

The Bag of Wisdom

Ọ̀ṣun and the Origins of the Ifá Divination

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By “Ifá divination” we mean Ifá and related systems of divination based on the stories and symbols of the Odu such as *dida ọwọ* (divination with the sacred divining chain called ọ̀pẹ̀lẹ̀) and *ètìtẹ̀-alẹ̀* (divination with the sacred palm nuts), *ẹ̀ẹ̀rìndínlógún* (divination with the sixteen cowries), *agbigba* (divination with a divining chain slightly different from ọ̀pẹ̀lẹ̀), and *obi* (divination with kola nuts). The purpose of this essay is to examine the intimate connection of Ọ̀ṣun with Ifá divination both in her own right as a person, and through the instrumentality of Ọ̀ṣètùúrá, her son. We will start with the popular view of the involvement of Ọ̀ṣun in Ifá divination which states that she got to know about Ifá through Ọ̀rúnmilà, her husband. We will then examine the importance of Ọ̀ṣètùúrá to Ifá divination sacrifice. In the later pages of this essay, I will make the claim that Ọ̀ṣun has much more to do with the origins of Ifá divination than the *babalawo* (Ifá priests) are ready to admit. I will, indeed, put forward the hypothesis that the entire divination system of Ifa started from Ọ̀ṣun from whom it got to Ọ̀rúnmilà and not the other way round. I will base my claims on verses of Ifá which give us hints to that effect. We will then examine the possibility that *ẹ̀ẹ̀rìndínlógún* is older than *dídá ọwọ* and *ètìtẹ̀-alẹ̀* which are probably later developments of Ifa divinations.

Let us begin with the popular view that Ọ̀ṣun was introduced to Ifá divination by Ọ̀rúnmilà. Several verses of Ifá tell us about this. For example, a verse of Ogbèsá states that Ọ̀rúnmilà created the sixteen-cowry divination system and gave it to Ọ̀ṣun as a reward for saving his life. In this particular verse, it was after Ọ̀rúnmilà had created the sixteen-cowry system for Ọ̀ṣun that both of them became married. But as will be seen later from another verse of Ifá, even though they were husband and wife, they did not live together in one place because it was not the custom for couples to live together at that time. Let me now take some

time to tell the story of Ọṣun and Ọrúnmilà as contained in Ogbèsá, especially because it relates to the importance of *ẹ̀ẹ̀rìndínlógún* in the Ifá divination system.

The story goes as follows. It happened at a time that Olódùmarè summoned all the four hundred-and-one Ọrìṣà to Ọrun (heaven). But to their greatest surprise, the Ọrìṣà encountered a group of wicked “cannibals” in heaven (probably witches known to the Yorùbá as *aje*) who started to kill and eat up the Ọrìṣà one by one. But since Ọrúnmilà had performed sacrifice before he left earth, he was miraculously saved by Ọṣun who successfully hid Ọrúnmilà from the cannibals, and substituted goat meat for the flesh of Ọrúnmilà which the cannibals had planned to eat on that particular day.

When both Ọṣun and Ọrúnmilà returned to the earth, they became much closer than ever before. It was probably at this time that Ọrúnmilà and Ọṣun became husband and wife. Ọrúnmilà then decided to reward Ọṣun for saving his life, and that was how he put together the sixteen-cowry system of divination and taught Ọṣun how to use it. Let me now quote a short portion of this verse of Ogbèsá. It goes as follows:

