene of periodic commemorative rites, and of expiatory sacrifices and offerings arising out of sickness and other diseases, which are divined to be the result of quarrels and other sins of omission and commission involving lineage members and their wives (Bradbury 1966: 138).

The senior son is the priest of the departed erha. He intercedes with him on behalf of himself and all of the departed erha's descendants. Bradbury states (1957: 54) that there may be a second priest, ideally the senior surviving brother of the deceased, who must be present at all important sacrifices and prayers to represent himself and his descendants in the male line, his brothers and their descendants, and his sisters.

II. THE MANIFESTATION OF THE ERHA

In line with their sphere of influence, the erha function as guardians of the unity and harmony of the lineage. Sickness and other disasters may be caused by the displeased erha. The erha can also cause the loss of prestige in the family circle. It is imperative that the senior son obey the dictates of the father. If the erha is not happy with the services of the son, he may cause his inherited property to dwindle. If the senior son fails to carry out the Eho ceremony, the erha may cause him to lose his senses and wander about Benin as a madman. One informant told me that a traditional chief who was dancing before the Oba during the Igwe dropped his eben and fell down, utterly disgracing

himself before the Oba. His family was in great bitterness. It was later discovered that he had not observed the Eho Festival because of miserliness.

If a son offends his father during his life time and fails to recant, he could begin to experience certain hardships. In order to be reinstated the son would have to sit in the father's shrine with his father's brother, call the name of the erha to come and hear his prayer. Each would have to take some medicine, water and a cutlass. The nature of the offense would be named before the shrine, the abuse recanted and water blown on the erha's son.

If the departed erha is not satisfied with the behaviour of members of the lineage, he can block their progress for the Edo believe that progress is dependent upon retaining the erha's blessing. Since the erha is intimately concerned with the affairs of the family, they have power to protect them from outside influences as well as power to disrupt the harmony of the patrilineage through sickness, etc. Part of their protective power includes the ability to thwart the azen. Although Olokun is 'for' everyone, the erha are especially concerned for ego and his brothers and sisters.

If one judges from the sacrifices offered to the erha, the erha can manifest themselves through the giving of children. It is common for the Edo to attribute the birth of a child to the erha. This will evoke a response in the form of a thanksgiving sacrifice. On another occasion the diviner suggested that the reason that the father's son was not progressing in his life was that the boy was the source of some conflict in the family. His behaviour was not acceptable to the erha. A sacrifice ensued in order to balance the relationship with the offended erha.

During the Biafran invasion of the Mid-West in August, 1967 a number of sacrifices were made to the erha for protective assistance. In one household one man made a number of sacrifices to his erha, and when the Mid-West was liberated September 20, 1967 he offered a further thanksgiving sacrifice; his safety over a six-week period being attributed to the erha's protective activity.

The Edo respond to the existence and presence of the erha primarily through prayer and sacrifice. Prayer can be offered at any time before the aruerha. In general prayer before the aruerha, a kola is placed on the shrine and the following prayer uttered.

Erhamwen orobue, rhie erimwin negberuehia, mwonbo nude rie evbare,
na nuvbedeba via, ghasimwin vben, kevbe emo vbe amwen. Ghegumwen wu
ghegumwen khuomwin khuebehia himwen egbe re ghegiogbe, ehgiangba mwen.
Simwin emo vbanwen me. Ise.

My father (mention name of father), I am entirely under your protection. I implore you to gather the departed forefathers. Come to partake of what I am presenting to you now (kola). In conjunction with the forefathers you seek my interest and protection, as well as that of my wife and children. Do not let me die a premature death or be afflicted with sickness. Protect me against all danger. Do not allow my enemies to get the upper hand over me. Protect my children's welfare as well as my wife's. Amen.

This is a general prayer and is a typical example of the kind of prayer offered before the aruerha. The prayers could be more specific according to the predicament and social situation of the suppliant.

The Edo respond to the intervention of the erha into their affairs by sacrifice. A conflict situation, or a situation indicating that all is not well in the family will set the sacrificial action in motion. The diviner sets the sacrifice in motion: it is he who reveals that the erha are offended. However, it is not only to gain protection or assistance that the Edo sacrifice to the erha. They also respond in thanksgiving.

A. VOTIVE SACRIFICES

Case 1

Mr. C. M. of Benin made a sacrifice to his erha with one cock. His purpose was to gain the erha's assistance for his son who was writing his GCE examination. He promised his erha that if his son passed the examination, he would offer one white goat and a bottle of gin as thanksgiving. This follows the usual Edo pattern: ritual action to get the erha's assistance with the promise of further offerings and sacrifices if the erha acts on his behalf. It is worth noting that in this particular case we have a father offering a sacrifice on behalf of someone else.

Case 2

Mr. O. E. of Benin made a sacrifice to his erha with one leg of antelope and kolanuts. His purpose was to allow him to succeed in passing his trade test. Like C.M. he promised that if he succeeded he would sacrifice one goat as a thanksgiving.

Case 3

Mr. J. E. of Benin made a sacrifice to his erha of some fish and fufu. The purpose was to persuade the erha to stop troubling one of his

sons who was not progressing very well in school.

Case 4

Mr. J. E. of Benin made a sacrifice to his erha with a goat. His purpose was to avert the quarrelling between two sons who were working at Sapele, 35 miles from Benin. The diviner said that a sacrifice should be made to the erha to avert the quarrel.

Case 5

Mr. J. E. of Benin made a sacrifice to his erha with a goat. His purpose was to be delivered from the rebels who were occupying Benin City at the time of sacrifice. This particular sacrifice was made to the erha for deliverance and protection. This same man also came before the aruerha and promised that at the end of the war a goat would be sacrificed.

Case 6

Mr. J. E. of Benin made a sacrifice to his erha with a goat, cock and tortoise. This particular sacrifice was the result of a visit to the diviner. The father probably had a dream and sent his wife to the diviner to inquire about the dream's meaning. The diviner said that a sacrifice had to be made to the erha. This particular sacrifice was made at the time of the Federal Government's liberation of the Mid-West. The purpose of the sacrifice seemed to be to gain a general end: that things would 'get better' in Benin.

B. THANKSGIVING SACRIFICES

Case 7

Mr. E.E. of Usen Village near Benin made a sacrifice to his erha

with one she-goat. The purpose of this sacrifice was to thank his erha, on the occasion of his grand-daughter's delivery of a child, for sparing him to live to an advanced age so that he could see the birth of a great grandchild. This sacrifice was from the heart and was not diviner motivated.

Case 8

Mr. I. U. of Benin City made a sacrifice to his erha of one goat, and one cock. His purpose was to thank his erha for his wife's delivery of a male child. She had not had a single male child before, having given birth to ~~three~~ daughters. Thus by this birth, Mr. I. U. would now have someone to succeed him after his death. His properties would no longer go to his brother-in-law. This particular birth was attributed to his departed erha. Now his name will not die in the family circle.

Case 9

Mr. J. E. made a sacrifice to his erha of one goat. His purpose was to thank his erha for the work done for him and his family during the Biafran occupation of the Mid-West from August 9, 1967 to September 20, 1967.

III. THE EHO FESTIVAL AS RESPONSE TO THE ERHA

The most important ritual directed to the erha is the Eho Festival. This is the yearly festival in honour of the departed erha at which all the patrilineal descendants of erha and his father and their wives, kneel one-by-one before the altar, presenting kolanuts and other offerings and praying for the well-being of themselves, their wives and children.

Married daughters return home to take part in the Eho. Patrilineal collaterals and other cognates may be present but they do not kneel before the altar (Bradbury 1957: 55).

The Eho begins with the Ihonmwhona or the purification of menstruating women. This ceremony must take place before the actual performance of the Eho. The menstruating women cannot go near the ancestral shrine since they are in a state of impurity.

Menstruating women must confine themselves to their room for seven days. The Edo believe that bad spirits follow them during this state. Certain action must take place before they can be brought to a state of purity. First a small chicken or, in its absence, an empty egg shell is purchased. Ikimwin leaves from the tree known as the 'tree of decision' are gathered and tied to the small chicken. A dish containing native chalk, cowries and water is prepared by a member of the husband's family. Chalk is said to bring good fortune and the cowries wealth.

After the necessary items have been gathered, a junior member of the patrilineal line will take the chicken in his right hand and the dish in his left and repeat the following incantation: 'All the bad spirits that come during menstruation should go away. The good ones can then come in.' While the incantation is being said the chicken is swept around the household. The small chicken is then left to die, since the Edo believe that it is the bad spirits that must kill him and then go away. The good spirits are said to feed the bad spirits.

