

## [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 Ominigbòn*, being difficult to obtain, are separately posted in the support of transparency in the aforementioned analyses of historical relationship:

Ọnwuejiọgwù ( Onwuejiegwu ), 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.

Egharhevbá, J. [1936/1965]. [Ìha Ominigbòn: 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: Òminigbòn and polyglot culture in medieval 9ja](#), posted immediately below.

## [Before Wazobia: Òminigbòn 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 Egharhevbá's *Ìha Ominigbòn* (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 *Òminigbòn* — 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 *ọgwègga* and *n'áabe*, as well as for *Ogbèide* — the second appellation of the person who introduced the system to Èdó (Egharhevbá 1936, 3, no tone indicated). Respectively, the Ìgbo sources are *òkwé ẹ́ja* 'oracle seeds', *n'áabọ* 'double' and *ò-gbù ire* '[performing/possessing] very effective [sacrifices/medicine]'. An Ìgbo source is independently plausible from comparison of *Òminigbòn*'s casting method with those of *Áfa* and *Ifá* (Emovon 1984, Ọnwuejiọgwù 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 Ọrúnmilá (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 (Adéšínà 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).

Adéšínà, 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 Ominigbòn*, prepared on request by Jeff Ọmóruyí (Benin-City), can be read [here](#) alongside the second edition of Egharhevbá'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!

