

## Before Wazobja—Òminigbõn and polyglot culture in medieval 9ja

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For full data, references and explanation of tonemarking, see:  
<http://people.bu.edu/manfredi/BeforeWazobja.pdf> (37pp.)  
<http://people.bu.edu/manfredi/lfaAfaNri.pdf> (32pp.)

### 1. Wazobjan blowback

The compound “wá-zò-bjá” amalgamates the roots for ‘come (here)’ respectively in Yorùbá, Hausa and Ìgbo—the three most populous languages indigenous to the land area currently known as Nàìjǎ (= 9ja in SMS mode), a.k.a. “Nigeria”. Following Braudel, Wallerstein (1974) defines “modernity” relative to the capitalist world-economy. If Atlantic Africa’s trading states were incorporated into that system in the 18th century, discussion of earlier times risks modernist presentism. In southern 9ja, knowledge of the medieval (“classical”) era >300 years ago depends mainly on oral sources and archaeology. Both types of study flourished in Ifẹ̀ and Ìbàdàn universities, from where BUASC recently hosted leading scholars Wáńdẹ̀ Abím̀bòlá and Akin Ògúndiran. Oral accounts are of course highly mediated. By the 18th century, Ifẹ̀ traditions had become instrumental in Oyo, to whose hegemony Èdó (“Biní” or “Benin”) and other regional powers became aligned, and which alignment was further entrenched by Lugard’s Indirect Rule and its successor in the southwest corner of the Wazobjan game-theoretic regime, namely Awólòwò’s Action Group/Ègbẹ̀ Omọ̀ Odùduwà (Beier 1956, Ryder 1965, Law 1973, 1996, Dudley 1973, 1978, Williams 1974, Aṣiwájú 1976, Qbáyẹ̀mí 1979a, Thornton 1988).

In this overdetermined nexus, no pathfinder has been more followed than J.U. Eghar[h]evba—a first-generation literate born in the capital of Èdó Kingdom a few years before British troops burned the palace and sacked its treasure (Eyo 1997, Plankensteiner 2007). Among his many publications are two whose reception contrasts to the maximum extent: *Èkhérhe vbe èbé itan Èdó* (1933), translated and four times revised as *A Short History of Benin* (1936b/1953/1960/1968 with many reprints) and *Ìha Ominigbõn* (1936a plus a 1965 reprint), never translated, few copies extant. The pioneer Èdó writer made effective use of Yorùbá spelling learned in Àkú(r)ẹ̀ gradeschool and of experience collaborating on the standard Èdó dictionary (Melzian 1937, abridged as Agheyisi 1986). Impressed by impressive Christian ethnonationalist books like Johnson’s *History of the Yorùbás* (1897, cf. Law 1996), Egharhevba assiduously pruned his Èdó chronicles so as to graft them onto Odùduwà’s legendary stem (Bradbury 1959, Eisenhofer 1995, Úsuánlẹ̀le & Fálólá 1998). When an Èdó monarch politely demurred in print (Erediauwa 2004), he was slapped down by a Yorùbá establishment which stands heavily on Egharhevba’s shoulders (Àjàyí 2004). Èdó popular wisdom says that someone suffering from waist pain should not visit Òkè Imàle—the Yorùbá neighborhood of Benin-City, where prolonged, low-bending salutations are obligatory.

### 2. Oracular counterevidence

Here in full is Egharhevba about the source of the Èdó 8-bit oracle:

Ominigbõn (Ogbeide) ọre a tie eni ọmwan nọ rhie lha na ke Uhe (Ile-Ifẹ) ghadi Edo. Ọbo Ọrọnmila nọ re Uhe ọro na rue lha, ren ọre ovbiwaisẹ n’ọdion oghe Ọrọnmila vbe eghẹ nii, ọ ke vbe ren lha dinmwini eṣeṣemwese ọ ke do mu oghe obọ re tobọ-re y’otọ gha fi vbe Edo. (1936a, p. 3)

[Òminigbõn alias "Ogbeide" [tone unknown] is the name of the person who brought Ìha to Èdó from Úhẹ (Ìlẹ̀-Ifẹ̀). His teacher in Úhẹ was the oraclepriest Ọrọnmila, and he had already become Ọrọnmila’s senior apprentice and thoroughly mastered Ìha before going on to establish his own practice in Èdó.]