The completion of this event does not complete the Ihonwhonwa ceremony. The now purified women must cook for their husbands in order to please them and as a sign that the good spirits will come. It appears that

the good spirits are linked with conception, for the Edo believe that it is after menstruation that conception will take place. On that night no other woman must interfere with the sexual relations of a purified woman and her husband. As the purpose of the Eho is to ensure that the erha will be pleased with the sacrifice, one can readily see the importance of the Ihonmhonwa to the Eho ceremony.

Before the actual sacrifice proceeds, the head of the house will set a date. All relatives will be notified of the precise date. They will bring their gifts to the house on the day before the performance of the Eho. In some instances gifts will be brought in before the day of performance. In this case they will be stored. Dancing precedes the sacrifice ritually preparing the ancestors for the sacrificial offering. It is also essential for the compound to be in a state of cleanliness.

Each member of the family prays before the shrine, each presenting a kola-nut on the aruerha: 'O father, let me live prosperously. Let my household be in good health. For at this time next year, I will come again in good health and feed you more scrumptuously than last year. And let me be blessed by the king.'

A bell is then rung to notify the ancestors of their approach to them. The erha presences himself in the bodily efflugia (nails, etc) that have been buried in the aruerha. Before the sacrifice can proceed, the acting priest must break a kola-nut. After the kola is broken, the headman will read its position. This will indicate whether or not the sacrifice has been accepted. If all is not right for the sacrifice, further action will be necessary to right the situation. The headman (senior son assisted by the departed father's brother) will place one piece of the four-sided

kola on the shrine; the rest being distributed to the members of the family.

Now the sacrifice can begin. If a titled man is performing the ceremony, the livestock will be brought before the altar. A cock, goat, and cow will be sacrificed in that order. The first son is forbidden to hold the sacrificial animal since tradition has it that the father's brother should hold the animal. First, the animal's blood is spilled on the shrine. The Edo claim that the blood is used by the erha: they are hungry and want food. One informant stated that the blood is provided for the erha's 'sustenance' in erimwin.

After spilling the blood on the aruerha, the blood is marked on the forehead of the headman followed by the heads of the family. The Edo believe that 'it is the head that directs the body, the body being useless without the head.' No one else is allowed to do the blood-marking. Performed by the headman, this act signifies his trusteeship of the ancestral shrine.

If a cow has been sacrificed before the shrine, the various sections of the animal will be distributed. One leg of the cow must go to the palace. This part is considered to be the best; it will be sent to the palace with kola-nuts. The Oba will reciprocate this gift by sending a valuable gift which may include a goat, cocoanuts and the traditional kola.

Prayer is then offered by the headman who will by then have washed his hands of the blood. 'It is necessary for one to feed the fathers with clean hands.' Food is brought again to the shrine. A small piece of meat is cut from the sacrifice, dipped in a native soup and then placed on the shrine. The erha are believed to be present or participating in the feast.

The neck of the sacrificed animal is given to the children. The

reason for this, stated by the actor, is that this is the way it has always been done. The waist of the cow is reserved for the wives. (The waist is related to the womb and is supposed to promote the fertility of the women). The rest is distributed as the headman chooses, although the father's brother will receive a share first. The meat is taken from the animal's head, the jaw tied together and placed on the wall. This will indicate status.

The nature of the sacrifice is related to one's social status. A poor man may use an antelope leg which is believed to be the lowest acceptable offering to the erha. There is no need for a poor man to call a dance because this individual is performing the Eho with the primary intention of becoming rich, of receiving the erha's blessing. He comes to the erha more out of need than of thanksgiving. My informant said that even though the erha are not receiving any blood at least they are being remembered. The poor man prays to his erha so that he will be lifted up to a higher status. One informant told me that the ancestors love antelope (uzo) meat more than any other bush meat. When a poor man comes before the shrine, the sacrifice follows the same general pattern except that there will be no dancing.

The cock is an acceptable offering because it is presumed to awaken the erha. Its use serves as a symbol of this intense desire to awaken the erha in order that they might hear and fulfill prayers. The acceptability of the goat sacrifice is related to the fact that the erha 'love' certain types of animals more than others. The goat is believed to be the most valuable animal in the sight of the erha. The he-goat is used for the male ancestors since things male are used for the male ancestors. One

informant told me that in the past the Edo had not used a cow for sacrifice to the erha. In present times the cow is used primarily as an indicator of social status, but not to the exclusion of the goat.

The Eho is performed primarily to remember the erha as a living part of the lineage. 'If you remember the erha, they will remember you. To forget them will mean that there will be bad repercussions for that particular person.' The family head is under a great deal of pressure, as a trustee of the aruerha, to perform the Eho ceremony. He holds the key to the success and welfare of the entire family unit. 'What the erha handed over to you must be performed and preserved.' Another purpose of the Eho is to bestow prosperity upon the family. A secondary end, but an important one, is the occasion for the reunion of the family. The family can observe how the family has grown. The family also pays respect once more to the head of the family, his authority being reinforced by tribute and gift.

THE EDION

This discussion of edion will be limited to the edion of the village unit, i.e. the collective predecessors of a village.

I. THE EDO REPRESENTATION OF EDION

The edion are thought to be the original occupiers of the village land and as all the edion who have since lived and been buried there (Bradbury 1957: 56). All villages have edion shrines which contain an altar decorated with ukhurhe. These shrines (ogwedion) also serve as

meeting places. The odionwere as the priest of the edion makes regular offerings there, and his influence with the edion spirits is a powerful sanction particularly with reference to his control of the age-grades. Promotions are made in the ogwedion and the odionwere himself is invested there.

We have already seen that the different kinds of dead correspond to a status category among the living. Each of the incorporated dead has his own field of authority. As Bradbury has pointed out (1966), for all three types the act of incorporation is a part of a complex series of mortuary and succession rites. From the actor's standpoint these rites do three main things. First, they ensure the deceased his rightful place in erimwin. Second, they reformulate and regulate his relationships with those among the living for whom he has relevance by virtue of the same statuses. Third, the rites effect of symbolize the transmission of these statuses to one or more successors. The edion or elders, then, are the undifferentiated deceased elders of kinship, territorial and associational groups. The chiefs (enigie and oba) have their own predecessors for which there are special rites (Bradbury 1966: 138).

The edion demand that the living elders should uphold the customs and rules they have transmitted to them, and afford them mystical sanctions to assist them in dealing with infractions. It seems that just as relations with the ancestors image father-son relations, so do relations between the village edion and their congregation reflect the corresponding aspects of the relationship between the living edion and their apparent heirs.

II. THE MANIFESTATION OF THE EDION

Since the sphere of influence of the edion is restricted to the village, the villagers believe that the edion intervene in their affairs; causing disaster of both a general and individual nature. The flouting of an elder's authority and cases of adultery are particularly serious events and will incur the retributive action of the edion. It is through the events taking place in the village that the living will know that the edion are displeased--events that threaten the whole village. When 'things are going poorly' in the village this is taken as a sign that the edion have been offended. This leads to a consultation with a diviner who tells what action is needed to restore the relationship between the living and the dead edion.

III. THE EDO RESPONSE TO THE EDION

The Edo respond to the manifestation of the edion in their affairs in the following ways. If it is divined that the edion are dissatisfied with some aspect of life in the village it is necessary to sacrifice to them before the ancestral shrine. The sacrificial items are collected and all of the village gathers at the shrine. The items for sacrifice will be handled by the odionwere who invokes the edion to guide the living both at home and abroad.

Next he breaks the kola and spreads it on the floor. He places one piece on the shrine and shares the rest with the others. Then he slaughters the sacrificial animal (eg. goat) and spills the blood on the altar. He

takes the ukhurhe staff and rubs the blood on it--an essential aspect of the sacrifice. After this is done, the staff is placed back on the altar. The sacrifice is followed by feasting. This sacrificial pattern is followed at all sacrifices before the edion shrine.

As well as responding to the edion's intervention in their affairs, informants told me that in case of an impending epidemic sacrifices would be made to the edion for protection of the whole village. Judging from the general prayer offered to the edion at various occasions, the edion are also capable of driving away evil spirits or counteracting the azen.

During the important village decisions, proceedings will be conducted before the edion shrine. In cases of conflict, for example, the parties would be summoned to the shrine where they would be dealt with. Every meeting is opened with the breaking of the kola, followed by prayer.

