



Femi Kolapo

The Ife origin and creation myths

In het huidige Nigeria woont het volk Yoruba. De Yoruba waren de stichters van grote staten in West-Afrika maar zichzelf zien zich als afstammelingen van het mythische koninkrijk Ife. De Yoruba geschiedenis bestaat uit mondelinge overlevering, ondersteund door archeologische vondsten in het gebied. Femi Kolapo onderzoekt in dit artikel aan de hand van sociologische theorieën de mogelijkheden en beperkingen van orale bronnen voor historisch onderzoek. Daarnaast zal hij aandacht besteden aan de staatsvorming en de sociaal-culturele ontwikkelingen in de West Afrikaanse geschiedenis aan de hand van de ontstaansmythen van Ife.

The Yoruba inhabit a large area of South-Western Nigeria and parts of the Republics of Benin and Togo. They speak the same language and the dialects spoken by its composite groups are generally mutually intelligible. They share a common culture and, with very few exceptions, all claim a common historical origin and descent. They produced some of the biggest states in West African Guinea before European colonization of Africa, the most notable being the famous Oyo Empire (1600 -c.1830). However, in Yoruba historical and cultural thought, Ife kingdom was the primeval state of the people, the 'most ancient' of all states, 'the cradle of the Yoruba people', and indeed, the birthplace of other peoples. It is also considered as the wellspring of all major Yoruba dynastic systems. The discovery and excavation in Ife of a wide range of plastic art objects in brass, stone and clay, many dating back to between the 8th and 12th centuries, has enhanced the claims of Ife oral tradition on the primacy of Ife in Yorubaland.¹

The oral histories of the Yoruba, and especially of Ife, include a creation and

- 1 L. Frobenius, *The Voice of Africa*, (London 1913); F. Willet, *Ife in the History of West African Sculpture*, (z.p., z.j.) 196,7 and F. Willet, 'Ife and Its archaeology', *Journal of African History* 2 (z.j.) 231-248; T. Shaw, *Nigeria. Its archaeology and early history* (z.p., z.j.) 159-162.

related myths that encapsulate the perception of the people about their origin, the origin of their pre-colonial state systems, and their culture and identity. An examination of this creation/origin myth as historical source for the understanding of the emergence of ancient Ife state system is the major focus of the present analysis.

The different versions of Ife creation and origin myths have a stable core around which minor differences of details are woven. However, the myth as recounted in Ife, is in substance and in its major themes, corroborated in most other Yoruba states and societies within and outside Nigeria.



Map of Ife and Other Yoruba-speaking Peoples of West Africa

The corpus of Ife Map of Ife and Other Yoruba-speaking Peoples of creation/origin myth West Africa

presents several important themes regarding the place of Ife in Yoruba history. One of these themes is the origin of the Yoruba people and whether they migrated into their present site, whether they met a prior group and what happened to these peoples. A second is the issue of Ife's primacy as the dispersal point for other Yoruba socio-cultural groups. Third is the view that Ife was the first great kingdom (state system) and the source of the royal dynasties of other Yoruba kingdoms. These are themes that have been given a lot of attention in studies of Yoruba history.² This article reassesses aspects of the last theme, and especially applies sociological theories to them in order to highlight the usefulness and limitation of this oral source in reconstructing the history of the transition from autonomous village groups to a state system in Ife.

Following Uli Beier's example, 'Before Odua',³ historians of Ife are in accord

- 2 B. Adediran, 'The Early Beginnings of the Ife State', in: I. A. Akinjogbin, ed., *The Cradle of a Race (Ife From the Beginning to 1980)* (Lagos 1992) 77-95; R. Horton, 'Ancient Ife: A Reassessment', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 4 (1979) 69-149; A. Obayemi, 'Ancient Ile-Ife: Another Cultural Historical Reinterpretation', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 4 (1979) 151-185; Robert Smith; *The Kingdoms of the Yoruba* (London 1959) 4-6.
- 3 Uli Beier, 'Before Odua', *ODU Journal of Yoruba and Related Studies* no.3 (1956) 25.

that the Oodua saga contained a political and social intrusion upon and supercession of a new over a pre-existent socio-political system.⁴ It represents 'a change of leadership, the grafting of a new political culture on the stock of an existing one and the eventual emergence of a culture florescence which started in Ile-Ife...' ⁵ While a number of scholarly attempts have sought to sketch out the details of these political developments, there has been a limited application of state formation theories to such analyses. Most of the available analyses do not focus on the question of 'why' but rather supply a description of 'how'. Answering the two, or at least the first question effectively could be achieved by the application of such theories as is planned in the current work.

