

[Áfa, the Nri-Igbo counterpart of Ifá](#)

Conference on *Ifá* divination in Africa & the Diaspora, Harvard University, 14 March 2008. Grupo de Estudos Africanos e Afrobrasileiros em Línguas e Culturas, [Universidade do Estado da Bahia](#), 15 April 2009 (Os caminhos de Ifá).
[20 pp. A4, last modified 10 June 2015]

ABSTRACT: *Áfa* and *Ifá* are two out of many localizations of a farflung West African 'oracle' (spanning system capabilities of information retrieval and Lullian *ars combinatória*) whose digital processor keys natural language text to 256 ordered pairs of 4-bit arrays (ordered binary sets), cf. Følgrúnso & Akínwálé (2009). While being ported south and west from the Benue river valley some 500 years ago, the oracle's own name and other proprietary terms underwent sound change in the receiving languages. These phonetic shifts, plus paralinguistic mutations, remain behind as footprints on the transmission routes. The texts themselves and their uses also evolved along their branching path, as emergent élites turned from ancestral legitimation rooted underground, to novel ideas of authority dangling from the sky.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTE: Two files of supplementary data included in earlier versions of this manuscript are now posted separately:

[Comparison of 4-bit array names and associated information from oracle localizations across 5 historical zones](#)

[1 p. 410 x 230 mm, last modified 28 August 2014]

[8-bit semantic key for duplex \(8-bit\) array names across oracle localizations](#)

[5 pp. 438 x 320 mm, last modified 26 May 2015]

Furthermore, the main printed sources on Igbo *Áfa* and Èdó *Ìha Ominigbon*, being difficult to obtain, are separately posted in the support of transparency in the aforementioned analyses of historical relationship:

Ọnwuejìogwù (Onwuejogwu), M. [1978/1997]. [Áfa Symbolism & Phenomenology in Nri Kingdom & Hegemony: an African philosophy of social action](#). Ph.D Thesis, University College, London/Ethiopia, Benin-City.

Egharhevba, J. [1936/1965]. [Ìha Ominigbon: Efen Nokaro, Nogieva, Nogieha, Nogiene, Nogisen kebve Nogiehan](#). Kopin-Dogba Press, Benin-City.

Part two of this research can be found in the companion manuscript [Before Wazobia: Òminigbon and polyglot culture in medieval 9ja](#), posted immediately below.

[Before Wazobia: Òminigbon and polyglot culture in medieval 9ja](#)

[41 pp. A4, last modified 19 June 2015]

[Walter Rodney Seminar](#), African Studies Center, Boston University, 13 February 2012. [Handout](#) [4pp. A4, last modified 8 March 2012]

ABSTRACT: A scholarly reincarnation of Egharhevba's *Ìha Ominigbon* (1936) is long overdue. This Èdó classic has intrinsic value as cultural description but is virtually unobtainable today and readable only with difficulty. It's also relevant to wider historical relationships — even if not in the Ifé-centric way intended by its author — and requires critically-informed translation for both academic and popular access.

Preliminary comparisons with Yorùbá *Ifá* and Ìgbo *Áfa* show that Èdó *Òminigbon* — alias *Ìha* — breaks the presentist mold of an encompassing Yorùbá-Èdó world system (Ọgúndiran 2003, 57, cf. Burton 1863, 222). Ìgbo etymologies exist for core *Ìha* terms *ogwègga* and *n'áabe*, as well as for *Ogbèide* — the second appellation of the person who introduced the system to Èdó (Egharhevba 1936, 3, no tone indicated). Respectively, the Ìgbo sources are *òkwé èja* 'oracle seeds', *n'áabò* 'double' and *ò-gbù ire* '[performing/possessing] very effective [sacrifices/medicine]'. An Ìgbo source is independently plausible from comparison of *Òminigbon*'s casting method with those of *Áfa* and *Ifá* (Emovon 1984, Ọnwuejìogwù 1978, Abímbólá 1976). Transmission from Ìgbo to Èdó is also consistent with evidence of loanword phonology as to how oracle-specific jargon crossed the southern 9ja area in medieval times (Manfredi 2009a). Obvious matches between the 256-part semantic keys of *Áfa* and *Ìha* surpass 35% — well above chance similarity — though it is harder to measure the extent of Èdó innovation in the remainder, as well as in the relationship between Èdó oracle narratives (*èria nọ dimwin*) and their functional counterparts in Yorùbá (*ese Ifá* parts 2-6) and in the Gbè-speaking area (Maupoil 1943a, Kligueh 2011b).

