THE DYING AND RISING GOD
IN THE NEW YEAR FESTIVAL OF IFE

There was a time when the Yoruba were generally thought to have originated outside of sub-Saharan Africa. Some authors favoured Canaan and Arabia as the starting point of a great migration,[1] others North Africa and Egypt.[2] In view of the unlikeliness of a large scale movement of people – whether by land or sea - over these long distances such theories are no longer taken into consideration.

Following a general trend in post-colonial African history in favour of local developments, historians of the Yoruba now prefer to search for regional closely circumscribed origins.[3] This position seems all the more valid since the neigbouring people in the north, the Bariba, Nupe, Hausa, and Kanuri were thought to have no comparable claims of northern connections. Why should the Yoruba alone have migrated over a long distance while their neighbours have stayed for hundreds or even thousands of years in their homelands without major residential changes? We have seen above that this was not the case. Even though the concept of large scale migration has to be rejected, the evidence for far reaching contacts with the north in ancient times is, with respect to the Hausa and the Kanuri, too obvious to be neglected.[4]

The Yoruba legend of origin traces the starting point of the great migration to Arabia. Indeed, the culture hero of the Yoruba, Oduduwa, is said to have originally lived as a crown prince together with his father Nimrod in Mecca. There he tried with the help of his priest Azar to reverse the religious situation by reintroducing idol worship. However, Abraham, the son of Azar, agitated in favour of Islam and destroyed the idols.[5] When the people were about to burn Abraham, the Muslims revolted so that Oduduwa and his supporters had to flee.[6] Nearly all the details of the story including the particular name of Abraham's father and the destruction of the idols can be shown to have been borrowed from the Koran

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[1] Johnson, *History*, 3-5; Frobenius, *Götterlehre*, X-XVI, 8-10.

[2] Frobenius, *Und Afrika*, 323-351; Lucas, *Religion*, 352-354.

[3] Smith, *Kingdoms*, 4-6; Law, *Oyo Empire*, 26-30.

[4] See above chap. XII.

[5] The Koran mentions Āzar instead of Terah as the father of Abraham (Gen 11: 26; Kor. 6: 74).

[6] Johnson, *History*, 3-5. See also Law, "How many times", 39-40.

and from Islamic Tales of the Prophets.[7] However, why was Oduduwa as a son of Nimrod so cogently inserted into the story of Abraham's struggle against idolatry? Later his son Oranmiyan is, in a similar vein, supposed to have attempted to return to Mecca in order to reconquer the town. The great collector of Yoruba traditions Johnson himself cannot possibly be credited with such reconstructions since he clearly states that he relied on oral accounts which he heard. Further to the north the Fulani scholar and later Sultan of Sokoto Muḥammad Bello was acquainted with a similar story according to which the Yoruba were remnants of the Canaanites and hence kinsfolk of Nimrod.[8] These elements of Yoruba history interwoven with Islamic feedback are certainly based on old traditions transmitted via the milieu of Muslim traders residing among the Hausa and in northern Yorubaland. Although the details about Mecca and Islam are certainly not based on historical events, the general link they establish between certain biblical figures and the Yoruba culture heros cannot be dismissed as mere fabrications for the sole purpose of constructing a prestidious ancestry without any foundation in ancient history.[9] Owing to the reorientation of trade towards the coast and hence the disruption of contacts with the north in the colonial period, later authors could no longer avail themselves with similar informants.[10]

Behind the Yoruba legend of origin we perceive the more complex Ife mythology involving a remote High God, Olodumare, and his antagonistic sons, Oduduwa and Obatala. All three deities participated in one way or another in the process of creating the world which is supposed to have taken place in Ife. The creation myth of Ife can be shown to be closely related to the Baal Cycle of Ugarit.[11] On the legendary level clear correspondences exist between the Hausa tradition of origin and the biblical genealogy of the tribes, both distinguishing between the chosen people descending from the legal wife and the underprivileged sons descending from the slave concubine. According to Ife mythology the same pattern is found in the grouping of the deities in the two major parties of Oduduwa and Obatala, two figures corresponding to Ishmael and Isaac-Jacob.[12]

These parallels are not accidental since Canaanite-Israelite myth and legend are based on a dualistic social organization in which two clusters of clans stand

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[7] Koran 2: 260; 19: 43-49; 21: 53-68; 37: 85-97; Tabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, I, 257-264; transl. Brinner, *History*, II, 53-60; Kisā'ī, *Lisas*, 131-137; transl. Thackston, *Tales*, 140-147.

[8] Bello, *Infāq*, 48; transl. Arnett, *Rise*, 16.

[9] Current research insists mainly on the feedback aspects of the tradition (Law, "How many times", 39-40; Shaw, *Nigeria*, 10).

[10] Though published only in 1921, Johnson wrote his book originally in 1897 (*History*, VIII).

[11] Lange, "Erbe, II", 106-137; *id.*, "Ursprung des Bösen", 6-18.
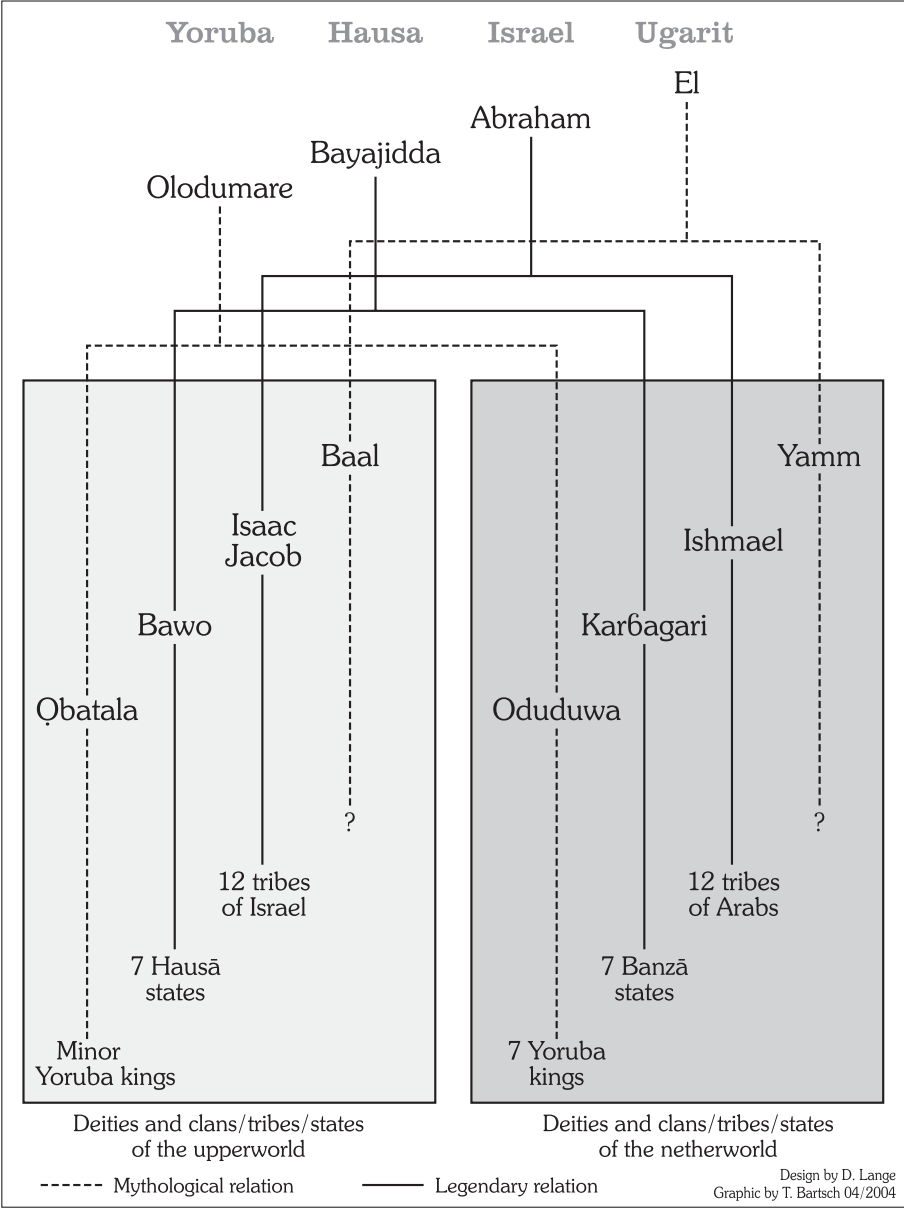
[12] Lange, "Ursprung des Bösen", 20.

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Yoruba   Hausa   Israel   Ugarit

El

Abraham

Bayajidda

Olodumare

Baal

Isaac
Jacob

Bawo

Ọbatala

Yamm

Ishmael

Kar6agari

Oduduwa

?

?