Edion, edion nirunagban wahia do sikoko niwa dorie evbare na wa
ghegie evboni mayena ve, wagie okpia kevbe okhuo no ro ghama.

Wa khue be Kevbe uwa ro rue. Wa giomokpia kevbe omo okhuogha maubo.
Azen okpia kevbe azen okhuo nogha omwan vbe vbo waghi gbe.

Translation:

Departed settler of the village we implore you to see that the community continues to multiply in children and in food. Let both male and female in the village continue to prosper. We implore you people to drive away all witches that will cause sickness or death to the community. Let both male and female children continue to live long. Any witches that may cause sickness or death, may you gather to counteract them.

In cases of adultery, the guilty party will be fined.

CHAPTER IX

THE AZEN: BRIDGE BETWEEN AGBON AND ERIMWIN

I. THE EDO REPRESENTATION OF THE AZEN

The azen are anti-social spiritual beings. During the day they are 'normal' human beings but in the night their spiritual part (orion) is released from the body enabling them to carry out their evil activities. Their special power lies in their ability to move from agbon to erimwin without being permanently resident in one or the other. Of all the beings in the Edo pantheon, the azen are the only beings capable of moving between the agbon and erimwin realms. Even the ancestors who once resided in agbon are permanent members of erimwin after the proper burial. As social beings the azen are able to gain an intimate knowledge of their fellows which helps them to work evil against them. Thus their observations during the day are utilized in their nefarious activities after dark.

A. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE AZEN ON THE SOCIAL LEVEL

Witches, say the Edo, are incapable of functioning normally on the social level. They are believed to behave in an anti-social manner, and if their actions appear 'good,' it is only to disguise their fundamentally evil motives. They are characterized as follows:

1. They will provoke anger in the household. The Edo say that palaver should never be made in the night, for the azen will

find the cause and with their knowledge of inner weakness continue to multiply distress. They will seek to 'double' the already existing state of affairs.

2. An azen may harm someone in the daytime. It may be that when two women are cooking soup that one of the women will have some meat and the other will not. Jealousy may provoke the azen to poison the meat of the more fortunate wife.
3. A refusal to meet an azen's request may lead to retribution at a later date. For example, a witch may request money from a rich man. If the rich man refuses not knowing the supplicant is a witch, he may be the object of evil action. In such a case as this the Edo say that the witches are not interested in whether or not anything is shared, but in finding an opportunity or excuse to work evil. The Edo also believe that if a man refuses to share some of his wealth he may be a victim of witchcraft activity in the night. Here we see clearly the emphasis the Edo place on sharing and hospitality.
4. The Edo believe that an azen will be motivated to evil action through jealousy. For example, in a house where there is more than one wife, one woman may have six children. The woman who is believed to be a witch will have only one. In order to retaliate, the barren woman will direct evil action against her co-wife. It should be noted that if the jealous woman is able to kill the other woman, the living children will be cared for by herself. The Edo say that if a woman feels that things are not right within the household, whether this be manifest in the

sickness of children or other evil omens, she will direct her witchcraft against another member of the household who appears as a threat or hindrance to her social status. However, in actual practice accusation between co-wives does not seem to occur very often. Bradbury states (1957: 60) that most recorded instances of witchcraft accusations involved people who were not close kinsmen. The conflict between kin was regarded as having disturbed the unity of the kin group, thus making it vulnerable to witchcraft. The cases I have recorded seem to verify Bradbury's hypothesis.

The Edo also believe that any good behaviour by a witch is merely a camouflage for them to gain their objective. For example, a witch may be very honest and show excessive friendliness as well as showing the utmost respect to all persons. This is a cover-up for evil motives. It is more characteristic of a witch, however, to manifest socially reprehensible behaviour. If an Edo's behaviour contradicts accepted norms, they will be asked: Azen we khin ra? 'Are you a witch?' Summing up, we can say that the Edo believe that a witch's behaviour on the social level is abnormal: either too good or too bad.

B. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE AZEN AS ERIMWIN BEINGS

The majority of witches in the Edo culture are female. There are also male witches (oso) but they are less common and have less power. The azen are associated with darkness and are commonly known as the 'night people.' During the night the azen are no longer limited to any physical

locality, for while the body sleeps, the azen's orion flies away, usually in the form of a bird. The Edo say that the azen fly out of the body through the private orifices of the body. Once the orion has left the body it is impossible to awaken the witch. It is also believed that if one happens to be in the presence of a witch during the night that one will feel dizzy.

An Edo may become a witch through inheritance. The children of witches are quite likely to be witches also. 'Witchcraft is frequently said to be inherited. Closer questioning, however, reveals a belief that a pregnant witch may give witchcraft food to the child she is carrying; the child of a witch is, therefore, more likely to be suspected than others. New witches can be recruited by putting the same substance, which is invisible, into a person's food' (Bradbury 1957: 60). I was also told that it was possible to buy 'witchcraft power' in the Afenmai Division and thus be initiated into the witches' society.¹

One woman living in the area relegated to known Edo witches by Eweka II in the 1930's claimed that she had entered into the witches' society because of her barrenness. She had lost many children due to the malpractice of witches and in order to have children she became a witch to protect herself from any further child deaths. This woman did not inherit her witchcraft, but underwent certain rituals suggested by a known

¹ It should be noted that the Edo conceptualization of witches does not correspond entirely with the classical definition given by Evans-Pritchard in Witchcraft, Magic and Oracles Among the Azande. See notes in Chapter I on Some problems with the classical dichotomy between witchcraft and sorcery.

witch or obonoyada.

The Edo have always believed that the azen possess a certain substance in the stomach. This substance is roughly akin to a tennis ball. One way of detecting witches in the old days was to force the witch to vomit up the witchcraft substance. In contemporary Edo culture this method of detecting witches is banned. Needless to say, a number of cults claiming to detect witches have arisen in Benin and the surrounding area.

The witches do not operate individually. Immediately upon leaving the body, they fly away to a meeting of the witches (ikeniwarenason). The witches' society is hierarchically structured. Citing Bradbury, he states that the 'witches are said to be organized along lines parallel to the territorial divisions of the Benin kingdom. Each village has its tree in which the witches of the village are said to meet at night. There are larger meetings for the more powerful witches of the major geographical areas of the kingdom and finally a central meeting which is attended only by the most powerful witches from the Benin kingdom' (1957: 60). This hierarchy is in no way related to social status on the agbon level. 'A small man in agbon may be a big man in erimwin.' One Edo whom my informant described as a very ugly, poor man claimed to be second in command to the king of the azen. He also claimed to have controlled eight wives in the witches' society. One barren woman claimed to have had many children while a member of the witches' society.

It is the job of the witches to steal a person's orion and take this to the meeting of the witches. The purpose of the meeting is to cause trouble and participate in a kind of communal feast. Once the witches have seized someone's soul, they transform it into an animal (usually a

goat), kill it and then feast upon it.

Unlike Esu who acts suddenly, the azen are believed to toy with an individual before they finally kill him. One informant told me that the azen will quite often warn a potential victim through dreams or other experiences giving him a means of escape. The occurrence of strange phenomena will lead the potential victim to the diviner who will reveal what must be done to escape injury.

II. THE MANIFESTATION OF THE AZEN

1. The azen have the power to stop conception. It is said that they will drink a woman's conception. This is absolutely abhorrent to the Edo. It is very common for Edo women to claim that they have been pregnant only to lose their conception to the azen. The Edo also believe that the azen can hold a woman's embryo in the womb for as long as four years.
2. The azen can cause disturbances in a woman's menstrual period.
3. The azen have the power to render a man impotent.
4. The azen can cause madness. They take control of the brain, causing violent behaviour in the streets. The Edo usually leave such people alone for there is nothing that they can do to counteract the influence of the azen after a person has acted in this manner.
5. The azen can cause general sickness. Stomach trouble is attributed to their activity as are poor breathing and some throat problems. Most common of the sicknesses attributed to the azen.

are those connected with the loss of blood.

6. The azen can cause blindness. They are believed to have a supernatural way of 'pointing the finger' in order to cause blindness.
7. The azen have the ability to empower various medicines.
8. The azen can ruin individual Edo business enterprises.

Cases Revealing Some Information about the Manifestation of the Azen

Case 1

In 1961 a certain man won ₦5000 in a lottery. He did not give a feast or distribute any of the money to his relatives. Instead, he went and dug a hole into which he placed his money. Later he became sick. Some of the man's relatives went to the diviner who stated that the 'night people' were the cause of the ailment. The man had failed to give the azen any food; nor had he offered them a sacrifice. He remained adamant in his resistance of the azen and later died of dysentery. To this day the family does not know where the money is. In this case the azen have first caused the sickness and finally, after the warning, his death.