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Òghori <i>nààbò</i>	useless		empty handed	poverty, fall from wealth to deprivation			loss of kingdom [?]	hyena acquires talons for his paws [?]	[dog chews bones]
Òghori Àkà	death		punishment	[kill rat, sickness runs, dispute scatters people]			trouble coming to the house	<axe can't cut forest tree without sacrifice>	<axe usurps the inheritance of iroko>
Òghori Àkwù	unlucky ones		<animal sacrifice>	[war with bloodshed, Ògún]					[dog savior]
Òghori Àgàrí	stomach illness		[burden, sacrifice]	stomach illness, bloated like calabash				[stronghead prince beaten for his <i>Fa</i> initiation]	[stronghead prince]
Òghori Ète	<i>áḷḷḷ</i> of Ògugu		child	[menstruation]			children	[why oracle priest never does farmwork]	python's stomach illness/[vulture's absence]
Òghori Òbàlá	corpse			boat of death collects sacrifice for Òvía			[quarrel of friends]	[husband flees ashamed as wife pays his debts]	[adultery/womb]
Òghori Òbì	female child			[corpse/quarrel]				[ <i>Oduduma</i> acquires longevity and followers]	child/fertility
Òghori Òhú	<i>óyè</i> weekday			[illness]					[diarrhoea/snake bite]
Òghori Òkàlá	woman			[Àkè/arrow of ancestral realm]				goat cures lion's stomach ache	[farmer/tree]
Òghori Òrà	kindle fire/illness			[travel back in boat with sacrifice for Òvía]					stomach ache/illness
Òghori Òsé	nighttime			[stomach illness]				[riches or death]	orphan repairs night damage, becomes rich [?]
Òghori Òtúré	tell story			[woman/waist]				[ <i>gbá's</i> impoverished son inherits kingdom]	[ram's arrogance]
Òghori Àtúrùkpà	female child			nubile woman					[antelope's pelt]
Òghori Òdí	big trouble			someone is tied up by his own belt					[death]
Òghori Ùrùrù	mourning			someone dies and goes away never to return					[lion's arrogance]
Òkàlá <i>nààbò</i>	thing struggled for		war, fight	quarrel, dispute	quarrel		<i>Ṣàngó</i> fights against Ram and flees to the sky	apes versus humans, earth versus sky [?]	porcupine and panther fight over one wife
Òkàlá Àkà	run/escape		[war, fight]	[steadiness and powerful hand]					[crow owns white scarf/is punished for theft]
Òkàlá Àkwù	accident		[tree]	[husband, wealthy house-owner]	[menstruation]			[approach of death]/<sow survives danger>	[water turns to mud]
Òkàlá Àgàrí	animal sacrifice			<celebration for surviving danger>					[suffering]
Òkàlá Ète	silk-cotton tree			[hunger, bad deed, ?]					[taboo violation is punished]
Òkàlá Ìjíte	<i>óṣṣ</i> titleholder			[oracle priest, curative herbs = Òbàlá Ìjíte]	[pregnancy]				[beware falling tree]
Òkàlá Òbàlá	deceit			<your sacrifice for others helps you yourself>	<prosperity>				[crab/the stubborn child ends up badly]
Òkàlá Òbì	said/decided		advice, counsel	messenger who is your adversary	quarrel				disregarding advice brings disaster
Òkàlá Òhú	alcoholic drink		alcoholic drink	alcoholic drink, drunken behavior					[face to face]
Òkàlá Òghori	wasted lifetime			[small child that becomes an elder]					[danger from siblings and cousins]
Òkàlá Òrà	refusal/disgrace		false, no	[joy, celebration, coming of a child]					mistaken dog ownership [?]
Òkàlá Òsé	respect/avoidance			[curative herbs]					child beg forgiveness/[panther trapped]
Òkàlá Òtúré	truth	intelligence		<abundance from the ancestors>				<accept limited bad, ancestors will provide>	<accept limited bad>
Òkàlá Àtúrùkpà	deceit			<favorite, sexy wife>					<bachelor finds pregnant wife>
Òkàlá Òdí	watchfulness			confident boasting, drumming for Ólokún					[ancestral insult remains today]
Òkàlá Ùrùrù	cleansing evil			escape evil					[naif trapped in a sincere commission]
Òrà <i>naàbò</i>	villain		{{spirit}}	[sudden event like thunder, fall from tree]	[death]		worthless person	assassin farmer/[frog beats buffalo]	family better than treacherous friend