12 tribes
of Israel

12 tribes
of Arabs

7 Hausā
states

7 Banzā
states

Minor
Yoruba kings

7 Yoruba
kings

Deities and clans/tribes/states
of the upperworld

Deities and clans/tribes/states
of the netherworld

------ Mythological relation   ——— Legendary relation

Design by D. Lange
Graphic by T. Bartsch 04/2004

Chart 12: The Canaanite-Israelite descent pattern in Ugarit, Israel, Hausaland and Yorubaland

in sharp contrast to each other: there are those clans claiming descent from deities of the netherworld and those clans deriving their descent from deities of the upperworld. It is this intermediate level of two different categories of deities which allows us to understand the social implications of Canaanite mythology and the derived Israelite legend since each deity is worshipped exclusively by the members of the specific clan attached to it.[13] The very close relationship between the members of a clan and a particular ancestral deity becomes clear when we consider the performance of the different festivals of Ife. Each festival is organized by the priests of a particular clan and it is enacted by the active members of the clan as a religious service done for the clan deity. Other people may join the festival at different stages, but they can do so only as members of related clans insofar as their own deity was once associated to the main deity of the festival. Even the organization of the traditional state depends on the clan structure of the society since the palace officials are chosen according to their membership in specific civil service clans and their corresponding functions with respect to the clans of the society and their festivals. The king himself is considered to be the last of the deities and hence the closest to human beings. Through his support of the major cultic activities and his participation in the most important festivals he transcends the social segmentation introduced by the clans and the clan parties.[14] For the historian these connections are relevant insofar as they show that in the contexts under consideration creation myths and the cognate foundation legends are deeply rooted in society. When parallel myths, legends, social and political origanisations can be found in distant societies it has to be assumed that these societies must once have been in historical contact. For the Hausa, the Kanuri and the Yoruba the available evidence clearly points to Canaanite-Israelite influences reaching the Central Sudan through Phoenician agency.[15]

The topic of this paper is the dying and rising god in the New Year festival of Ife. By comparing the Itapa festival of the religious capital of the Yoruba with the ancient Near Eastern New Year festival, I would like to draw attention to the remarkable number of parallels that exist between an African festival studied *in vivo* and a Canaanite festival solely known by its cult-mythology. Although mythological and ritual performances tend to emphasise different aspects of the underlying cultural pattern, it can often be assumed that specific myths and corresponding rituals form two sides of the same coin. On the African side, the ritual

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[13] For further details see chap. XII, sec. 4.

[14] For further details on clans in Ife see Bascom, *Yoruba*, 42-46, and Lange, "Preservation", 141-143.

[15] Lange, "Ursprung des Bösen", 5, 13-14; siehe auch *id.*, "Erbe, II", 138-140, and Kühme, *Königtum*, 213-216.

performances are of outstanding importance, while the texts of the ancient Near East provide us with extensive accounts of myths. Once it is established that both sets of information belong to the same myth and ritual pattern, the comparisons become an heuristic device of far-reaching consequence. Thus, while the idea of the rising and dying god has, with respect to the ancient Near East, mainly been considered on the level of myths, its relevance for the actual celebration of the ancient New Year festivals remains highly conjectural.[16] In contrast, the New Year festival of Ife provides us with a concrete example of such performances for which the mythological background is partly missing. Taken together the cult-dramatic performances in an African context and the mythological testimonies of the ancient Canaanites provide us with new evidence for understanding of the history of a major African society. Furthermore they help us to consider the rise of Christianity and Islam from a new perspective.[17]

1. The Itapa Festival and the Resurrection of Obatala

Various Yoruba towns celebrate an annual festival in honour of Obatala.[18] However, nowhere does this festival so distinctly resemble a resurrection festival as in Ife.[19] The organization of the festival is the duty of two descent groups, the clan of Obatala and the clan of Obameri. But not all members of these clans claiming descent from the respective deities are active practioners of the religious cults. In fact, only the members of the cult groups within the Obatala and the Obameri clan organize and enact the festival. Moreover, there is no connection whatsoever between the two antagonistic cult groups, each of which celebrates its own festival ignoring that of the other. Nevertheless, both festivals take place simultaneously and are interrelated in various ways, such that it is necessary to consider them as complementary units of one great festival. Designed by unknown organizers from the past, the New Year festival with all its details seems to follow a master plan in giving a vivid and lasting expression to the fundamental religious concepts and emotions of Ife society.

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[16] It is rejected by von Soden, "Zeugnis", 130-166, Smith, "Dying and rising gods", 521-527, and Smith, *Origins*, 104-131; but its validity is confirmed by Frymer-Kensky, "Tribulations of Marduk", 131-141, Day, *Yahweh*, 116-124, and Mettinger, *Riddle of Resurrection*, 55-111, 185-215.

[17] A more detailed account of the Itapa festival and its connection to the social and political organization of Ife will be found in Lange, *Chaoskampf* (forthcoming).

[18] For Ejigbo, see Verger, "Ejigbo festival", 208, and Lange, "Erbe, II", 114-115, for Ila see Pemberton/Afolayan, *Kingship*, 136-138, 141-145, and for Oyo see Beier, *Yoruba Myths*, 29-31.

[19] Stevens and Ojutalayo mention the final procession but fail to refer it to the resurrection of Obatala ("Orisha-nla", 198-199; *Orisa, 94-96).* Obatala is often called Orisanla in Ife.

According to the festal legend, the festival re-enacts in the first place the creation of the world in which several deities were involved. At the beginning of the world the High God Olodumare commissioned his eldest son, Obatala, with creation by handing over to him a special bag containing soil. However on his way from heaven to the primordial ocean, Obatala got drunk on palm wine and fell asleep. When Oduduwa, Olodumare's younger son, saw that his brother was sleeping, he stole the bag and created the world in his stead.[20] It is unclear whether he accomplished the act of creation or whether he left the work unfinished. The members of the Oduduwa clan believe that he indeed finished it, while the members of the Obatala clan claim that he did not since only their god had the necessary *àṣe* "divine authority" to fulfill the act of creation. These versions of the story of creation are still in dispute today.[21] They explain the never ending quarrel between the two major clans of Ife and hence between the two multi-clan parties constituted around them.[22] Yet, there is agreement among the members of the different clans and among the inhabitants of the different kingdoms of Yorubaland that the creation of the world took place on the very spot where the town of Ife was later founded.[23]

At a later stage of primeval history, a quarrel over control of Ife occurred in the course of which the primordial god Oduduwa was able to maintain his supremacy while the god of creation Obatala was expelled from the town. In this case, the confrontation did not take place between Obatala and Oduduwa himself, but between Obatala and Obameri, the god of death and the general of Oduduwa.[24] Once Obatala was in exile, it was again Obameri who made sure that his enemy was unable to return to town. Yemoo, Obatala's companion, stayed in

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[20] Owing to this misfortune, the worshippers of Obatala still today abstain from drinking palm wine (Idowu, *Olodumare*, 118).

[21] Stevens and Willett consider Oduduwa to have been the creator of the world ("Orishanla", 185; *Ifè*, 121), while Idowu claims that it was Obatala (*Olodumare,* 19-22). Only Ojutalayo is aware of the conflicting versions of the story of creation (*Orisa*, 2-3). Among the oral accounts gathered by the author are those of Obalubo/Oduduwa, Idare/Oduduwa, Lokore/Obameri (FN 01, 93, 108-9; FN 02, 223) and those of Obalale/Obatala, Olu/Obatala (FN 01, 93; FN 02, 20). Stevens was told that Obatala withdrew to heaven taking with him the bag of creation when he saw that Oduduwa had created the world (*"Orisha-nla"*, 187). In contrast, one Obatala priest claims that his god finished the work of creation in six days and that he got drunk on his way back to heaven on the seventh day (Obaluru/Obatala FN 01, 101).

[22] On the relation between the myth of creation and the clan structure of Ife see Lange, "Preservation", 132-134.

[23] Although providing an entirely different version of the creation account, the Yemoja myth recorded at Badagry also refers to Ife as the place where the creation of the world occurred (Ellis, *Peoples*, 45).

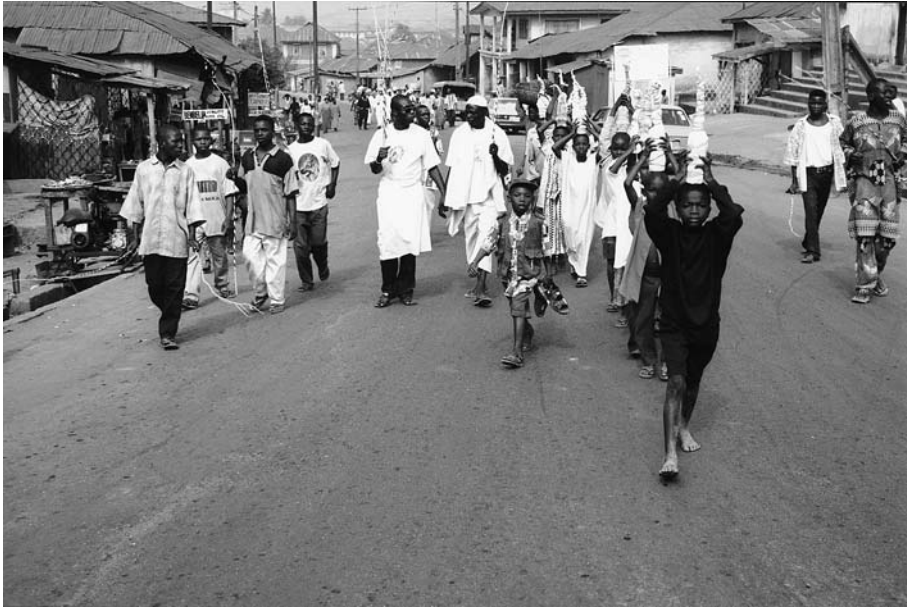[24] For the characteristics of the main deities of Ife see below sec. 3 of this chapter.

