

## The Òṣun Groves of Òṣogbo

(A handbook for visitors)

by

Susanne Wenger

All the Yorùbá towns have Sacred Groves, or had them in the past. These areas of virgin nature are totally reserved for the Òrìṣà, the traditionally worshipped gods, and for their rituals. The patroness of the Òṣogbo Groves is the goddess Òṣun.

Òṣun is the Yorùbá impersonation of the "Waters of Life", and the spiritual mother of the township and all its inhabitants. To her belong the Groves, but a number of otherwise sovereign godheads take lodging on her ground.

The goal of the world famous annual procession is the pond, river-altar and river-shrine Ojúbọ Òṣogbo. The procession nowadays takes place around the end of August, when the day of the four-day week sacred to the god Šàngó falls on a Friday. This occasion marks, to the traditional devotee, the renewal of mystic bonds between the goddess and the people of Òṣogbo, who then ritually represent all of humanity.

Òṣogbo township's regal head (ọba) bears the title Atáọja, "The One Who Holds the Fish in his Hand". (This title refers to the myth of Òṣogbo's establishment.) From the time of his installation until his death, the Atáọja incarnates Òṣogbo's mystic founder Lárò. Ọba is an ancient theocratic institution, whose earthly vehicle is the psychosomatic organism of a person elected from one of certain specific families. As the overlord of all religious institutions in his township, the ọba is responsible for the Sacred Groves. Because of the traditionally generous attitude toward all sacred forces, the ọba is, paradoxically enough, also the overlord of the aggressive, missionary-minded imported creeds, which aim at the destruction of that which puts him in power.

## The Òṣun Groves of Òṣogbo

There were times when, under the influence of struggling literacy and the colonial-minded importation of what one may call "petit bourgeois respectability", all African cultural heritage was declared doomed, as if just saying so would achieve this result. During that era, parts of the Sacred Groves were allotted by the Local Authorities to the governmental departments of Forestry and Agriculture. While the agricultural experiments proved abortive, the teak plantation was a "success". At the sight of wildly falling groups of sacred giant trees, all of which were beloved saints and devotees of the gods, the minds of the artists of New Sacred Art were beaten into revolt. To save what remained, we adopted the plan to save nature by means of "pure form". Good art, which is ritual in the service of the Òrìṣà, the Yorùbá gods, has had the strength to save a few miles of sacred river and a few million trees - the gods' aspect as flora - together with the animals which inhabit them.

The District Officer ordered the (then) Western State Survey Office to map the Òṣun Groves of Òṣogbo, following the boundaries pointed out by the elders. These boundaries are reinforced by the ojúbọ river altars, traditionally frequented for worship. The authentic plans, number OS 162, were signed by the Western State Surveyor General in 1976. The survey and plans were paid for by the Department of Antiquities, National Museum, Lagos. First one, then three, and now seven caretakers, watchmen and gardeners for the Groves are employed by the (now) National Commission for Museums and Monuments, National Museum, Lagos. Most of these caretakers are themselves artists of the New Sacred Art.

New Sacred Art is modern art in the ritual service of the traditional religion and philosophy of the Òrìṣà. We regard this religion to be still alive, however much it may be threatened by changing circumstances and by violent missionary fanaticism. We regard the Òrìṣà as intensely alive, a fact which is realistically proved to us ever so often. All that is alive is modern in its time. Art is a mirror to reality in one of reality's aspects. Our art, like the gods, is alive to the circumstances of the present time. While our art is modern, our artists are traditionally cultured and have not seen exhibitions or books of "modern art" from abroad. Their works are spontaneously modern in form, because the artists are modern in their humanity.

The trees along the river are Òṣun's clothes. We receive much help from the Federal Forestry Department in protecting and replanting these trees, and repairing the damage done to those parts of the Groves. Only recently was farming stopped, for the sake of preserving this area for

cultural purposes exclusively. The Forestry Department also helps us to stop hunting, fishing, building, woodcutting and burning — activities which are illegal both in the Groves and in the town's immediate surroundings.