Egharhevba doesn’t exactly say that Òminigbõn a.k.a. "Ogbeide" was Yorùbá-speaking, or that the Ìha learned in Úhẹ is derived from what’s now called Ifá. Both inferences are commonsensical, but demonstrably false.

Comparatists have long observed that some of Yorùbá Ifá’s core terminology, apparatus and procedures are closely matched in other oracles localized across southern and middlebelt 9ja (Armstrong 1964, Bascom 1969). The next-best documented occurrences are Èdó “Ìha Ominigbõn” (Egharhevba 1936a) and Ìgbo “Áfa” (Ọnwụjẹjìogwù 1978), but sketchier descriptions of Úrhobo “Èpha”, Nupe “Eba”, Ìdọmà “Èpa/Èba”, Ìgálà “Ifá” and Ngas “Pa” also give valuable clues to the spread and evolution of this information retrieval code, which joins southeastern “nsibiri” script (Macgregor 1909, Battestini 1991, Slogar 2005) and other tropical African analogues of the ‘restricted’ or ‘privileged’ literacy which sustained stratified city-states in cuneiform Mesopotamia, New Kingdom Egypt and Minoan Greece.

Ifá’s closest relatives are its direct descendants in Gbẹ̀-speaking ex-Dahomey/Danhomè now called “Bénin” (Maupoil 1943) and in Cuban Lucumí, Brazilian Nagô and other American neo-Yorùbá communities. Such transatlantic reach would merit the Weberian label of “world religion” (Abím̀bòlá & Miller 1997, Prothero 2010) if not for (i) the irrelevance of religious “belief” (ìgbàgbó)—which in Yorùbá applies to the Bible but neither to Qur’anic oration nor to ìtàn (narratives) of òrìṣà—not to mention (ii) the marginality of Yorùbá Ọlọ́run/Olódùmarè, a supreme sky-being promoted by the babaláwos themselves in their own interest (Peel 1990) and pre-adapting the òrìṣà system in turn for montheistic acculturation/syncretism at home and abroad (Ortiz 1906, Bastide 1960, Ìdòwú 1962). As to the other correspondent oracles, their status as Ifá’s possible ancestors, collaterals or offspring is much less obvious, and needs separate argumentation.

The names of the 16 elementary 4-bit oracular sub-signatures lack etymologies in any known locality. Instead of being coined from local linguistic resources, or inherited along with ordinary vocabulary from an extinct protolanguage, they are therefore evident loanwords—opaque proper nouns—memorized laboriously as a set during priestly initiation. The remote origin of these words will probably remain unknown and has not the faintest echo in Europe, Arabia or the African Sahel, but some of the oracle jargon’s more proximate transmission steps can be inferred from forensic hints.