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Photo 3: The procession of resurrection approaches the palace, Ifẹ 2000

the town and remained faithful to him. In exile, Obatala was well received by his friend Obawinrin (i.e. Sanpọnna, the god of small pox), who even abdicated his throne in his favour. After a while, the citizens of Ifẹ saw that humans, animals and fields were becoming infertile. Realizing that these misfortunes were caused by the absence of Obatala, they wished for his return. The head of a third party, the deitiy Oramfẹ, changed sides and forced Obameri to let his enemy come back to town.[25] Indeed, when Obatala returned, fertility was restored and all the hardships the people had suffered from came to an end.[26]

In accordance with the primordial confrontation between Obatala and Obameri, the main performances of the Itapa festival are staged by the Obatala and the Obameri cult groups, both celebrating their own festivities. In spite of

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[25] Influenced by the saying about Oluorogbo according to which this deity is "a fighter on earth and in heaven", scholars thought up till now that this deity and not Oramfẹ was the arbiter in the creation conflict (Stevens, "Orisha-nla", 187; Obayẹmi, "Yoruba", 271; Eluyẹmi, *Ile-Ifẹ,* 45).

[26] Obalale/Obatala FN 96, 121; Obalale/Obatala, Obaluru/Obatala FN 01, 95-96, 100. Obaseemi/Obameri denies that Obatala's exile had an influence on fertility (FN 01, 165). Since Stevens, Parratt and Ojutalayọ rely on Oduduwa informants, they miss the fertility aspect of the exile ("Orisha-nla", 185-187; "Approach", 244; *Orisa*, 94-102). Stevens however mentions the birth of disfigured children owing to Obatala's retreat from the earth after the creation ("Orisha-nla", 187).

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this antagonism during the festival, all traditionalists of Ife know that the main confrontation was between Obatala and Oduduwa. Likewise, the various clans of Ife are organized according to this basic mythological conflict, one party being led by the high priest of Oduduwa and the other by the high priest of Obatala. A third party headed by the high priest of Oramfe is also linked to the creation conflict since its members claim descent from the arbitrating god Oramfe and his helpers. The same basic pattern of three religious factions which underlies Ife clan structure can also be found in the organization of the palace, the judicial senate and the militia.[27] Although the Itapa festival is characterised by the confrontation between the descendants of Obatala and those of Obameri, the basic antagonism re-enacted is the one between Obatala and Oduduwa. Even the descendants of Obameri admit without hesitation that they actually fight on behalf of Oduduwa. Therefore, the apparently divergent cult dramas of the Itapa festival together mirror the creation myth of Ife.

The Itapa festival is all the more important as most of the cult groups of Ife participate, irrespective of their own festivals, in one way or another in its various cult-dramatic re-enactments. However, the cult groups are strictly divided into the two major parties, one led by Obatala, or rather his priests, and the other by Oduduwa or his priests. Despite the fact that the priests of Obameri organize their own festival of opposition against Obatala, they acknowledge their subordination to the high priest of Oduduwa since their own god was a follower of his god. On four occasions during the festival this relationship of subordination is clearly expressed.[28] During the thirteen days of the festival there is not a single ritual action in the course of which members of the two distinct parties come into direct contact. This physical separation and the corresponding antagonism are all the more surprising, since the original setting of the festival clearly exhibits a coherent overall structure with various linkages between the activities of both cult groups and their associates.[29]

Historians are convinced that the Itapa festival corresponds to a re-enactment of events which occurred in the medieval period.[30] Relying on distorted and one-sided accounts of the festival and its mythology, they overlook the fact that the Itapa festival refers to the story of creation and that its main activities consist of cult-dramatic re-enactments of the descent of a fertility god into the netherworld

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[27] For further details, see Lange, "Preservation", 131-132.

[28] These are during the cult meal of Obameri, during the cult meal of Esindale, during the Imojubi ritual behind the palace, and during the Imojubi dances in the "reception hall" of the palace.

[29] The two available descriptions of the Itapa festival by Stevens and Ojutalayo only consider the actions of the Obatala cult group.

[30] Smith, *Kingdoms*, 14; Obayemi, "Yoruba", 268-263; Adediran, "Early beginnings", 81-85.

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and of his subsequent resurrection.[31] Furthermore, they do not take into account the basic euhemerism of Yoruba myths which involves the depiction of deities as human beings and the presentation of the mythical events of primordial times as profane stories. Hence we hear of the expulsion of the hero from town, his stay in exile and his triumphant return to town. Actually, we do not face here an annual re-enactment of precise events of the past for the sake of historical commemoration. Instead the Itapa festival must rather be considered as a form of cult-dramatic worship consisting in the performance of a myth. Therefore the main features of the festival should be considered as providing the basic structural support for the traditional religion of Ife. Three arguments favour this interpretation. First, the entire festal myth and its practical realization during the festival are connected to an account of the creation of the world. Second, all protagonists are at present worshipped as deities. Third, all the actions of the festival aim at noting else than obtaining divine blessings.

2. The Baal Cycle of Ugarit and the Dying and Rising God

We now turn our attention to the pre-Roman North African horizon of Sudanic cultures. In view of the scarcity of North African sources from the Punic period, we must consider the Phoenician homeland on the Levantine coast and the surrounding Canaanite region. The most important texts were found in the trading town of Ugarit situated north of Tyre, Sidon and Byblos which was destroyed by the Sea Peoples around 1200 BC.[32] The cuneiform texts discovered in the mound of Ugarit provide the most important single corpus of documents for the reconstruction of the Canaanite culture of the Phoenicians. Among the mythological and legendary texts of Ugarit, the Baal Cycle is particularly relevant for any attempt to explore the festival culture of Canaan and hence of Punic North Africa.[33]

It remains unclear to what extent the Baal Cycle is a mythological or a ritual text. While most scholars restrict their enquiry to its mythological features consisting of an account of the actions of the main gods of Ugarit, some scholars regard

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[31] Stevens mentions the creation account but omits referring to the scene of the palm wine. In his opinion, the resurrection only concerns Yemoo ("Orisha-nla", 184-185, 198-199). Without having been able to assist at the procession of resurrection, Ojutalayo correctly mentions the final victory of Obatala on this day, but she renders other details in a distorted way (*Orisa*, 94-96).

[32] Loretz, *Ugarit und die Bibel*, 6-7; Yon, *Cité d'Ougarit*, 31-35.

[33] Xella, "Ugarit", DCPP, 481-484; Lipinski, *Dieux*, 49-51;

Chart 13: "Baal au foudre" – stela from Ugarit (Louvre AO 15775; Keel, *Welt*, n° 291)

it as a liturgy of the New Year festival.[34] Going one step further, some interpreters believe it to contain the most convincing evidence of the ancient Near Eastern mythological or even cult-mythological pattern of the dying and rising god.[35] A few researchers even try to uncover specific scenes of a cult drama in the text dealing with the death and the resurrection of the fertility god.[36] They thus join earlier scholars in their attempts to interpret the Mesopotamian text first called "Passion and Triumpf of Bel-Marduk" in terms of a cult-dramatic re-enactment of Bel's death and resurrection during the Babylonian New Year festival.[37] The narration of the Baal cycle consists of three different parts. In the first part, the weather god Baal confronts and vanquishes the primordial god Yamm in the so-called chaos combat. Although the surviving text fragments do not explicitly mention any act of creation, some scholars by comparing the Baal Cycle to the Babylonian *Enuma Elish* draw attention to the scattering of Yamm and the subsequent rise of Baal to kingship and thus consider both to express cosmogonic ideas.[38] The building of Baal's temple is the most important theme in the

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[34] For an overview of the different interpretations of the Ugaritic Baal Cycle, see Smith, *Baal Cycle*, I, 58-114. For the most comprehensive study of the Canaanite New Year festival, see de Moor, *New Year,* I, 4-12.

[35] Gaster, *Thespis*, 114-244; Engnell, *Divine Kingship*, 99-100; Smith, *Origins*, 120-130; Mettinger, *Riddle of Resurrection*, 55-81. For the pattern of the dying god and rising god, see Baudissin, *Adonis und Esmun*, 1911, and Frazer, *Dying God*, 1913.

[36] Hvidberg, *Weeping and Laughter*, 15-49. Similarly but less cult oriented Gray, *Legacy of Canaan*, 20-75.

[37] Zimmern, *Neujahrsfest*, 14-26; Pallis, *Akîtu Festival*, 200-206; Frymer-Kensky, "Tribulations of Marduk", 131-141.

[38] Fisher, "Creation at Ugarit," 313-324; Clifford, *Creation Accounts,* 117-133.

second part of the cycle. Contrary to Yamm and Môt, Baal insists that he should have his own a temple, so that his rule would be firmly established. In the third part, the god of death, Môt, challenges and defeats Baal, forcing him to descent into the netherworld.[39] As if wanting to emphasise Baal's litteral death, the author describes how his consort Anat searches for him, finds his body, mourns for him, and finally buries him.[40] Yet, Baal is not dead forever. In the final sequence of the cycle he reappears, engages Môt in a dramatic struggle, vanquishes him with the help of Shapsh the sun, and ascends to his throne.[41] As the outcome of a power-struggle, Baal's resurrection corresponds to a radical turn of fortune and hence to the climax of a cult drama: after his painful descent into the netherworld, Baal's resurrection is the consequence of a cosmic victory over his enemy. No doubt a radical change of mood from sorrow to joy was quite suitable for a dramatic display of Baal's fate. Most likely the author of the text does not mention any details of the festival as such because he, like all the participants, felt that the merging of the two spheres, the divine and the human, lay at the centre of the New Year festival as religious experience.

