

Chapter

One



IFÁ, THE YORÙBÁ DIVINITY OF WISDOM

The Names Ifá and Òrúnmìlà

In this work, the connotation of the term 'Ifá' is deliberately restricted to the Ifá divination system and its literary corpus as it exists among the Yorùbá people of Nigeria. It is important to establish this from the outset because similar systems of divination exist among the Igbo, the Nupe, the Gwari and the Jukun¹ of Nigeria as well as among the Yorùbá people of Benin Republic, Togo, Ghana, Cuba and Brazil.

The Yorùbá divinity of wisdom is mostly called by either of two names, Ifá and Òrúnmìlà, both of which are the centre of controversy. A number of writers hold the mistaken view that the name 'Òrúnmìlà' refers to the deity himself while the name Ifá refers only to his divination system. Thus the Rev. E. M. Lijadu calls Ifá 'The word of divination issued from the mouth of Òrúnmìlà'.² Rev. D. Epega confirms the same view when he says: 'The received instructions from Òrúnmìlà are called Ifá... Ifás are so many and varied that none can know them all'.³ J. D. Clarke⁴ holds a similar view.

The fact borne out of my own research, however, is that the two names, Ifá and Òrúnmìlà, refer to the same deity. But while the name 'Òrúnmìlà' refers exclusively to the deity himself, the name 'Ifá' refers both to the deity and his divination system. Most Ifá priests interviewed by me maintain this point, which is corroborated by Bascom when he says: 'The word Ifá is used to mean both the system of

divination and the deity who controls it; and this deity is known also as Ọ̀rúnmilà.⁵ A close examination of the Ifá literary corpus also shows that the two names, Ifá and Ọ̀rúnmilà, are used to refer to the deity while the name Ifá is used also for the system of divination.⁶

In view of the fact that in Yorùbá custom most personal names have meanings, the possible meaning of the name Ifá has also led some writers to much speculation sometimes tending towards folk etymology. Some writers say that the word Ifá comes from the root 'fa' which means 'to scrape' or, in an idiomatic sense, 'to embrace, to contain'. Some Ifá priests themselves do not seem to be much informed on the question of the etymology of the word Ifá. Thus Chief Fággbémí Àjànàkú, the high priest of the Ifá society in Lagos, writes: *'Nítorí pé kò sí ohun tí ọ̀rọ̀ Ọ̀lórún kò fá tán, ní wọn se pé é ní Ifá.'* (It is because there is nothing that the word of Ọ̀lórún (i.e. High God) does not embrace that is why it is called Ifá). There is nothing either in the Ifá myths or in the Ifá corpus itself to support this view.

Certain writers⁸ have also attempted to trace the etymology of the name 'Ọ̀rúnmilà'. One popular interpretation of this name is *Ọ̀run-ló-mọ-ẹni-tí-ó-là*. (Heaven [Ọ̀lórún] alone knows those who will be saved.) This interpretation is defective because it is not based on any logical analysis, and it is strange that some scholars have accepted it without question.

The view of this investigator is that it is not possible to trace the etymology of such ancient names as Ifá and Ọ̀rúnmilà, especially since the structure of the words does not permit a straightforward analysis.

Myths about Ifá

Several myths about Ifá say that Ifá, in the company of other major deities, came to earth from heaven and first landed at Ife, which the Yorùbá people believe to be the cradle of mankind. The divinities were sent from heaven to Ife mainly to establish order on the young earth. Ifá played a major role in this divine ordering because of his great wisdom. At this period of the sojourn of Ifá at Ifẹ̀, he lived in a place

known as Òkè Ìgèṭí. That is why one of his praise names is *Ọkùnrin kúkúrú Òkè Ìgèṭí* (The short man of Ìgèṭí hill).

Fẹla Ọowande warns us that we are not to think that the Ifẹ mentioned in this myth is the present one. He writes:

...Because we have an Ilé-Ifẹ in Western Nigeria today, it is quite understandable that people naturally think that this is the Ilé-Ifẹ which figures in the oral traditions concerning Yorùbáland...

NOTES ON PLATES

Plate 1: Ifá sacred palm nuts (*ikin Ifá*) are sixteen in number and are the most important ritual symbol of Ifá. According to the myth contained in *Iwori Meji*, Òrúnmìlà replaced himself with the *ikin* when he finally left the earth. Since then, *ikin* became the most important medium of communication between human beings and Ifá. On the extreme right of the sixteen *ikin* could be seen a carved head-part known as *olóri-ikin* which constitutes the seventeenth *ikin*. It is believed that this head stands for Èṣù. But the name *olóri-ikin* signifies that it is the essence of the personality of *ikin*. It means that just as an individual has *orí*, the *ikin* like other divinities, also have their own *orí*.