Òrà Àkà	pay a fine		punishment	sacrifice a rooster to the ancestors		[imminent event]			[sabotaged by a rival tie-dyer]
Òrà Àkwù	taboo			something dangerous behind your back		<i>é bọ</i> (≈ Igbo <i>áḷḷḷ</i> )			[ram and bull can't defeat each other]
Òrà Àgàrí	patrilineage		relative/brother/sister	patrilineage					patrilineal inheritance/[fish-wife caught]
Òrà Ète	sorrow		tears	tears					[oracle escapes ambush, leaves bag behind]
Òrà Ìjíte	patrilineal ancestors			[advice]			[the hunter's totemic duiker-wife]		[witches fall in own trap/tree lives by bending]
Òrà Òbàlá	bad-death ones		[god/sky/ancestors]	[sky god]					[one tree outlives its brother in the world]
Òrà Òbì	sibling, {visitor}			close sibling					[innocent maid of a pair is accused of theft]
Òrà Òhú	sibling		<obey/careful>	<prediction>					[living underwater, the frog escapes birds]
Òrà Òghori	small child			[lies]				[antelope/forest animal seeks out hunter]	[treacherous friend/tortoise brings fire]
Òrà Òkàlá	small child		male	male child, man, men					[buffalo kills hunter's obedient dogs]
Òrà Òsé	illness			worm illness					[goat the troublemaker becomes sacrificial]
Òrà Òtúré	first son			[advice]				[ <i>Légbá's</i> eternal erection]	[innocent hunter executed/cow loses voice]
Òrà Àtúrùkpà	first daughter			[advice]					[toucan beak/river/a chief requires a house]
Òrà Òdí	left-side moiety			[deafness, stubbornness]				[Why maggots consume fish]	[Afa reveals the password of death]
Òrà Ùrùrù	inlaws		{{children}}	[something that's wrong and to be discarded]		[no ill event]			[farmer uproots grass; people stop thunder]
Òsé <i>naàbò</i>	see		eyes	eyes, vigilance to avoid trouble			[kola medicine against death]	<act before too late>	<night/rain falls before job is done> [?]
Òsé Àkà	odd behavior			wasted spending of money					dog habitually eats shit/calabash always rattles
Òsé Àkwù	sacrificial items in market			baboon follow branch to market/make sacrifice					[where iroko falls is its own grave]
Òsé Àgàrí	sacrificial items in market			sympathy or desire to see someone					[sing good songs/suspicion causes adultery]
Òsé Ète	thing held			something that delays your hand to act				[a portent too terrible to be pronounced]	antelope's cane [?]/[strength of dancing feet]
Òsé Ìjíte	food sacrifice	[ <i>ébi</i> procreative force]		<avoid selfishness>					<crab lost his neck in helping others>
Òsé Òbàlá	joy			coral bead/[pale person]				[death is approaching]	[termites flee from bush fire]
Òsé Òbì	sacrificial items in market		market	sacrificial persons or things in market			'make market'/[bad head/witch/pregnancy]	proof of wife's honesty in the market	[vagina is buried and spoiled/ <i>Nefi's</i> adultery]
Òsé Òhú	profiteers			someone who plays a trick				<wallowing in mud does not kill the pig>	<pig doesn't rest in mud>
Òsé Òghori	waste/in vain			weakness/idleness					[partridge call/vagina blocked with clay]
Òsé Òkàlá	<i>áḷḷ</i> titleholder			[what is spoken will happen]				[grave danger]	[squirrel is killed for betraying the hunter]
Òsé Òrà	you have escaped	sacrifice to living	[ <i>ébi</i> procreative force]	[something that you keep in mind]					[baobab is killed by helping others]
			{{annoyance}}						
Òsé Òtúré	joy			prosperity/progress/long life			goodness	[messenger/17/4-eye <i>ikin</i> ]/<escape death>	[loyal youngest son escapes death]
Òsé Àtúrùkpà	joy			[woman ties beads on waist]					[stubborn child dies in initiation]
Òsé Òdí	anger		[underworld, dead]	[bad spirits that go at night]					[intelligent people, don't try the impossible]
Òsé Ùrùrù	caution			[turbulent river spoils/scatters something]					[oracle bag with hole/riches lost from house]

