

REL 095: Altars of the Black Atlantic

Fall 2017

Week Five Class Notes: DUE by MIDNIGHT on WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 27!

This week we are reading the first chapter of Robert Farris Thompson's book, *Flash of the Spirit*. You are only required to post one key term, key quote, or discussion question for this chapter. However, you should be sure that your entry is COMPLETE and COMPREHENSIVE. Make sure that you clearly define the key term that you have chosen, and explain why you think it is an important word for us to know. You should not only identify a quote, but you should also write a sentence or two explaining why you think it is interesting, confusing, or frustrating. Your discussion question should be grounded in the reading as well as relatable to our previous class concepts, issues, and discussions. All items (key terms, key quotes, discussion questions) should refer directly to the readings, with a page number or set of pages reference.

We are back to the original rotation: so if you posted a discussion question last week, you will post a key term, and so forth.

KEY TERMS

Osanyin Staff - A staff constructed of iron that features a bird (senior bird of healing) at the top surrounded by a series of lesser birds. The staff holds a message within it that represents the prevailing of one's mind amidst chaos (destruction and disease). This iron Osanyin staff is mirrored in Afro-Brazilian culture, where the bird (senior bird of healing) synthesizes that the natural forest and its remedies are far more critical than any document (Thompson, pg. 49-51) (visual representation on pages 50 and 51..plate 30-32) **-Jamie Bottino**

Iwa - custom, the traditional way of life. (Sam Brady)

Oju Inun- Inner or Spiritual eyes, that the gods and goddesses possess that allow them to see absolute truth without question. (Greg)

Itutu- Mystic coolness; most of the time this term is used to refer to art. (page 12) (Scarlet Shifflett)

Opele- This is a diving chain that is made of string or metal and has four half nus for the opele fruit. These are used as a Ifa divining method (Page 35, Seth)

KEY QUOTES

"The Yoruba asses everything aesthetically- from the taste and color of a yam to the qualities of a dye, to the dress and deportment of a woman or a man...These preoccupations are especially evident in the rich and vast body of art works celebrating Yoruba religion."

Also

"The Yoruba religion presents a limitless horizon of vivid moral beings..They are messengers and embodiments of *áshe*." (dan)

"The Yoruba remain the Yoruba precisely because their culture provides them with ample philosophic means of comprehending, and ultimately transcending, the powers that periodically threaten to dissolve them." (16) this just shows how strong they are as a religion, agreeing with everything we have talked about earlier in class and corresponding to the video we watched. (alyssa)

"Because of his provocative nature, Eshu has been characterized by missionaries and Western-minded Yoruba alike 'the Devil.'"(19)

I thought this quote was interesting because Eshu is very important and worshipped by so many, but when looked at with more of a closed mind he becomes the complete opposite. (Joe)

" Once Ifa reigned upon the earth and there dispensed his precious wisdom. But one day a son of Ifa arrogantly refused to bow down before his father, whereupon Ifa withdrew to heaven.

When the light in the eyes of Eshu dimmed by the road and disappeared, the world began to die. Similarly, the translation of Ifa to heaven occasioned such a terrifying blast of sterility and drought that starving animals attempted to devour sharp razors scattered on the ground, and river basins were covered in dead leaves. The world again was dying. The children of Ifa climbed the sacred palm tree to beg their father to return, and he gave each of them sixteen palm nuts as a concentrated essence of his healing wisdom, replacing himself on earth with the sixteen sacred palm nuts, the *ikin*. Order and life were again restored.

"

What a quote. Let's get into the implications of this, Ifa is SUCH a powerful source that merely the absence of it/him causes the world to die. Not only is Ifa a God or Orisa in heaven, his physical/worldly presence has been converted into these 16 palm nuts as concentrated essences of his healing wisdom. Also, let's not forget to say what an overreaction! Just because your son doesn't bow down to you, do you decide to leave this earth and send the physical world into armageddon? wow.

(Eli)

"She greets the most important word within the water

She is the orisha you see healing by means of water that is cool

Iworo bird with brilliant plume upon her head

Titled women who heals the children

Witness of a person's ecstasy removed

She says: Bad head- become good!

Mistress of *ashe*, full predictive power

She greets the most important matter in the water

She cures without fee; gives honey to children

Has lots of money, speaks sweetly to the multitude" (79)

Michael Hemond

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Interacting with deities happens quite often in day to day life in Yoruba culture. (34) However, most of these interactions are done by throwing something normally a kind of nut or shell, Kola nut or cowrie shell, by staring at the water, or by going to a priest or priestess. The act of scattering things is very important in reading the Efa which is done by the babalawo who is allowed to have some jewelry which has 16 beads normally. The jewelry is called "The 16 Sacred Palm Nuts" and is considered to be cast down from heaven by Eshu. However, why are palm nuts so important to the Yoruba religion?

"Coolness" and "seriousness" are traits we see as being honored and respected within Yoruba religion as signs of maturity and power. How do we see this idea being represented in the Gods of Yoruba religion? How do we see people who remain cool and generous being rewarded? How do we see people who "lose their cool" being punished? (Tessa)

"Sheer artlessness may bring a culture down but a civilization like that of the Yoruba, and the Yoruba-Americans, pulsing with ceaseless creativity richly stabilized by precision and control, will safeguard the passage of its people through the storms of time" (Thompson, p. 97) Considering the tumultuous history of the Yoruba people, how does their artwork continue to show their resilience and capture our interests? What makes their artwork different from that of other religions? (Noah)

"Without the concept of witchcraft, power would have flowed naturally through society, lodging only in socially structured positions, most of which were held by men in the traditional Yoruba patrilineage" (Thompson 74) How have Yoruba beliefs influenced how different genders are perceived in society? For example, how has the concept of witchcraft changed how women are seen in society? (Louisa)

How do the different depictions of Eshu relate to his characteristics and background? Why is Eshu depicted in the ways that he is and why is Eshu so important in African diasporic religions? (Hayden)