Also in this figure could be seen cowry shells, sea shells, a piece of bone, beads and stones. Two cowry shells tied together constitute the affirmative part of *ibò* while the piece of bone stands for the negative aspect. The stones are also used to signify good health while the beads stand for wealth when the *Ibò* is used in finding solutions to any specific problems asked from Ifá.

Plate 2: The divining chain (*Òpèlè*) is next in rank to *ikin* in importance as an ancient and ritual Ifá material. As could be seen from the photograph, the chain has two equal halves. Each half has four half-nuts of the *òpèlè* fruit attached to it. Each half-nut has a smooth as well as a rough surface. The 256 probable presentations of the divining chain are based on the two basic probabilities of a rough surface or a smooth surface presentation of each of the four half-nuts on each side of the divining chain. If the basic probabilities (i.e. rough versus smooth surface) are represented with the base 2, it means that the possible number of presentations on one side of the divining chain is 2^4 . When this is duplicated, we will have the following equation:

$$(2^4)^2 = 256$$

Note the decoration of beads on the strings of the divining chain especially on the bottom part which also has cowry shell decoration. *Òpèlè* could also be made of metal, for example, brass.

Plate 3: *Ìròkè* is used in tapping the Ifá divination tray during the process of divination. Tapping is an invocation of Ifá to be present during the process of divination. The *Ìròkè* is held in the bottom part while the pointed head part is used to strike the divining tray. *Ìròkè* may be ivory or wood. It is carried by the Ifá priest as a symbol of the high status he enjoys in the community.

Note the elongated and conical head part which resembles the conical shape of the *orí* instrument (Plate 1 1). This emphasizes the importance of *orí* (spiritual or inner head) in Ifá divination.

Note also the figure of the kneeling woman which is characteristic of Yorùbá ritual art. This familiar posture stands for *ikúnlè abiyamò* (the kneeling posture of a woman during child birth). This position is a pleading, begging posture, calling on Ifá to give the correct answer to the supplicant's request. Till today, the greatest symbol of pleading among the Yorùbá is that of a nude woman kneeling down. When a woman says '*Mo fi ikúnlè abiyamò bè yín o*' (I beg you with the kneeling posture of a woman in labour), only a hard-hearted person will fail to grant her request.

Plate 4: Ifá divining trays (*opón Ifá*) are invariably made of wood. They are available in rectangular, circular and semi-circular forms. The *ìyèròsùn* (powder of the *ìrosùn?* tree) is sprinkled on the tray. The Ifá priest then prints his divination marks on the powder during the process of divination.

Note the face in the centre of one of the four sides of the tray. This prominent face is believed to represent the watchful eyes of Èṣù during divination. The tray is laid down in such a way that the watchful eyes of Èṣù directly face the Ifá priest during the process of divination.

The edges of the divining tray are decorated with different kinds of designs including sometimes animal figures.

Plate 5: This Ifá receptacle (*ajere Ifá*) is made of wood; some Ifá receptacles are made of brass. Ifá receptacles appear in various forms with lids and carvings.

Plate 6: This is one type of Ifá bowl with a lid. It has five compartments for storing the sacred palm-nuts (*ikin*) and other Ifá materials. Note the ever-present eyes of Èṣù at the bottom part of the lid.

Plate 7: This beaded bag of Ifá (*àpò Ifá*) is worn by the Ifá priest as part of his outfit. It is due to the habit of Ifá priests wearing bags of this type that they are called *Akápò* (carriers of Ifá bags).

Plate 8: This ritual iron staff used by Ifá priests carries the image of *eye kan* (a bird) on its top part. The staff which is also known as *osun*, is believed to be an Ifá divinity. The staff must not be put down on its sides. It must always be found in an erect position. Hence, the saying:

Òrò gangan là á bósùn
Osun must always be found in an erect position

Plate 9: This ritual cutlass of (*Àdà Òòṣà*) with a rattle inside is believed to be one of the paraphernalia of Òòṣàálá which Ifá acquired from that divinity. One *ese Ifá* in *Ọsá Méjì* explains how the cutlass got to the possession of Ifá. Talabi, the son of Òòṣàálá, offended the witches who then pursued him until he took refuge in the home of Ifá. Ifá took the cutlass of Òòṣàálá which Talabi held in his hands, and with it defeated the witches. When Talabi was leaving Ọrúnmílà's house, he forgot to take the cutlass with him. That was how the cutlass became one of the instruments of Ifá.