	Fòn-Gbè	NW Yorùbá	NE Yorùbá no tones in source	Nupe no tones in source	Ngar no tones in source	Èdó 180°	Ùrhobo 180° no tones in source	Wìgbo	Nri-Igbo	Ìsúká-Igbo 180° no tones in source	Igálà	Ìdomà
←top												
◆◆◆◆	Gbè	Ogbè	[Ošika]	[Šikan]	[Šhi]	Ógbì	Ogbi	Ógbì	Óbi/Ógbù	Obi	Èbí	Ébí
◆◆◆◆	Yèkú	Oyèkú	Oyèku	Eyako	Kum	Àkó	Ako	Àkwu	Àkwu/Àhwu	Àkwu	Àkwù/Oyeku	Àkwù
◆◆◆◆	(W)ólí	Ìwòrí	Ogori	Gori	Guiri	Òghoi	Oghori	Ògoli	Òyeri/Ògori	Ogoli	Ògòlì	Ògòlì
◆◆◆◆	Dí	Èdí/Òdí	Ojì	Ejì	[Nwa]	Òdín	Edi/Odi	Òdí	Òdí	missing	Òjì/Òdí	Òjì
◆◆◆◆	Ab(à)là	Òbàrà	Qbara	Bara	Mbara	Ò(v)ba	Q(v)bara	Òbaj	Òbala	Qbara	Òbàrà	Òblà
◆◆◆◆	Aklán/Akànà	Òkànran	Qkona	Kana	Gina	Òkan	Okanran	Òkaj	Òkala	Qkara	Òkàrà/Òkòṅò	Òklà
◆◆◆◆	Lósò	Ìròsùn	Orosun	Rusu	Lusu	Òrúùhu	Urhur(h)u	Úlúshù	Úrúrù	Uhu	Òlòrù	Òlò
◆◆◆◆	Wòlín/Wèlè	Òwònrín	Oga	Ega	[Chiyong]	Òghác	E/Aghare	Ògá(l)i	Áyári/Ágári	Egali	Ègálí	Ègálí
◆◆◆◆	Gùdá	Ògùndá	Ogunta	Guta	Kura	Ìghítan	Ighite	Èjíte/Ògúte	Ìjíte/Ògúte	Ijite/Ogute	Èjítá/Ogwute	Èjítá
◆◆◆◆	Sá	Òsá	Osa	Esa	Saa	Òhá	Qrha	Òshá	Òrá	Oha	Òrá	Òlá
◆◆◆◆	Letè	Ìrètè	Irete	Etia	Lete	Ète	Ete/?Eke	Ète	Ète/Èke	Ete	Ètè/Olete	Ete
◆◆◆◆	Túlá	Òtú(r)á	Otura	Turia	Toro	Ètúrè	Erhurè	Ètúle	Òtúre	Oture	Òtúlá	Òtlé
◆◆◆◆	Trúkè	Òtúrúpon	Otaru	Rakpan	Matpa	Èrhòxuá	Erhokpo/a	Àtúkpa	Àtúrukpa	Eturukpa	Àtúnúkpa	Ètrúkpa
◆◆◆◆	Ká	Ìká	Oyinkan	Yikan	Mishpa	Èká	Èka	Àká	Àká	Èka	Èká	Èká
◆◆◆◆	Ché	Òsé	Qkin	Arikin	Kye	Òsé	Ose	Òsé	Òsé	Ose	Òché	Òché
◆◆◆◆	Fú	Òfún	Ofun	Efu	[Kapla]	Òhún	Ophu	Òfú	Òhú	Ohu	Òfú	Òfú

Unlike oral narrative, primary language data have an “unconscious character” immunizing them “to secondary reasoning and to reinterpretations” (Boas 1910). Babaláwos’ unlimited and irrepressible puns, though psychologically apt both as *aides-mémoire* and as tropes of verbal art (Verger 1972, 1977), are historically irrelevant. Each of the following examples (among dozens of others) may be poetically compelling, but it is nonetheless phonetically and/or semantically unworkable as a literal derivation of the odù (8-bit sign) whose content it’s claimed to evoke:

◆◆◆◆\ ◆◆◆◆	Ogbè Òtúrúpon	→	tún omo pon	‘carry again [another] child by means of a sling’ (fertility blessing)
◆◆◆◆\ ◆◆◆◆	Ìròsùn Ògùndá	→	gún edá	‘pound a bushrat [in a mortar]’ ( <i>materia medica</i> )
◆◆◆◆\ ◆◆◆◆	[Ìrètè Òsé]	→	irè tètè osè	‘tail [of a leopard] press down on [be pounded with] soap’ ( <i>materia medica</i> )