These observations and a long list of others support the view that Yorùbá oral history has confused Odùduwà with Ọrúnmilà (Erediaua 2004, 206) in the thrall of Ifé-centric narratives motivated by the modern politics of 9ja, the *Nàìjá* area, colonial Nigeria (cf. Ryder 1965; Vansina 1971, 457; Law 1973; Obáyemí 1979). The advanced codification of *Ifá* as compared to its 9ja relatives shows the mnemonic bias of several arguably modular cognitive domains — number, folk biology, folk sociology, theory of mind — plus the nonmodular but eminently memorable genius of paganism (Augé 1982) and its superstimuli (Sperber & Hirschfield 2004, 45).

UPDATE 12 January 2013: On Saturday 5 January 2013, the boss of Ifé Central Local Government joined General Akínrínádé and the Ọ̀nì at the commissioning of the gigantic Orí Oló.kun edifice [...] at the Mayfair Roundabout (Adéšìná 2013). This is the very spot where 9ja police (alias *Sorrow, Tears & Blood*) fatally stampeded a peaceful anti-Şíjùwádé protest on Sunday 7 June 1981 (cf. § 3.5 of my paper). Public doubling down on the Frobenius myth shows the force of Wazobia's consciousness; in the same vein, Olúpòná (2011).

Adéšìná, B. [2013]. At Orí Oló.kun launch, Yorùbás canvass cultural renaissance. *Guardian* [Lagos], 11 January.

Olúpòná, J. [2011]. *City of 201 Gods; Ilé-Ifé in time, space & the imagination*. University of California Press, Berkeley.

UPDATE 14 April 2014: Prof. Akin Oyèèbòdè, progressive eminence of international law at the University of Lagos, explains in [this engaging interview](#) (20 min.) his recent proposal at the improvised and unsovereign National Conference to drop the name Nigeria because of its dubious colonial antecedents, its negative notoriety acquired during the past 54 years and its indelible etymological association with the N-word of racist usage.

UPDATE 30 April 2015: Incomplete English translations of 73 chapters of *Ìha Ominigbon*, prepared on request by Jeff Ọ̀móruyí (Benin-City), can be read [here](#) alongside the second edition of Egharhevba's Èdó text. The unfortunate disappearance of the first edition (1936) from public record leaves unexplained numerous obscurities and inconsistencies of the 1965 text — not to mention a dozen mysterious Bible interpolations!

BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTE: Part one of this research can be found in the companion manuscript [Áfa, the Nri-Igbo counterpart of Ifá](#), posted immediately above.

Comparison of 4-bit array names and associated information from oracle localizations across 5 historical zones