Òtúre <i>naàbọ</i>	(bad) talk, lies			quarrels afflict squirrel			[orgin of imams/Aina vomits riches]	[harmful individual can be useful]
Òtúre Àkà	abomination			bad rooster-cry give way to a good one				disorder (mixture of <i>abo</i> and <i>eto?</i> )
Òtúre Àkwú	commotion			<secret, hiding>				<a crowd plants a farm en masse at night>
Òtúre Àgári	sworn oath			[correct prediction]				[failed marriage test/neglected son]
Òtúre Ète	egg/regret			humiliation				homestead reduced to bushland [?]
Òtúre Ijíte	rooster			'good head/destiny' leads you to progress		[befitting burial of a mother]		[jealous twin kills visitor, can't shift blame]
Òtúre Òbala	peaceful talk			washed clean to be good in this world				[fatal failure to heed approaching fire]
Òtúre Óbi	pleading			continuous requesting			[secret of Death/generosity repays the giver]	[take a risk to end an impasse]
Òtúre Òhú	negotiating peace			save yourself with your mouth				[regicide averted by loyalty]
Òtúre Òghori	foolish			useless activity (toothless one can't eat mango)				[even the leper perseveres with life]
Òtúre Òkala	said/decided			[disagreement]				[taboo violation voids bulletproof charm]
Òtúre Òrá	ears			talking in secret				[hawk helps orphan solve cooking riddle]
Òtúre Òsé	bad talk			bad talk hooked the rat's mouth with a thorn				death sentence for grey hair is repealed
Òtúre Àtúrùkpà	regret			fulfil your previous agreement				spying eyes sold by mistake/[monogamy]
Òtúre Òdí	cannon bursts			[fight without winner between ditch and elephant]				swallowed victim bursts the predator's gut [?]
Òtúre Ùrùrù	<i>áfo</i> weekday			<death, mourning especially of a small child>		<death>/[sacrifice for stomach or pregnancy]		<bullet charm fails by carelessness>/[failure]
Àtúrùkpà <i>naàbọ</i>	handcuffed/in trouble			[infidelity causes the death of a child]			[head, pregnancy, gourd, round things]	panther fakes death but fails to grab dog's paw
Àtúrùkpà Àkà	you have escaped			leaving to another place {difficult journey}				[a drunk should go and rest]
Àtúrùkpà Àkwú	wrapper cloth			[planned event/committed from the beginning]				[owner of salt owns dead cow]
Àtúrùkpà Àgári	tied down/fixed			[insincere talk/tonguelashing]				[mouse says it has fled but it hasn't]
Àtúrùkpà Ète	living across the river			[loss of abundance in difficult times]				[perform precautionary ritual]
Àtúrùkpà Ijíte	'bigmen'/titled elders			[sacrifice tortoise to prevent undesired event]				[rite of purification]
Àtúrùkpà Òbala	<i>ìdala</i> fruit/peace			[children of chiefs]				[birds escape witches by nesting in tree trunks]
Àtúrùkpà Óbi	accidental/premature death		cloth	[prime minister is multilingual]				[contest to throw spear through baobab]
Àtúrùkpà Òhú	trouble			trouble because of cloth				disobedient dog stuck in priapic copulation [?]
Àtúrùkpà Òghori	troublesome ones			[relatives, siblings]				[termite hill erodes in the rain]
Àtúrùkpà Òkala	firm control			[good health]				[toad saved from hawk by thorns]
Àtúrùkpà Òrá	trouble			something holding you back {retreat/deceit}				[purify in red earth to escape suffering]
Àtúrùkpà Òsé	wrapper cloth			[foreigner]				[river is hard to cross/water remains in mud]
Àtúrùkpà Òtúre	<i>íẓọ</i> titleholder			[danger from a bad friend]				[jealous co-wives fall in their own pit trap]
Àtúrùkpà Òdí	tied/in trouble			no trouble/misfortune				[a white goat spoils reputation of the herd]
Àtúrùkpà Ùrùrù	give me snuff			[snare catches only snake/death of small child]				[fire is trapped]
Òdí <i>naàbọ</i>	miss the target		< {food for witches} >	<feed ancestors, to achieve victory on enemies>	[distress]		[mother fails to sacrifice/maize sacrifice]	[weaver of death]
Òdí Àkà	burden/trouble			struggle for freedom entails undergoing loss	[cooperation]			destruction
Òdí Àkwú	anger			fighter in dispute over 2 chalks, 2 women			need to perform sacrifice against jealousy	jealousy (= Àkwú Òdí, 180° rotation)
Òdí Àgári	misfortune on me			[animal sacrifice]				[wilfulness of the ram]
Òdí Ète	terrifying			threats/[boasting]	[male]		[ <i>Léghá</i> 's 4-color hat beats king's 4-eyed goat]	[jealousy]
Òdí Ijíte	earth force			sacrifice to the earth	[guest]		[ <i>Léghá</i> earns his place in front of the doorway]	[cow enjoys after suffering]
Òdí Òbala	(grand)mother			[persistence, complete three times to finish]				[initiation]
Òdí Óbi	peace restored		[food, labor]	[{expect money}]				
Òdí Òhú	mother, pregnancy			[a marketing load of goods]			[crab kills jealous husband/escapes creditor]	[the handsome unknown suitor/misfortune]
Òdí Òghori	<i>áhpjí</i> of Ògugu		<father, ancestor>	mother, wants another person's child			<the oracle priest's words will do him harm>	<useless efforts>
Òdí Òkala	firm control		<m/f ancestor>	<jealousy based on ancestral home>				[confession at point of death]
Òdí Òrá	breathe, breeze			[crisis without solution]		control, loss, enemy/<sacrifice for father>		hunter dies from jealousy
Òdí Òsé	anger/sit on stone			[abundance of food?]				[adultery]
Òdí Òtúre	father/patrilineage			[victory/porcupine is invulnerable]			[how sky took precedence over earth]	[town crier unrecompensed, unheeded]
Òdí Àtúrùkpà	grandfather			longevity is awe-inspiring			father's confidence brings inheritance	[resentment/reciprocity]
Òdí Ùrùrù	maternal patrilineage			[relatives, rejoicing]				[antelope escapes hunter]
				<escape from danger>		<escape from danger>/[open the path]	feed one's mother or else do Ramadan fast [?]	[death from one's own gun]
Ùrùrù <i>naàbọ</i>	pay a debt		debt	vomit back	[happiness]		[pregnancy]/[fear of losing wife]	[rain extinguishes fire]
Ùrùrù Àkà	food			[anger, jealousy]				
Ùrùrù Àkwú	food			food				
Ùrùrù Àgári	animal sacrifice			meat to eat/[talkative person]	friendly shrine			
Ùrùrù Ète	cocoyam, sorrow		<kolanut>	cocoyam/<gift>				
Ùrùrù Ijíte	yam/strongminded			yam food/[what you are looking for]				
Ùrùrù Òbala	food			food			dead twin eats wife's food	
Ùrùrù Óbi	food		[forgiveness]	food				
Ùrùrù Òhú	food			hunger for food				
Ùrùrù Òghori	bad food/poison		[mourning]	food				
Ùrùrù Òkala	food			food				
Ùrùrù Òrá	hunger			[taboo of performing sexual act in daytime]			[feed ancestors]/[increased prosperity]	
Ùrùrù Òsé	bad food/greed		wrongdoing	taboo				[oilpalm is <i>Fá</i> /tree of life]
			{ {bad belle} }					
Ùrùrù Òtúre	food			yam food/[what you are looking for]				[unchangeable destiny or status]
Ùrùrù Òdí	bad food			food				[riches of palmtree/cat can't kill fish]
Ùrùrù Àtúrùkpà	food			yam food/[what you are looking for]				[dance to music of life]