The books of the Old Testament refer to a corresponding great annual festival, the Feast of Booths, only in passing. Although the Israelites associated it with the exodus from Egypt, the festival must have had strong Canaanite connotations.[42] From the Mishna, we learn that the Feast of Booths was celebrated in the temple of Jerusalem in connection with the earlier worship of the sun by the Priests (*kōhanîm*): the Levites on the stairs between the Court of men and the Court of women behaved as if they wanted to obstruct the movement of two Priests towards the rising sun.[43] The two priestly groups were apparently the last survival of a once highly significant distinction between two groups of deities, the party of Baal/Yahweh and the party of Yamm-Môt. Similarly, the cult-dramatic re-enactment of the Baal myth in Ugarit must have been in the hands of groups of priests belonging to two different clans.[44] Therefore the attempt to identify the performers of the erstwhile Canaanite cult drama, to specify their organization and to describe their ritual performances is not pure speculation.

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[39] KTU 1.5 V 2 – 1.5 VI 10; transl. Wyatt, *Religious Texts*, 123-126.

[40] KTU 1.5 VI 27 – 1.6 I 34; transl. Wyatt, *Religious Texts*, 128-130.

[41] KTU 1.6 VI 16 – 1.6 VI 53; transl. Wyatt, *Religious Texts*, 142-145.

[42] Mowinckel, *Psalms*, I, 130-182; Gaster, *Festivals*, 80-98;

[43] Sukkah 5: 1-5; transl. Neusner, 288-289; Gaster, *Festivals*, 80-98; Ez 8: 16; Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 115-146; de Moor, *New Year*, I, 12-29. I am grateful to Claudia Wolfer for information on the present celebration of Jewish festivals in Israel.
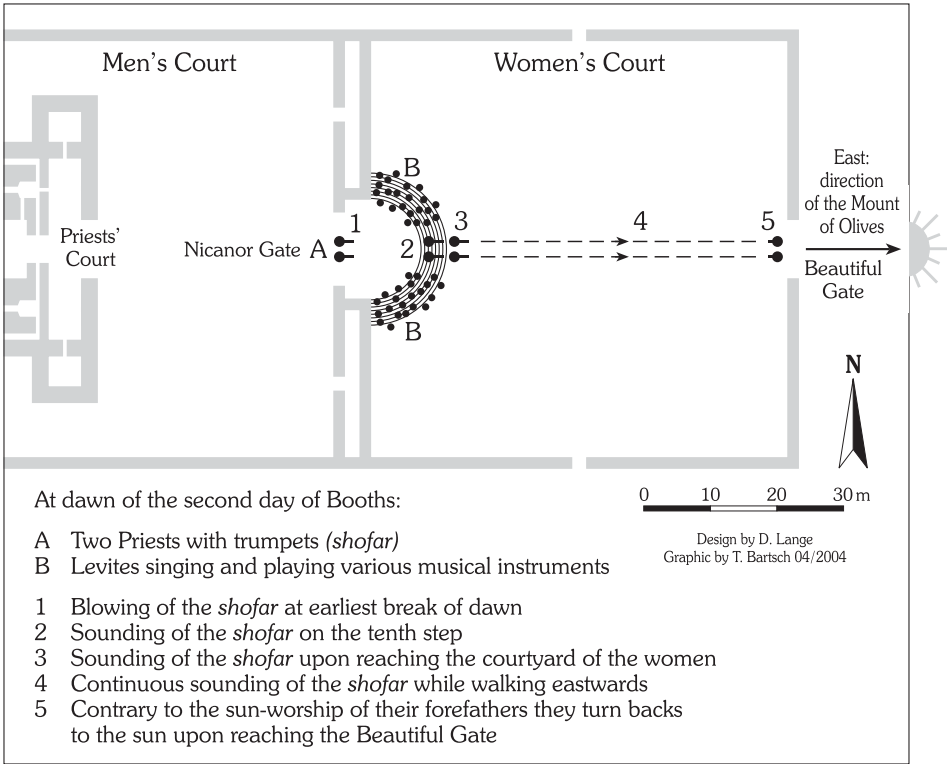
[44] Cf. Lange, "Ursprung des Bösen", 13-26.

Chart 14: Remnants of a cult-drama between Priests and Levites in the Herodian Temple of Jerusalem

3. Deities of the Itapa Festival of Ife

Before turning to the cult-dramatic enactment of the Itapa festival itself, it is important to identify the various gods in whose honor the festival is performed. The parallels between the Yoruba and the Canaanite deities will show the close relationship beween the two sets of phenomena.[45]

Olódùmarè

As the highest god of the Yoruba, Olodumare is superior to the other deities without actively influencing events on earth. Therefore, no cult is dedicated to him. For the Itapa festival, he is important because the Yoruba consider him to

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[45] For the general plausibility of Phoenician influences from North Africa see Lange, "Ursprung des Bösen", 4-18.

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have been the ultimate instigator of the act of creation.[46] As a remote High God Olodumare has much in common with the Canaanite god El. Etymologically the name Olodumare is probably derived from Olu/El and from *demaros* a word probably based on the Aramaic *dī marūs*, "the one of the height".[47]

Obàtálá

The Yoruba venerate Obatala as the god of creation, or more precisely the god who created human beings. Not only in Ife but also in other towns, annual festivals celebrated in his honour represent him as a "dying and rising god" of fertility.[48] In Canaan and Israel, Obatala should be compared to Baal, Melqart and Yahweh.[49] His name can be interpreted as *Oba - baꞎal* "king" with the addition of *tꞎla*, "the one who raises himself".[50]

Odùduwà

He was the opponent of Obatala in the primeval time of creation. Taking into account other Yoruba myths, he can be described as the primordial god whose claim to fulfill creation was originally based on his identification with "water", the first existing matter. Being the only Yoruba deity to have both a masculine and a feminine form, he corresponds to the Canaanite masculine Yamm "Sea" and the Babylonian feminine Tiamat "Sea". The name Oduduwa seems to be derived from the Yamm's prominent epithet *mdd il* or *modūd il* "Beloved of El" which is mentioned in the Baal Cycle.[51] The inscription of the Mesha stele shows that southeastern Israelites venerated a god called Dôd as well as Yahweh. This dualism is similar to the Ugaritic contrast between Baal and Yamm.[52] Arabian inscriptions suggest that the Levites worshipped a deity called Wadd.[53] In the South Arabian kingdoms of Maꞎīn and Awsān, Wadd was the moon god and the main

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[46] Idowu, *Olodumare*, 38-47; Hallgren, *Good Things*, 23-25.

[47] Lipinski, *Dieux et déesses*, 123-124. On the attributes of El see further Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts*, 25-54.

[48] Idowu, *Olodumare*, 26; Lange, „Erbe, II", 114-115.

[49] Baudissin, *Adonis und Esmun*, 450-510; Widengren, *Sakrales Königtum*, 62-79; Engnell, *Divine Kingship*, 97-110; Lipinski, *Dieux*, 226-243.

[50] Lange, "Erbe, II", 109.

[51] KTU 1.1 IV 20, 1.3 III 38; 1.3 III 43; 1.4 II 34; 1.4 VI 12; 1.4 VII 3.

[52] KAI, 181 12; Mowinckel, *Psalms*, I, 137-138.

[53] Grimme, "Südarabischer Levitismus", 169-199; Höfner, "Stammesgruppen", 476-477; Lange, "Ursprung des Bösen", 16, 19, 25.

deity of the state.[54] These pieces of evidence make it likely that Wadd /Modūd /Dôd was a widely venerated god in the ancient Near East corresponding to the Ugaritic Yamm.

Obamerì

He is a Yoruba god only known in Ifẹ. Although his priests and followers are the direct opponents of Obatala during the Itapa festival, in the primordial conflict Obameri acted as the military arm of Oduduwa.[55] Besides this basic dependency on his overlord, mythological accounts tell us very little about him. His main characteristic as a god of death can only be inferred from the functions of his high priest.[56] The high priest of Obameri is supposed to be able to force people to commit suicide and he is called upon in cases of suicide. At the burial of the king, his functions are more important than those of the other priests of the Oduduwa party. Furthermore, it is believed that the staff of Obameri makes women barren.[57] His equivalent in Ugarit is Môt, whose name means "death".[58] Obameri's name can be etymologically traced back to *Oba – baḥal* "Lord, owner" and *meri – môt* "death".[59]

Yemòó

She is Obatala's companion and wife. Yemoo's image stands next to her consort's in the temple of Obatala and it is treated the same way. Only during the procession of resurrection when the high priest and the high priestess of Obatala and Yemoo play the roles of the two deities is a clear distinction made between her and her husband. As Obatala and Yemoo are venerated in the same temple and their cult-dramatic representations are closely connected, their worshippers

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[54] Höfner, "Religionen Arabiens", 289-290. On Yamm see Pope, "Jamm", *in:* Haussig, *Wörterbuch*, 289-291, and Fantar*, Dieu de la mer*, 27-130.

[55] Ademakinwa, *Ifẹ*, II, 28-32; Fabunmi, *Ifẹ Shrines*, 14; Stevens, "Orisha-nla", 185-187.

