

The most elaborate historical legends of the Yoruba are those of the great northern kingdom of Oyo. They offer a complex example of the shaping of a mythologized historical tradition in a dualistic fashion. Indeed, the oral record in this case is characterized by an intriguing combination of Israelite and Assyrian elements grafted onto the Canaanite dichotomy of two cult-mythological parties. As in all Yoruba communities we find in Oyo a number of cult groups divided into an Oduduwa/Yamm and an Obatala/Baal section. The oral record of Oyo begins with Oduduwa, the legendary ancestor of the Yoruba. From the cultic situation in Ife, the holy city of the Yoruba, it is obvious that this well-known ancestral figure corresponds to a humanized god. Being the leader of the major party of deities he – and not his defeated opponent Obatala – was predestined to become the great ancestor of the Yoruba.⁸² According to the organizational pattern of Ife clans, his son Oranmiyan was one of the leading members of the Oduduwa party.⁸³

All following figures of the Oyo king list apparently belong to the world of human beings. Ajaka, the third and fifth figure of the oral list, must be seen in conjunction with the intermediate Sango, the most famous ruler of Oyo, who after his death is supposed to have been deified as the god of thunder. Sango's intrusion into the reign of Ajaka and other elements of his tradition indicate a foreign occupation of Israel. Having a closer look at the history of Israel, we find that Isaac can be considered as an epoch-ruler whose long reign was most likely interrupted by the conquest of Šalmanassar III in 841 B C and the subsequent three years' Assyrian occupation of the country.⁸⁴ While the name of Ajaka seems to correspond to Isaac, the name Sango was apparently derived from the priestly *šangû*-title applied to the Assyrian kings who represented the god of thunder Bel-Aššur. During the New Year festival, when the divine king incarnated the thunder-god, the common people may easily have taken the name of the king for that of the god.⁸⁵ The subsequent four rulers appear to belong alternately to the Assyrian line

⁸¹ On the identification of Obatala with Baal/Melqart/Yahweh and Oduduwa with Yamm/Dôd/Modûd, see Lange, "Jesus", 7; *id.*, "Ursprung des Bösen", 9-16, and below pp. 354-358.

⁸² Johnson, *History*, 3-7, 143; *id.*, "Ursprung des Bösen", 9-13. See also below pp. 354-358.

⁸³ Fabunmi, *Genesis*, 83; *id.*, *Ife Shrines*, 15-17.

⁸⁴ Astour, "Assyrian invasion", 383-389; Thiel, "Jehu", ABD, III, 670-673.

⁸⁵ Lange, "Wettergott Schango", 222-230; *id.*, "Erbe, II", 81-99.