### How to Find the Groves

Coming from Lagos, Ibadan or Ifè and arriving on Òşogbo ground, the motorist can see a signboard on the right side of the highway. After this signboard, enter the first road to the right and then turn half left, a bit uphill, on a bumpy road. (The right branch would lead even more directly to the Groves, but is hardly passable at the moment.) This joins the main street, Station Road. Turn right on Station Road, and take the right branch at the roundabout. Arriving at Ojà Oba, the King's Market, the Atáója's palace is on the right, and the ancient Òşun market shrine on the left. Coming to the crossroad, turn into the road on the right, so that the Central Mosque now stands on the left and the side wall of the Palace premises is on the right. (Within these premises' outer cement and brick enclosure can be seen the painted walls and carved veranda posts of the Òşun shrine in the palace.)

This road, which descends slightly, leads straight into the Groves. It goes first out of town and into an area which, unfortunately, was illegally destroyed not long ago. This area was once ritually intensely important, containing (on the left side) the grove of Orò and (on the right side) the Igbó Èpà, the hunters' burial grove. The growing township had encroached on these heavily tabooed areas; already years ago, we anticipated oncoming disaster from the violation of taboo, and, when an inquiry to the oracle permitted it, we transplanted these forest altars, loaded with symbols, into the Groves' interior.

After passing the line of NEPA electric poles, the road enters the Sacred Groves of Òşogbo, the Òşun Groves, in their present, ritually guarded extent. The teak plantation, established some time before we started New Sacred Art, are certainly no sacred premises, but they do not interfere with us.

### The Sacred Groves

The visitor's first encounter with òrişà, the Yorùbá gods, is Igbó Oya, the Oya Grove, on the left. The original Oya Grove was in town, behind the present Ojú Orí Oba Kòso, Dúró Ládípò's mausoleum and the former Mbarí Mbayò art club. The grove was transferred long before the beginning of New Sacred Art. Now and here, on the spot and altar where Oya priests lay down atonement offerings, stand magnificent statues of the goddess Oya and her beloved husband, the god Şàngó. The twin sculptures, carved by Kàsálí Àkàngbé, are really one, carved from a single teak tree stem (embedded in the ground) which branches into two. This symbolizes the ritual and emotional closeness of these divine personages in the oneness of ideal marriage.

The forest which abuts Oya Grove is that of Obaúayé and Alájere, but while the Oya Grove reaches the river, Obaúayé's grove reaches close to Àwòwò, the steep precipice where Ògún Tímeyìn encountered the helpers of the god of floral-magic potencies, Òşenyìn, an encounter which catapulted Tímeyìn into divine status and beyond time. Thus Òşogbo's timeless myth lingers on here under taboo, fed by the river's mystic prowess.

The visitor is advised against roaming about unguided in this and other parts of the Sacred Groves. This warning should not be disregarded. The visitor who treats frivolously what we feel to be serious is not welcome in our precincts of worship. Accepting our warnings about poisonous snakes (in the service of the gods, like all that lives here), the visitor may follow the guide.

As one advances uphill, nearly ascending the height of Onótóó, the teak plantation recedes. The teak replaced what were once the Groves of Ègbé. Bravely invading the havoc of scattered roots and branches, under cover of night, we managed to save a few of our dying florid friends by wrapping white cloths around their doom-expecting bodies. (One of those saved then was recently burned alive, however.) Between this plantation sector and the present Orò grove, a path branches off. On this intersection

of three paths (all the roads were once forest paths) is *Idí Èṣù*. Èṣù is always ritually remembered on crossroads, which physically correlate with his meta-intellectual complex of multidimensional assignments. Èṣù is responsible for regulating traffic among the illimitable thought complexes of his friend, the oracular *Ifá*. The statue on *Idí Èṣù* is by the artist *Ṣáká*.

Orò Grove is separated from the premises of *Ògbóní* by a path which belongs to the teak plantation but is also used by us, so as to reach *Ọjà Ontótóo* directly, without intruding into *Ilédì Ontótóo*, the *Ògbóní* clubhouse. (*Ògbóní* activities are often under taboo.) Orò and *Ògbóní* are closely linked in ritual. This is why the walls are adorned together, as one work of Sacred Art, with representations of the *egún gún*, Sacred Masks, by the artist *Òjèwálé Amọo*, the first *Òṣogbo* person to produce New Sacred Art.