[56] Likewise standing for death among the Yoruba are the god Amᴑta in Ila, the Egungun masquerade Mope in Edẹ and the quarter Oke Mᴑpo in Ejigbo (Pemberton/Afᴑlayan, *Kingship*, 179-181; Beier, *Year*, 27; Oluwin FN 02, 143-144).

[57] Lokorẹ/Obameri FN 00, 33 (suicide), 46, 180-189 (dead king); Idare/Oduduwa FN 00, 105 (hanged people); Obaseemi/Obameri FN 01, 163 (staff); Orunbatᴑ/Obameri FN 02, 88 (king's grave).

[58] On Môt see Cassuto, "Baal and Mot", 77-86, and Pope, "Mōt", *in:* Haussig, *Wörterbuch*, 300-302.

[59] Lange, "Erbe, II", 116-125.

[60] Stevens, "Orisha-nla", 193-199; Ojutalayᴑ, *Orisa*, 87-102; Eluyᴇmi, *Ile-Ifẹ*, 17.
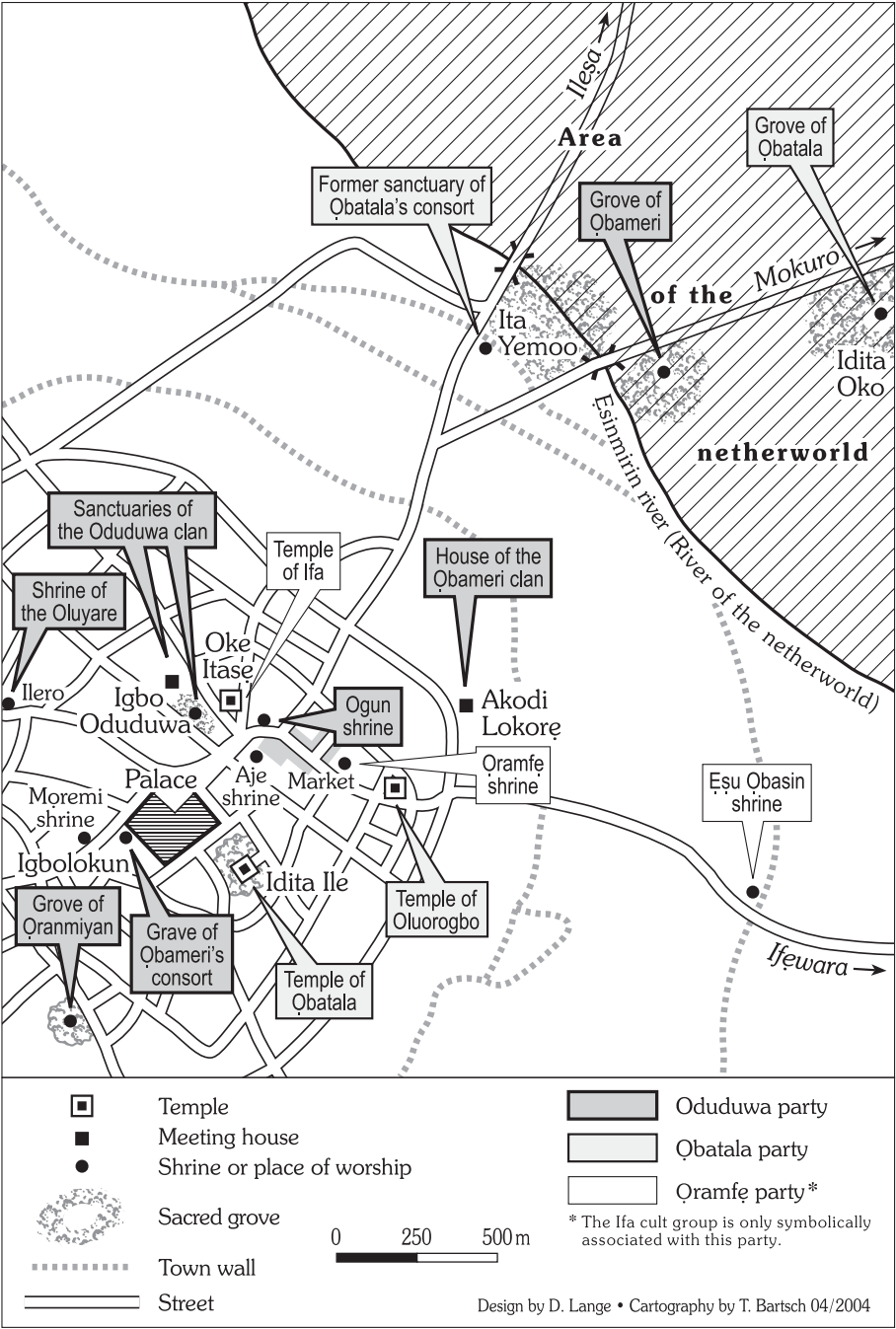
Map 6: Important temples and sanctuaries of the three cult parties of Ifẹ

belong to a single clan, the Idita community.[60] On the cult level, the same close relationship between these two deities exists in other Yoruba towns.[61]

With respect to Canaan and Israel Yemoo corresponds to Baal and Yahweh's consort Anat. Possibly the name Yemoo is derived from *ybmt* (Yabamatu), the most important epithet of Anat. It occurs in the Baal Cycle, has the meaning of "widow" and probably refers to the time when Baal is absent.[62]

Sànp/nná

He is the god of small pox throughout Yorubaland. In Ifẹ it is said that Obawinrin, the high priest of Sanpɔnna, welcomed Obatala after his expulsion from town and gave over to him the position of *oba Ìgbò* "king of the netherworld".[63] During festive ceremonies, the high priests of Sanpɔnna wear a long rafia masquerade (*Aarè*) as a cult dress that covers the whole body. These are then known as Oluyare "owners of the *Aarè*". According to the de-mythologized version of the Ifẹ tradition, re-enacted in particular during the Edi festival, their ancestors, the Ìgbò, are considered to have been an ancient neighbouring tribe which attacked the town and seized the people.[64]

In Canaan, we find the pest god Rashap, whose Mesopotamian equivalent, Nergal, is known as lord of the netherworld.[65] In Israelite folk religion, Rashap can still be recognised as a god who followed Yahweh (Hab 3:5). The name of Sanpɔnna is either derived from Rashap, by the omission of the first syllable, or from Saphon, the name of the deified holy mountain of the Canaanites.[66]

4. The most Important Cult-Dramatic Performances of the Itapa Festival

The activities of the Itapa festival of Ifẹ deal with the death and resurrection of the god of creation, Obatala. The dramatic suspense of the festival is derived from the primordial conflict between Obatala and the god of death Obameri, whose

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[61] Ede and Ogbomɔso (FN 00, 192; 201). In Ifẹtẹdo, Yemoo/Yeemolu is the wife of Oran-miyan (FN 00, 161).

[62] KTU 1.3 II 33; 1.4 II 15. For the meaning of the full epithet *ybmt limm* "widow of the Lord (Baal)" see Pope, "Anat", *in:* Haussig, *Wörterbuch*, 240. On Anat see further Kapelrud, *Violent Goddess*, and Cassuto, *Goddess Anath*.

[63] Ademakinwa, *Ifẹ*, II, 34; Stevens, "Orisha-nla", 185. For an explanation of the title *oba Ìgbò* see Lange, "Erbe, II", 135-137.

[64] Walsh, "Edi festival", 230-236; Ademakinwa, *Ifẹ*, II, 32-52; Willett, *Ifẹ*, 122-123; Smith, *Kingdoms, 15;* Lange, "Erbe, II", 122-137.

[65] See Pope/Röllig and Edzard *in:* Haussig, *Wörterbuch*, 109-110; 305-306; Fulco, *Rešep*, 33-71, and Pardee, *Ritual*, 282-283.

[66] Lange, "Erbe, II", 130-133. For the holy mountain of Canaan see Clifford, *Cosmic Mountain*, 57-79.

festivals are celebrated simultaneously. By annually re-enacting the conflict which first led to Obatala's expulsion from town and later to his triumphant return, the cult groups of Obatala and of Obameri not only commemorate an event of the primeval past, they also placate their respective deities for the upcoming year. At the same time, the identification of the participants of the festival with the fate of their deity leads to an intense communion with the ancestors of their clans.

The terms netherworld, netherworld's river and resurrection are important for understanding the inner meaning of the festival, although they are not familiar to the participants. The main reason for this estrangement from the fundamental concept of the festival lies in the euhemeristic approach of the Yoruba and of the Canaanites alike to the primeval events: when the festal legend mentions Obatala's expulsion from town, his sojourn in exile and his triumphant return, it is difficult for the participants of the festival to recognise that in mythological terms these events correspond to the distant and abstract death and the ressurection of the deity. Nevertheless, the overall religious orientation of the festival and the presence of the deities felt during the cult-dramatic re-enactments make it clear that celebrating the Itapa festival is an intense form of worship. It has nothing to do with the historical commemoration of any outstanding event.[67]

In the following brief outline of the festival, I discuss only the three most important days of the festival and its key dramatic moments.[68]

Ìpiw/

On the seventh day, cult servants fetch from Idita Ile, i.e. the Obatala temple, the statues of Obatala and Yemoo out of the holy of holies and wrap them in large white cloths. At the head of a ceremonious procession, in which all members of the cult group participate, two junior priests carry the wrapped but still distinctly recognisable statues through the town with great effort. They cross the netherworld river and finally reach Idita Oko, the netherworld grove of the Obatala cult group.[69]

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[67] The inhabitants of Ejigbo and Ede celebrate a similar festival of liberation and hence of resurrection of Obatala (Lange, "Erbe, II", 114-116; Beier, *Year*, 13-14). In Ila the resurrection festival of Obatala takes place at the same time as the festival in honour of Amota (Pemberton/Afolayan, *Kingship*, 136-144, 179-181).