As primary data, phonetic differences between localities in the names of individual arrays—and to a lesser extent in the name of the oracle itself—track the oracle’s transmission paths at least in part. For example, as shown in the 12x16 table above, the NW Yorùbá pronunciations of ◆◆◆◆ and ◆◆◆◆ each contain [w]. Independently it’s known that this sound evolved in NW Yorùbá from [gh] (= fricative [g]) as shown by dialect variants oghó/owó ‘cowrie’, -ghò/-wò ‘look at’ etc. (Adétúgbò 1967). (The consonant was elided entirely in Ifè, where ‘cowrie’ is pronounced eó.) I don’t know how ◆◆◆◆ and ◆◆◆◆ sound in SE or Central Yorùbá (the latter including Ifè proper), but the table shows that these two names have [gh] in Èdó and Ùrhobo, [y] in Nri-Igbo (= the regular diaphone of [gh], cf. ágha/áya ‘war’) and plain [g] in the middlebelt and some adjoining places. Since none of these languages has a (historic or live) rule weakening [g] to [gh], positing such a change just to explain the crosslinguistic pronunciations of ◆◆◆◆ and ◆◆◆◆ would be stipulative at best. Instead, the null hypothesis for these names is to start with [gh] and account for [g] as the automatic byproduct of borrowing [gh] into any language that lacks this sound but already has a [g]. By inspection, such languages include all those which lack [gh] in these names—a positive result. If so, then in principle the names containing [gh] could have spread west from Macro-Èdó to SE Yorùbá or the reverse, but the latter hypothesis is ruled out by ◆◆◆◆ and the oracle name, both of which consistently display [f] in Yorùbá, [h] in Èdó and [ph] (= fricative [p]) in Ùrhobo. Since both Èdó and Ùrhobo possess historically stable indigenous [f] sounds (Elugbe 1986) there’d have been no reason for Yorùbá [f] to change while moving east. The ‘basic’ (inherited, unborrowed) lexical roots for ‘wash [cloth]’ and ‘blow/fly’ show the same Èdó [h] = Ùrhobo [ph] correspondence, reconstructed by Elugbe as [p’], a glottalized or unreleased [p] (cf. also the word for ‘debt-pawn’). A non-oracle example of [p’] adopted in Yorùbá to yield [f], exactly parallel to the [f] in “Ifá” and “Òfún”, is the English loan káfiníntá ‘carpenter’. In both Nupe and Ìdomà, the consonants of ◆◆◆◆ and the oracle name fail to match, and this discrepancy is understandable if the oracle name existed in the middlebelt before the oracle itself, as the name of the “Ap’a” state (known in Hausa as “Jukun”). “Ap’a” monopolized salt trade in the middle Benue as late as the 16th century (Afiigbo 1977, Shain 2005) and was also the first reported ‘power user’ of oracle software in the Niger-Congo zone (Ruxton 1907), so it’s not surprising if a politically-charged oracle acquired the “Ap’a” brand. To complete the analysis of ◆◆◆◆ and ◆◆◆◆, the middlebelt forms of these names are explained as showing automatic fortition of [gh] to [g] because both Igálà and Ìsúká-Igbo lack a [gh] of their own, then this [g] was retransmitted as such further to the north and west.

For clarity, it should be repeated that any antecedent of the [gh] sound in ◆◆◆◆ and ◆◆◆◆ is beyond present observational reach. The preceding paragraph demonstrates only the more recent development, that [gh] (including its modern Nri diaphone [y]) is the historically most remote of all attested variants of the first consonant in ◆◆◆◆ and ◆◆◆◆, to which the [w] and [g] containing forms are chronologically subsequent, hence ‘downstream’ in loanword transmission. (This is a slight oversimplification because loan doublets occur, e.g. the alternate Nri names for these signs, but the above discussion suffices to disprove the commonsense interpretation of Egharheva’s two sentences above.) It would be intriguing to extend the analysis of the consonant of ◆◆◆◆ and the oracle name to the place name Ifè = Úhè, but so far I’ve been unable to learn if this word has a special localized pronunciation in Ùrhobo or other non-Èdó members of the Macro-Èdó cluster (a.k.a. “Edoid”). The enduring prestige of colonial misspellings (“Owerri”) and cartographic snafus (“Old Calabar”) retards the forensic study of Westafrican place names (Capo 1978, Yáí 1978). Related puzzles are posed by the fact that Ùrhobo calls the Èdó kingdom and its capital “Àka” LL (Ukere 1986), a label unknown in Èdó itself, while the corresponding term in Ágbò and other western Igbo areas is Ìdúù, recalling Èdó Ìdúnwù ‘street/neighborhood’.

A second indication that Ifá was not a source for cognate oracles to its north and east is its massively larger and more complex textual component. Had Ifá been the donor, all the recipients somehow managed to ignore most of this huge content, and always the *same* content—a statistical miracle. Of course, all of Ifá’s unique cognitive riches could have evolved AFTER outward transmission of a barebones 8-bit system, but then at least some stray remnants of the older, word-based computation should show up in Ifá, contrary to fact: an individual odù sign may have a semantic “character” (Abímbólá 1976, 33) but it doesn’t appear to match the the sign’s corresponding semantics outside of Ifá (cf. §2.4 below).