Bascom records one Ife version of this myth, viz.:

the deities originally lived in the sky, below which there was only primeval water. Olorun (Olodumare), the Sky God, gave to Orishala, the God of Whiteness, a chain, a bit of earth in a snail shell, and a five-toed chicken, and told him: "Go down and create the earth." However, as he approached the gate of heaven he saw some deities having a party, and he stopped to greet them. They offered him palm wine and he drank too much and fell asleep, intoxicated. Odua (Odua), his younger brother, had overheard Olorun's instructions, and when he saw Orishala sleeping, he took the materials and went to the edge of heaven accompanied by Chameleon. Here he let down the chain and they climbed down it. The chicken began to scratch the earth, spreading it in all directions, and as far as the ends of the earth. After Chameleon had tested the firmness of the earth, Odua stepped on it at Idio where he made his home, and where his sacred grove in Ife is located today.

When Orishala awoke (...) he came down to earth and claimed it as his own because he had been sent by Olorun to create and rule it and because he was Odua's elder brother. Odua insisted that he was the owner of the earth because he had made it. The two brothers began to fight and the other deities who followed them to earth took sides with them. When the Olorun heard of the fighting he called Orishala and Odua to appear, before him in heaven, and each told his version of what had happened. Olorun said that the fighting should stop. To Odua, creator of Earth, he gave the right, to own the earth and rule over it, and he became the first King of Ife. To Orishala he gave a special title and the power to mould human bodies, and

4 Obayemi, 'Ancient Ile-Ife', 154-161; I. Olomola, 'Ife Before Odua' in: *The Cradle of A Race*, 51.

5 Olomola, 'Ife Before Odua', 51.

he became the Creator of Mankind. Olorun then sent them back to earth with Oramfe, the Ife God of Thunder, to keep peace between them, and with Ifa, the God of Divination, and Eleshije, the Ife God of Medicine, as his companions.⁶

Another myth mentions the *Ooye merindinlogun*, (or 'sixteen ancients') who descended from heaven with Odua. Among these sixteen are Oreluere, Obawinrin, and other deities that have represented professional archetypes like Ogun, metallurgist/war; Aje, financier or god of commerce, Elesije or physician, and Ifa/Orunmila Agbonniregun as diviner or scientist. These elders were each linked to particular sites on which tradition claims they descended. While the available lists of these elders do not harmonize completely with one another, Obayemi observed that at least thirteen of the elders are common to all the lists. These elders also have traditions associated with them and virtually all of them are deified and worshipped in accordance with some formalized ceremonies, chants, processions and/or locations.⁷

Another set of traditions relating to Obatala (Orishala) establishes the presence of a community and social identity autonomous, previous to and independent of the Odudua group, but which later clashed with it. Indeed, Obatala's titles include 'Obatala, Oba Igbo', i.e. Obatala, the king of the Igbo. In the clash between the two groups, the Igbo people were brought under the dominance of a new socio-political system headed by Odua.⁸

The re-enactment ceremonies during the *Edi* festival in Ife in which the Moremi legend is recapped elaborate on the nature of the conflict among the 'gods' or 'elders', and further provide an insight into the historical content of the myths. This legend as recorded by Makinde presents Moremi as a brave and patriotic Ife persona who devised a means to free her people from perennial guerrilla war and devastation by the pre-Odua Igbo polity that was superseded with Oodua's incursion. She allowed herself to be captured and was made a wife by the king of the Igbo. After she had learnt the tricks employed by the Igbo to terrify her people (Ife) and deprive them

6 Bascom, W., *The Yoruba of South-Western Nigeria*, (New York 1969) 9-10. His source for this version is footnoted to be Samuel Ajayi Crowther, *Vocabulary of the Yoruba Language* (z.p., z.j.).