[68] The summary description of the Itapa festival is based on participant observations in January and February 2000 and on subsequent interviews concerning its different performances in August/September 2001 and 2002.

[69] The Esinmirin river can be interpreted as a river separating the world of the living from the world of the dead and the two groves of the Obatala- and the Obameri people beyond it, Igbo Obameri and Idita Oko, as groves of the netherworld.

Photo 4: Junior priests carry the statues of Ọbatala and Yemoo to the grove of the netherworld, Ifẹ 2000

By this time, the Obameri people are already in their grove beyond the netherworld river where they worship their god and two minor deities. They can hear the procession of their opponents passing at a short distance. A little later they move to the processional way the Obatala people just used and pour palm wine across it. Through this action they commemorate Obatala's failure to create the world owing to his excessive drinking of palm wine. At the same time, they symbolically deny the Obatala people return into town. Subsequently, they march to the palace where they dance in front of the king thus demonstrating that from now on they are the ones who rule the town.[70]

In the meantime, the Obatala people start a night vigil in Idita Oko: they unwrap the statues of Obatala and Yemoo and paint the statues and the naked torsos of the highest priests with white dots. This is done in remembrance of the god of small pox and ruler of the netherworld, Sanpọnna, and his friendly reception of Obatala.[71] Then the rituals of the long night vigil begin: by singing, dancing, offe-

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[70] The earlier descriptions of the Itapa festival by Stevens and Ojutalayọ fail to mention the cult-dramatic performances of the Obameri people and the activities of their allies from the Oduduwa party.

[71] The legendary accounts always refer to Obawinrin, the highest priest of the Oluyare who are worshippers of Sanpọnna (Stevens, "Orisha-nla", 185; Ojutalayọ, *Orisa*, 10-11; Owajan/ Oluyare, Woyeasiri/Oluyare FN 00, 112, 120).

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Photo 5: The high priest of Ọbameri pours palm wine on the processional route of the Ọbatala people, Ifẹ 2000

ring sacrifices and thus commemorating the unfortunate fate of their deity whom the inhabitants of the town betrayed, the Obatala people worship their god. The members of the Obatala segment of the palace staff and the members of the other cult groups of the Obatala party join them for the final *iwo* sacrifice.

Ìmójùbí

Two days later on the evening of the ninth day, all members of the Oduduwa party celebrate the climax of their rule over the town. Organized by the Obameri people, they first perform a night time ritual just behind the palace at Igbolokun. Two statues, one female and the other male, are brought into a temporarily erected palm hut and placed into hole. Then the high priest of Obameri blesses all the high priests of the Oduduwa party one by one.

Subsequently they move together into the palace and dance before the king the dances of the 401 gods of Ife. First, the different priests of Obameri dance one after the other, then the different priests of Oduduwa, then all the other high priests of the Oduduwa party and finally the king. They even sing the songs of their enemies from the Obatala and the Oramfe party whose priests are not

Photo 6: The Ọbameri people fight in front of the palace against the return of Ọbatala into the town, Ifẹ 2000

present. The members of the Oduduwa party thus demonstrate their willingness to include all cult parties in their rule over the town. During both rituals the high priests of Obameri and of Oduduwa and their allies show the extent their deities were in full agreement about the course to take in their fight against Obatala.

Subsequently, the Obameri people prepare for the decisive combat against their opponents who try to escape from the netherworld. They sing the whole night and dance through the town and thus demonstrate their determination to oppose the return of Obatala into town.[72]

Èkuru Ìtàpá

At noon on the tenth day, the peak of ritual fighting in front of the palace occurs, in which Obatala and his people are branded once more as archenemies.[73] All of a sudden the fighting spirit of the Obameri people vanishes.

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[72] After the dances in the palace the Oduduwa people return home, only the Obameri people and one other group, the people of Esindale, roam about in the town for the whole night without ever meeting.

[73] Neither at this nor at any other scene of the festival do the antagonistic cult groups actually meet.

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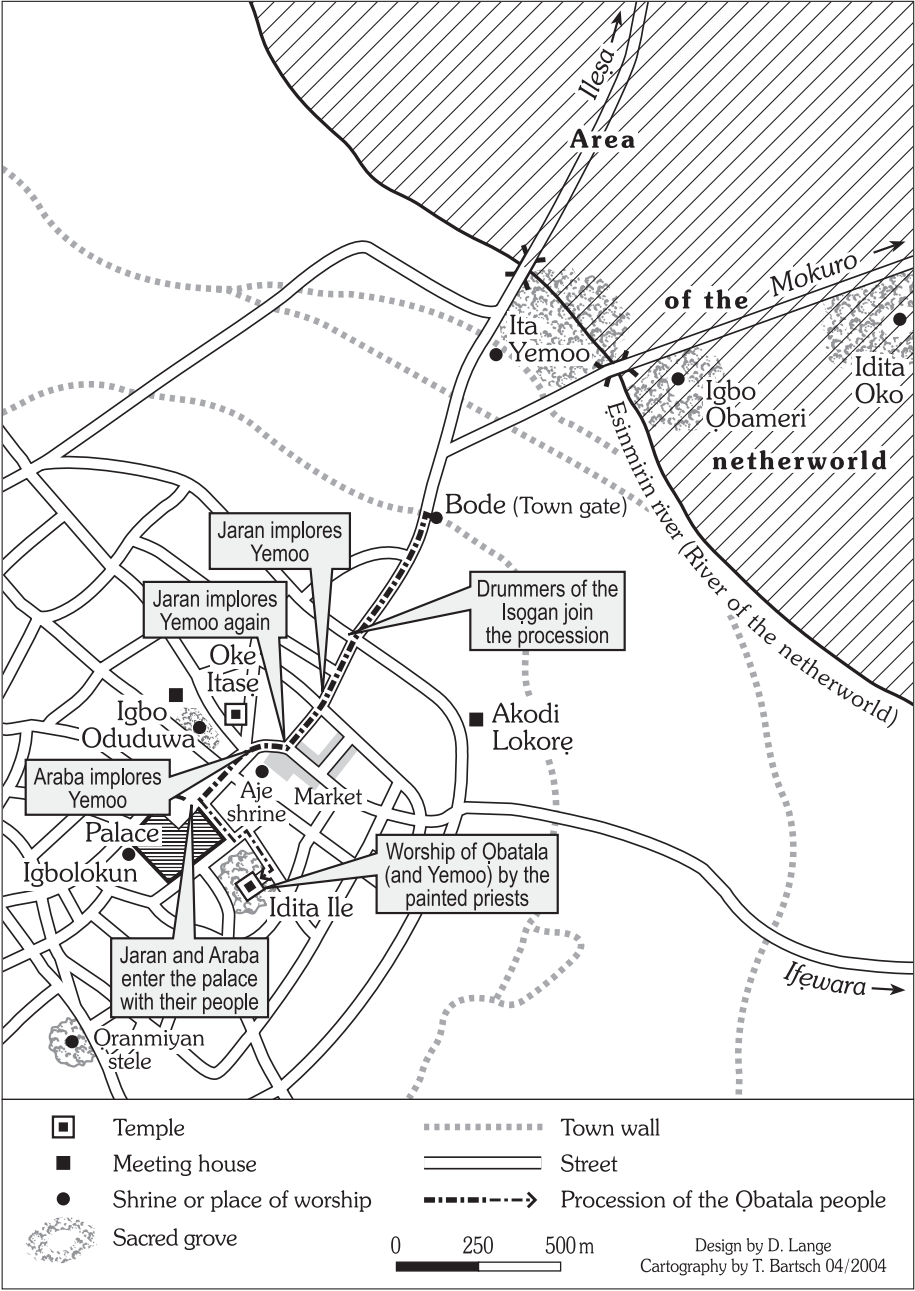
Map 7: Procession of the resurrection of Ǫbatala

Photo 7: Representing Ọbatala, the painted priests dance at the rear of the procession, Ifẹ 2000

Then the Obameri people proceed into the palace where they receive the burning torches that they themselves had prepared and carried ceremoniously into the palace at the beginning of the festival. Then they run with their torches through town into their netherworld grove in order to quench the fire with the blood of a sacrificial animal. By leaving the town and crossing the river of the netherworld, they indicate that the short period during which their party had assumed rulership is over.

In the afternoon of the tenth day, the celebration of Obatala's resurrection begins. The procession forms itself near the entry of town on the way to the netherworld river. Once again, the highest priests are painted with white dots in remembrance of the friendship of their god with the god of small pox and ruler of the nestherworld. Continuously dancing besides each other in a row at the end of the procession, they represent the god of creation resurrected from the netherworld.

The procession is led by a row of boys marching in front of each other carrying wrapped bottles on their heads containing sacred water. They are followed at a distance by a girl carrying the throne stool of Yemoo on her head. Behind her the highest priestess of the Obatala cult, Yeyeloriṣa, walks in a dignified manner. She is in a trance and embodies Yemoo herself. The procession, slowly moving toward the palace, is successively joined by other members of the Obatala clan: young men of the Isọgan age-group playing drums, other men and elderly women.