Victor Manfredi

African Studies Center, Boston University

zone A				zone B					zone C				zone D				zone E											
<i>Ijá</i>				<i>“Agbigba”</i>					<i>Ìba</i>				<i>Áfa</i>				<i>Kbet't er remel</i> (‘sand-writing’ of literate Arabs)											
i	ii	<i>gloss of doubled array</i>		iii	iv	i	ii	iii	<i>gloss of single array</i>			i	ii	iii	<i>gloss of single array</i>			i	ii	iii	iv	<i>gloss of single array</i>						
◇◇◇◇	Ogbè	(1)	good visitor	Gbè	♂	[Oşika]	(1)	[Şikan]	(6)	[Shi]	(1)	leg	Ógbì	(1/5)	Ogbi	(1)	Óbì/Ógbù	(11)	Obi	Èbí	(5)	open door= <i>e</i>	(5/16)	♂	(7)	(4)	(1)	tarik ‘road’
◆◆◆◆	Ọyèkú	(2)	longevity/good journey/wives	Yèkú	♀	Oyèku	(2)	Eyako	(5)	Kum	(16)	crisis	Àkó	(2/6)	Ako	(5)	À(k/h)wù	(3)	Akwù	Oyèkwu/Ákwù	(13)	meeting= <i>e</i>	(16/5)	()	(16)	(6)	(2)	jemāh ‘assembly’
◆◇◆◆	Ìwòrì	(3)	children; ending of good luck	(W)òlì	♂	Ogori	(7)	Gori	(8)	G(y)iri	(8)	stomach trouble	Òghoi	(3/2)	Oghori	(10)	Ògori/Òyeri	(2)	Ogoli	Ògòlì	(11)	4-legged animal= <i>e</i>	(11/10)	♂	(8)	(3)	(5)	ijitima ‘unity, meeting’
◇◆◆◇	Èdí/Òdí	(4)	bad visitor/avoid journey	Dí	♀	Oji	(8)	Eji	(7)	[Nwa]	(9)	death	Òdín	(4/1)	Edi/Odi	(9)	Òdí	(10)	[]	Òjí/Òdí	(10)	stomach	(10/11)	♀	(11)	(11)	(6)	ocleh ‘deception’
◇◆◆◆	Ọbàrà	(7)	coming of good luck	Ab(á)là	♂	Ọbara	(4)	Bara	(15)	Mbara	(15)	annoyance	Ọkan	(6/11)	Ọkanran	(4)	Ọbala	(7)	Ọkaraọ	Ọbàlà	(2)	blood sacrifice	(2/3)	()	(12)	(12)	(3)	lahyān ‘bearded person’
◆◆◆◇	Ọkànràn	(8)	accident; honor	Aklán/Akàná	♀	Ọkona	(3)	Kana	(16)	Gina	(4)	silence/dark skin	Ọ(v)ba	(5/12)	Ọ(v)bara	(6)	Ọkala	(1)	Ọbara	Ọkòṅò/Ọkàlà	(8)	blood sacrifice	(8/13)	♀	(13)	(10)	(4)	nekys ‘reversal’
◇◇◆◆	Ìròsùn	(5)	poverty	Lósò	♂	Orosun	(15)	Rusu	(1)	Lusu	(14)	illness	Ọghác	(8/4)	E/Aghare	(3)	Ùrúrù	(5)	Ègali	Òlòrù	(9)	laughter= <i>e</i>	(9/12)	()	(10)	(5)	(16)	nousra el khārijah ‘victory leaving’
◆◆◇◇	Ọwónrín	(6)	longevity; slander	Wòlín/Wèlé	♀	Ọga	(16)	Ega	(2)	[Chiyong]	(3)	woman	Òrúúhu	(7/3)	Urhur(h)u	(7)	Àgári/Àyári	(13)	Uhu	Ègálì	(12)	machete	(12/9)	♀	(9)	(2)	(15)	nousra el dākhilah ‘victory coming’
◇◇◇◆	Ọgúndá	(9)	sudden trouble; double wealth	Gùdá	♂	Ogunta	(14)	Guta	(11)	Kura	(13)	fame/conciliation	Ọhá	(10/15)	Ọrha	(2)	Ìjíte/Ògúte	(9)	Oha	Ogwuta/ẹ/Èjítà	(14)	youngest son	(13/8)	♀	(15)	(14)	(8)	atabah el khārijah ‘outer threshold’
◆◇◇◇	Ọsá	(10)	difficulties in work	Sá	♀	Osa	(13)	Esa	(12)	Saa	(2)	man/‘idol’	Ìghítan	(9/16)	Ighite	(8)	Ọrá	(15)	Ijite/Ogute	Ọrá	(3)	elder’s walking stick	(3/2)	(♂)	(14)	(13)	(7)	atabah el dākhilah ‘inner threshold’
◇◇◆◇	Ìrètẹ	(14)	prosperity despite enemies	Lẹtẹ	♀	Irẹtẹ	(10)	Etia	(14)	Lete	(6)	misfortune	Ètúrẹ	(12/13)	Erhurẹ	(12)	Ète/Èke	(8)	Oture	Ọlẹtẹ/Ètẹ	(1)	fire running forward	(1/4)	♂	(2)	(7)	(13)	gandle ‘solid’
◇◆◇◇	Òtú(ṛ)á	(13)	peace and consensus	Túlá	♂	Otura	(9)	Turia	(13)	Toro	(7)	delay	Ète	(11/14)	Ete/ʔEke	(13)	Òtúre	(12)	Ete	Òtúlá/ẹ	(16)	loud noise= <i>e</i>	(14/7)	♂	(1)	(8)	(14)	naki el khadd ‘beardless’
◆◆◆◆	Òtúrúpòn	(12)	accept advice	Trúkpẹ	♀	Ọtaru	(6)	Rakpan	(9)	Matpa/e	(10)	elder woman	Èká	(16/10)	Eka	(15)	Àtúrùkpà	(16)	Eka	Átúnúkà	(4)	elder woman= <i>e</i>	(4/1)	♀	(3)	(16)	(11)	bayādh ‘white color’
◆◆◆◆	Ìká	(11)	health and prosperity	Ká	♂	Oyinkan	(5)	Yikan	(10)	Mishpa/e	(11)	dark skin	Èrhóxuà	(13/9)	Erhokpo/a	(14)	Àká	(4)	Ètùrukpa	Èká	(7)	young woman= <i>e</i>	(7/14)	♂	(4)	(1)	(12)	homra ‘red color’
◇◆◆◆	Ọsẹ	(15)	good wife; journey/prosperity	Chẹ	♂	Ọkin	(11)	Arikin	(4)	K(y)e	(5)	victory	Òhún	(15/8)	Ophu	(16)	Òsé	(6)	Ohu	Òché	(6)	unearthed/uncovered	(6/15)	♀	(6)	(15)	(10)	cabdh el khārijī ‘outgoing arrow’
◆◆◆◇	Òfún	(16)	share with friends; be alert	Fú	♀	Ofun	(12)	Efu	(3)	[Kapla]	(12)	light skin	Òsé	(14/7)	Ose	(11)	Òhú	(4)	Ose	Òfú	(15)	compliant person	(15/6)	♀	(5)	(9)	(9)	cabdh el dākhil ‘incoming arrow’