In sum, although available data from east and north of Ifè don't point to Ifá's immediate antecedent, they suffice to exclude that any of these eastern and northern oracles ever came from a Yorùbá-speaking community. Therefore while Ifè babálawos certainly aren't wrong to boast of a Big Bang of poetic and ritual creativity, their creationist notion—framed as divine descent from the sky, hence the popularity of the term “divination” among current Yorùbá-centrists, instead of “geomancy” in older literature—is less plausible than the proto-Darwinian idea so well expressed in a Yorùbá ofò (incantation), Ewé níá kò ní rú wéwé 'Broad leaves can never become narrow (wé) by the process of sprouting (rú)'.

Turning specifically to Èdó, five separate information channels (documented in part by Egharhevba himself) refute his claim that Òminigbò had a Yorùbá (specifically, Ifè) source. This inference is unaffected by the fact that Yorùbá-speaking babálawos of the modern Ifá oracle—alongside rival Rosicrucians, Jehovan Witnesses, Eckankarites and Mormons—offer ambulant metaphysical services in Benin-City today. Horton (1979, 123) was confused on this point, being apparently unaware of the difference between the Ifá and Iha 'apps'.

**2.1** The word “Òminigbò”, naming the introducer of the Èdó 8-bit oracle, has no clear analysis in any language. The best available Èdó parse would mean ‘those who don't inhabit àgbò, the visible world’ (cf. òmini-gie ‘those who don't possess ègie, chieftaincy’), and this description fits the liminal supernaturals “Agai-nabe, Aku-nabe”, portrayed in nearby Ùrhobo as having invented the oracle. (300 years ago, Barbot cited Ùrhobo as the home of Èdó's chief oraclepriest.) The two names are closest to the Igbo labels for doubled ♦♦♦♦ and ♦♦♦♦, just as “Dibie”—the Ùrhobo name of the culture hero who first encountered them—is the ordinary Igbo word for oraclepriest, exactly as pronounced in adjacent, western Igbo dialects.

**2.2** “Ogbeide”, the alternate appellation of Iha's introducer, also has no clear analysis in any language. A good candidate is a hypothetical Igbo phrase “ò-gbú ire” meaning ‘purveyor/prescription/predictor of great effectiveness’, based on the predicate root -ré specialized to medicine and oracles. The Igbo phonetics automatically yield Egharhevba's Èdó spelling. Secondly, “ògwègga” is the unanalyzable Èdó name for the tree (*Detarium senegalense*) whose seed exocarps compose the Èdó oracle chain, but it's also a predictable Èdó pronunciation of the analyzable Igbo phrase òkwé èja, denoting the seeds (òkwe) of the analogous tree (*Ricinodendron africanum*) plus the word for oracular sacrifice (èja). A third Èdó 8-bit oracle term with an Igbo etymology is “n'áàbe”, applied to any doubled 4-bit sign. Though unanalyzable in Èdó, it is the ordinary Igbo phrase meaning ‘double’ (Èzikéojiaḱu 2001), pronounced “n'áàbo” in standard Igbo but precisely “n'áàbe” in northern dialects. This trifecta all by itself is ironclad proof that the Èdó oracle had an Igbo source. [Caveat: I make no Igbo claim for Ifá. Confusion surrounds the identity of the original inhabitants of Ifè, who are known in oral tradition there as “Ùgbò”—unhelpfully spelled “Igbo” by Yorùbá historians because standard Yorùbá lacks word-initial “u”. Zero evidence exists for any medieval Igbo-speaking indigenes in Ifè, although an urban legend to this effect, immortalized in Dúró Ládiípò's 1966 Òşogbo staging of the Mòrèmi saga (Beier 1994), periodically reappears in academic writing.]

**2.3** As already argued above, the large-scale pattern of loan soundshifts, though underdetermined in regrettably many details, is consistent only with an east-to-west transmission path for 8-bit oracle vocabulary across southern 9ja, with Igbo Áfa located ‘upstream’ of Òminigbò either directly or via an Ùrhobo intermediary.

**2.4** In all known oracle localizations except for Ifá and its descendants, interpretation depends on a 256-word natural language key, a complete version of which was elicited from a díbá Áfa at Nri (Ònwùjejiógwù 1978). For Òminigbò, I've been able to fill in 223 cells of this matrix from Egharhevba (1936a), with translation help of Dr. P. Ifeúko, and this sample conservatively shows 35% semantic identity to the corresponding Áfa cells. Such frequency, well above chance, fits only a borrowing scenario, though the raw score is neutral as to direction of transmission. (More sophisticated analysis might be able to track mutations in the key, whose subsequent inheritance in mutated form could indicate the direction of spread.) [Caveat: so far there's been no translation of Egharhevba's 81 Òminigbò narratives—called èria nò dimwín ‘deep explanations’—to determine if these share any content with stories from eṣe Ifá in corresponding odù, but even a positive result in this respect could in principle result from either direction of borrowing, subject to forensic argumentation.]