Case 2

In December, 1966 the village of Ekiadolor near Benin destroyed all the dogs living (within the boundary of the village. On three different occasions it was reported that the dogs in the village had barked in an unusual manner after the church bells had rung for early morning prayers and on each occasion a child suddenly died. The village elders associated the three events and came to the conclusion that all dogs without exception were affected with witchcraft (or at least the potential instruments of the

azen) and were responsible, as vehicles of the azen, for the deaths of the children. Consequently, all dogs were destroyed and new ones banned from entering the village.

In this case we see that the azen use lower animals as agents of their nefarious activity. The azen will give the unsuspecting animals something to eat in the night, enabling them to control the dog's behaviour and use them to destroy the children. The second fact emerging from this case is that the azen are believed to be capable of destroying life. My informant told me that the azen hate the church. Rejection of the traditional religious system does not eradicate the belief in witches. Witchcraft beliefs are still very much a part of the conceptual framework of the Edo Christians.

Case 3

In December, 1966 a Nigerian Yoruba man was jailed for life in London for beating to death a 19-year old girl who he claimed was a witch. The judge, Mr. Justice Jones, told the 36-year old Nigerian that the repeated assaults on a fellow Nigerian were so horrifying that he would recommend a minimum of twenty years imprisonment. The girl's bruised body was found parcelled in brown paper in a north London street where the accused had taken it in a taxi. Upon discussing this particular case with an Edo man, he said that it was a case of 'disappointed love.' My informant told me that all witches (and this would include the azen) have the power to harass humans. The girl was a witch and appeared to the man in the form of snails, rats, and birds, causing him to become very weak and confused. The man probably dreamt of the girl and believed that she was a witch, continually plaguing and harassing him to the point where

he could no longer study or function normally. Thus he killed her.

Extrapolating from this case, it is clear that the azen are not limited to a particular locale. They are capable of travelling great distances and can cause confusion through tormenting dream experiences.

Case 4

Mr. P. A. of Ova Village near Benin discovered that the azen had been responsible for the repeated miscarriages of his wife. He sought Ogun² who was reported to have killed the witch.

Case 5

Mr. I. O. discovered through divination that the azen were responsible for his continually troubled sleep.

Case 6

Mr. E. I. of Iguosala Village discovered through divination that the azen were the cause of his wife's abnormally developed embryo.

Case 7

Mr. I. O. of Ugbogui persuaded Ogun to obstruct the witch who was causing his wife to undergo irregular menstruation.

Case 8

Mr. I. O. of Benin discovered through divination that the azen were the cause of his declining transport business.

The azen manifest themselves to the Edo through the disrupting of

²Cases 4-8 are taken from the data in the chapter on Ogun.

activities on the social level. They also invade the nature of man, disrupting his normal functioning. Their presence, then, is felt primarily as a result of the evil ends of their action. The Edo 'read' the signs of their manifestation: the causal link in an event being explained in terms of the azen.

III. THE EDO RESPONSE TO THE AZEN

The Edo seldom initiate communication with the witches. The witches pose a serious threat to the harmonious functioning of Edo society. Therefore the primary motivating factor in the Edo response to the azen is appeasement. The azen must be kept at a distance, or putting it another way, ritually managed. Thus the majority of sacrifices to the azen are for this specific purpose.

If an Edo desires to harm another person, he can interact with a known, confessed witch. Or he can offer his complaint openly, promising to give the witches something if they carry out his request. The Edo may also contact the obonoyada in order to purchase some medicinal power which will enable them to gain supernatural insight into the azen's activities.

Before examining a number of cases of sacrifice to the azen, I will outline the actual sacrificial process to the 'night people.'

After the consultation with the obonoyada or possibly other diviners, the suppliant will go with him to the junction. The azen always want blood. Things associated with dirtiness and evil are acceptable to the azen (My informant told me that items killed on the road and rejected by everybody else are acceptable) as well as items associated with the left (eg. the left foot of a goat). Some of the items offered to the azen are the dog,

goat, tortoise, hen, small egg, native mat, white cloth and fufu. The purpose of the white cloth is to serve as an undercover for the slaughtered animal which is placed on a mat. The mat is believed to be used by the azen to roll their ingredients in when they travel away.

The individual goes with the obonoyada to the crossroads. The reason for this according to the Edo is that the azen can come from the cardinal points to partake of the offering. Before the sacrifice is made, a horn (oru) is blown. After the sacrifice is made the obonoyada and the supplicant go home.

Case 1

One informant told me of a man who was troubled as he felt very uncomfortable during the night. He approached an obonoyada who prepared a talisman and told him to bathe in Osun (there are various medicinal pots associated with Osun, the divinity of medicine). He was also told to sacrifice some pepper soup (oil is forbidden to be used in the preparation) and a cock at the crossroads. I was told that it is necessary for the head of the family to associate with the azen, as the junior members of the lineage might kill him and take his position if he did not have strong medicine. This particular sacrifice was made to appease them.

Case 2

In this case Mr. F. O. had been falsely accused. He wanted redress for what he was accused of; in this desperate state of mind he sought the azen at the crossroads (ada) praying blindly for their help. My informant told me that this man was taking a very serious chance, for if 'everything had not been all right in his life,' the azen could easily have caused him

harm. Apparently the azen granted F.O.'s request and his opponent later fell sick. This led the accuser's family to seek the cause of the sickness. The diviner revealed the nature of the problem, stating that the cause was related to the activity of the azen and that the azen demanded a sacrifice from the man. He was also told that the money should be given back to F.O.

Case 3

Mr. I.E. of Iguosodin Village offered one he-goat, one small native mat, some cowries, kolanuts and one tortoise to the azen. His purpose was to implore them not to hinder the progress of his wife's pregnancy as she was suffering from occasional bleeding. The diviner advised him to offer the aforementioned materials to the azen because one of the man's wives was jealous of the other wife, thinking that she might give birth to a male child thereby inheriting her husband's property upon his death. The only thing he could do to escape the recurrence of attacks from the azen was to sacrifice to them at the crossroads.

In commenting on this case, my informant said that there is considerable conflict within the polygamous family over succession rights. One of the man's wives feared that her co-wife would have a male child. Apparently the woman succeeded in conceiving and the jealous wife was banished.

Counteraction of the Azen

The consciousness that the azen are constantly trying to disrupt their lives leads the Edo to seek ways and means of counteracting them.

The first means by which the Edo may obtain protection from the azen is to interact with the divinities Ogun and Esu. In the chapter on Ogun we examined a number of cases in which Ogun was sacrificed to in order to counteract witch activity. My informant told me that in ninety out of one hundred cases the diviner will lead the person troubled by the witches to seek protection from Ogun who is believed to be greatly feared by the witches. The 'imported' divinity, Orunmila, is also believed to be especially 'good' at detecting witchcraft. Obsession with the azen and their anti-human acts has resulted in the introduction of a number of cults into the Mid-West. One such example is the Azelu cult introduced from the Afenmai Division. Syncretist churches such as the Cherubim and Seraphim also claim to have the power to counteract witches.

The Edo may gain special protection from the azen by bathing with specially prepared medicines. The obonoyada, skilled in the preparation of leaves, prepares a special medicine. He then asks the one in need of protection to buy a goat. The blood from the goat is then sprinkled over the leaves and everything is placed in a large clay pot. This is generally known as Osun. The pot will be placed somewhere in the bush. The one seeking protection will be asked to travel to the bush and bathe with this medicine. No medicine, say the Edo, can work without the aid of erimwin beings. By bathing in this medicine, or others like it, the Edo can be protected from azen activity.

Another means of counteracting the azen is through the use of talismen. The diviner may make one out of a tarry substance in the shape of a silver dollar. My informant showed me one he was using--he kept it tucked in his watchpocket. I have also seen a number of broom pieces stuck together with a tarry substance and placed on the inside of the front door.

Once someone is known as a witch, he is expelled from the intimacy of face-to-face contact and participation in the daily round of activities. This limits their evil powers considerably since they are denied the necessary intimate knowledge needed in order to work their evil against the Edo. Their power becomes limited to that of directing evil upon particular individuals as a result of a nocturnal visit by an individual desirous of directing evil against some enemy.