	<i>Báyìí ni Ọrúnmilà òun Ọṣun bá sún mó raa wọn.</i>	This was how Ọrúnmilà and Ọṣun became close.
	<i>Ọrúnmilà ní irú oore tó ẹ̀ fún níjèlò,</i>	Ọrúnmilà said that the good turn which she did for him
5	<i>Kò sírú oore kan tó tún le tó ẹ̀yìun mó. Kín ni òun ibá ẹ̀ fúnwọ Ọṣun báyìí o? Ìdì eléyìí pàtàkì ló mú kí Ọrúnmilà</i>	Was an exceptional one. He wondered what he should do in return. This was the most important reason why Ọrúnmilà
	<i>Ó dá ẹ̀ẹ̀rìndínlógún sílẹ̀.</i>	Created the sixteen cowries.
10	<i>Ló bá kó o lé Ọṣun lówọ. Nínú gbogbo ẹ̀bora òṣà tí í lo ẹ̀ẹ̀rìndínlógún, Kò sí ọ̀kan tó ní in saájú Ọṣun. Ifá ló sì kó o fún Ọṣun Pé kó máa dá a.</i>	He then handed them to Ọṣun. Of all the Ọrìṣà who use sixteen cowries, There is none who had it before Ọṣun. It was Ifá who gave it to Ọṣun. And asked her to cast it
15	<i>Kóun náà ó máa fi Ẹ̀yèwò. Èyí ni Ifá fi san oore lákòókọ ná. Báyìí ló fi jẹ̀ pé Ifá pèlú Ọṣun</i>	And use it as another form of divination. This was what Ifá used to reward Ọṣun. That is why the relationship between Ifá and Ọṣun
	<i>Ènikan kò le mó ààrin araa wọn</i>	Is such that nobody else can know
20	<i>Ni Ọrúnmilà bá fẹ̀ Ọṣun nýàwó. Nifá bá di ọ̀ko Ọṣun Nínú gbogbo àyèwò pátápátá, Èẹ̀rìndínlógún ló Ẹ̀kejì Ifá.¹</i>	What is between the two of them. Ọrúnmilà then got married to Ọṣun. Of the several forms of divination, <i>Èẹ̀rìndínlógún</i> is next in rank to Ifá.

According to this particular story in Ogbèsá, even though Ọrúnmilà was the one who created *ẹ̀ẹ̀rìndínlógún*, this system of divination later received its own *àṣẹ*² from Olódùmarè. It happened as follows:

<i>Nígbà tó bá sì di ọ̀dún kẹ̀rìndínlógún kẹ̀rìndínlógún</i>	Every sixteen years
<i>Ni Olódùmarè, Ọlófín ọrun, máa á gbé</i>	Olódùmarè, Ọlófín of heaven, ³ used to

Àwọn tó bá ní ùyèwò nílẹ̀ ayé é yèwò Bó yá irò ni wọn ní pa fàráyé	Subject diviners of earth. To find out whether they were telling lies to the inhabitants of the earth	5
Bó yá òótọ̀ ni wọn ní sọ fún wọn. Ìdánwò tí í máa á ẹ̀ fún wọn ní pé Kí wọn ó kẹ sí Ọ̀rúnmilà wá o Àti gbogbo àwọn tó bá tún ní yẹ̀ ǹnkan án wò fàráyé Pé òun fẹ́é rí wọn.	Or whether they were telling the truth. This test involved Calling on Ọ̀rúnmilà and other diviners of the earth.	10
Nígbà wọn bá dé, Olódùmarè á ẹ̀ ayèwò lódò araare. Ni Olódùmarè bá ní kí Ọ̀rúnmilà ó yèun wò.	When they arrived, Olódùmarè would ask them to divine for him. So, Olódùmarè asked Ọ̀rúnmilà to divine for him.	15
Ọ̀rúnmilà ẹ̀ ayèwò tán, Olódùmarè é ní ta ló tún kù o? Ọ̀rúnmilà ní àfi ẹnì tó tún ẹ̀kẹ̀jì òun	When Ọ̀rúnmilà finished divining, Olódùmarè asked, "Who is next?" Ọ̀rúnmilà said that the next person was his partner	20
Tó jẹ̀ obìnrin. Olódùmarè wáá dáhùn pé "Òun náà tún ní ùyèwò?" Ọ̀rúnmilà ní, "Bẹ̀ẹ̀ ni." Olódùmarè ní kó wáá yèun wò. Nígbà tí Ọ̀ṣun ó yẹ̀ Olódùmarè wò, Ó já gbogbo ohun tó dáníyàn sí. Sùgbón kò sọ ọ̀ geere. Ó sọ kókó ọ̀rò ní, Sùgbón kò hú u légbò légbò bí i ti Ifá.	Who was a woman. Olódùmarè then answered, "Is she also a diviner?" To which Ọ̀rúnmilà replied, "That is true." Olódùmarè then asked her to divine for him. When Ọ̀ṣun examined Olódùmarè, She hit on all those things in his mind. But she did not say it in full. She mentioned the gist But she did not tell the root of the matter like Ifá.	25
Olódùmarè wáá bi Ọ̀rúnmilà pé "Èwo sì tún léyí?" Ló bá kó àlàyé, ló ẹ̀ Bó ti ẹ̀ fi ǹnkan yíi dá a lólá.	Olódùmarè asked Ọ̀rúnmilà, "What is this one?" Ọ̀rúnmilà then explained to Olódùmarè How he honored Ọ̀ṣun with the sixteen cowries.	35
Olódùmarè é ní, ó dáá. Ó ní, "Ènuu bó ti ẹ̀ sọ ọ̀ mọ̀ yíi,	Olódùmarè said, "It is all right." He further said that even though she did not go into details,	40
Òun fi àṣẹ̀ sí i. Láélélé Bó bá sọ ọ̀ báta, Bó bá sọ ọ̀ bàta. Èni tó bá dá a lẹ̀jàá, Kó sì maa ẹ̀ mọ̀ ọ̀n lára lẹ̀sẹ̀kẹ̀ṣẹ̀ Lójó náà; Kò gbòdò díjọ̀ kejì." Ìdí nìyí tí ẹ̀rindínlógún fi máa Ní yára á ẹ̀. Àmọ̀ ohun tí wọn ó maa sọ kò ní Tààyan lára.	He, Olódùmarè gave his assent to it. He added, "From today on and forever, Even if what ẹ̀rindínlógún says may not be detailed, Anybody who disbelieves it Would see the consequences instantly. It must not wait till the following day." This is why the predictions of ẹ̀rindínlógún come to pass quickly	45
Bí ẹ̀rindínlógún ẹ̀ gba àṣẹ̀ Lódò Olódùmarè nù un. ⁴	Even though the stories may not be impressive. That was how ẹ̀rindínlógún received àṣẹ̀ Directly from Olódùmarè.	50