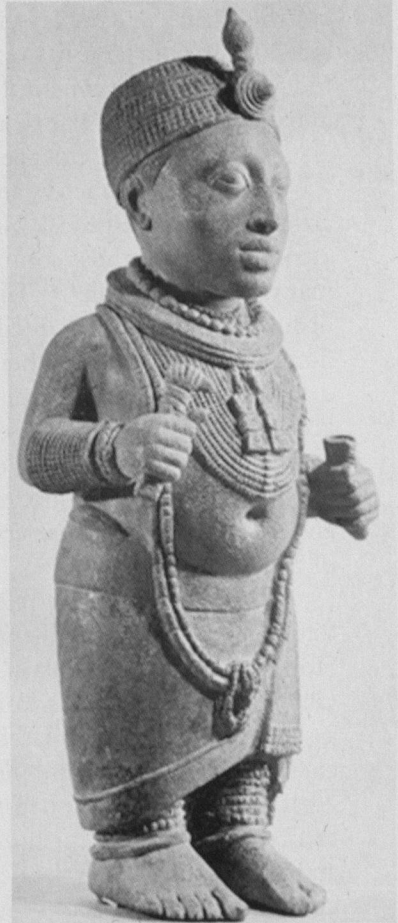
7 He also stresses the inconsequence of the discrepancy in the lists. Obayemi, 'Ancient Ile-Ife', 161 - 64; Obayemi, 'The Yoruba and Edo-speaking Peoples and their Neighbours before 1600', in J.F. A. Ajayi and M. Crowder, eds., *History of West Africa* vol. 1 (London 1976) 28; O. Eluyemi, *Oba Adesoji Aderemi: 50 years in the History of Ile-Ife* (Ife 1980).

8 J. Ademakinwa, *Ife, Cradle of the Yoruba*, III (Lagos z.j.) 43.

of their harvests every year, she effected her escape, got back to Ife where she divulged this secret to its people. Armed with the secret, the Ife were able to effectively defeat the Igbo and permanently stop their yearly raids.

The Edi festival re-enacts the events leading to the defeat of the Igbo people by the Odua group.⁹ However, despite the conflicts and wars attributed to these patriarchs in the traditions, the same traditions, in the same breadth, indicate that reconciliation and mediation was effected among them and the victors were 'forced' to accommodate the vanquished Igbo leaders because the latter were simply too well entrenched to be totally displaced. Hence, this accounts for the placing together of Oodua and Obatala as well as other deities in the *Ife* poetry corpus. It is also the reason for their placement together in many traditions of Ife and also their nearly equal positions in the various enactment ceremonies (including those observed for the coronation of the Oni (king of Ife.)) This must also explain why all the deities are included together, victor and vanquished, as being important in the Yoruba pantheon. While the traditions attest to Oodua's ascension to a supreme political position in Ife, Obatala's almost parallel high status within the new political setup is equally obvious. Thus,

The very significance of the name, Obatala or Orisa Nla (the great deity), the fact that in Ile-Ife he is still cherished as the deity next in rank only to Olodumare (*God) – the circumstantial reference to him as *Olufe* (*Olu*, ruler or owner of Ufe/Ife) and many



Bronze figure of an Oni (Ife King) showing regalia worn in the era starting with Oduduwa. From: Frank Willet, *Ife in the History of West African Sculpture* (London 1967) 38.

9 M. A. Makinde, *Ile Ife: An Introduction* (Ibadan 1970) 24-27; M.A. Fabunmi, *Ife Shrines* (Ibadan 1969) 17-18; Ademakinwa, Part II, 33.

more attributes emphasize that though displaced, the system belonged to him – and it could not work without a place being reserved for him.¹⁰

The historicity of Odua, with the elders, seems to be amply demonstrated by aspects of Ife traditions that made him a man with named wives.¹¹ His cult, his shrine, and the associated priesthood (as well as of the other deity/elders) that loom large in the installation of every new king of Ile-Ife up till today seem to have constituted a bridge between the mythistorical Odua and the definitive historical period when the socio-political culture associated with his incidence blossomed.¹²

The various characters and places mentioned in the above traditions are undoubtedly historical. 'None of them possessed grotesque, non-human attributes such as those commonly associated with the mythical figures of many Yoruba folktales'¹³ Though deified, these personae were thus real historical characters credited with individual political, religious, social, domestic, familial and other *normal* roles. The conflicts, peace efforts, divided following, power-realignments and conciliation and/or accommodation that followed the conflict among these characters were real historical processes and events in Ife and Yoruba history. These were conflated or telescoped into myth form over the passage of time as a cultural and educational tool to preserve and relay history to succeeding generations of Yoruba.