CHAPTER X

EH1: DESTINY IN THE EDO TRADITIONAL RELIGION

I. THE EDO REPRESENTATION OF EH1

The Edo believe that every individual consists of two parts: the living person in agbon and the spiritual counterpart Eh1 which is in erimwin. It is a common belief that when a person is going to be born in agbon he goes before Osanobua and tells him what he plans to do with his life on earth and requests the material and spiritual facilities for accomplishing this. This act is expressed in the word hi. If a man is unsuccessful in the world he is said to have done this badly or to be fighting against the fate which he has determined for himself and when people are buried the mourners call after them to hi well next time (Bradbury 1957: 58-9).

Osanobua has created all Eh1 and has given them a number of functions. An Eh1 acts as informant to Osanobua. The Edo say: Aghoghonorsoe omwan vbaserimwin. 'When we shall get to erimwin, Eh1 will be my witness.' The word used here for Eh1 is aghoghon which means shadow. An Eh1 is like a shadow, constantly observing its agbon counterpart. An individual's Eh1 witnesses all actions and when an Edo eventually goes before Osanobua for judgment it is impossible to cover up, for his Eh1 will bear witness.

The destiny of an Edo is set before he comes into the world.¹ The element of fate is operative here for it is commonly believed that one cannot rise higher than one's Ehi. If an Edo has a 'poor' Ehi, then he is destined to be 'poor.' Upon observing an individual's unfortunate behaviour, an Edo might remark: Ehi ere ima. 'That person's Ehi is not good.' The name Ehimwenma (My Ehi is good) reflects this attitude as well. This particular name no doubt reflects an attitude of thankfulness before one's Ehi: possibly the birth of a child is attributed to Ehi's intercessional activity.² A number of other names reveal a similar attitude to Ehi. The name Ehiorobo (Ehi is a good doctor) is a praise name indicative of a belief that Ehi is capable of interceding on one's behalf. This consciousness that good destiny is attributable to Ehi is further seen in the name Ehizogie (Ehi has created me to be like a king). The happiness over good fortune is expressed in the name given to the newly born child.

It is obvious, then, that apart from the shadowing function, another of an Ehi's functions or spheres of influence is that of giving assistance to his human counterpart. This takes the form of intercession before Osanobua. It may be that if an Ehi is successful Osanobua will send the other divinities on a mission on the suppliant's behalf. One informant

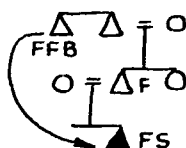
¹In an essay 'Ezomo's Ikegobo and the Benin Cult of the Hand,' R. Bradbury states: 'At one level the Ehi represents the innate potentialities for social achievement with which each individual is believed to be endowed. Predestiny is seen as a limiting factor on the individual's capacity to achieve success through his own actions (1961: 133-4).'

²Bradbury states (1961: 133-4) 'In operation the cult of the Ehi can be shown to have a particular association with the ability to beget, or bear, and keep healthy children. Though one who has a stroke of good luck should, and often does, thank his Ehi, it is more often invoked in contexts of failure and misfortune.'

told me that an Ehi is the 'last of all the divinities'³ because his sphere of influence is limited solely to the personal level. The protecting function of an Ehi is also revealed in the Ehi names. The name IgbinEhi (I take shelter under Ehi) asserts the Edo belief that an Ehi can give protection in dangerous situations. Ehisumwen (My Ehi guards me) indicates that Ehi is being praised for protection throughout trials imposed by enemies. Ehi has stood by and enabled the individual to remain free from 'bad intentions.'

At death the individual's Ehi ceases to exist. As we have seen when an Edo child is born it is given an Ehi by Osanobua; when dead the Ehi ceases to function. An Ehi, however, will incarnate at the first opportunity. The Edo believe that death releases the orion into erimwin where it takes its place assuming the new function of lineage guardian. The exception to this are the ighele-erimwin who are wanderers (ghosts), since they have not had a proper burial. The orion does not incarnate, only the Ehi.

The Edo believe that an Ehi goes through fourteen cycles before its final judgment before Osanobua. In a number of interviews with informants, I discovered that the Edo believe that it is possible to identify the incarnated Ehi. There are essentially four means of identification. First, it is necessary for the woman to conceive contiguously with the death of some member of the extended family.



FFB died and his Ehi incarnated the FS.

Diagram 5

³ As far as I have been able to ascertain, there is no divinity Ehi in whom all Edo participate. Further research may be necessary on this point.

Secondly, markings on the child's body will be identical to the dead person's. Thirdly, the child's behaviour through the years will be similar to the deceased's. Fourthly, the diviner will identify the child's Ehi.

In one case I was told that the FS had the FFB's Ehi, making the child a 'brother to the father's father.' The following explanation for this statement was given. One day the FFB came from the village of Orogho and found that F was not at home. He told the FW to prepare some food. This she did. The FFB then said that he was going out and would return shortly. Unfortunately he died on the road back to the village. During the month the FW conceived. Shortly after her conception she had a serious stomach problem. This led the husband to go to the diviner in order to discover the nature of the problem. The diviner said that the child wanted to be 'known' as the FFB's Ehi. The woman's sickness vanished after they said that the child was the FFB's Ehi. The child's subsequent behaviour reinforced this 'revealing.' For example, when the boy married, he took an Itsekiri woman for a wife. This parallels the FFB's behaviour and choice of a non-Edo for wife. My informant told me that Ehi will always stay in the family.

Ehi and the Edo Belief in Uhumwun

In contrast to Ehi representing predestiny of the potentiality of life is the Edo concept of the head (uhumwun), believed to be the seat of the individual's capacity to organize his actions in such a way as to survive and prosper. The uhumwun is recognized by the Edo to be the seat

of thinking (iroro), of judgment (enwae) and will (ekhoe) as well as of most of the senses. Bradbury states (1961: 134):

While Ehi implies a rejection of personal control over one's fortunes, uhumwun admits a greater degree of responsibility for them...On a man's Head depends not only his well-being but that of his wives and children; and, since this dependence is reciprocal, he serves their Heads at the same time as his own. Thus the Head cult has a particular association with family headship.

The Edo say that 'without the head, the body is useless.' One informant told me that it is the head that gives the body 'shape.' An Edo proverb says: Uhumwunnamure a ya khian. 'It is the head that one has brought from heaven that goes on with (on earth).' If someone experiences ill-luck or behaves badly, he is said to have a bad head (Omijie 1968: 41).

Sacrifices and offerings are made to the head particularly after a piece of good fortune such as the winning of a court case or the birth of a child (Bradbury 1957: 58). The individual sacrifice to the uhumwun begins with prayer.

My head, be present with me to take this food. I'm doing it for a sign of thanksgiving for your guidance throughout this troublous period. I implore you to allow me to live long so that the world will not say that I have bad luck (uhumwun dan) and a bad Ehi (Ehi dan).

My informant said that it is necessary to mention both Ehi and uhumwun together. There doesn't seem to be any sacrifice to the uhumwun without the consciousness that one is invoking or honouring one's Ehi.

The actual sacrifice to uhumwun follows the usual Edo pattern. A sacrifice can be offered at any time either to thank uhumwun or to change the course of events. It is possible for the diviner to ask any Edo to make a sacrifice to his uhumwun.

The individual who is making a sacrifice to his uhumwun (the coconut is the favoured item) first cuts the coconut into 31 pieces. The

thirty-first piece must be circular in shape which contrasts with the other thirty v-shaped pieces. A kola nut is then placed on top of the circular shaped cocoanut. Native chalk is taken and rubbed on the front, side and back of the head. The last place it is rubbed on is the chest. After this is done the suppliant prays: Ehimwen, Uhumwunmwun come to me. I am thankful for the safe delivery to the child. May my wife and I live to see the growth of the child.' After the sacrifice in the open courtyard the sacrificial item is eaten by those gathered.

In contrast to the individual's sacrifice to his uhumwun is the public ceremony (Igwe) to honour the Oba's head. The importance of this particular ceremony derives from the Oba's position and status in the Edo kingdom. The Igwe is held at the end of every year. There are a number of rites associated with the Igwe Festival. In the morning just before dawn children take burning brands from a fire and chase all evil things out of Benin City to the junction of roads leading out of the town. This is called the ugie-ewere. Then they gather 'leaves of joy' (eb-ewere) which on their return they present to their parents and other adults. In the evening the Ihogbe (priests of the past kings) present similar leaves to the Oba. Only the last rite is regularly performed. It takes place on the sixth day after the sacrifices to the Oba's uhumwun (Bradbury 1957: 59).