Ọṣẹ̀tùúrá and Ifá Divination Sacrifice

We will now turn our attention to myths of Ifá divination which tell us about the importance of Ọṣun in Yorùbá religion generally and how Ọṣẹ̀tùúrá became the representative of Ọṣun in Yorùbá divination and sacrifice. The full story goes as follows:

When the Ọ̀rìṣà first came to the earth, they must have arrived in waves — not all the four hundred-and-one Ọ̀rìṣà arrived at once. In any case, according to this myth from the Odù Ọṣẹ̀tùúrá, there were only seventeen Ọ̀rìṣà in the first party, and Ọṣun was the seventeenth. Olódùmarè gave instructions to the Ọ̀rìṣà about what they should do as soon as they arrived on earth to make the young earth a pleasant place to live. They carried out all the instructions without involving Ọṣun in any of their activities. The result was that things did not go well for them. Rain did not fall. There was illness, bitterness, and restlessness all over the earth. Let us quote a few lines from this Odù at this juncture:

	<i>Wọn délé ayé, Wọn lagbó orò, Wọn lagbó ọpa. Wọn lánà gbóóró òntifẹ wá.</i>	When they arrived on earth, They created a sacred forest for Orò. ⁵ They created a sacred forest for Ọpa. ⁶ They made a small road leading to Ifẹ ⁷
5	<i>Wọn rán ni okùn, Wọn rán 'nii 'de. Enìkan ò ké sí Ọṣun. Ọṣun ní sù í máa á tójúú wọn</i>	They sent people to make okun beads. ⁸ They sent people to make brass objects. ⁹ But nobody involved Ọṣun in anything. Whereas Ọṣun was the person taking care of them
10	<i>Lónjẹ, níwá, lẹ̀yìn. Gbogbo ohun tí wọn ẹ, kò gún.</i>	Giving them food and other things. All the things which the Ọ̀rìṣà were doing, none was successful.
	<i>Wọn pòjò, òjò ò rò. Kíkan kikan gbayé, Òjòjò ó gbòde.</i>	They prayed for rain, but it did not rain. Bitterness engulfed the earth. Restlessness took over the streets of the city.
15	<i>Wọn ní hà! Olódùmarè é ha jẹ purọ́ fáwọn. Iruú kín lẹ̀yí? Bó ẹ ní káwọn ó ẹ é làwọn n ẹ é.¹⁰</i>	They exclaimed “Did Olódùmarè tell us a lie? What is this? We are doing everything according to his instructions.”