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Photo 8: Jaran implores Yemoo that Ọbatala should forgive the people of the town, Ifẹ 2000

Close to the palace the procession stops three times. First Jaran, the highest palace official of the Obatala service group, leaves his group and comes close to Yeyeloriṣa. Accompanying cult servants hide the two behind a white cloth: in a low voice Jaran begs Yemoo, now seated on her throne stool, to try to convince Obatala to forgive the town's citizens for their previous unfaithfulness that led to his expulsion. After the first attempt fails, the same official approaches Yemoo a second time with the same request. Frustrated once more, he again joins the procession with his people. At last, already in view of the palace, Araba, the high priest of the Ifẹ oracle, appears with his fifteen priests. When he expresses the same request for forgiveness, Yemoo's reply gives some hope.

Together with the Obatala people, the members of the Obatala segment of the palace staff and the Ifa priests proceed toward the palace. They stop in front of the palace which the Ifa priest enters in order to consult with the royal Ifa oracle. When the oracle announces that Obatala has forgiven the town's people their earlier betrayal, the Obatala people, the palace staff and all the spectators from the town joyously respond.[74] Now the procession of the Obatala people continues

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[74] If at present there are any spectators at all, it is curiosity which makes them look at the ceremonies, not any concern about the religious meaning of the cult-dramatic performances.

confidently to the temple: Obatala has returned and Idita Ile will once again be his home.

In the late evening the king, barely clad and protected from the public view by a white cloth, comes out of the Edena gate and walks to Idita Ile. Nobody else is allowed to approach this area.[75] He humbly worships Obatala and begs in his turn that the deity forgive the people of Ife. He then returns to the palace waiting for Yeyelorisa in the ritual chamber of the Obatala group. A little later, Yeyelorisa follows the king into the palace carrying sacred water hidden under her dress which she hands over to the king by way of a palace official. This gesture shows the king's divinity at this point as based on his identification with Obatala, with Yemoo as an intermediary. Blessed by Yemoo – which in an attenuated form corresponds to his earlier sacred marriage with her[76] - the king thus becomes the *alter ego* of the resurrected Obatala. Just as Obatala rose from the netherworld to save all people from death, the king assumes similar power to turn death into life (*ikú, alásèe èkejì òrìsà* – "death, owner of a power like that of Obatala")[77].

5. Comparisons between Ife and Ancient Semitic New Year Festivals

With respect to possible comparisons between African and Semitic phenomena, the New Year festival is the most significant link between Yoruba culture of the tropical rain forest and Canaanite culture of North Africa. Besides the six prominent deities of the Itapa festival, all with precise Canaanite equivalents, a number of structural parallels between the Itapa festival of Ife and the Semitic New Year festival provide further evidence for the existence of a common cultural pattern extending from Phoenician North Africa to Hausa and Yorubaland in West Africa.[78]

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[75] This interdiction is still strictly applied today, but it is now also meant to conceal the fact that the king himself has not performed the ritual for more than twenty years. In 2002 he declared that for the sake of Christianity he would no longer participate in any festival at all (Lange, "Preservation", 147-148).

[76] Such a marriage is still thought to be concluded by the king at his enthronement between himself and the well of the palace, Yeyemolu (Fabunmi, *Ifè Shrines*, 26).

[77] Although usually this motto of the divine king is taken to refer to all *orisa* "deities" (Pemberton/Afolayan, *Kingship*, 92), the Obatala worshippers relate it to their deity alone (Obaluru/Obatala, FN 01, 103, but also an elder of the Obajio family, FN 00, 143). For the motto see also Fasogbon, *Constitutional History*, 23, and Stevens, "Orisha-nla", 188.

[78] For preliminary evidence concerning the integration of the Hausa into this cultural pattern, see Lange, "Dimension", 161-203, and *id.*, "Ursprung des Bösen", 6-8.

1. The Itapa festival is a New Year festival centred on the death, a three-days' stay in the netherworld and the resurrection of the god of creation on the fourth day. This festival scheme appears to have been widely followed in the Semitic world.[79] In different ways it has survived in the Easter celebrations of Christians and the *hājj* ceremonies of Muslims.[80]

2. The Itapa festival consists of the cult-dramatic representation of a divine conflict between a god of creation and a god of death. For both deities it is their descent groups or clans and in particular their specific cult groups which organize the festival. On the mythological level the same conflict is discribed by the Baal Cycle of Ugarit.

3. Even though the cult groups of Obatala and of Obameri are the organizers of the Itapa festival, most of the other cult groups of Ife - belonging to two major cult parties led by the high priest of Obatala and the high priest of Oduduwa - also participate in the festivities. In Ugarit a similar dualistic antagonism exists in the mytholgical opposition between the "gods of the circle of Baal" and the "sons of Ashirat".[81]

4. Although most of the festal celebrations primarily involve the cult groups, the king and the palace staff of Ife have important roles in the festival. The members of two of the three palace chambers are the intermediaries between the two antagonistic cult parties and the king: Their leaders provide the sacrificial materials and they represent the king at important cult-dramatic actions outside the palace. In particular, the leader of the Obatala faction plays an important role during the resurrection procession. In Phoenician cities, certain officials, often having the title of *suffet*, had the task of resurrecting the dying and rising god Melqart.[82]

5. Just as the clans of Ife are divided into two major parties and one minor group, the palace staff is split into three segments according to the three groups of deities.[83] In Punic North Africa the threefold palace structure of Ife might correspond to a municipal organization headed by two or three *suffets* having administrative, judicial and religious functions.[84]

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[79] For Mesopotamia, see Zimmern, *Neujahrsfest*, 3-26; for Israel, see Gressmann, *Adonis und Esmun*, 405-423; for Ugarit see del Olmo Lete, *Canaanite Religion*, 210-212, and for Phoenicia, see Lipinski, "Fête de l'ensevelissement", 30-58.

[80] Meissner, *Babylonien und Assyrien*, II, 98; Lange, "Jesus", 4-6, 10-11; Daum, *Religion*, 119-128, 131-144.

[81] Herrmann, "Göttergruppen", 93-104; Smith, *Baal Cycle*, I, 92-96; Olmo Lete, *Canaanite Religion*, 49-51.

[82] Bonnet, *Melqart*, 174-179; Bonnet and Lipinski, "*Miqim Elim*", DCPP, 294-295.

[83] On the palace organization of Ife see Adediran, "Analysis", 3-29, and Lange, "Preservation", 131-143.

[84] Gsell, *Histoire*, II, 193-201; Gubel/Lipinski, "Suffètes", DCPP, 429.

Iharẹ/Agba Ifẹ	Mọdewa	
1. Ọbalufẹ/Ọruntọ [Irẹmọ]	1. Lọwa	Ogungun/ Lọwa (Oduduwa)
2. Ọbajio/Ejio [Mọrẹ]	2. Jaran	
3. Ọbalọran [Ilode]	3. Aguro	
4. Jagunọsin	4. Arodẹ	Ọmirin (Ọbatala)
5. Ọwasin/Wasin [Ilarẹ]	5. Isanire	
6. Ejesi	6. Ladin	
7. Ọbalaye [Iraye]	7. Lọwate	Ilọsin (Ọramfẹ)
8. Akọgun [Ikọgun/Okerewe]	8. Erebẹsẹ	

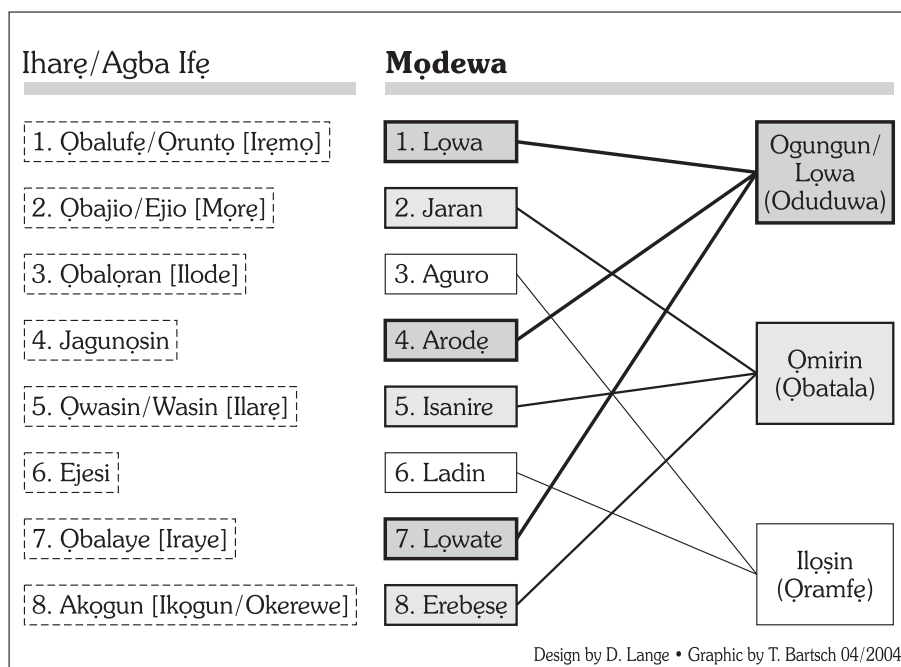Design by D. Lange • Graphic by T. Bartsch 04/2004

Chart 15: The town officials and the three segments of the palace organization of Ifẹ

6.　　Two of the three palace service groups of Ifẹ are deeply involved in the cel-
ebration of the Itapa festival. Indeed, members of the two majors factions
provide the antagonistic cult parties with sacrificial materials on behalf of
the king, the officials of the Oduduwa ritual chamber (Ogungun) dealing
with the cult groups of the Oduduwa party, and the officials of the Obatala
ritual chamber (Ọmirin) with those of the Obatala party. Members of both
chambers are born into their groups and during their life can climb the
hierarchical ladder from infant servant to the position of the most senior
palace official of their respective chamber. On the Oduduwa side the most
senior palace official is called Lọwa, and by extension the same name is
also given to his two senior colleagues of the same ritual chamber.[85] The
same or similar names are used for half-priestly or priestly officials, oc-
cupying a similar structural position in relation to the divine parties, in
the Yoruba city states of Ila, Ejigbo, Ifọn, and Edẹ. These officials can be
equated with the order of the Levitic priests in Israel, in terms of the ear-
lier cultic functions of the Levites in the polytheistic setting. The validity
of the comparison is more obvious for the Levites of the Arabian oasis of

[85] Adediran, "Analysis", 27 n. 52; Fasọgbon, *Constitutional History*, 27-28.