The sacrifice to the Oba's head is a most impressive ceremony. Thousands of Edo gather at the Oba's palace to observe the sacrifice. Before the actual sacrifice the various titled chiefs salute the Oba. These paramount chiefs enter the ceremonial ground with their entourages and dance before the Oba demonstrating their power and asking for his blessing. They twirl the traditional eben and are acknowledged by the Oba.

Next the Oba's head is anointed with a medicine ritually prepared by two of the Oba's assistants. After this is completed the sacrifice to the Oba's uhumwun takes place. The first item to be sacrificed is the cock. Held by one man, its throat is slit and the blood flows into a large wooden bowl. Some of the blood is then taken and is anointed on the head of the Oba.⁴ This is followed by the sacrifice of four goats. The same process is completed. The final item to be sacrificed is the cow, brought before the Oba's throne after being bludgeoned and subdued for the sacrifice. There is a separate bowl for the cow's blood which some Edo say is a surrogate for a human being. The cow's throat is slit and again the Oba's head is anointed with the sacrificial blood. The atmosphere in the crowd is extremely tense during the sacrifice of the various animals, but once the final animal is slaughtered the Oba arises from his throne triumphantly. Facing towards his wives, he twirls the eben. (ceremonial sword). He then perambulates the carcasses of the slaughtered animals followed by men blowing horns made out of elephant's tusks. The crowd also joins in praise to the Oba. The people appear to have been brought out of a dangerous period into protection. It is the Oba's head that gives direction to the Edo people. Since the Oba is the depository of blessing for the Edo, if he is blessed with a 'good destiny,' then his subjects will benefit as well.

⁴ Blood is also anointed on the head of one of the holders of "body-titles" (egie-egbe). The holders of these titles represent different parts and qualities of the Oba's person: torso (erha/onye); head (ohoba); feet (ehana), etc. During the sacrifice to the Oba's head, blood is anointed on the ohoba title-holder.

II. THE MANIFESTATION OF Ehi

As we have seen from our analysis of Ehi-names, the Edo believe that when things are going well (good destiny) their Ehi is doing his job satisfactorily. Names like My Ehi is good; Ehi is a good doctor; My Ehi guards me indicate that successful living is attributed to the workings of an Ehi. On the other hand, if an Edo's way is unsuccessful he may attribute this to the fact that his Ehi is not being honoured and is thus in need of something. This may precipitate some ritual action designed to bring the individual back into a harmonious relationship with his Ehi. An Edo will receive messages from his Ehi through the diviner who will interpret certain events as signs that his Ehi is displeased. Neither the dream-media nor the possession-media are utilized by an Ehi.

III. THE EDO RESPONSE TO Ehi

Since an Ehi can be influenced, the Edo believe that they can pray to their Ehi as well as sacrificing to him. The sacrifice is made in an open courtyard. Although the average Edo does not have an aruEhi, one informant told me that one must reach 60-70 before one's own Ehi shrine could be obtained. This would consist of a pot containing a large amount of chalk with cowries tied around it. It would be placed in a separate place in the house where Ehi could be invoked every year. And during the burial ceremony the aruEhi would be buried with the dead person.

The Edo believe that they can sacrifice to their Ehi at any time. The motivation to interact with Ehi may come from within the individual

or because of the diviner's request. I have not recorded a great number of sacrifices but the few I have may give some idea of sacrifice and the Edo belief in Ehi.

Case 1

Mr. U. I. of Ogbe Quarters in Benin City made a sacrifice to his Ehi with one white cock, and a cocoanut. His purpose was to thank his Ehi for sparing him to live to be a grandfather. This sacrifice was made as a token of gratitude for allowing him to live to such a grand old age. Mr. U. I. was conscious that his good fortune in life (old age and grandchildren) were attributable to his Ehi's favourable action on his behalf.

Case 2

Mr. J.E. of Benin City made a sacrifice to his Ehi with a cocoanut. His purpose was to be delivered from danger. This particular sacrifice was made during the Biafran occupation of Benin City, August 1967. Apparently whenever he was seen at a roadblock by the rebels, he was harassed. He went to the diviner seeking some guidance. The diviner suggested that he sacrifice to his Ehi. This he did and repeated the sacrifice fourteen days later. Here we can see that Ehi is being sought for his intercessional functions. Ehi is approached and persuaded to go before Osanobua to plead his cause. Ehi is able to perform this function more personalistically than any of the other divinities such as Olokun, Ogun or Esu. This fact does not preclude interaction with these divinities for similar ends.

Case 3

Mr. J. E. of Benin City made a sacrifice to his Ehi with a cock. The purpose was for continued deliverance from rebel hands during the

Biafran occupation of Benin.

The Edo respond to the personal divinity Ehi when they are thankful or when it is revealed to them that their plight might be related to their Ehi's dissatisfaction with their activities in agbon. As seen from the above cases, an Ehi is also interacted with in order to alleviate 'dangerous' situations.

The potentiality of what an Edo can become is related to the status of his spiritual counterpart in erimwin. Not only does an Ehi guide individual Edo through their uhumwun or present-life principle, but he also intercedes before Osanobua on their behalf.

Thus when the uhumwun is the recipient of a sacrifice, it may be that it is not the uhumwun per se that is actually receiving the sacrifice, but the Ehi. This point seems confusing. Bradbury (1957: 58) states that there is 'some difficulty...in determining what, in the case of uhumwun and obo⁵ (Bradbury regards the hand as a more positive symbol of wealth and social achievement that either an Ehi or the Head), is the actual object of sacrifice or worship. In practice the Edo act as though making offerings to their actual heads and arms though when questioned more closely some informants will aver that the actual entities 'served' are in erimwin.

Hazarding a guess, I would say that when a sacrifice is made to uhumwun, the individual Edo is directing his Ehi's attention to a particular

⁵The Edo make sacrifices to their hands (obo). One case I recorded illustrates this. Mr. O.I. of Benin City made a sacrifice of kolanuts, alligator pepper and one cock to his obo. His purpose was to thank his hand for the good yield of large yams in his farm. Mr. O.I.'s success is judged in terms of wealth. According to Bradbury (1961: 134) the sacrifice symbolizes his vigour, enterprise and industry; in fact, a kind of self-congratulations.

component of his body; in this case the head. For without a 'good' head, no divinity is able to assist one in his activities. And further, without a good Ehi, it doesn't matter how good one's head is.

Summing up, an Edo's destiny is set in erimwin. He can rise no higher than his Ehi. However, there are various obstacles that hinder a full, harmonious and successful life. In such circumstances, Ehi can be approached for assistance. It is important to note that the kind of assistance the Edo receive from their Ehi is not of the same nature as that received from the other divinities. Ehi needs the assistance of the other divinities whereas Ogun, for example, can act independently of Osanobua. Therefore when an Edo attempts to manipulate his destiny this is not paradoxical because he can really only manipulate his Ehi to help him achieve a destiny that is not being fulfilled due to careless or even rebellious behaviour as well as the disruptive activity of Esu or the azen.

CHAPTER XI

THE EDO RELIGION: AN OVERVIEW

I. DIVINITY IN THE EDO RELIGIOUS SYSTEM

The Edo believe in a supreme Divinity, Osanobua, as well as lesser divinities. The relationship of the lesser divinities to Osanobua is conceived of in genealogical terms: they are the 'children' of Osanobua who have each been given a specific function or purpose to perform. Osanobua is not a withdrawn God. He is active in the creative process. Without Osanobua's consent, no Edo child could be born. Osanobua is also closely related to the Edo individual in that he has given every one an Ehi. All Edo know that it is the high god who has given them this Ehi; that their destiny has been predetermined. Thus unfortunate events in their life can be related to Osanobua who is sovereign over the Edo individual. Further, Osanobua sends the dead back into the world in a reincarnational cycle intimately linking him with the continuity of life. And lastly, Osanobua is the object of worship by a cult; the members of the Holy Aruosa.

Each of the Edo divinities has a distinctive personality. Olokun as gentle and good may be contrasted with the capricious Esu and the temperamental Ogun. Not only do the Edo divinities display various types of emotions in their interaction with the Edo, but they have low or high status in the hierarchically structured pantheon. The relationship between Osanobua and Olokun is a particularly interesting one. Some Edo feel that

the worship of Olokun has superseded that of Osanobua, that Olokun is 'more powerful.' The relationship between Osanobua-Olokun parallels that of Jehovah-Christ. Just how much the Edo have been influenced by Christian concepts of Divinity I cannot say here. Possibly Olokun has come to assume his position in the hierarchy of divinities due to what he is believed to be capable of doing for the Edo.