The Ọ̀rìṣà then decided to send Ọ̀rúnmilà to Olódùmarè to find out what actually happened. When Ọ̀rúnmilà got to Olódùmarè, he stated the problem. He said that they were living on earth in accordance with the instructions of Olódùmarè but to their greatest surprise nothing they did on earth was good. Olódùmarè then asked whether they involved the only woman among them in all they were doing. But Ọ̀rúnmilà replied that since she was a woman, they did not involve her. To which Olódùmarè replied as follows:

<i>Olódùmarè ní dánídání loun, Òun è é dání lẹ̀mẹjì.</i>	Olódùmarè said that he was a creator But he would never create any person or thing twice.
<i>Ó ní ẹ padà sóhúún, Ó ní ẹ rẹ̀bẹ̀ bẹ̀ é.</i>	He told Ọ̀rúnmilà to go back to his colleagues And that all of them should go and beg Ọṣun.

Kó máa báa yín lówó sí nkan.

So that she could agree to be involved in their affairs.

Ó ní gbogbo nkan yín ó sì maa gún.¹¹

He assured them that their affairs would then be good.

When Òrúnmìlà got to the earth, he reported back to his colleagues, and all of them started to beg Òṣun, but Òṣun did not yield until Òrúnmìlà appealed to her. She said:

È máa bẹ orí yín àtẹlẹdaaa yín

Begin to beg your *ori* and your creator

Pé oyún tí ní bẹ nínú òun yíi,

So that the fetus which was in her womb

Kóun ó bí i lókùnrin.

Would be delivered as a male child.

Ó ní tí òun bá bí i lókùnrin,

She assured them that if it was a male child,

Nìkan yín o ò gún.

Their matters would from then on be straight.

Àmọ tóun bá bí i lóbìnrin,

But if it was born as a female child,

È kangun.¹²

War would begin in earnest.¹³

Òrúnmìlà reported back to his colleagues what Òṣun told him. When Oosaala looked at Òṣun's womb with his *awo*¹⁴ he found a baby girl there. He then pointed his *ado asure*¹⁵ to Òṣun's womb, and commanded that fetus to change into male with immediate effect. When Òṣun delivered the baby, it was born as a male child.

Oosaala was the first person to carry the baby. He petted the baby and coddled it. Then Òrúnmìlà, the father, also carried the baby and named him Òṣẹ̀tùúrá. He, Òrúnmìlà, carried the baby with him wherever he went. Whenever anybody was to be initiated as an Ifá priest, Òṣẹ̀tùúrá must be involved. Whenever anybody was making a sacrifice, Òṣẹ̀tùúrá, the son of Òṣun, must be invoked last before the sacrifice was delivered to Esu. If any person was suffering from illness, as soon as Òṣẹ̀tùúrá touched the person that person would be well instantaneously. Òṣẹ̀tùúrá is today a minor Odu of Ifá but he governs all sacrifices and rituals of Ifá.

Òṣun then became happy since her son was deeply involved in the affairs of the male Òrìṣà. She then made the following pronouncement:

Gbogbo obìnrin pátá pátá látòní lọ,

From today on, all women without any exception,

Wọ̀n ò gbọ̀dọ̀ morò,

They must not know Orò,

Wọ̀n ò sì gbọ̀dọ̀ wọ̀lé Eégún

And they must not enter the shrine of

Eégún.¹⁶

5

Pé kээ́gún ó máa tojúu wọ̀n jáde.

Eégún must not come out in their presence.

Ó dèwò.

This must be observed as a taboo.

Sùgbón gbodo mkan yòwùwù tí ẹ̀ bá ní ẹ̀,

But all other things you are doing,

È ẹ̀ gbọ̀dọ̀ mọ̀ fí tí Òṣun ẹ̀.

You must involve Òṣun in them.

Layé bá gún régí.

Their lives then became smooth.

10

Wọ̀n ní bónyán bá ní gúnýán,

They said, "If someone is pounding yams

Tí ò fí tÒṣun ẹ̀,

Without the knowledge of Òṣun,

Iyán an wọ̀n a lẹ̀mọ.