## NOTES

\* This file (5pp. 438x320mm) is posted at [people.bu.edu/manfredi/8bitSemanticKey.pdf](http://people.bu.edu/manfredi/8bitSemanticKey.pdf). Coding of more data is in progress. Most recent update: 26 May 2015. For references and discussion see the main text, parts one ([people.bu.edu/manfredi/IfaAjaNri.pdf](http://people.bu.edu/manfredi/IfaAjaNri.pdf)) and two ([people.bu.edu/manfredi/BeforeWazobia.pdf](http://people.bu.edu/manfredi/BeforeWazobia.pdf)).  
n = total number of attested cases per locality. nn = *shared* number of cases between localities, in case of data gaps on both sides.

- As discussed in the main text (§4.3 of part one), Ñsùkà, Ùrhobo, Ìsóko and Èdó glosses attest a systematic 180° rotation of binary 4-bit arrays with reference to the Ñri orientation. In Èdó, the rotation is explicitly recognized by practitioners as reflecting the oraclist’s virtual perspectival shift, “as if the reading was done from the side of the client sitting opposite the diviner” (Emòvò 1984, 4). Importantly this geometric mutation, apparently contained in a contiguous area, did not in itself affect the semantic mapping of the array names; in other words, the ‘deep structure’ of the oracle is the set of (linguistically meaningless) names and not the geometric arrays that call these names in the binary procedure.
- The listing order of the 256 cases follows Ónwùejìógwù (1997), who apparently used alphabetical sequence based on the spelling of one version of the Ìgbo array names; this does not necessarily correspond to some of the variants given here, due to the extreme phonetic variability of the array names at Ñri. The corresponding names of the individual 4-bit arrays in the other localities are given at [people.bu.edu/manfredi/4bit-ArraySpreadsheet.pdf](http://people.bu.edu/manfredi/4bit-ArraySpreadsheet.pdf).
- Maupoil (1943a, 580 *fn.* 1) plausibly identifies this oracle text with a Ìgbo folktale (Ànekwé 1936).

## SOURCES

Column 1 is based on Ónwùejìógwù (1997) with supplementary translations in {curly brackets} from the recording posted in audio form at [manfredi.mayfirst.org/chukwumaDibiaNri.mov](http://manfredi.mayfirst.org/chukwumaDibiaNri.mov) and transcribed in the Appendix of part one of this monograph.

Column 2 is based on Shelton (1965b).