Plate 10: This is an image of Èṣù who is certainly the closest divinity to Ifá. His watchful eyes dominate the Ifá divination process. As the keeper of *àṣẹ* (the divine power with which Olódùmarè created the universe), Èṣù is a neutral force in the universe who controls both the benevolent and the malevolent supernatural powers. He is the universal policeman without whom effective communication cannot be maintained between the two opposing powers of the universe.

In this picture, Èṣù stands on a platform like a true master watching the doings of all the forces in the universe. He is devoid of all emotion. He will support only those who perform sacrifice and act in conformity with the moral laws of the universe as laid down by Olódùmarè, his master, from whom he acquired the *àṣẹ*.

Plate 11: These are two cases or Orí. The big one on the right hand side has been opened (the lid is the big instrument on the left) to show the two parts of the instrument. The small *orí* in the middle has less cowries than the big one. Orí itself which is put inside the case, is shaped in almost exactly the same way as its case, but it is a smaller instrument. Note the pointed, conical shape of the *Ilé orí* which resembles the shape of *Ìròkè* (*Ifa* tapper).

When a person goes to an *Ifá* priest for divination, he is simply trying to find out through *Ifá* the wishes of his own *orí* who is his personal divinity who regulates the affairs of his life. Whatever has not been sanctioned by a person's *Orí* cannot be approved by the divinities.

Plate 1: Ikin (Ifá sacred 16 palm-nuts)

Plate 2: Òpèlè (The divining chain)

Plate 3: Ìròkè (Ivory)

Plate 4: Ọpón Ifá (Ifá divining tray)

Plate 5: Ajere Ifá (Ifá receptacle)

Plate 6: Àpótí Ifá (Ifá bowl with lid)

Plate 7: Àpò Ifá (Ifá bag)

*Plate 8: Ọpá ọrẹrẹ, also known as ọsùn
(Ifá ritual Walking staff)*

Plate 9: Àdà Ọ̀òṣà (Ifá ritual cutlass)

Plate 10: Ère Èṣù (Image of Èṣù)

Plate 11: Ilé Orí (A case or container of Orí)

Ifá verse refers to seven Ifẹ. The first, and possibly the original one is Ifẹ-Oòdáyé. Others are Ifẹ-Ílẹrẹ, Ifẹ-Oòyèlagbòmóró, Ifẹ-Wàrà, Òtù-Ifẹ, Ifẹ-Oòrè, Ifẹ-Oòjọ and Ilé-Ifẹ.

The myths say that after a long stay at Ifẹ, Ifá moved to Adó. Ifá is believed to have spent the greater part of his life on earth at Adó. That is probably why there is the saying '*Adó nilé Ifá*' (Ado is the home of Ifá). But it is not known which one of the two most prominent Adó in Yorùbá oral literature - Adó-Èkìtì¹⁰ and Adó-Àwáyè¹ - this myth refers to. Ifá literary corpus is, however, so full of names of places from Èkìtì area that one is inclined to think that Adó-Èkìtì is the more probable one.

We also learn in these myths that Ifá had eight children and a number of disciples, to whom he taught the secrets of divination. Six of the eight children bear personal names similar to the titular names of Èkìtì kings: *Alárá, Ajerò, Ońtaji, Olóyémoyin, Eléjèlúmòpé and Alakegi*. The other two are *Olówò* (similar to the title of the king of Òwò) and *Ọwàràngún* (similar to the title *Ọràngún*, king of Ilá and to the title *Owa*, king of Ilésà). All the eight children were born while Ifá was at Ifẹ. They all grew up to be important people, and they later dispersed to various parts of Yorùbáland.

According to the myths, there were occasions when Ifá was summoned by Olódùmarè (High God) to heaven to use his great wisdom to solve problems for Him. Ifá finally returned to heaven in annoyance due to an insult from one of his children. Shortly after his departure, the earth was thrown into great confusion. Famine and pestilence raged throughout the earth. So great was the calamity that the fertility cycle in human beings was disrupted.