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al-#Ulā/Dedan of the sixth century BC, who were worshippers of Wadd (= Dôd/Oduduwa).[86] In Israel the Levites were integrated into the central-ized cultic organization as a secondary priestly order subject to the Priests (*kōhanîm*).[87]

7.   Among the important sanctuaries of the Itapa festival are individual tem-ples for Obatala and the three major deities of his party.[88] By constrast strictly speaking neither Obameri nor Oduduwa have a temple. Instead for the Igbolokun rituals of Imojubi the members of the cult group of Obameri erect a hut of palm leaves behind the palace in which a male and a female deity are brought together and worshipped. This palm hut might correspond to the booths of the Israelite feast of Tabernacles or *Sukkôt* which in Israelite legend was later connected to the exodus from Egypt to Canaan.[89] Similar booths were erected in Ugarit to temporarily house pairs of deities.[90]

The comparisons between cultural forms of Ife and similar phenomena of the Semitic world reveal how little we know about the cultic and political organiza-tion of Ife and other Yoruba cities. But more particularly they show that we are still far better informed about the social and institutional implications of cult-mythological matters among the Yoruba of Ife than among the ancient Semites, however advantageous the documentary situation might be in certain regions and towns like Ugarit.

6. Conclusion: Trans-Saharan Slave Trade and the Spread of the Canaanite State

Historians are expected to be able to explain how in Yorubaland similar insti-tutions from those of Phoenician North Africa and the wider Semitic world could arise. In our time, they will not content themselves with vague ideas of diffusion which were in vogue during the colonial period. We face here com-plex and interwoven parallels between phenomena which cannot possibly have been transmitted by isolated and hapazardous individual travellers or nomadic tribes. In spite of the fact that the comparisons presented above concern specific mythological and institutional details, it has to be assumed that these isolated

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[86] See Lange, "Ursprung des Bösen", 18-26; Grimme, "Südarabischer Levitismus", 169-199.

[87] *Mishnah*, II, Sukkah 5: 2-4; transl. Neusner, 288-289; Gaster, *Festivals*, 82-83.

[88] Besides the people of Obatala, the worshippers of Oluorogbo, Orisakire and Orisateko also each have their own temple.

[89] Gaster, *Festivals*, 84; Loretz, *Ugarit*, 77.

[90] De Moor, *Anthology*, 121 n. 25, 121 n. 25; Pardee, *Textes rituels*, I, 209-210.

features, emerging from the documentary and ethnographical record, belong to a cultural continuum consisting of fully articulated social and cult-mythological structures. Ifẹ is in this respect only a particularly well-preserved example of an ancient culture in which the cult-dramatic underpinnings of myth presuppose a context of corresponding organizational and topographical features. Beyond Ifẹ, other Yoruba city states and in the West African context other Sudanic polities, in particular those of the Hausa and the Kanuri, seem to have been part of an ancient complex of specific cult-mythological organizational forms with wide structural ramifications.[91] In the north, this cultural pattern included the whole range of Semitic civilisations stretching from Mesopotamia to the Atlantic coast of North Africa and from Syria to South Arabia and Ethiopia. How could such complex structures involving institutions of the state as well as the priestly orders of complex cults have reached the people of the tropical rain forest?

The most obvious lines of communication between the Canaanite city states of North Africa and sub-Saharan Sudanic cultures were the trans-Saharan trade routes. For the pre-Christian era, rock-paintings of the Sahara attests to the wide distribution of horse-drawn chariots.[92] This means of transport may have been used on similar routes to those known with greater precision since the medieval period – albeit only for limited distances.[93] It has often been overlooked that on the central Saharan route between Tripoli and Lake Chad the geographical conditions of travelling were so favorable during the last five thousand years that in the winter period men, walking from oasis to oasis, could cross the desert without animal transport.[94] Even at the beginning of the Christian era, as the camel became widely used in the Sahara, horses continued to play an important role on these routes. Furthermore, slaves could be forced – as in the nineteenth century - to cross the entire distance from the Sudanic belt to the Mediterranean coast by foot. For these and other reasons, during this period the Sahara between Tripoli and Lake Chad should not be considered a barrier preventing contacts. Rather,

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[91] For the integration of the Yoruba into the Sudanic cultural pattern, see Baumann, *Völkerkunde von Afrika*, 56-76, 295-296, and Oliver/Fage, *Short History*, 31-38, 49; for the Hausa see Lange, "Dimension", 161-203, and *id.*, "Neujahrsfest", 109-162.

[92] Law, "Garamantes", 181-185; Mauny, *Siècles obscurs*, 61-65; Lhote, *Chars*, 47-62.

[93] Mauny tried to trace the different routes used from the eleventh to the sixteenth century (*Tableau*, 430-436).

[94] Drawing from accidental written and archaeological remains, Law believes that the contacts of the Garamantes with the south mainly concerned the Tibesti and the Aïr mountains ("Garamantes", 197-198), while Mauny, in spite of his better knowledge of Saharan conditions, speaks of the "Saharan barrier" (*Siècles obscurs*, 16-20).

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it should be seen as allowing easy and continuous travel and exchange during all periods other than summer.[95]

As for African products which might have been in demand in classical Mediterranean societies, historians think in the first place of gold and tin.[96] Besides the fact that there were no important gold deposits in the Central Sudan, on the one hand the handling and transport of both products would not have required important trading posts. On the other hand, Phoenicians were well-known in the Mediterranean as slave capturers and traders.[97] It is therefore quite likely that they extended the frontiers of this sinister trade to countries south of the Sahara. While at the same time developping a market for slaves in the Central Sudan, the Phoenicians may also have provided various Mediterranean societies with a steady supply of black African slaves.[98] In order to organize a profitable slave raiding and slave trading network, they had to ally with local people and establish well-equipped garrisons in the countries south of the Sahara. Further to the south, other societies may have been forced to provide yearly tributes of slaves.[99] Still one of the *Banzā bakwài* states in the nineteenth century Hausa system of slave recruitment, the Yoruba (of Oyọ) were well known among the slavers of the Sudanic belt.[100] There is strong evidence that the ancient slave trade across the Sahara was the single most important factor contributing to the spread of Canaanite state ideas as far south as the tropical rain forest and its subsequent adaptation to local conditions.[101] In later periods and under entirely different historical circumstances these foreign inputs were used by local people to produce their own Sudanic civilisation. Some states, like Kanem-Bornu, were able to impose in turn their domination over the Saharan oases, thus ensuring save travel conditions and a steady flow of goods both ways through the Sahara.[102]

Postscript: From the 4th to the 10th of December 2002 the German Evangelist Reinhard Bonnke of the Pentecostal movement staged a "crusade" against the

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[95] Apart from the accounts of European explorers of the nineteenth century who travelled on the Central Saharan trade route – D. Denham, H. Barth, G. Rohlfs and G. Nachtigal – see also Lange/Berthoud, "Qasaba", 19-40.

[96] Gsell, *Histoire,* IV, 140-141; Huß, *Geschichte*, 486-487, 487 n. 99.

[97] V. Gucht, "Esclaves", DCPP, 157; Ameling, *Karthago*, 119-140.

[98] Bovill, *Golden Trade*, 21-23; Mattingly, *Tripolitania*, 156.

[99] On the historical dimension of West African slavery with respect to the Sudanic states see Meillassoux, *Anthropology*, 45-67,

[100] Hogben/Kirk-Greene, *Emirates*, 145-149.

[101] Shaw considers medieval slave-raiding from the north to have been the most important factor for the process of political centralization among the Yoruba (*Nigeria*, 168-170).

[102] See also above chap. XII, sec. 10.

remnants of Yoruba religion in Ifẹ in the course of which the entire Idita Oko grove of the Obatala people and the adjacent shrines and holy places were demolished. This unwarranted act of destruction and the subsequent levelling of the ground for the purpose of later constructions deprives the Obatala people of any possibility of future re-enactments of the key performances of the Ifẹ religion of creation.[103]

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FN 00, 01, 02: Field notes D. Lange from the years 2000, 2001 und 2002, including names of the informants and their group affiliation.

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[103] For further details see Lange, "Preservation", 154-155.

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