In Column 3, glosses in {curly brackets} are from Peek (1982, 199), otherwise from Nabofa & Elugbe (1981). The aggregation of Ùrhobo and Ìsóko is obviously a simplification intended to compensate for the sparseness of the data reported for both localities.

In Column 4, glosses in {curly brackets} are from Erivwo (1979) and Emòvò (1984), otherwise from Egharhevba (1936a), a source whose first edition is apparently lost and whose second edition (loaded with typos and obscurities) urgently requires full translation. Incomplete and unedited English versions of 73 out of the 80 chapter narratives recorded by Egharhevba (1965, 90-168) can be consulted at [people.bu.edu/manfredi/Egharhevba1965.pdf](http://people.bu.edu/manfredi/Egharhevba1965.pdf).

Columns 5-9 are based respectively on Nadel (1954), Boston (1974), Bascom (1969), Maupoil (1943a) and Kligue[h] (2011b).

Other sources exist for some of these oracle localizations (e.g. the works of Abím̀b̀ólá), but I know no other localizations of this oracle (i.e. any oracle with a semantic key in 256 parts where the array names are at least partly cognate to those above) that has been described in ethnographic literature with even a partial a sample of the 8-bit semantic table. (Exception: 14 Tiv glosses (Downes 1933, 69*f.*) are omitted here.) Any such information, whether from secondary or primary sources, can be mechanically added to the compilation above, and appropriate comparisons made. For example, it will be straightforward to to add a full column for any *libreta* of Cuban *Ifá*, such as typically comprises several hundred typewritten pages of mixed *Lucumí* (Cuban ritual Yorùbá) and Afrocuban Spanish, all systematically indexed by *odù* name. Such indexation was demanded by the literate nature of *Lucumí Ifá* consultation, in contrast to the African situation where indexed compilations emerged only gradually through the 20th century (e.g. Lìjádù 1908, Ìbié 1986).

No glosses have been sampled here from the unordered 16-cowry oracle (e.g. Bascom 1980), which happens to be well attested on both sides of the Atlantic. While the scale of information retrived by the cowry oracle is smaller, the content is relevant in principle, because some names of the unordered arrays in the cowry system are clearly cognate to those of the ordered 8-bit system.

## METHODS

The topline scores in the chart are calculated directly from the glosses in each column as a proportion of the available sample less than or equal to 256 meanings, as compared to the index set in Ñri. Recorded glosses in a given column *not* matching Ñri by the semantic criteria discussed below appear [in square brackets] and are not counted. Borderline/tenuous matches are flagged by “[?]” and excluded from the lower bound statistic where a range is given. Matches between any localities excluding Ñri are not counted in the topline, but are flagged <in angle brackets> for independent calculation; a few ratios are noted in the headers. This table calculates relationship \*\*to Ñri\*\* because Ñri is represented by a complete 256-part sample, but in principle the exercise could be carried out using any other localization as the index without obtaining a different degree of similarity to Ñri, since the similarity relation is both transitive and reflexive.

Three kinds of considerations, unavoidable either in practice or in principle, reduce the quality of the semantic matching scores obtained here with respect to a theoretical ideal, but without vitiating the results.