Last updated 28 August 2014. Posted at people.bu.edu/manfredi/4bitArraySpreadsbeet.pdf. For cited references, see people.bu.edu/manfredi/IfaAfaiNri.pdf. The fullest available comparison of 8-bit wglossaries from zones B/C/D is collated in people.bu.edu/manfredi/8bitSemanticKey.pdf.

Notes. Left side of transcription = top of array; ◇ = concave up, ◆ = concave down, corresponding to single vs. double line in *yanrìn títẹ* ‘sand-writing’. Omitted here is Èfík “Efa”, briefly mentioned by Talbot (1912, 274) as well as Southern African “four tablet divination” (Binsbergen 1996, 21f) which shows no resemblance (other than the use of binary numerology) to the oral Niger-Benue systems in Zones **A - D**, and only faint similarity to the literate Arabic systems in Zone **E**.

Graph mutation in Zone C and Zone D-ii: all asymmetric arrays rotate 180° with respect to their counterparts in Zone **A**, despite the impression given by Armstrong’s chart (1964, 139). Emovon notes that this flip is due to explicit adoption of a perspective “as if the reading was done from the side of the client sitting opposite the diviner” (1984, 4), although the matter is more complex because even rotated arrays are nevertheless read from the oraclist’s right to left, just as obtains in the nonrotated zones.

[A-i] Ọyọ (Abímbólá 1976), listed in the order recorded in Òmu-Ìlọrin (Clarke 1939, 252) as well as in “Ifẹ, Ìlẹṣà, Èkìtì and Ìgbómìnà” (Bascom 1969a, 47). A variant order of **[A-i]**, recorded in “Onđó and Bini [=Èđó]”, shifts *Ìká/Èká* to final position (Ìbiẹ 1986, 65). **[A-ii]** is the order “primarily associated with Lagos, Òdè Rẹmọ... and the provinces of Abẹkúta and Ìbàdàn” plus Cuba and Brazil, called by Bascom “the dominant pattern” (1969a, 47; cf. 1961, 1966). **[A-iii]** also occurs in Nàgó and eastern Gbè, for which **[A-iii]** gives Àgbómẹ names (Maupoil 1943a, 414f. plus variants from Trautmann 1940 and Herskovits 1938, 210f., cf. also Lóngé 1983, 30-33). Glosses of double arrays (= *ojú odú* ‘major *odú*’) from Clarke (1939, 255). Trautmann, Maupoil (1943a, 430-572) and Abímbólá (1976, 30f) list more detailed semantics of single names, based on folk etymologies, associated narratives or other mnemonics. **[A-iv]** lists a gendering of arrays as reported by Hébert (1961, 152 citing Johnson 1899, Maupoil 1943a, 414-16 and Alápini 1952). The Ajá-speaking variant of *Afá* **[A-ii]** demotes *Ká* to its **[A-i]** position: “*Gbe, Yẹku, Wólì, Di, Loso, Anlọẹ, Abla, Akla, Guda, Sa, Trukpe, Tu(mi)la, Lẹtẹ, Ka, Tse, Fu*” (Kligue[h] 2001, 205, 2011b, unreliable diacritics), whereas a nearby Èdè-speaking tradition has the **[A-i]** order (Spieth 1911, 201f) and yet a different order is reported nearby: *Gbe, Yẹku, Wólì, Di, Loso, Ijọlì, Abla, Akla, Guda, Sa, Ka, Trukpe, Tula, Lẹtẹ, Tse, Fu* (Surgý 1981, 43).