**2.5** As Bascom noted, Ifá's oracle routines are unique compared to all those to Ifè's north and east. In Ifá, only 8 bits (= one pair of 4-bit strings, read right to left) are computed per processor cycle (= one òpèlè throw or one 8-step procedure with ikin seeds), but in all the other localities 16 bits (= four 4-bit strings) are thrown at the same time and read off as up to 6 right-to-left pairs of 4-bit strings (along with other improvised permutations, varying from place to place, allowing still more messaging freedom). In this respect too, Ifá counts as innovative not conservative, because the useability of Ifá's simpler CPU demands massive expansion of fixed memory. In Ifá each single odù (= byte of 8 bits) returns, not just one interpretable phrase as is the case in Áfa, Òminigbò et al., but an open-ended number of fixed, semipoetic narratives, up to the limits of human rote virtuosity, approaching the world-class level of the Vedic brāhmans (Verger 1972, Staal 1986). In Ifè, the requisite mental cultivation by members of the oracle guild plainly grew in synch with their professionalism and class power. The spiritual middlemen's advantage was logically advanced by Ifá's cosmological turn away from dispersed ancestors under the earth, towards unique, remote divinities in the air, whose access was more readily monopolized. The historical reality of this shift is proved by the telltale Yorùbá-internal semantic change of the word òrun itself, from an older meaning of ‘death’ (< -run ‘perish’) to the ordinary modern word for ‘sky’ (Verger 1966, cf. Talbot 1926, Bámbóşé 1972). Parallel development occurred elsewhere to a lesser extent, e.g. Igbos acquired their own skygod to lord it over the earth (Nwáòga 1984), but it's in Ifè that the cult of divinity attained its ‘highest’ medieval ascent, while not effacing the “genius of paganism” (Augé 1982) and its cognitive “superstimuli” (Sperber & Hirshfield 2004).

### 3. The myth of Ifè brasscasting

Egharhevba's claim that Òminigbò came from Ifè was not a stray mistake; he also touted Ifè origin for Èdó's lost-wax brass-casting skill and for its current dynasty, again citing no evidence. Here's the 1st English edition of the *Short History*:

Òba Ogùòla wished to introduce brass-casting into Benin so as to produce works of art similar to those sent to him from Ifè. He therefore sent to the Òghèné of Uhè [→Òhìni of Ifè in the 3rd & 4th English editions] for a brass smith and Igue-igha [→Iguegha in the 3rd & 4th English editions] was sent to him. (1953, p. 12, known tones added)

Egharhevba's 40-something words on copper-alloy work allowed Murray, Willett and W. Fagg to swap Frobenius' Atlantic fantasy with a new and equally circular—but politically more palatable—romance. Despite objections by Shaw, Connah, Eyo, Williams, Qbáyémí and Lawal, Horton (1979) declared Ifè-centrism “bloodied but unbowed” (1979). Although the conventional Yorùbá names for “Ifè” brass heads—“Oló.kun”, “Qbàlùfòn” etc.—are all modern conjectures, they've been curatorially reified, sometimes to tragicomical effect (Şoyíńká 2006, cf. Nóbrega & Echeverria 2002). No one disputes that a few dozen “naturalistic” terracottas, formed and fired in Ifè, were excavated there in situ, but no evidence supports Murray's (1941) speculation that the Ifè brasses—numbering only two dozen, all recovered from disturbed, secondary

sites—were modeled on the stylistically similar terracottas. More likely is the reverse scenario, with all Ifè-like brasses of middlebelt manufacture, some imported to Ifè as prestige goods where they were skilfully copied in clay. The sculpting of terracotta homologues by brass smiths is attested in modern Èdó (Ezra 1992, citing Willett 1973 and Ben-Amos 1980). The oldest Ifè terracotta (1275±80) is nominally 50 years older than the Nupe “seated figure” (1325±60) but this is within the stated error of either TL date (Willett & Fleming 1976). “Ifè” pieces’ alloy blends and “spiral” casting techniques are closer to the Ìgbo-Úkwu finds and/or to living artisanal traditions of the middlebelt than to the Èdó artworks (Williams 1967, Shaw 1970a/b, Goucher & al. 1978). Ifè contains extensive slags from the smelting of luxurious sègi glass beads from which the town grew rich (Elúyemí 1987), but no trace of premodern metallurgy despite concerted search (Willett 1960).