Facing *Igbó Orò* across the highway are the premises of *Ọbátálá* (*Òriṣàálá* or *Òriṣàńlá*, "The Great *Òriṣà*"), whose buildings house symbols of some of the "white gods", a multiply-branching cult complex of enduringly creative sacred-force impersonations. The building which is taller on its left wing, and deeply sculptured on its front, is the shrine of *Òriṣà Ajagẹmọ*. It is named *Ayé Dákun Yípadà* "World, I beg you to reconsider your ways". The artwork represents the embrace of *Ọbátálá* and *Ṣàngó*, a meta-psychically contradictory embrace in which the two gods simultaneously meet and part. This double spiral of antipodal intellectual forces from different *òriṣà* hierarchies can be seen inside this shrine. The shrine's steep, winding staircase resembles the inner column of the shell of *ìgbín*, the big, edible snail, and symbolically correlates with the Baroque Mariolatry, the ritual representation of the Mother-of-God. *ìgbín* is *Ọbátálá*'s ritual food, through offerings, and is one of his organic instruments of creation.

Inside the middle tract, secured in the ground behind fences, are buried magic-mystic-emanating objects of *Òriṣà Olufọn* and *Òriṣà Ọginyọn*, two eminent branches of the *Ọbátálá* religion. A bending passage leads from here to *Ayé Dákun Yípadà* and to the base of the winding stairs. This long, half-lit room and its furniture represent the florid aspect of *Ègbé*, the heavenly complex of angelic soul-particles from whence our souls come like bees from a hive. Where that room empties out onto the base of the stairs is the altar of *Ọya*, representing the dark heaviness of the spiral thunder-

clouds from whose inner magic cauldron her husband *Ṣàngó* takes the flash of lightning (which is his emblem, not hers). At the top of the stairs is *ato Orí*, a meditation chamber dedicated to *Orí*, *Olódùmarè*'s meta-intellect.

The building's right wing leads through a number of preparatory symbol rooms towards a chamber in which kneels a statue of *Alájerè*. (Occasionally housed here are also *Alájerè*'s priests, both humans and snakes.) The front of the building is bedecked with sculptured thorny creepers, sacred to the god for their psychodynamic qualities. The priests' living quarters are furnished with an earthen bed, shelf and cupboard in the inner room, and a floral altar whose abrupt position, shockingly near the entrance, represents the god's pubescent unpredictability. Outside, between sculptures representing elements of *Alájerè*'s myth, a path leads away to the god's meditation sites. Where the path bends to the right towards *Àwọwọ*, there stands a statue of *Ọbátálá* gesturing atonement and welcome to *Alájerè*, his ideational son, *Alájerè*, was driven from the outer spaces of the universe into *Ọbátálá*'s meta-psychic awareness.

On this bend, the path is crossed by two scissorlike pythons, who probe the purity of one's intentions. (Symbolic reality is passive, so the truth of this statement is relative.)

The height of the *Àwọwọ*-precipice is flanked by two statues of *Alájerè*, as unlike in character as the different sides of his nature. Here, on the brink, he dances lyrically for *Òṣun* who, as the river, silently flows by far below. There, he jumps over the cliff. This death-life, life-death motion represents the flow of physical bodies back and forth into the universe from where they come.

The visitor may now be guided back across the road to the premises of *Ilédì Ontótóo*, the clubhouse and ritual site of the earth cult, the *Ògbóní* "secret society". Visitors are advised to refrain from entering (with or without a guide) if ritual is in progress. At other times, they can enter, together with the guide, but only as far as the first room of the right-hand entrance.

The totality of *Ilédì Ontótóo*, and especially its roofs, represent three prehistoric (or pre-genetic) lizards and one toad. The leftmost wing with the deeply sculptured front wall is the intensely tabooed altar room. Such taboos do not primarily hide material riches or curiosities, but are estab-

lished for the hygiene of emanations. The visitor is therefore not missing anything by leaving it alone. Even a glimpse over the walls is felt to be an intrusion, and a priest, discovering such impertinence, may become rude.

From the first room mentioned above, over the carved gate, can be seen a long, wide hall with traditionally painted walls. It bears repeating that visitors are admitted to the Ọgbónl area only with a guide or as our personal guest, accompanied by one of us.