Historians have been able to fix each of these patriarchs/deities to a settlement or group of settlements: Odua at Oke Ora, Oreluere at the Idena Stone carving site, Obatala at his Itapa quarter in the present Ife and Ideta Oko. Observations made from archaeological excavations of the shrines associated with these patriarchs and information from *Ife* divination verses concerning the deities and their shrines corroborate these placements.¹⁴

It should be mentioned that archaeological excavations have been carried out to establish the chronology of Ife, to cross-examine oral traditions and to appreciate better the Ife past. A chronology of Ife derived from clear-cut culture traits in the excavated and recovered plastic arts, potsherds,

10 Obeyami, 'Ancient Ile-Ife', 168.

11 In one non-Ife tradition, Odua was considered a female. See, G. Parrinder, *The Story of Ketu: an Ancient Yoruba Kingdom* (Ibadan 1956) 13.

12 Makinde, 22-23; P. Stevens, 'Orisha-nla Festival', *Nigerian Magazine* 90 (1966) 184-199.

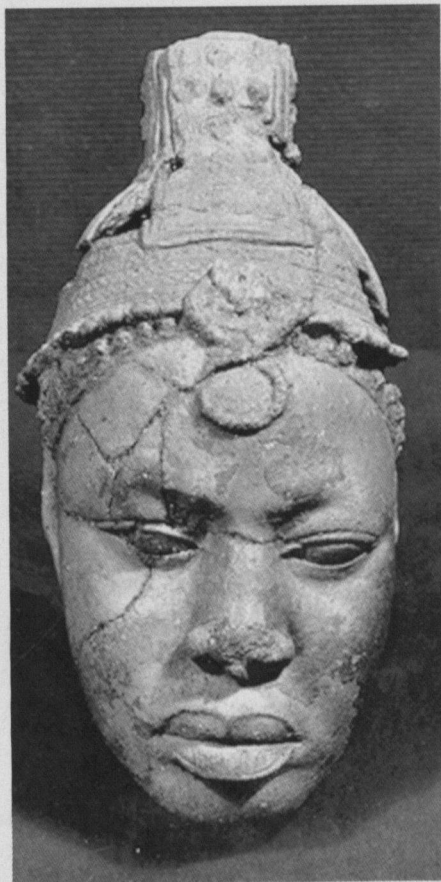
13 Adediran, 'The Early Beginning', 80.

14 Obayemi, 'The Yoruba and Edo-speaking Peoples', 210; see also O. Eluyemi, *Oba Adesoji Aderemi*.

pavements, shrines etc., and radio carbon dates periodize Ife's history into three eras: pre-pavement or pre-classical (up to the 12th century); pavement or classical period (between 12th and early 15th century); and post-pavement or post-classical period (from the 17th to the present century.)¹⁵ Obayemi has suggested some of the implications of the archaeological findings for the identification of the systems represented by the major characters in the myths, i.e., Obatala and Oodua. He suggested that

the earliest dated clay figurines could be accommodated with the notion of Obatala, or Orisha-Nla (great God) as the 'Chief Artist' ... And the stone figures? The *Edena*, *Olofeunra*, the mudfish, the *Osupa* (moon) of Ijio figures have been attributed to personages who descended from Orun (translated 'heaven')... This Ife of Obatala (pre-Oodua) times, this Ife area of the Igbo peoples and culture with its artistic pre-eminence marked the culmination of an indigenous development which could date back to the 5th century B.C.¹⁶

This was the pre-state period, when the Ife or Igbo of Obatala and other priest-rulers existed as multi-settlements and the former was *primus inter pares*. Ile-Ife, in which these patriarchs flourished, did not exist as a regular urban settlement. This awaited the intrusion of the Odua group and the establishment of its social and political dominance. The settlements, however, were more than villages – they



Terracotta crowned head excavated at Ita Yemoo, Ife in 1958. From: F. Willet, *Ife*, pp.157.

15 B. Agbaje-Williams, 'Archeology and Yoruba Studies', in T. Falola, ed., *Yoruba Historiography* (Wisconsin 1991) 12-13; and Obayemi, 'Ancient Ile-Ife', 169-70.