As with the oracle, so for brass, linguistics points to a compelling alternative scenario. Metal (unlike babaláwos) being mute, the pertinent data are associated verbal forms, which still count as primary in the Boasian sense insofar as their internal structure lies beneath social actors’ consciousness. (Here I consider data from published texts, but it would also be important to study Èdó smiths’ living vocabulary.) Egharhevba names “Igue-Igha”—later revised to “Iguẹgha”—as the person who introduced brasscasting to Èdó. Neither of these spellings is plausible as either Èdó or Yorùbá, but simple phonetic assumptions give the plausible Ìgbo interpretation *ìgwé ìhja*, meaning either ‘oozing/glittering metal’ or ‘the burning of metal with a hot instrument’. A second example comes from testimony collected in rough translation by “Sir” Ralph Moor near the raw ruins of the Èdó palace. The edited transcript (Reed & Dalton 1899) mentions “white men”, one of whom “made brasswork and plaques for the king” in the 16th century while another was an agent of 19th century Atlantic trade. Both names are unmistakably Ìgbo, although the literature preferred to look to Arabia and Europe when nothing Yorùbá would fit. The “white” artist “Ahamangiwa” is the predictable Èdó pronunciation of *Àhà-ní-ajù-nwa* ‘My family name never refuses childbirth’, both halves of which are popular personal name truncations in modern Ìgbo. Reed & Dalton paraphrase “Ayniaju” as “the man without eyebrows”, close in meaning to the homophonous Ìgbo phrase *ányá aájù* ‘eyes don’t blink’. In 9ja, Ìgbos are often stereotyped as light-complexioned, and English “white” can render the Èdó terms for exotic origin (*Èbó*), pale complexion (*òmwán n’ò fúá*) or albinism (*ẹnyae*). As to the “Great Water” which “Ahamangiwa” reportedly crossed, Ryder already noted persistent ambiguity between the Niger River and the Atlantic Ocean, and gave several other textual reasons to consider eastern, rather than western, formative influences on the Èdó kingdom.

If so, the palace plaques would not be the only Èdó icons with Ìgbo heritage. *Ìkèngà* (= *ìkèngħa* in southern dialects), representing a gendered and agentive right hand or arm, figures on the *íru nímọ* ‘ancestral altar’ in the *òbí* ‘ancestral temple’ of Ìgbo patrilineal compounds (Boston 1977, Cole & Anjákò 1984). Its Èdó counterpart, swapping sculptural ram’s horns for real elephant tusks, is called *ìkẹ̀gga obó* (Bradbury 1961) and this nomenclature betrays an Ìgbo antecedent: *òbó* ‘hand/arm’ is no less pleonastic to the Ìgbo meaning of *ìkèngà* ‘right hand/arm’ than is “crazy” in “crazy *meshugener*” or “shrimp” in “shrimp *scampi*”—forms which which no one would ever suggest were borrowed from Newyorkese by Yiddish and Italian. Instead, the Èdó and New York borrowers added *obó*, *crazy* and *shrimp* for local intelligibility. Eastward spread of *ìkẹ̀gga obó* as *ìkèng(h)a* can also be ruled out for another reason: Ìgbo would have no motive to delete the second word of the object’s Èdó name, and wouldn’t need to add a nasal (or the southern aspiration) in the first word, whereas Èdó phonotactics demand deletion of the nasal. Another key element of Èdó ritual paraphernalia is *ùkhúrhe òhó*, an intricately carved patrilineal staff cut from *ùkhurhe* (*Detarium senegalense*), the same bamboo-like tree which Ìgbo calls *òfó* and which Ìgbos use in a similar way. [Caveat: Èdó *ùkhurhe* has the ancestral *function* of Ìgbo *òfó*, but the artistic *form* of Ìgbo *álò*, the accompanying lineage staff.] The word *òhó* having no existence in Èdó outside of this one phrase, the directionality argument proceeds just as with *ìkẹ̀gga obó*. Finally, both of these familial icons presuppose the cosmology of the ‘personal guardian spirit’ known in Ìgbo and Èdó respectively as *chí* and *ẹhi*, whose activity is evoked by the 8-bit oracle and whose role in reincarnation underlies the very un-Yorùbá institution of primogeniture, a core belief in Ìgbo and Èdó kinship (inheritance) and kingship. Apart from the *Ọba*-ship of Èdó and its Lagos branch (Ulsheimer 1616), the only other cases in southern 9ja of royal succession by the firstborn son are the *Ọbis* of three western Ìgbo towns: *Ágbò*, *Ìsele-Úku* and *Úbulu-Úku* (Ìjẹ̀oma 1983). By contrast, Yorùbá citystates deploy the more flexible notion of *ipò àgbà* ‘seniority’ (Adéboýe 2007) supplemented by *àṣẹ*—the authority of ‘heavenly’ approval as conveyed by initiation, as sanctified by mouthpieces of *Ifá*, as expressed by the canonical appellation “*ọba alá.ṣe, ẹkeji ọriṣà*” ‘powerholding king, deputy to divinity’ and as represented by the *ọba*’s beaded veil (Abíòdún 1994)—a symbol alien to Èdó, in defiance of the Ifè origin claim.