Each of the divinities in the Edo cosmology is believed to exist as beings capable of manifesting themselves in culture. This is to be expected for another characteristic of personality is the ability to communicate. The bulk of the descriptive material in this thesis accentuates the importance of this point: the actors within the system interpret experience as the 'speech' of divinity. We have seen that the Edo divinities speak through dream-experiences, and the possession-experiences of the ohen. But the most significant way in which the Edo experience divinity is through the relating of fortunate and unfortunate events to a particular divinity in the pantheon. Without going into great detail, we could say that the Edo divinities enable the Edo to comprehend and order experience by grounding these experiences in divinity. Thus all Edo experience is 'under' the sacred canopy of one/more divinities believed to live in erimwin. Once the Edo have classified experience as either fortunate or unfortunate, the experience will be further classified according to the divinity it is grounded in. For example, the death of a child, lack of children, menstrual problems are all unfortunate events which would be grounded in either Esu or the azen. Ogun is also capable of killing but the nature of death

¹In seven of the thirteen cases in my data, the Edo sacrificed to Ogun in order to destroy a witch who was believed to be the ground of some ailment or disturbance.

would not be the same as death attributed to Esu. And the gift of a child would be grounded in Olokun. The entire Edo experience could be mapped in this manner. Once the experience has been attributed to divinity it can be comprehended and then managed through ritual interaction to the divinity who has been divined as the ground of the experience or to another divinity who can assist the individual in his dilemma.

II. RITUAL IN THE EDO RELIGIOUS SYSTEM

The Edo relationship with divinity, if placed on a continuum of pure manipulation to pure communion, would be very close to pure manipulation. Like other African religious systems (See Uchendu 1965: 15), the Edo relationship with divinity is contractual. However, the communion element is not entirely absent as there are selected individuals within the culture who are able to achieve a kind of mystical communion in their relationship to the divinities. Particularly relevant here would be the Ogun and Olokun priests. Since the majority of the priests of Olokun are women this is particularly significant. For with the possession-experience comes power and control over cult members which usually includes some male members.

The divinities of the Edo cosmology help them to maintain social and cosmological balance. Any event that involves an 'affliction,' or disruption of the harmonious functioning of the Edo individual in culture demands ritual action. Disruptions or obstacles in the way of the Edo fulfillment of their goals are attributed to a number of divinities who are associated with evil: Esu, the azen and other evil spirits. The

diviner will attribute some obstacle (Lack of a male child, lack of progress in business, various types of sickness) to the activity of a particular divinity. The diviner will set the disruptive event in the context of social relationships relating the event to his relationship with others and to a particular divinity as the ground of that experience as well as to a particular divinity who is the balancing agent: the divinity who is believed to be capable of restoring cosmological balance (The counteraction of bad forces by the good) and social balance (The obstacle is removed and the individual can function normally again). V. Uchendu has an illuminating passage on a similar theme in the Igbo religious system:

But the Igbo believe that these social calamities and cosmic forces which disturb their world are controllable and should be "manipulated" by them for their own purpose. The maintenance of social and cosmological balance in the world becomes, therefore, a dominant and pervasive theme in Igbo life. They achieve this balance, for instance, through divination, sacrifice, appeal to the countervailing powers of their ancestors (who are the invisible father-figures) against the powers of the malignant and nonancestral spirits, and socially through constant re-alignment in their social groupings (1965: 13).

What Uchendu has stated for the Igbo is also valid for the Edo who interact with their divinities in order to solve their problematic situations which are invariably related to three basic concerns of the Edo: health,² wealth and children. At the cosmological level there are beings for and against the Edo: disrupters and restorers; malignant and non-malignant beings. Some divinities disrupt and afflict primarily while others are 'mobilized' to remove the affliction.

²Fifty percent of the sacrifices offered to Olokun were thanksgiving sacrifices offered because Olokun was believed to have overcome obstacles blocking the fulfillment of goals. One Edo woman, for example thanked Olokun that he had fought against the azen for her.

The Edo believe that the ancestors underpin the lineage and village units within the social order. The hero-divinities have a yet wider sphere of influence: the welfare of village or village-groups. The most important divinities in the Edo cosmology are Ogun and Olokun and it's not surprising that they are 'concerned' for the welfare of individuals regardless of lineage or village affiliation. The servitors of the free divinities, Ogun and Olokun, are drawn from many lineages and all villages. Although all of the divinities are concerned with some aspect/s of Edo experience, with the Edo it seems that the most important and powerful divinities are concerned with the most highly valued matters in the culture. This is not to say that only one divinity is pre-occupied with matters of health. The erha, Ogun and Olokun are all capable of alleviating sickness. The point is that Olokun is not limited to health concerns but is able to give children and increase wealth.

The Edo achieve cosmological and social balance through sacrifice. Sacrifice for the Edo demands that they procure at considerable expense various items such as goats, hens, dogs and pieces of cloth and foodstuffs.³ The items to be offered to divinity are determined by the diviner in a patterned manner. With Olokun, for example, the favoured items are the white female hen and the white goat. Ogun favours the dog. These sacrificial items have a symbolic meaning in the ritual context where the actors say that they are interacting with divinity. I suggest this tentatively,

³The economic transaction involved here is obviously important but I did not have the time to determine the actual cost to the Edo. For a paper on the economic aspects of sacrifice see Firth 'Offering and Sacrifice: Problems of Organization' (1965: 185-194).

but it may be that the desired end as stated by the actor, the items offered and the ritual setting are analogous to the phrasing of words in meaningful patterns in order to communicate. If we accept at face value what the Edo believers affirm: that sacrifice is meaningful to them because the divinity can be manipulated and controlled by offering items to him, then it may be that the symbolic meaning of the sacrificial item lies in the actors attempt to structure messages in non-verbal media to beings, who though personal, are not entirely subject to the communication patterns on the social level. The Edo do say: 'Ogun hears us better when we give him a dog.' How are we to interpret such a statement? At one level, the offering of goods to divinity uncovers a belief in the possibility of communication with these 'extra-social' (to use Horton's phrase) beings.

Many writers (Frazer, Robertson-Smith, Hubert and Mauss) on the nature of sacrifice have noted that the importance of sacrifice is in the communal sharing of the sacrificial offering. The communal aspect of sacrifice does not seem to be overly important in the day by day interaction with divinity. I have seen a priest of Olokun sacrifice a hen to Olokun, making certain that the blood was sprinkled in the proper place in front of the shrine. After he had sprinkled the blood on the floor of the shrine, the hen was tossed aside. I was told time and time again that it was only the blood that mattered. However, in the yearly thanksgiving festivals the element of communion in the sacrificial rite is predominant. In the Eho Festival, for example, there is a ritually defined sharing of the sacrificed animal. It should also be noted that kinsmen partake of other prepared foods. Here it seems obvious that the bonds of fellowship between kin members are being ritually reaffirmed. This is also true for

the ceremonies honouring the various divinities where members see themselves as linked together in a single cultic community.

An interesting feature of both Edo and Dahomean religion is their congregational structure. What Horton (1960: 217) has said about the Dahomean is also valid for the Edo. He has noted that 'so much of it (is) marked by recruitment virtually unconnected with social provenance and resulting in ritual groupings coincident with none of the enduring structural units of the kingdom, (this) is a function of the character peculiarities of the vodun.' Although this statement would not be entirely accurate in pre-contact days, today the Edo religious system is essentially cultic, that is, the structure of the most important cults in the Edo culture crosscut lineages and descent groups. The Edo have come to view their divinities in a highly individualistic way as instrumental to the attainment of various goals within an open, urban environment where there is considerable struggle between individuals for both economic and political ends. This is not to say, however, that the Edo are pursuing entirely new goals. They are still able to pursue old goals (health, wealth, fertility and status), even though the means to attain these goals may have changed. For example, the divinities are now being sought for help in lorry trade, to sell motorcycles, to pass exams or to obtain a better job. Rather than rejecting all the divinities, it appears that certain divinities who have not been identified with any enduring unit of the social structure are helping the Edo adjust to the modern world.