- In most of the sources, the main share of interpretations are cited in English or French translation, whose accuracy naturally varies with the investigator’s fluency in both object language and meta-language; with the quality of philological resources—grammars and dictionaries—which are available for the object language and the investigators ability to utilise same and especially with the investigator’s position on the insider-outsider scale with respect to the oracle knowledge. In all these respects, no scholar of any localization this oracle is ever likely to come close to Professor Abím̀b̀ólá (whose research is not sampled in the above table), who is famous for his balanced bilingualism and possession of a strongly insider perspective, and who enjoys the leading status of Yorùbá in terms of extant philological resources. In my view, the second highest level of adequacy among scholars of this oracle was occupied by Verger and Ónwùejìógwù, both of whom were bilingual (though asymmetrically and in different directions, neither one as balanced as Abím̀b̀ólá) and both of whom underwent thorough, long-term initiation in the respective oracles from monolingual virtuosi (though neither one employed his initiation to practice the oracle professionally). Both Verger and Ónwùejìógwù had the further advantage of sustained selfcriticism and were personally sp opposed to dogmatism as to be exceptionally sensitive to conceptual difficulties in translating cosmological concepts. On a third rank in my opinion are Egharhevba (1936a) and Kligueh (2011). Egharhevba has the advantage of transcribing the 8-bit meanings directly in the source language (Èdó), but unfortunately only in a pioneering way, without tonemarking, with very many typos and without benefit of a dictionary or grammar. As a result, many key terms of Ìha are obscure, but it is not always clear if this is because they are esoteric or just wrongly transcribed. Kligueh like Egharhevba is a nonprofessional scholar, moreover he describes a nonstandard variety of a Gbè language and does not translate either completely or consistently. Other sources quoted here occupy yet a fourth level of semantic and pragmatic adequacy overall: they contain very valuable indeed irreplaceable information, but convey much less about the object of study. Although the wide range of this scale determines many incommensurabilities, it probably does not grossly change the relative degrees of similarity between the different localizations sampled, as calculated above.
- For the oracles on the eastern side of the area (Ñri, Ùrhobo, Ìsóko, Ígàlà), the oracle returns short phrases, so normalization is relatively straightforward. In counting semantic matches in these systems, strict identity of denotation is relaxed just in two situations: partial matches (e.g. ‘said’ = ‘messenger’) and translation-independent links supported by culturally canonical pragmatics (e.g. ‘rooster’ = ‘good head’). These cases are relatively few in number, so they don’t substantially affect the statistical results and they can be manually excluded by the reader in case of differing judgement of plausibility.
- Semantic normalization in the above sample is more arbitrary for the systems located further west (Èdó, Nupe, Ilé-Ifè, Àgbómè, Adzá-Tádó). This is because the more western oracles return longer and multiple texts per array. A total limit on the scale of such texts is nevertheless imposed by the fact that they are learned (orally), so any stability observed from one practitioner and one location to another is a testimony to mental discipline supported by oracle professionalization based on appropriation of economic surplus. The learnability of these texts is also enhanced by their stereotypical linguistic and poetic format. The expanded circumstance of oracle semantics in the west poses a problem of comparison to data of the eastern area, where the cultivation of human memory is sustained by a more rudimentary/less professionalized guild or social class of oracle specialists. Therefore in comparing the western systems to each other and especially to those of the east, less stringent (more subjective, more abstract) criteria of identity are required. Provisionally, in addressing this issue, I have not calculated any statistical penalty for negative matches for a given 8-bit array (= a Yorùbá *odù*), which penalty would dilute whatever positives appear. This decision obviously reduces the absolute significance of the measurement, because comparison of texts of infinite length and infinite number would always yield identity (100% resemblance) between any two systems purely as a matter of chance. Such *reductio ad absurdum* is escaped, however, thanks to the relatively short length of most of the western texts (approximating standard folktales) as well as to the relatively small number of alternative texts recorded in a given locality (a handful at most). In some instances, stability and identifiability of the semantic core of the *odù* is reinforced by an accompanying one-sentence motto (Èdó *eria*, French *devise*). In Ilé-Ifè, these mottos have been systematically integrated in the narrative text in a specific poetic format, namely as “the name(s) of the Ifá priest(s) involved in the past divination that the *esè* alludes to” which are immediately followed by the formula “*a dí(F)á fún...*” ‘the one who cast for...’ (Abím̀b̀ólá 1976, 43). Similar nominal attribution of the motto occurs in some of the Àgbómè narratives, undoubtedly reflecting Ilé-Ifè influence (via Óyó) as noted by Maupoil. Borderline matches are noted in the table by [?] and reflected in the topline statistics as a min/max range where the amount is significant. To be sure, disregard of negative matches is better adapted to the retrospective demonstration of shared archaism and common origin than the more interesting and challenging question of prospective, innovative, evolutionary developments, i.e. it is closer in spirit to Greenberg (1963) than to Watkins (1962). This limitation is temporary!