Together these elements show wholesale transmission of Ìgbo culture to Èdó in medieval times. ‘Oriental’ influences on such a temporal and spatial scale elude the ken of standard literature preoccupied with the modern “Ifè-Benin interaction field” and “Yorùbá-Èdó world system” (Ọ̀gúndìràn 2002, 2003, cf. Burton 1863, Bradbury 1964). The Wazobjan apriori is saved only by the *deus ex machina* of Egharhevba’s delphic syllables which, for brass as for the oracle, never touch down on empirical ground but dangle from a sky-chain like hapless *Ọbátálá* who—quoit Ifè creationists—was briefly crucified on a palm branch while trying to descend from ‘heaven’ in the vanguard of *Odúduwà* and *Ọ̀rúnmilà* (Fábùnmi 1969).

#### 4. Polyglot political and cognitive evolution

The foregoing particulars point up the limits of modern ethnic consciousness as a framework for prehistory, and correlate two phenomena: (i) replacement of ancestral legitimation by class hierarchy in southern 9ja’s most prosperous medieval city-states and (ii) eclipse of ancestral geomancy by Ifè’s oracle 2.0, quite appropriately called “divination” in English. Both of these new formats are said in Ifè to have been downloaded from the sky, by *Odúduwà* and *Ọ̀rúnmilà* respectively. Each of these Ifè culture heroes was accompanied to earth by a chain of 16 heavenly companions, and the coincidence recalls the partial homophony of the name *Odúduwà* and the word *odù* which denoting the 256 (= 16x16) individual addresses of *Ọ̀rúnmilà*’s memory bank. If, as rationalists, we prefer to find the sources of Ifè’s cognitive and political evolution in the terrestrial realm, Èdó looks like a crucial intermediate stage, not just in the east-to-west conveyor belt of 8-bit technology and associated icons, but also conceptually insofar as the sea—home of *Ólokún*, patron spirit of the Èdó palace—is horizontally halfway between ‘heaven’ and the ancestral underground. In modern times, this indigenous dynamic interfaced with exotic commercial, ideological and administrative systems, yielding diverse local adaptations observable on ground today. Belasco (1980), following Bradbury and Ryder, makes the good materialist point that salt water was the main conduit of guns and money, before it ultimately brought colonial invasion. *Ọba Ọ̀vónrànmwẹ̀n*’s shocking overthrow, by British gunboats from the coast, did nothing to discourage Egharhevba’s wounded Èdó pride from turning inland towards Ifè, whose mystique had already been secondarily enshrined by *Ọ̀yọ* and further hybridized by Christian neo-Yorùbá “*Sàró*” (Sierraleone-descended) literates. Egharhevba could not ignore the hybrid vigor of the Yorùbá project, among the most viable of all of Africa’s ethnic nationalisms and in a different league from its failed Ìgbo counterpart. Egharhevba’s irredentist zeal, understandably endorsed by the Yorùbá academy, swept under the modern Wazobjan rug the medieval polyglot dynamics responsible for overwhelming, convergent evidence of ritual loans in both verbal and sculptural form.