16 Obayemi, 'Ancient Ile-Ife', 170, citing P. Ozanne, 'Sample From the Site of the University Faculty of Agriculture Buildings' *mimio* (1968), for the 5th century limit.

were rather polities each 'occupying its own land.'¹⁷ Ethnographic data indicate that these polities engaged in some sort of cooperation, but political integration was absent. Adediran suggested that there was a rotating overall leadership among the chiefs of the component groups of the 'confederacy'. Nonetheless, each component part retained its political autonomy.¹⁸

It has also been speculated that the counter attacks of the Igbo people against Ife (i.e., Obatala and Obawinri against Oodua and Obameri) represented in the myths and re-enactment ceremonies must have been the cause for building the first city wall. This indicates the beginning of urbanization. Thus a 'decisive dating for Oodua would appear to be in connection with the building of the first composite walls – the "Medieval walls" of Ozanne and others'. Charcoal from the medieval layers of these walls produced three dates of 960 A.D., 1060 A.D., and 1160 A.D.¹⁹ This was the beginning of the dynastic period in Ife and the period of the pavements: the classical period of Ife arts. It has been considered the period when the first Yoruba state system emerged. Most of the other dynasties of Yoruba kingdoms have considered the Oodua dynastic revolution, together with its accompanying culture of beaded royalty, as the spring from which their systems originated.

The myths, other data and explanations for Ife State system

How and why then did this state system emerge? What were the material ingredients that catalysed the revolution? We shall not revisit the questions of where Oodua came from. Suffice to accept the conclusions already reached by scholars of Yoruba history that Oodua or the system represented by that name usurped the place of the previous rulers of Igbo and their political system. It replaced that system with a monarchical one that incorporated the vanquished into its structure as minions and officials in various subordinate capacities.

Ozanne's brief interrogation of archaeological data concerning the medieval Ife city wall prefigured our attempt to apply a social theory to this historical process encapsulated by these myths. Observing the emergence

17 Obayemi, 'The Phenomenon of Odua in Ife History', *The Cradle of a Race*, 72.

18 Adediran, 'The Early Beginning' 81.

19 Obayemi, 'The Yoruba and Edo-speaking Peoples', 210, and 'Ancient Ile-Ife' 170-71, quoting P. Ozanne.

of the first urban centre of Ife with a protective wall built round it and in which a large population must have been concentrated, he asked 'whether this urbanization, and the rather sudden social change it indicates, resulted from independent agreement amongst the communities or, from the imposition of a new order from outside...' ²⁰

Using cultural history of the north-east Yoruba who have preserved pre-Oodua political and cultural systems complete with kingly titles and triadic (three-way) territorial arrangements into 'centre', 'left' and 'right', Obayemi proposed briefly that 'it would have required someone or a group not hitherto bound by existing protocol and prohibitions to coerce the hitherto independent groups into a new dynastic structure such as is represented by the Odua figure.' ²¹ He also thought that this intrusion might have been caused by economic competition over agricultural resources.

Adediran explored the economic motive for the dispute more fully. Using information from a little known fixed-structured song, he shows that revolt against the leading head of the Ife confederacy started during the leadership of Oramfe, before Obatala became the leader. Several stanzas in the song invoke the success of Oramfe over the mutiny of some 'stranger elements' and the re-affirmation that Ife belonged to Oramfe. Adediran conjectured that these stranger elements that had settled in Ife must have been attracted by 'the comparative wealth and economic potentialities of the area... [and] the availability of parcels of land suitable for cultivation and pasture.' ²² The Odua group came with one of the waves of this local immigration, settled on the hill (Oke Ora) and as Odua built up his power, he refused to acknowledge the primacy of the pre-existing leaders. A dispute in which he was first defeated was the result, but he finally became triumphant. ²³

Of all studies done on the transition to statehood in Ife Adediran's study is the most thorough and it pays attention to the application of definite social theories to historical processes. His analysis shows that revenge attacks launched by Obawinrin and other displaced Igbo leaders on the

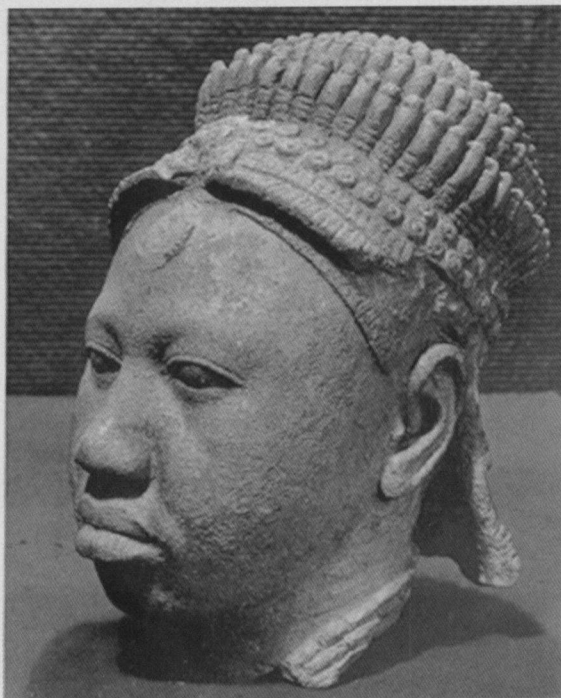
20 Ozanne, 'Sample', 2-5 cited by Obayemi in 'Ancient Ile-Ife', 171.