[B-i] Yàgbà-Yorùbá (Bascom 1969, 7 no tones, citing Ògúnbiyí 1952). **[B-ii]** Nupe (Ọbáyemí 1983, no diacritics); Nadel (1954, 41) gives a different order. **[B-iii]** Angas, West Chadic (Danfulani 1995, 81f., 195, no diacritics, noncognates in [square brackets]), individual 4-bit glosses included.

[C-i] Èđó (names from Egharhevba 1936, 7-10, tones from Melzian 1937, 137). The first ordering is from Egharhevba (1936, 7-10, 10-39), who notes a variant with *Òsé* (13), *Òbún* (14), *Èrbóxuà* (15); the second ordering is from Melzian (1937, 137); Emovon (1984, 5) gives yet a third order. **[C-ii]** Úrhobo (Nabofa & Elugbe 1981, inconsistent transcription, no tones, significance of ordering not stated). Similar nomenclature occurs in Isókó *Eva* (Peek 1982, 189 no tones). BK1 tonemarking convention in Èđó: no mark = same as previous mark.

[D-i] Nri-Igbo (Ọnwẹjìọgwù 1997, no diacritics, significance of order not stated). Revised transcription based on 1977 recording of *dìbì* a Chúkumà at Águ-Ukwu Nri (= Appendix of people.bu.edu/manfredi/IfaAfaiNri.pdf). **[D-ii]** Nsùká-Ìgbo (Shelton 1965, unreliable diacritics, no ordering given, ◇◆◆◇ not named). BK1 tonemarking convention in Ìgbo: no mark = same as previous mark. **[D-iii]** is from the “*Ifa-annwa*” (seed-casting) method of Ígàlà (Boston 1974, no tones), significance of order not stated, approximate tones and alternate names from Armstrong (1964, 139 via Bradbury *p.c.*). Boston also documents “*Ifa-ebutu*” (sand-writing), a less specialized oracle which resembles “*Ifa-annwa*” substantially, not only in the names of the 4-bit signs but also to a lesser extent in semantics: seven out of the sixteen simplex “*Ifa-annwa*” glosses—those suffixed with “=*e*” in the table above—closely match the glosses reported by Boston (1974, 359) for their “*Ifa-ebutu*” counterparts.

[E-i] Before the slash is given a “mathematical” order attributed to the Berber author Ez-Zenati, also found in Porto Novo (Maupoil 1943b, 5-6, cited by Hébert (1961, 155 and 156, *fn.* 1), in Chad (Jaulin 1957 cited by Hébert 1961, 156, *fn.* 2) and in “Atimi” collected at Mèkọ, Nigeria (Bascom 1969, 8 citing Monteil 1932, 89f., no tones). Trautmann (1940, 151). The order after the slash is obtained by reversing the parity of each bit (Hébert 1961, 182). The genders are given by Ez-Zenati (Maupoil 1943b, 61). The **[E-ii]** order was collected in Mauritania (Trancart 1938, via Hébert 1961, 150). **[E-iii]** is from Grande Comore (Hébert 1961, 146 who gives three alternate orders from Madagascar, cf. also Trautmann 1940, 153). The **[E-iv]** order and the Arabic glosses are from Darfur (Tūnisī 1845 via Hébert 1961, 121, 188ff). Jaulin (1957, 1966) documents semantic shifts in Chad.