We may leave the Ilédì premises by the back road, although it is not to be entered from there. Along this forest path, we next reach a flat rock, Ọjà Ontótóo. Ọjà means "market", and in the present-day language this has the same implications as in Western languages. Less than 25 years ago, however, every market was a complex ritual situation, and the act of buying and selling was just one part of a wider range of outdoor ritual procedures, all of them sacred as spiritual-material interchanges. Ọjà Ontótóo is a market for gods, subterranean and supernatural beings, angels and clairvoyant humans, i.e. those humans who "see" gods and spirits. It is an amphitheater where earthly and heavenly beings are actors and audience combined. The holes in the rock floor are remnants of a prehistoric time before geologic upheavals raised the riverbed and sea floor. Later on, these whirlpool pans were used for grinding raw iron before smelting.

It is from Ọjà that Timẹyìn, the subsequently apotheosized hunter and Ọjà's mystic discoverer, first heard the sound of the Ọṣun River. A path (sometimes closed to the public) leads from there to the river shrine and altar of Ọṣun Láọkan. The riverbank both upstream and downstream of this shrine are presently closed to the public, so the visitor will return along the same path back to Ọjà and, along the road which circumvents the Ọgbónl premises, back to the highway.

The highway descends past a small group of cement figures representing Ọgún. These were the first works of the artist Adébí sí Àkànjí. Then a small shrine and a big arch mark the place where the annual Ọṣun procession branches towards its final goal. The continuation of the Àwọ̀wọ̀-precipice is Arugbá's own path, but the crowd must continue on the main route under the big arch.

Arugbá (aru-igbá) means "carrier of the calabash" containing sacred symbols which, "reloaded" on that day with Ọṣun's emanations, can

physically represent for the goddess for another ritual year. Her path leads through the small but intently form-intent Ilé Iyemòwó. This shrine represents birth into another dimension of reality. Only deeply initiated priests protectively accompany Arugbá on this, her exacting errand into the spiritual realms of Omi, the "Waters of Life", i.e. into the parallax instant when physicality and metaphysicality coincide, in which only the gods may procreate physical offspring. (It is for offspring that most of the pilgrims come, on that day of sacred fecundities.)

Arugbá next approaches Idí Irókò, the spot of the annual man-river encounter when promises must be renewed. Arugbá's mind is ecstaticized by ancient incantatory songs, as she "descends" into the depths of Ọṣun's metaphysical truth forms, whose paragon she is on that day. Whip-bearers accompany her, not only whipping the air for the sake of transcendental fecundities (a world-wide archaic practice), but also, if necessary, to fend off persistent non-initiate intruders from this vulnerable ritual privacy.

The crowd, which numbers many thousands, proceeds under the arch, which represents — oddly enough — a flying, giant tortoise. The tortoise symbolizes the heaviness of matter, and its taking to the air evokes a turning point in one's rational habits. For here, other laws prevail.

Arugbá's path then rejoins the public way. Protected from view by her entourage, she enters the shrine, where she will rest until they all go back. Meanwhile, her mind is with Ọṣun, while Iyá Ọṣun and other priests receive food offerings and kola nuts, heaping all of them up on an enormous tray. In the evening, the river will be fed from this tray. That is when, to their spiritually opened gaze, the goddess and her messenger, Ikódí, will appear and bless them. (To the metaphysically dull eye of the merely curious, and to the ever-ready-for-the-kill camera, this sight remains blank.) After the river has been fed, and everyone has gone home, the river and its precincts are drawn once again into reverie and silence.

The main shrine is ancient, older than the town of Ọṣogbo (which is not older than 400 years, according to Chief Olúgunna's research). The outer shrine walls and central altar room were almost intact when the late Iyá Ọṣun appealed to us, worshipper-artists who at the time were rebuilding Idí Baba. Termites had invaded the shrine, eagerly devouring the altar, walls, pillars and roof. We responded, destroying the termites and repairing damage. Our minds, inspired by our own annual ceremony, spiritually

urged some of us to create art on the repaired walls. This was the beginning of New Sacred Art.

The outer portico's clay walls were still standing in almost their original condition, very solid from endless wetting and patting by the hands of the worshipper-builders: an antiquity par excellence with which we would not tamper. But the original veranda posts had fallen prey to the excesses of our climate. We could not repair them, so we created them anew.