21 Obayemi, 'The Phenomenon of Odua', 75.

22 Adediran, 'The Early Beginning', 82-83.

23 Ibid., 83. For a fuller reconstruction of what Ife economy might have been before and following Odua but without linking it to factors for the Odua revolution, see R. Horton, 'The Economy of Ife c. A.D. 900 - c. A.D. 1700' in: *The Cradle of a Race*.

Odua group and on those who defected to him prompted a clustering around Odua's settlements as a security measure. This also accounted for the building of the first (inner) city wall.²⁴ All this called for more cohesion, more organization and the result, presumably, was increased centralization of political authority around the person of the king and the palace. The ascendancy of the Odua group was enhanced by their monopolizing of symbols of authority and royalty. They also seem to have brought a number of important craft organisations like those of the smiths, diviners, physicians and herbalists, as well as merchants under close control. They also monopolized the bead-making industry that seems to have been introduced with the onset of the Odua monarchical system, and to which the production of the primary insignia of royalty – beaded crown – was restricted.²⁵



Terracotta head showing 'a very complex beaded crown with five concentric tiers' From: F. Willet, *Ife*, pp. 159.

Relevant theories

A brief discussion of state formation theories is called for here, to enable us to analyse the Ife case. A state consists of a structured institution of centralised government that welds together previously autonomous social units under its *sovereign*, and usually *hegemonic*, rule. It has officials who are endowed with authority and the power to directly and indirectly control most facets of social economic activities of its subjects and citizens. The latter is achieved by wielding state power as punishment, threat of punishment, incentive to benefit, and withholding of benefit.

Stratification is implied and the rulership class is sustained 'in its privileged position by its separation from and control over the remainder of the

24 Adediran, 'The Early Beginning', 83-86.

25 Ibid., 86.

members of the society'.²⁶

Prior to the evolution of such a supra-structure as described above, all the existing forms of political organization are pre-state societies. Such was the pre-Odua system. They were 'chieftaincies' which, though possessing identifiable officeholders or a 'ruling class', possessed no clearly differentiated roles. The leaders felt more responsible more for the maintenance of the autonomy of their individual polities than the consolidation of the entire system.²⁷

John Lonsdale lists several hypotheses that scholars have used to explain state formation in Africa. These include the Hamitic²⁸ conquest; demographic; managerial (articulation of two or more forms of subsistence, typically farming & herding); long distance trade; and the drought hypotheses.²⁹ A neater classification to be considered in the succeeding section of this analysis could be distilled from the above, viz. analyses based on conflict, contract, integrationist, and synthetic or systemic theories.

Those who hold the conflict theories of state formation give several reasons that could result in conflict, emergence of classes, and the imposition of a group upon the rest as their government. Immigration of non-kin groups could initiate social stratification when, as late-comers,

26 J. Haas, *The Evolution of the Prehistoric State* (New York 1982) 172, defines a state as a 'stratified society in which a governing body exercises control over the production or procurement of basic resources, and thus necessarily exercises coercive power over the remainder of the population.' Hobhouse, Wheeler and Ginsburg define state as an 'hierarchical and centralized authority system in which local entities lose their autonomy and become districts whose heads are subordinated to the center; quoted in R. Cohen, 'State Origins: A Reappraisal' in H.J.M. Claessen and P. Skalnik, eds. *The Early State* (Den Haag z.j.) 35. Carneiro's definition emphasizes that a state comprises of a supra-community held together by distinct political organizations, the latter having superseded a previous political organisational level. It is an autonomous territorial and political unit with a central government having coercive power over men and wealth. L.R. Carneiro, 'Political Expansion as an Expression of the Principle of Competitive Exclusion' in Cohen and Service, *Origin of the State*, 205, 212, 214. For a taxonomic view of these positions, see particularly, *ibid.*, 2-3.

27 See Cohen, 'Introduction', *Origins*, 4-5; and his 'State Origins: A Reappraisal' in *The Early State*, 35, 36.

28 This hypothesis had considered state creation in sub-Sahara Africa to be due essentially to the direct influence of light skinned people from the north.