His/her pounded yam will not be smooth.

Bí onírokà bá ní rokà,

If someone is preparing *okà* food

Tí ò fí tÒṣun ẹ̀,

Without involving Òṣun in it,

15

Okàa rẹ̀ a sì mèrẹ̀.

His/her food will not come out fine.

A fímọ̀ jọ̀ tÒṣun o.

We will involve Òṣun in whatever we do.

A fímọ̀ jọ̀ tÒṣun o.

We will involve Òṣun in all our deliberations.

Iyee wa,

Our great mother,

- 20 *A bá wọn pé nímò.*
A fimò jọ tỌṣun.
Agberẹgẹde àjùbà,
Àjùbà agberẹgẹde
 25 *A difá fún Ọṣun sèngẹsì,*
Olóòyàa yùn.
Ó gbé kòkò,
Ó ní beḡo inúnmoḷẹ ẹ jẹ.
Ta ní ní rùbọ,
 30 *Tí ò ké sẹlẹḡọ.*
Ọṣun, ẹwùjì,
A kúnlẹ,
A bẹ ó.
Ẹ wólẹ fòbìnrin.
 35 *Obìnrin ló bí wa*
Ká tóó dèniyàn.¹⁹
- Who must be present at every important
 deliberation.
 We will involve Ọṣun in all our deliberations.
 Agberẹgẹde àjùbà,¹⁷
 Àjùbà agberẹgẹde
 Divined for Ọṣun Sèngẹsì,
 Owner of a hair comb decorated with *iyùn*.¹⁸
 When she was in a secret place,
 She spoiled the sacrifice of other divinities.
 Who is performing a sacrifice
 Without involving the owner of sacrifice?
 Ọṣun, whose other name is Ẹwùjì,
 We are all on our knees.
 We are all begging you.
 Let us all kneel and prostrate before women.
 We are all borne by women
 Before we become recognized as human
 beings.

The Bag of Wisdom: Did Ọṣun Originate the Ifá Divination System?

Our next story from the Ifá literary corpus about Ọṣun is taken from Okanran-
 sode. It was recorded from Babalawo Ifátòògùn, a famous Ifá priest from Ìlobùú,
 near Ọṣogbo. The story is about a bag of wisdom which Olódùmarè threw down
 from the sky and asked all the Ọ̀rìṣà to look for. Olódùmarè assured the Ọ̀rìṣà
 that anyone who found it would be the wisest of them all. Olódùmarè showed
 the bag to the Ọ̀rìṣà so that they would be able to recognize it as soon as they saw
 it. Since Ọṣun and Ọ̀rúnmilà were a very intimate couple, both of them decided
 to search for the bag together. I will now quote this interesting story in full.

- Ọlogbọn sodè, ó tú.*
Ìmòràn sodè, a dẹ.
Ẹ̀yàn tó bá fẹ̀yìn tọ̀pẹ
Ní ó sodè pé títí.
 5 *A difá fún Ọ̀rúnmilà*
Ọ̀un Ọṣun jọ ní wọgbọn kiri.
- Olódùmarè ló ké sí irinwó moḷẹ,*
- 10 *Igbaa moḷẹ.*
Ó ní kí wọn ó wá sí ẹ̀kìtì isálọ̀run.
Wọn sì dẹ̀bẹ.
Ó ní ọ̀un ó gbèè pagidarì ogbọ̀n àtì agbára fún
un yín.
 15 *Ó ní ẹ̀ni tí ó bá lẹ rí nìkan yìt*
Ní ó maa pàṣẹ lẹ e lóri.
- Olúwaarẹ ní ó sì gbọ̀n jù lọ láyẹ.*
- A wise person tied *idè*,²⁰ but it disintegrated.
 A sage tied *idè*, it became loose.
 Only a person who leans his back on Ọ̀pẹ
 Will tie *idè* which will last for long.
 Ifá divination was performed for Ọ̀rúnmilà
 When he and Ọṣun were searching for
 wisdom.
 It was Olódùmarè who called the four
 hundred divinities (of the right)
 And the two hundred divinities (of the left).
 Olódùmarè summoned them to heaven.
 When they arrived there,
 He told them that he wanted to give them
 deep wisdom and power.
 He told the Ọ̀rìṣà that anybody who had
 What he was planning to give them
 Would be the source of wisdom,
 And that person would be the wisest person
 on earth.