Evolution is a fact, neither to be hailed nor to be regretted. This great religion, no matter how intensely harassed, is still intensely alive. Alive, too, are our correlated talents. The living gods and our living art are, both, modern. Repetition of the past cannot but be an absurdity.

The florid forms of our architecture — sometimes they are faunal or environmental — are the outcome of submission to Nature's perfection. Gods are Nature's sublimest manifestation. We would never impose on it. Admiration helps us to underline it.

The statue where the river bends at Ojúbọ̀ Ọ̀ṣogbo is from the hand of Ẓáká. It is a rather reverent replacement for one which fell when its author, Ọ̀jẹwálé Amọ̀, violated one of the god's taboos. The stone sculpture and ritual objects near the pond do not belong to Ọ̀ṣun, but to Ọ̀kẹ̀, whose sanctuary on Ọ̀kẹ̀ Ọ̀batedo was destroyed.

Other sculptures occupy the places where the priests of various gods sit on the day of the Ọ̀ṣun river procession. On that day, all the ọ̀rìṣà are represented with drum orchestras, which resound together with a multitude of sacred emanations and rhythms, all drummed-out praises of the gods, one big symphony in praise of inspired life.

Visitors to the premises and river shrine of Ojúbọ̀ Ọ̀ṣogbo as well as to the Ọ̀ṣun shrine at the Atáọ̀já's palace (which is Ịyá Ọ̀ṣun's residence) are hereby informed that, traditionally, it is their due to give a decent amount of money to the priests. These people have no other income than the fees which they receive as indispensable intermediaries for the supplicant who seeks the goddess' favours. This is a fact of the culture on whose ground they stand.

Visitors should give politely and according to their ability. This act can, after all, be understood as compensation for the intrusion of an outsider.

On Yorùbá ritual grounds, including Ojúbọ̀ Ọ̀ṣogbo, grows Peregun (Dracanea Fragrans), a short, treelike plant with sheath-leaves. These are to be cut short annually — according to the traditional hygiene of the sacred — so as to prevent their sudden outbursts into blossoms, which appear overnight, without warning, on armlong branches. An oversight in pruning is said to be catastrophic, as from these explosive blossoms would emanate swarms of Ẓonpónnó's most horrible helpers.

Palm fronds, split along mid-rib and hung up curtainlike, indicate "Stop! Ritual in Progress!" to those who are not involved.

Exiting Ojúbọ̀ Ọ̀ṣogbo through gateways, the visitor may turn to the left along the small road to the "old" suspension bridge, brainchild of one Welsh District Officer in colonial times. In the open space by the entrance to Ojúbọ̀ Ọ̀ṣogbo stand two (formerly three) giant trees, which jointly impersonate one of Ọ̀ṣun's epiphanies, Olómọ̀yọ̀yọ̀ "The One with Many Children". There existed one sacred carving which represented Olómọ̀yọ̀yọ̀ playing ayo with Èṣù. When this was stolen, together with several other ancient images, the third tree withered within four days to such an extent that it had to be down as a danger to the approaching annual procession. Ẓáká's beautiful cement work was created on top of the stump cross-section, but as the wood decayed this base was replaced by stone and cement.

Before, when coming from the suspension bridge, one could see the entrances to the Igbó'Fá, the Ifá Grove. This is now under ritual preparation and not open to the public. The ancient Ifá forest altar is still frequented by the oracle priests, despite its desperate situation of progressing destruction.

Returning to the highway, the visitor may continue along to Ẽbu Ịyá Mọ̀pọ̀, the potterfield (ẹ̀bu) of that goddess, who is the patroness of all women's occupations including childbirth. Ịyá Mọ̀pọ̀ is, more than anything, a potterwoman and — since the creative artist and his work are essentially one — she IS the pot. To put it another way, she is the space in the pot, which defines the pot (a concept reminiscent of the ancient Chinese Tao Te Ching).

As one enters the ẹ̀bu under the arch of the chameleon (an animal which plays an important part in the creation myth), the statue of Ịyá Mọ̀pọ̀ is

back to the right. This statue is really a shrine which houses, fenced away in an inconspicuous place, the magically–mystically potent symbols of the goddess. The inside, still under construction, is supported by a flight of winding stairs, the spiral pillar at the center of creation. It is the dark polar opposite of the spiral in Òrìṣà Ajagẹmọ's Ayé Dákun Yípadà shrine.