29 J. Lonsdale, 'States and Social Processes in Africa: A Historiographical Survey', *African Studies Review*. Vol. XXIV (1981) 171.

they are denied equal access to land or other agricultural resources – resulting in the emergence of a privileged and/or inferior ‘class’. Increased efficiency in agricultural production due to use of superior technology³⁰ (e.g., the attribution of iron to Ogun, a member of the Odua group) and a consequent increase in economic surplus could result in the emergence of a division of labour between ‘workers’ and ‘managers’. The managers, of course, would centralize the control over the means of production into their hands. All this would distort resource distribution as well as eventually lead to accumulation of economic wealth in the hands of a few. To conserve and expand their position the privileged group would apply structural or institutional and ideological means of coercion or persuasion.

This concentration of responsibilities and authority in the hands of particular individuals initiated due to increased efficiency or proficiency in social production and/distribution could also gradually become permanent. The more ready and easier access by such a group or individuals to material resources deriving from the functions would further reinforce their ascendant positions. Warfare conditions, catastrophes and other cataclysmic situations are also important in establishing, expanding and transforming war leaders, elders, priests and daring fellows into more permanent overlords with increased control over their societies’ resource distribution, procurement and or production. Such societies crystallized into stratified and ranked socio-political systems.

Robert Carneiro’s theory stresses warfare as a very important agency in the development of statehood. Conditions of increasing population density, for instance, could easily produce a strain on available resources, especially, land. This would lead to competition between villages, and where expansion outwards was precluded by environmental or socio-political barriers, war would result. The communities that were vanquished being unable to flee as they might be expected to do in area of unencircled land would remain on their site as subordinates to the victors. Thus chiefdoms arose. Chiefdoms would war against each other until the stronger chiefdom incorporated the weaker ones to form a more highly organized polity. When the latter were brought under the umbrella of a single overarching political rule, a state system emerged.

For the Integrationist position, Elman Service is considered to be one

30 I. Olomola identifies the possibility of the possession of the iron technological as the cause of the conflict in Ife and the reason for the success of the Odua group; ‘Ife Before Odua’ 58.

of its foremost proponents. This view considers states to have emerged as a result of the integrative benefits that resulted or that were perceived would result from submission of local autonomy to a centralised and overruling authority structure. Thus, contrary to the view that centrifugal forces led to the need for a governmental structure to contain crises and break-ups, integrative theories observe that members of society, due to advantages or benefits to be derived from centralized organization (e.g., military efficiency and other advantages of scale) willingly submitted to a state system.

Thus, in a situation of persistent warfare, pre-state societies came up with a sort of centralized regulatory agency under whose organization different social groups could pool their efforts. By pooling together the resources of the component parts, such an agency would be more likely to emerge victorious in war. The members of the agency that demonstrated the greatest military skill and leadership ability would in time be turned into a more permanent body of overlords, possibly with hereditary positions. The previously independent units willingly made themselves subject to this emergent military body. At this stage, a state with a central government had emerged. The integrative element in the process would continue past the end of the war. The advantages of division of labour, increased production and general labour efficiency resulting from centralization would ensure this. Advantages of protection, security, more efficient adjudication of disputes etc, provided by the centre, would be sufficient considered compensation for the local autonomy that subordinated groups lost.

Depending on the peculiar circumstances of the society in question, the rise of stratification, and conflict could also generate integration among previously autonomous groups. Conversely, integrative attempts could involve the use of force and coercion.³¹ This is the synthetic position. As noted by Ronald Cohen, searching for specific causes among all these developments is a fruitless and a spurious methodology. 'Historical sequences support the notion of multiple and varied causes producing similar effects,' he concludes.

31 Such coercion might entail the use of force, moral sanctions or threat of them; and the threat to withdraw benefits and other resources etc.

Ife myths and what initiated state formation

The details of the myths and traditions of Ife concerning Odua, as well as ethno-cultural data, like songs, re-enactment ceremonies, morphology of words associated with personae, sites, objects, and titles, etc., that have to do with the Odua phenomenon indicate that intra-group and inter-group conflicts were very important in the rise of Ife monarchical state system. An era of equality passed away with the incursion of Odua. The processes of stratification and increased differentiation in ranks or status among the patriarchs could have been connected with trade, as Smith suggests, but there is no clear evidence for this. There is some evidence, though, that it could be connected with increased agricultural production and control over prime agricultural land (perhaps well-drained land, since the tussle between Odua and Orisha Nla or Obatala included a claim on land).³²

Ife traditions also indicate that the defeated patriarchs were accommodated within the new state system. However, rather than occupy political positions, they were confined to ritual or religious ones. This must account for the fact that Oodua, Obatala and others in the creation myth are in the same breadth considered important Ife/Yoruba deities and the founding fathers of the Yoruba people. This detail supports the integrationist position for state formation.