The Edo traditional religious system is very resilient and does not seem to be dying. It is true that the traditional religious system has shifted from an ancestral focus to a cultic focus. In general terms,

lineages, clans, and other large-scale groupings have decreased in importance as instruments to the attainment of goals. Ancestor worship has become less and less important as the field in which individuals achieve socially valued ends shifts away from lineage and village. And new experiences in a modernizing society have not caused any demise of the divinities. For example, Ogun the divinity of iron, has taken things associated with metal, machinery and mechanics under his canopy. Something of this adjusting of new experience to divinity came across to me when observing the ugiOgun. The priest praised Ogun, stating that whenever a bridge is built, this is due to his power. He also said that the 'Europeans' knew more about the power of Ogun than the Edo. Further, unfortunate experiences resulting from motor accidents in the modernizing society are attributed to Ogun. The point here is that some of the traditional Edo divinities have become the ground of new experience in a changing society.

We have seen that oppositions within the Edo social structure were ritualized and that the political roles in the Benin Kingdom have never been conceived of in terms of the competition between segments based on lineage affiliation. The Oba and Uzama performed important rituals to their respective edion 'who laid down the customs and continue(d) to uphold its values' (Bradbury 1967: 26). These rituals sanctioned the opposition between them, but also set limits on their use of power. When the Uzama served his edion, he did not do this to depose the Oba but to fulfill their divinely sanctioned function within the political structure. It appears more likely that if the Oba wanted to eliminate the Uzama or any competitor, the edion-Oba wouldn't help him attain this particular end.

In fact, in 1939 the 'struggle between the palace clique and the opposition coalition, which gained increasing popular support, grew to alarming proportions. A sensation was created by the discovery of paraphernalia of sorcery in the Residency garden. As was the custom in times of serious crisis, the Oba sent chalk and kolanuts to many important priests for the purpose of appeasing the gods in the interests of the people generally' (Bradbury 1968: 239). The ancestors of royalty and the commoner were the guardians of a divinely sanctioned social order and were not played off against one another in the sense that any one divinity was 'used' to gain power or influence over another group. For example, if a particular hero-divinity is served by an exclusive group of people, this divinity contributes to the welfare of that village or village-group but does not serve the interests of the worshippers qua group at the political level. At any rate this would be unlikely in the Edo culture because of its structure which is unlike the segmentary political system of the Nuer and Dinka. If any ambitious young Edo politician wanted to get ahead, he had to enter into alliances in many directions. Bonds of kinship, affinity, and friendship cut across the boundaries of chiefly orders and served as a basis for political cooperation and intrigue (1968: 198). Thus competition is not between segments of the social structure who see the divinities as able to help them achieve their individualistic ends. All Edo have access to the same divinities, excluding the departed ancestors.

We might expect that a shift in the structural alignments within the society would result in a shift in the Edo divinity to group coordination. To illustrate this, we turn to the Holy Aruosa church in Benin. I do not want to examine the Holy Aruosa as a nativistic movement which seeks

to perpetuate a selected aspect of its culture. Rather I will view the church as a response to new structural alignments in the social order. When Akenzua II was coronated in 1933, schools had been introduced for quite a few years, there were new economic opportunities and a growing intelligentsia of teachers, clerks, and civil servants whose literacy gave them access to Western political ideologies. Many Edo had interests in timber and other commercial enterprises. The Oba himself belonged to the intelligentsia and so did some of his closest associates, but there were others who saw the growing power of the palace clique as an obstacle to their own interests (Bradbury 1968: 235).

It is possible to identify three fairly clearly defined sectors within the modern Benin political class. The 'Old Guard' of titled chiefs who had come to power in Eweka's reign; the Oba, his retainers and functionaries and the radical modernist element (1968: 235). There was an intense struggle between the palace clique and the opposition coalition. During this time of political turbulence, it was discovered that the Reformed Ogboni Lodge, which had existed in Benin since the early 1930's, was recruiting most of its members from the educated and commercial elites. Before 1948 it had never been considered to have any direct political significance. But it came to be perceived as a menacing and sinister cabal. This was due to the fact that its head, the Oluwo, was none other than the new iyase. Further, it was a secret cult, with mysterious initiation rites. Such rites had never been allowed in Benin before. Moreover, it was an alien cult, associated with the Yoruba and had no place in Benin culture (1968: 244-5). By 1950 many Edo people felt they were at the mercy of an oppressive oligarchy. Two distinct organizations emerged as anti-Ogboni.

One was the Holy Aruosa. It developed as a focus of Edo values in opposition to the alien Ogboni cult. Bradbury says that it 'gained some success, mainly among older people, and played a part in the mobilization of anti-Ogboni sentiments (1968: 245).

The Holy Aruosa, then, emerged as a response to new alignments in the social structure. The Edo elite also achieved another purpose. They were able to modify one aspect of the indigenous religious system: the ritual approach to Osanobua. In no way did the Edo feel that their traditional religion was exhausted. They did recognize a need for change. Possibly they thought that Osanobua would assist them in upholding Edo values against these anti-Edo influences if they honoured him in this new way. The Holy Aruosa illustrates an important theme in the Edo religious system. The system is able to adjust to new structural developments as well as new ideas resulting from culture contact. This is not to say, however, that the Aruosa has been able to counter effectively the new developments in the society.

The Edo traditional religious system has undergone significant changes over the last hundred years. Some divinities have died, or have receded into the twilight (Obiemwen and Ogiuwu); others have 'adjusted' to social change resulting from the encounter with Western religious, economic and political ideas and behaviour patterns. And some divinities such as the Yoruba divinity Orunmila have only recently been added to the selection of divinities open to the Edo. In general terms, in the modern era a divinity seems to be rejected or accepted on the basis of his ability to assist the Edo to relate to a changing society with new problems, and new tensions. For example, the 'imported' divinity Orunmils is believed

to have special powers of counteracting Esu and the azen.

Thus the Edo 'pagans' remain undaunted in their worship of Ogun, Olokun, the ancestors and the hero-divinities. The coming of Christianity--and there is much evidence of this new religion--has had little success in eradicating traditional religious practices. Native Christian ministers are dismayed at how resistant the Edo are to the gospel, and often pray that the Edo 'pagan' will see the light and leave their idols.

There are many Euro-american denominations in Benin City. These range from the institutionally entrenched Catholic Church and the many Protestant churches to the Jehovah's Witnesses sect. The Roman Catholics rely primarily on their educational system to propagate their beliefs. There is great variety within the Protestant ranks. A large Baptist church situated in downtown Benin is clearly looking to its American founder for guidance, the entire programme having been taken from the manuals of the western church. Pentecostal churches with their emphases on divine healing, glossolalia, visions and intense emotional participation are sprinkled throughout Benin. Most of the buildings are small and unimpressive, but this group attracts a significant following.

As we have seen, religion in Benin is not a mere contrast between the old and the new. The introduction of new ideas, beliefs and ritual patterns has led to the phenomenon of syncretism: the blending of two or more religious systems to form something that is neither, but related to both.⁴ The Cherubim and Seraphim are such a movement although the 'pagan' elements in this cult are not traceable directly to any traditional religious

⁴ The Catholic anthropologist and missiologist L. Luzbetak (1966: 115-121) has coined the term Christo-paganism to describe such movements.

system. Groups are found all over Benin, ranging from back alley shacks to respectable white mud buildings.

The Cherubim and Seraphim are known by their distinctive shepherd garb. Led by supernaturally commissioned prophets, the worshippers dance and sing to the accompaniment of bell-ringers, drummers and samba players, as glowing candles waft incense heavenward. Although prayer is the core of the cult, the prophets seek for the God-sent vision or dream experience, for they believe that it is through dreams and visions that God reveals his messages through his chosen prophetic medium. The cult also practices baptism by immersion, confirmation, communion and fasting. I was told by one prophet that the Cherubim and Seraphim is a distinctive African church.

It is easy to see that the Edo have numerous cults to choose from to help them solve their problems and relate to a changing society. However, the old people and the semi-educated still adhere to the traditional system in its modified form, and the professing Christians cannot escape the influence of problem-solving divinities, the evil forces which are believed to disrupt and hinder progress and the responsibilities of the burial ceremony. The belief in witchcraft is still widespread, and a Christian does not find it contradictory to visit the diviner or seek some protection from the witches. Part of the impact of the Cherubim and Seraphim cult is that it takes the Edo 'fear' of witches seriously. Although the Cherubim and Seraphim and possibly some other churches relegate the Edo divinities to the evil spirit category, it is now the Holy Spirit and Jesus who serve as instruments, albeit more powerful ones, to enable the Edo to overcome particular problems. It is difficult to predict the future of the Edo traditional religion, but I think that the system is far from moribund, and that it will continue to be one of the options in the

market-place of competing belief systems.

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