Ìyá Mọ̀pọ̀ is traditionally represented (as a bronze altarpiece) with two children, one head–up on her breast, one on her back, head–down. In the context of natural inspiration, we have taken the liberty of representing her children — still in accord with symbolism — as atíalá-atìòrò, the sacred bird–epiphany of Ọ̀bátalá. The goddess stretches out three pairs of arms. She gestures blessings, advice and regrets. She herself has wings: she represents the ethereal dimension of matter.

On all these constructions, as well as on Ontótóo with the Ọ̀bátalá shrines and the Ọ̀gbóni clubhouse, the most sensitive first assistant was Adébisí Àkànjí, who is an excellent artist in his own right, working with cement screens and batiks. In the works of these years, he was the most empathetic and gifted helper. Nowadays, Susanne Wenger works alone on her monumental art, without assistants except for constructing foundations and scaffolding.

The tall slender statue is Èlá. An intensely sacred principle in the Ifá oracle cult, he represents the dynamism of the god's pubescence. Important Ifá ritual is opened with the request: Èlárọ̀ "Èlá relent!" The third statue also represents the youthful force of a godhead: Alájeré, who is the adolescent Ẹ̀nṣẹ̀nṣẹ̀. Three is Ẹ̀nṣẹ̀nṣẹ̀' s sacred number symbolism, and is also the sacred number of transsubstantiation.

As the works on the riverbanks behind Èbu Ìyá Mọ̀pọ̀ are still in progress, the paths there are presently closed to the public.

This ends the brief journey through the river groves. We now will mention several attractions to visitors within the town.

Those interested in purchasing works of the artists of New Sacred Art in Ọ̀ṣogbo can do so in their art shop, which is located in Ilé Abolúbodé, Ìbòkun Road 41a. Coming from the Ọ̀ṣun Groves, cross the Iléṣà road (by going straight ahead between the Palace and the Central Mosque). Do not turn to either side at this crossing, but, having gone a short distance along

the Sábo Road alongside the King's Market, take the first turn to the right. This is Ìbòkun Road.

In the center of this traditional market complex is Idí Ọ̀gún Tìmẹ̀yìn. To reach this, stand at the edge of the market which faces Ìbòkun Road, and walk between the stalls toward the center. According to the town's myth, Idí Ọ̀gún Tìmẹ̀yìn is the spot of Ọ̀ṣogbo's proto–origin. Here, the hunter Tìmẹ̀yìn (subsequently apotheosized as Ọ̀gún Tìmẹ̀yìn) tethered an elephant–calf. Rash hunter that he is, he had killed the calf's mother in childbirth, in a horrid violation of taboo. He involved the calf in atonement rituals, which transposed the spot from the profane into the sacred propensities of all future developments. At this place, the annual ceremonies for Ọ̀gún commence and climax.

Proceeding down Ìbòkun Road, the visitor will eventually see, on the left, a tall stone house, overgrown and shadowed by flowering vines. Inside the entrance to the house (which is the private residence of Susanne Wenger and her family) is a gong on the shop door. This gong will be answered on Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday.

There are some remarkable groves and wilderness altars in this "up-town" section of Ọ̀ṣogbo. We conclude this guide with some information about the shrines of the central town.

Returning to the Palace crossroad, the visitor can see ahead the painted walls and carved veranda posts of the Ọ̀ṣun shrine inside the Atáọ̀ja's Palace. Immediately on the right is the Ọ̀ṣun market shrine, which is the oldest building in town. It has been restored by New Sacred Art with the financial support of the (then) Federal Department of Antiquities, now the Commission for Museums and Monuments.

The veranda of the Ọ̀ṣun market shrine serves to hold the court of the town chiefs. But the inner enclosure houses the most ancient and potent Ọ̀ṣun altar. (Some routine controversies, soon to be cleared up by the Commission for Museums and Monuments, stem from this double use.) After some due reorganization, these premises will be partly open to the public. Until that time, the visitor may enjoy the outside facades, posts and gates, which were jointly created by all the carvers of New Sacred Art.