Aboyún kò bí mọ;

Àgàn kò tọwọ àlà bosùn¹²

(Pregnant women no longer delivered;

Barren women remained barren.)

After some time, the people of the earth decided to seek remedy for their hardship by sending the eight children of Ọ̀rúnmilà to heaven to go and beg their father to return to earth. When they reached heaven, they found Ifá ‘at the foot of the much-climbed palm-tree which branched this way and that way until it had sixteen hut-like branches.’¹³ They begged Ifá to come back to the earth, but he refused.

Ifá, however, gave each of his eight children sixteen palm nuts and said:

Bẹ ẹ bá délẹ,
Bẹ ẹ bá fowó ó ní,
Ẹni tẹ ẹ máa bi nù-un.
Bẹ ẹ bá délẹ,
Bẹ ẹ bá fáya á ní,
Ẹni tẹ ẹ máa bi nù-un.
Bẹ ẹ bá délẹ,
Bẹ ẹ bá fọmọ ọn ní,
Ẹni tẹ ẹ máa bi nù-un.
Ilẹ lẹ bá fẹ ẹ kọ láyé,
Ẹni tẹ ẹ máa bi nù-un.
Aṣọ lẹ bá fẹ ẹ ní láyé,
Ẹni tẹ ẹ máa bi nù-un.
Ire gbogbo tẹ ẹ bá fẹẹ ní láyé
Ẹni tẹ ẹ máa bi nù-un.

When you are back home,
If you want to have money,
That is the person you are to consult.
When you are back home,
If you want to have wives,
That is the person you are to consult.
When you are back home,
If you want to have children,
That is the person you are to consult.
If you want to build houses on earth,

That is the person you are to consult.
 If you want to have clothes on earth,
 That is the person you are to consult.
 All good things you want to have on earth,
 That is the person you are to consult.

When the children of Ifá returned to earth, they started to use the sixteen palm nuts for divination. The sixteen palm nuts are the symbol of the authority of Ifá given to his children to continue performing divination in his absence. The sixteen palm nuts known as *ikin* (Plate 1) have been used as an important part of the Ifá divination system from that time till today. The absence of Ifá from the earth no longer mattered, since his children and disciples could communicate with him through *ikin*, and the other instruments of divination.

It must be mentioned that the myths from which the above information has been extracted are not the only existing myths about Ifá. There are a number of other myths which are different, and it is to these that attention must now be drawn.

According to one myth, quoted by Dennett.¹⁵

Ifá was born at Ife, the cradle of the Yorùbá people. He was a skillful medical man... and was an eminently successful diviner. After he had become famous, he founded a town called *Ìpetu* and became king of the place and was styled *Alákétu*. He was very popular and was regarded ...as a true prophet. People from every part of the Yorùbá country flocked to him... His fame was so great that hundreds of persons... begged him to admit them as disciples and apprentices under him. Out of these... he chose only sixteen men... The names of these apprentices are said to be identical with the sixteen divinationary signs called *Odus*.

Another myth about the origin of Ifá is mentioned in Johnson's *History of the Yorubas*.¹⁶ Johnson describes Ifá as 'the great consulting oracle in the Yorùbá country.'¹⁷ He said that Ifá was introduced into Yorùbáland by one Sètílù who was a Nupe man.

Sètílù was born blind, and at first, his parents wanted to kill him. But Sètílù grew up to be a peculiar child and his parents were astonished at his powers of divination. At the early age of five, he started to use his powers, to tell his parents who would visit them in the course of the day and with what object.

As Sètílù advanced in age, he started to practise sorcery and medicine. At the beginning of his practice, he used sixteen small pebbles for his divination. He 'imposed successfully upon the credulity of those who flocked to him in their distress and anguish for consultation. From this source, he earned a comfortable livelihood.'¹⁸ But the Muslims were jealous of Sètílù's achievements and they expelled him from the country. He crossed the Niger southwards and went into Benin City. From Benin, he wandered into Òwò and Adó and finally settled at Ilé-Ifẹ. He found Ifẹ to be quite suitable for his practice of divination, and made it his permanent abode. He became so famous and popular that he persuaded the people of Ifẹ to give up the Yorùbá tradition of having facial marks.

Sètílù initiated several of his followers into the mysteries of Ifá divination, and Ifá gradually became the 'consulting oracle of the whole Yorùbá nation'. Oduduwá⁹ found Sètílù at Ifẹ and it was during the reign of Òfínràn²⁰ on the throne of Òyó that official recognition was given to the Ifá society.