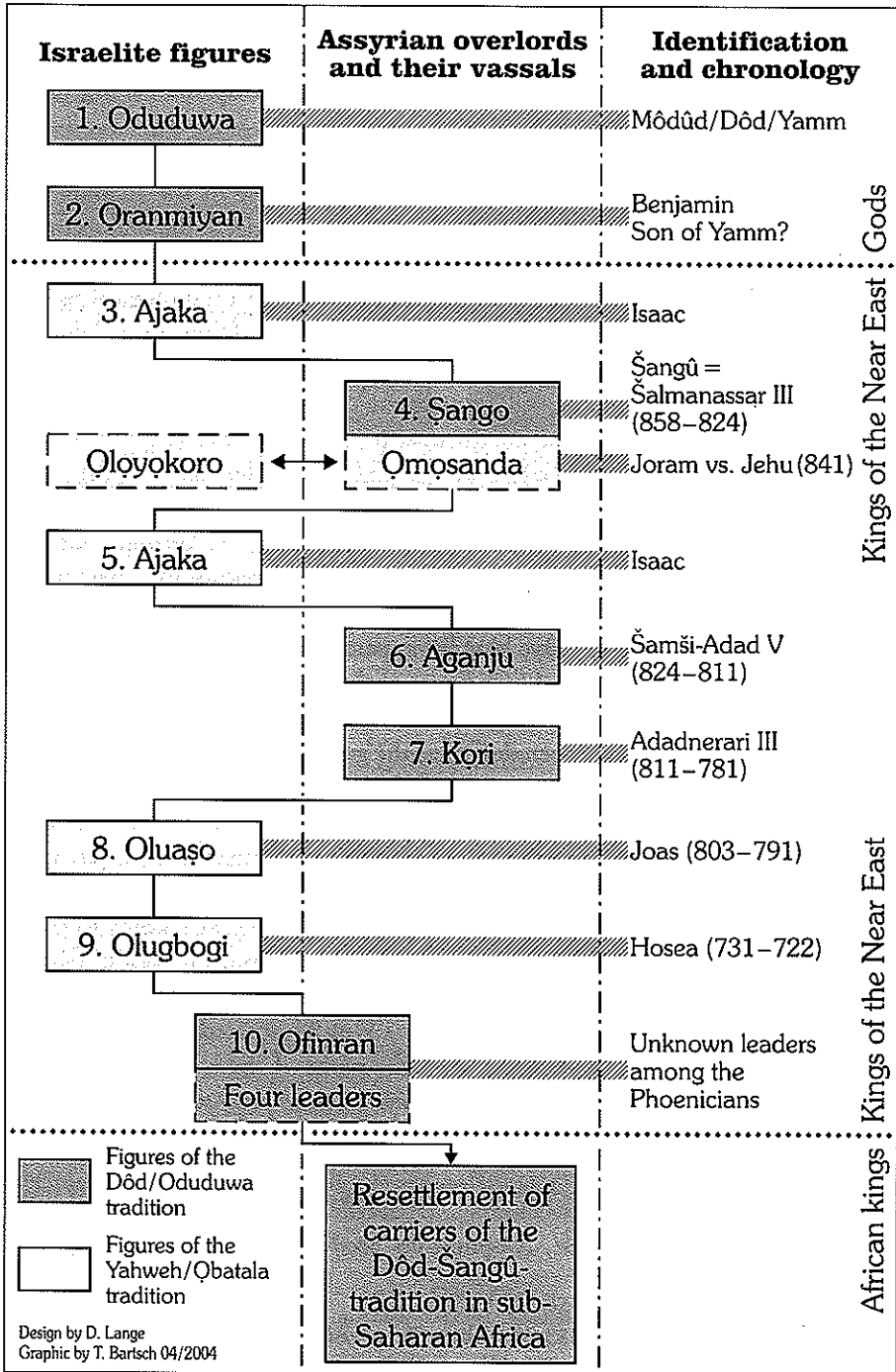


Chart 4: Legendary kings of the Oyo-Yoruba according to their cult-mythological classification

of conquerors and to the Israelite line of local kings, with Olugbogi being perhaps identical with Hosea (731-722 BC) – the last king before the final break-up of the Israelite state.⁸⁶ The next five leaders probably represent the North African transition period between the destruction of the Israelite state and the final settlement in Yorubaland of a group of Israelites with strong Canaanite tendencies.

Deriving their legitimacy from Oduduwa/Dôd – and not from Ọbatala/Melqart (as some minor Yoruba kings do)⁸⁷ – and linking themselves to certain Assyrian and hence foreign figures, the Ọyo rulers apparently belong to a Canaanite tradition of kingship rooted in the pre-eminence of the primordial god – as opposed to the tradition of the god of violent creation.⁸⁸ A similar dualistic cult-mythology seems to have predominated in the Phoenician cities of the Near East, where in Ugarit and Tyre the deities of the upperworld apparently prevailed, while those of the netherworld had authority in Sidon and Beirut.⁸⁹ Three elements show that information on the early history of Ọyo was transmitted primarily because its most significant details were considered to be related to the two parties of the creation conflict.⁹⁰ First, both available accounts of Ọyo history begin with the creation of the world – even though in one case, there is a demythologized version as well.⁹¹ Second, we notice that it was a snake – the animal symbol of the Dôd/Yamm-party – which led Ọranmiyan to the appropriate site of his future capital.⁹² Third, both accounts refer to a skull ritual performed in the Ọyo palace in commemoration of a number of defeated vassals representing Ọbatala.⁹³ Apart from the striking parallel to a particular incident recorded by the Book of Kings with respect to the treatment of the vanquished Omride dynasty of Israel by the pro-Assyrian usurper Jehu, we find in the ritual a remarkable instance of respect shown by the victorious rebels, associated with the Oduduwa cultic tradition, towards the vanquished local rulers identified with Ọbatala.⁹⁴ In

⁸⁶ Lange, “Erbe, II”, 99-102.

⁸⁷ Such as the kings of Ogbomoṣo, Ejigbo, Ifon, Ikire and Ọba Akure (Idowu, *Olodumare*, 16, 75, 153; Verger, “Ejigbo”, 208; Oriṣatoyinbo/Adediran, *History*, 3).

⁸⁸ On this difference with respect to the creation conflict see Lange, “Ursprung des Bösen”, 4-26.

⁸⁹ Philo of Byblos 10. 10; 10. 28, 10. 35 (Attridge/Oden, *Philo of Byblos*, 22, 28, 57); Baal Cycle, KTU 1.1.-1.6. (Wyatt, *Religious Texts*, 36-145); Lipinski, *Dieux*, 116-122, 226-243.

⁹⁰ For the importance of the creation conflict for Israelite political conceptions see Day, *God's Conflict*, 88-140.

⁹¹ Hess, *Âme nègre*, 119-122; Johnson, *History*, 9, 143.

⁹² Johnson, *History*, 11.

⁹³ Hess, *Âme nègre*, 146; Johnson, *History*, 152, 154.

⁹⁴ Jehu ordered the heads of the slaughtered Omrids to be put in two piles at the entrance of the city gate (2 Ki 10: 6-88, 11). For the Biblical comparison see Johnson, *History*, 154; Lange, “Erbe, II”, 84-86.

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general however, the kings of Oyo insisted on their Oduduwa/Dôd identity by incorporating a number of Assyrian rulers into their essentially Israelite list of patriarchal predecessors. A similar projection of cultic dualism into history can be detected for Tyre where Samemroumos/Baal Šamem is considered to have rebelled against Usoos (Yamm?) and for Katsina where the dynastic founder Korau is said to have in a mock fight treacherously murdered Sanau, the last ruler of the royal Aznā clan descending from Karbagari/Ishmael.⁹⁵ In view of the pre-eminence of the Yamm/Oduduwa tradition in the historical records of Oyo, in the cultic setting of Ife and more generally in the legend of origin common to all Yoruba states, it is certainly not by accident that the Bayajidda legend places the Yoruba into the category of the Banzā and not into that of the Hausā states.