Entering the new gate of the Atáọ̀ja's palace, opposite the Ọ̀ṣun market

shrine, the visitor may ask to be shown, by anybody sitting in the veranda of the story house, to the palace Ọṣun shrine. This is the residence of Iyá Ọṣun: it is respectful to greet her and her entourage, not just to look at them like animals in the zoo. The visitor may not forget the gift of money to her, which is her due traditionally.

Some visitors will remember the great Yorùbá dramatist Dúró Ládípò, who toured the world with his most famous opera, Ọba Kòso, with the greatest success. Dúró was himself an initiated Sàngó priest, and "Ọba kòso" is one of the god's praise songs meaning "The king did not hang". This refers to the god's tragic myth, according to which he was driven away from his town Ọyọ because of his violent temper. Deserted even by his beloved wife, the goddess Ọya, he hanged himself on an ayan tree. But no corpse hung, as he was mystically transformed into his ethereal other self.

Before Dúró died, he voiced the wish to be buried in Igbómọlẹ, the gods' wilderness. He also wanted to return to his family's traditional affiliation with Ọya, whose original grove lay in the backyard of the same house which he inherited as the eldest surviving son, and part of which he dedicated to the Artists and Writers Club Mbarí Mbayọ. This club was founded by Dúró, Susanne Wenger and Ulli Beier. Beier had first of all begun a similar club, which was named Mbarí after the decorated shrine buildings of the Igbò and Ibìbìò peoples of eastern Nigeria.

Dúró wanted to establish an Mbarí in (the then nearly totally illiterate) Ọṣogbo, as part of Ọṣogbo's first palmwine bar, which he had already established (with an inspiration very similar to Beier's own). Ulli and Georgina Beier made the resulting Mbarí Mbayọ world famous. The Igbò word Mbarí was reinterpreted by Yorùbá punsters in their own language as Mbarí, meaning "When I would see it". The same jokers then added the Yorùbá word Mbayọ, meaning "I would be happy". The new name thus meant "When I see it, I will be happy". This embellishment was readily accepted — a typically Yorùbá process.

This place is no longer an art club, but Dúró's mausoleum. It was developed by his ritual sister Susanne Wenger and her then assistant Adébisí Àkànjí, into Igbómọlẹ. As such, it is now named Ojú Orí Ọba Kòso, because "Ọba Kòso" was Dúró's ritual Sàngó-name. Ojú Orí is a

traditional grave, sanctified by ritual, and transformed in the classic Yorùbá way into a Sàngó shrine. The visitor can see it in Catholic Street, the main street which leads up to the King's Market.

Proceeding along Catholic Street, leaving behind the market and the mausoleum, the visitor will see the signboard of the so-called Ifẹ Museum. This is Ulli Beier's collection, left to the University of Ifẹ on condition that it stay in Ọṣogbo. The curator is the artist Afúnlabí.

We warmly recommend the visitor not to leave Ọṣogbo without visiting Art-Man's Gallery, which is the studio and residence of the great artist Twins Seven Seven. There is also Jimoh Buraimọ's African Heritage Gallery, in the quarter of town called Odi Ólówó. Every taxi driver knows these places and can lead the stranger there.

While these places are not part of New Sacred Art, we are all proud of each other and wish visitors to know all of our achievements in the ways of culture.

Dear Segun,

we did expect you but....

we hope that you are still as happy as while writing your last letter.

- ① I enclose two items: A copy of my reply <sup>Austin</sup> to a newspaper notice, in which was mentioned my "award" from the Fed. Govt. Touristboard - you know how I like that - and this may enlighten you to our present situation without further comment. <sup>which N. version of new classes</sup> WHO however DOES know the devellish implication of such vulgar perceptions of what-one-can-do-with-art-and-religious-dingspums. <sup>How to get money out of it</sup>
- ② <sup>pages are</sup> this enclosed handout is part 2 - but may be (not hopefully) the only what we could publish soon. <sup>We try to go ahead of all the shit</sup> which these idiots may produce. <sup>The pamphlet itself</sup> ~~It~~ needs a few pages more, then I will send it too.

PLEASE do not go to sleep today before having edited these pages!

PLEASE send it back at once.

Much love to you and yours