The Place of Ifá in the Yorùbá Pantheon

It is pertinent to inquire whether or not Ifá is the most important Yorùbá deity. Ifá priests claim that Ifá is the most important Yorùbá divinity. Several parts of the Ifá literary corpus also support this view²¹. Furthermore, Dr Farrow says, 'Ifá may be regarded as the most important. . . orísa'²² of the Yorùbá people. But Professor E. Bólájí Ìdòwú holds the view that Òrìṣàńlá, the Yorùbá god of creation, is the most important Yorùbá divinity. He

says, Òrìṣàńlá is the supreme divinity of Yorùbáland. As his name implies, 'he is the great arch-divinity.'²³ Professor Idowu adduces evidence from Yorùbá oral literature to support his view.

It must be realised, however, that it is not possible to prove either of these two claims conclusively. If one asks the worshippers of each of the other Yorùbá major deities, one finds that each group claims that its own divinity is the most important one. What is more, to the best of my knowledge, there is no common saying among the Yorùbá which designates a particular divinity as the most important. There are, of course, certain Yorùbá deities which are generally acclaimed as more important than the others, and these might be called major deities. Unfortunately, however, the order of seniority among these major deities is not clear. Therefore, one can only say that Ifá is one of the most important Yorùbá deities.

As mentioned above, Ifá is believed to have been sent by Olódùmarè, the Almighty God, to use his profound wisdom to put the earth in order. The belief of the Yorùbá concerning the great wisdom of Ifá is manifested in some of the praise names they give to him. Two of such praise names are *Akére-finú-sogbón* (The small person with a mind full of wisdom), and *Akóni-lóràn-bí-ìyekan-ẹni* (He who gives one wise advice like one's relative). It is this great wisdom of Ifá which gives him a high position among the other Yorùbá divinities.

Without Ifá, the importance of the other Yorùbá divinities would diminish. If a person is being punished by the other divinities, he can only know this by consulting Ifá. If a community is to make sacrifice to one of its divinities it can only know this by consulting Ifá. In this way, Ifá is the only active mouthpiece of Yorùbá indigenous religion taken as a whole. As a mouthpiece, Ifá serves to popularise the other Yorùbá divinities.

With his great wisdom, knowledge and understanding, Ifá coordinates the work of all the divinities in the Yorùbá pantheon. He

serves as a ‘middle man’ between the other divinities and the people, and between the people and their ancestors. ‘He is the mouthpiece and the public relations officer of all the other Yorùbá gods.’²⁵

The relationship between Ifá and Èṣù another major divinity of the Yorùbá pantheon, demands some close scrutiny. One sometimes sees the image of Èṣù (Plate 10), in the home of Ifá priests, and when one asks them why they keep such an image, they answer that Ifá and Èṣù are friends.

A close examination of the Ifá literary corpus reveals that Èṣù sometimes acts as a friend of Ifá²⁶, and sometimes as a tempter.²⁷ It would also appear that Ifá makes use of the powers of Èṣù when he wants to do wonderful things.²⁸ Ellis says that Ifá obtained the powers of divination from Èṣù upon promising to give him the first portion of all offerings.²⁹ This is not true since Èṣù does not know how to divine. Hence, the Ifá statement:

Èṣù ní gba ẹbọ
Bẹẹ ni kò mọ Ifá á dá

Èṣù is the one who receives sacrifices
Even though he does not know
how to divine with Ifá instruments.

There is certainly a very close relationship between Ifá and Èṣù. A good portion of all the sacrifices made through Ifá to any of the Yorùbá divinities is given to Èṣù. Èṣù may, therefore, be regarded as the closest divinity to Ifá in the Yorùbá pantheon.

Ifá is, of course, famous as a divination deity although he is not the only Yorùbá connected with divination.³⁰ The wisdom and understanding of Ifá is believed to cover not only the past but also the present, and the future. By consulting Ifá, the Yorùbá people find meaning and purpose in the past, the present and the future.

The belief of the Yorùbá people concerning the importance of Ifá divination in their daily lives is revealed in the following Ifá poem:

Ifá ló lòní,
Ifá ló lola,

Ifá ló lètúnla pèlú è.
Òrúnmìlà ló nijó méréèrín Òòṣà dá áyé

(Ifá is the master of today,
Ifá is the master of tomorrow;
Ifá is the master of the day after tomorrow.
To Ifá belongs all the four days³²
Established by Òòṣà³³ on earth.)