Regarding the primacy of Ife as the cradle of monarchical system in Yorubaland, a dissenting opinion by I. Olomola must be mentioned. He is of the opinion that a well-developed monarchical political culture had arisen in the Ife area before Odua. For his position he relies on the traditions of a number of autochthonous communities that were brought under Ife to the effect that their rulers were already crown-wearing "kings" by the time they were conquered by Odua - crowns which, like that of Obatala, Odua seized. Hence according to his argument, all that the new Odua dynastic group introduced was 'the palace culture in place of the then existing system whereby the rulers lived in their respective lineage compounds [as well as] beads....'³³ However, as many as thirteen or sixteen 'kings' reigning within 2-3 kilometres of one another has little to tell us concerning a state-society with subordinate groups under its centralized monarchy. All of the patriarchs were co-equals and, in their quarters, leaders in their own rights. Moreover, as Obayemi has shown, many non-

32 Adediran, 'The Early Beginning' 81,87.

33 Olomola, 'Ife Before Odua', 56.

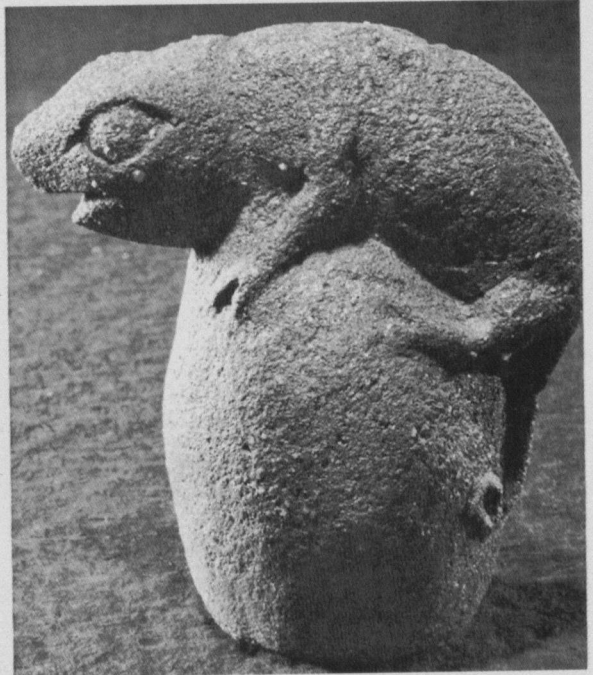
state polities (which he termed mini-states) exist on the fringe of central Yoruba today with a full accoutrement of royal titles, and insignia, but obviously lacking a unifying central state institution under which the various autonomous polities would submit their independence.³⁴

At best the pre-Odua patriarchs might have combined popular religious roles with the local rulership of their territorial groups. The beauty of the plastic arts associated with these patriarchs and their links with ritual or religious uses, would suggest this possibility. In fact, almost all of these pre-Odua patriarchs or 'kings' were (are still) considered gods and worshipped. But apart from Odua, the founding father of the state-society of Ile-Ife, no post-Odua king of Ife has been deified. We can, thus, clearly define a change-over to true monarchy from the Odua era; a more secular era with *obas* (kings) who began to wield total military power and who had a lot of political power concentrated in his hands.

The defeated patriarchs' acceptance of the kingship of Odua as well as their acceptance of official roles in the new Odua kingdom obviously also supports the integrationists theory of state formation. These leaders had the option of emigrating but

chose not to, opting instead to accept official roles in the new system in such a way that helped to advance the state-building process of Odua's Ife.

Here, the synthetic model of state formation with many factors inter-related and mutually reinforcing could be said to apply to Ife. Thus, integrative processes followed conflict situations, or conversely, integration



Chameleon. From: F. Willet, *Ife*, pp.99.

34 Obayemi, 'The Phenomenon of Odua', 74-75.

and conciliation efforts in state building by an emergent state group could be preceded by a measure of violent oppression and domination, when the group succeeds to impose its authority on the rest of the population.³⁵ Clearly, stratification and conflict at one time or the other seem to be vital ingredients in the rise of the Ife state-society.

35 Cohen and Service, 'Introduction', *Origins*, 8.