<p> <i>Ó ní tó bá di ojò mọ̀kàndínlógún òní, Òun ó ju àpò ogbón òhún sílé ayé.</i> </p>	<p> He told them that nineteen days hence He would throw down a bag of wisdom onto the earth. </p>	20
<p> <i>Igbó ni òun ó jù ú sí Òdàn ni o, Odò ni o, Ìlú ni o, Ojú ònà ni o, Òun ò ní sọ ibikan.</i> </p>	<p> But whether he would throw it into a forest, Or into a grassland, Or into a river, Or into a town, Or on a road, He would not tell them exactly where. </p>	25
<p> <i>Olódùmarè é fi àpò ogbón náà hàn wọn. Pé òun “Niyí o.” È wò ó dáadáa Bó ti rí niyí o. Nígbà tí wọn délé ayé tán, Èlẹ̀bọ ní rúbọ. Olóògùn ní sà á. Eléte ní dá. Pé “Kiní yí, èmi ní ó rí sẹ̀.”</i> </p>	<p> Olódùmarè showed them the bag of wisdom. He said, “This is it.” Look at it well And note its distinctive features. When they arrived on earth, Some of them started to perform sacrifice. Some were making medicine. Some were planning their own strategies. They were saying, “This thing, I will be the one to find it.” </p>	30
<p> <i>Òrúnmìlà òun Òṣun sì niyí, aláṣọse ni wọn. Tó sẹ pé wọn è é yaraa wọn.</i> </p>	<p> Òrúnmìlà and Òṣun used to do things together. They were always going about in company of each other. </p>	40
<p> <i>Làwọn méjèjèì bá mééjì kẹ́étà, Wọn looko akónilógbón Pé kí wọn ó yẹ àwọn wò.</i> </p>	<p> Both of them added two cowries to three, And went to divine. They asked the diviners to check both of them out. </p>	45
<p> <i>Nńkan tí gbogbo irúnmoḽẹ̀ ní wá yíí Ó ha le jẹ̀ pé owo àwọn ní ó bọ̀yí sɪ?</i> </p>	<p> “The thing which all the Òrìṣà are looking for Could both of them be the persons who would find it?” </p>	50
<p> <i>Wọn ní kí wọn ó yáa rúbọ. Wọn lẹ̀wù orùn ẹ̀nikòòkan wọn lẹ̀bọ.</i> </p>	<p> The diviners asked Òrúnmìlà and Òṣun to perform sacrifice With the big garments which they were wearing. </p>	
<p> <i>Kí oníkálùkù ó sì lẹ̀ é rú ewúré kan, Kó sì rú eku kan ọ̀so. Igba ọ̀ké àti wóro kan.</i> </p>	<p> Each should offer a goat, And a house rat As well as two hundred-and-one <i>oke</i> full of cowries²¹ for each person. </p>	55
<p> <i>Òrúnmìlà ní iwọ̀ Òṣun, “Jẹ̀ káwọn ó lọ̀ rú ẹ̀bọ̀ yíí o.” Òṣun ní, “È è é jẹ́yàn ó sinmi, Fẹ̀wù rúbọ, Fi nńkan rúbọ̀ tí wáá jẹ̀ níbi oun táwọn ní wá yíí!”</i> </p>	<p> Òrúnmìlà counseled that they should make the sacrifice. But Òṣun said, “Please, let me rest. Go make sacrifice with your garment, Go make sacrifice with other things, How does that relate to what we are searching for?” </p>	60
<p> <i>Òṣun kò, kò rúbọ. Òrúnmìlà, Àjànà, Ó yaa mú ẹ̀wùu rẹ̀, ó fi rubo.</i> </p>	<p> Òṣun refused to perform sacrifice. Òrúnmìlà, whose other name is Àjànà, Took his own garment, and surrendered it for sacrifice. </p>	65
<p> <i>Ó sì fi eku kan àti owó náa rúbọ.</i> </p>	<p> He also used a house rat and money for the sacrifice. </p>	70