In indigenous Yorùbá society, the people consult Ifá before they would do anything important. At the birth of a new child, Ifá is usually consulted to find out what would be the fortunes and problems of the new child on earth. As J.D. Clarke testifies, Ifá priests ‘name the òrìṣà which the child will worship, and it is they who are consulted in all the major affairs of life.’³⁴ In sickness, in contemplating a journey, in considering the choice of a life partner, and at any other important turn in their lives, the Yorùbá usually consult Ifá for guidance and advice.

The Paraphernalia of Ifá Divination

The first and the most ancient of these divination instruments is *ikin*, the sixteen sacred palm nuts of divination (Plate 1). The myth about how *ikin* was given to the children of Ifá has been narrated above. Priests of Ifá keep *ikin* inside ornamented bowls (Plate 6). Every fifth day,³⁵ when an Ifá priest makes sacrifices, he opens the bowl and takes out the sacred palm nuts. Holding the palm nuts in his hands, he prays to them in the belief that they are the physical representation of Ifá on earth.

The sacred palm nuts are also used for divination. For purposes of divination, the priest of Ifá puts the sixteen palm nuts in one of his hands, and tries to take all of them out at once with the other hand. If one palm nut is left in his hand, he makes two marks in the yellow powder of divination but if two palm-nuts are left in his hand, he makes one mark. If none of the palm nuts is left, or if more than two palm nuts are left, he makes no marks at all. This process

is repeated until an *Odu* signature is obtained.³⁶ However, Ifá priests seldom use *ikin* for divination. They mostly use *ikin* when consulting Ifá in their own homes for members of their families or for themselves.

Another important instrument of divination is *òpèlè*, the divining chain (Plate 2). The divining chain is shaped like a tuning fork to which four half nuts of the *òpèlè* tree (*Schrebera golungensis*) are tied. Four half nuts are tied to each arm of the chain. At each end of the chain, the Ifá priest ties a number of objects such as small beads, coins, cowries or sea shells. The Ifá priest holds the chain in the middle which is left bare.

The usual material of which the *òpèlè* chain is made is tough leather, but sometimes cotton string is used and likewise brass. The most valuable *òpèlè* chains are the brass type, some of which have small brass plates in place of the *òpèlè* half nut.

Each of the half nuts tied to the string has a concave and a convex surface. When the Ifá priest casts the chain on the ground, some of the half nuts would naturally present their concave side while some would present their convex side. Every combination of the four concave and the four convex surfaces of the half nuts gives an *Odù* signature.³⁷

The divining chain is the most popular instrument of Ifá divination. It is used much more than any of the other instruments of divination probably because it is easier and quicker to get the signature of an *Odù* by using it, and because it is less cumbersome to carry about.

Another important instrument of Ifá divination is the *ibò*, the sacred cowry and the sacred bone used in casting lots. The cowry shell stands for 'yes' while the bone stands for 'no'. Other items used as *ibò* include a stone, a cowry, a sea-shell, a bone, a broken piece of ceramic and the black part of ake fruit.

The *ibò* is used to select quickly the probable 'stories' in the corpus that could apply to the client. It is believed that it is the client's *orí* or divine guardian (Plate 11), who finally selects one of the countless 'stories' in the corpus for him.³⁸

The yellow powder of divination has been mentioned above. It is known as *ìyẹ̀ròsùn*, and it is obtained from the *ìròsùn* tree (*Baphia nitida*). When the Ifá priest uses his *ikin* (the sacred palm-nuts) for divination, he makes marks upon the yellow powder. The yellow powder of divination is kept in a carved bowl. These bowls (Plate 6) and trays (Plate 4) are usually made of wood but there are some which are made of brass. Ifá trays and bowls are precious symbols of the great ability of the Yorùbá people as carvers. They are very prominent among the Yorùbá carvings that have been preserved in museums all over the world.

Another important instrument of Ifá divination is *ìròkẹ̀* or *ìrófá* (Plate 3). These are carved club-like objects used by Ifá priests to invoke the spirit of Ifá during the process of divination. The Ifá priest performs his invocation by knocking the ornamented tray with *ìròkẹ̀* to produce a sonorous sound while he simultaneously chants the praise of Ifá. Most *ìròkẹ̀* are made of wood but some are made of ivory, and these are very attractive, and precious instruments of the Ifá divination system.