- Wọn wá àpò ogbón títí,
 Wọn ò rí i.
 Gbogbo àwọn irúnmọlẹ̀ yókù náà,
 75 Wọn ò rí i.
 Wọn wá a dé ègbá ajá.
 Wọn wá a dẹ̀sà adẹ̀.
 Elòmí wá a dé Ìkọ̀ Àwú sí.
 Wọn wá a dé Ìdòròmù Àwú sẹ̀.
 80 Wọn wá a dé Ìwọ̀nràn
 Níbi tí ojúmọ̀ tí mọ̀ ọ̀n wá.
 Wọn ò rí i.
 Nígbà tó dìjọ̀ kan, ni eku bá sì bọ̀ síbì ẹ̀wù
 Ọṣun tó fì kọ̀,
 85 Ni eku bá jẹ̀ àpò igbá àyàa rẹ̀ lábénu.
 Ní ojọ̀ kejì, ni wọn bá tún múra,
 Wọn tún bèrẹ̀ sí í wá àpò ogbón yí.
- Ni Ọṣun bá rí i.
 90 “Han-in! Àpò ogbón niyí!”
 Jùà, ó gbé e jù àpò àyà ẹ̀wùu rẹ̀.
 Ló bá fọ̀n ọ̀n.
 95 Níbi tó gbé ní sáré é dá igi kojá,
 Dátàkùn kojá,
 Pọ̀rọ̀ ni àpò ogbón bó ó lẹ̀,
 Ní ọ̀gangan ibi tẹ̀ku ti jẹ̀ àpò.
- 100 Ọṣun sí ní kẹ́ é pe Ọ̀rúnmìlà
 Pẹ̀ “Ọ̀rúnmìlà, Àjànà,
 Maa bọ̀ o, maa bọ̀,
 Ọ̀n ti rápò ogbón o.”
 105 Bí Ọ̀rúnmìlà tí ní lọ̀,
 Ló bá sì rí àpò ogbón un nílẹ̀.
 Ló bá jù ú sínú àpò ẹ̀wùu tiẹ̀.
- Nígbà tí wọn délé,
 110 Ọ̀rúnmìlà ní, “Ọṣun, jẹ́ kí n wo àpò ọ̀hún.”
 Ọṣun ní láyé yí kọ̀kúnrin ó rí i.
 Èni tí ó bàà sì rí i,
 Yóó maa nígbà eku,
 115 Igba ẹja,
 Igba ẹyẹ,
 Igba ẹran,
 Ọ̀pòlọ̀pọ̀ owó.
 Ọ̀rúnmìlà bè é bè é bè é,
 120 Kò gbà.
 Ló bá padà sínú ilée tiẹ̀.
 LỌṢUN bá ní kí ọ̀n ó tiẹ̀ mú àpò náà jáde
- They looked for the bag of wisdom,
 They did not see it.
 All the other Ọ̀rìsà
 Did not see it either.
 They searched for it up to Ègbá ajá.²²
 They went as far as Èsà adẹ̀.²³
 Some went as far as Ìkọ̀ Àwú sí.
 Others searched for it in Ìdòròmù Àwú sẹ̀.
 While some looked for it in Ìwọ̀nràn
 From where the day breaks²⁴
 But they did not see it.
 One day a house rat went to the garment
 Which Ọṣun hung up in her house.
 The rat ate up its chest pocket underneath.
 The next day, they got themselves ready
 And started to search for the bag of wisdom
 once again
 Then, Ọṣun found it.
 She exclaimed, “Han-in! This is the bag of
 wisdom!”
 She threw it into the chest pocket of her
 garment.
 She started to go in a hurry.
 As she was crossing dead woods
 And scaling climbing stems,
 Suddenly the bag of wisdom dropped down
 From where the rat had eaten her garment’s
 pocket.
 Ọṣun was calling on Ọ̀rúnmìlà,
 Saying, “Ọ̀rúnmìlà, whose other name is
 Àjànà,
 Come quickly, come quickly.
 I have seen the bag of wisdom.”
 As Ọ̀rúnmìlà was going,
 He saw the bag of wisdom on the ground.
 He then put it inside the pocket of his own
 garment.
 When they arrived home,
 Ọ̀rúnmìlà said, “Ọṣun let me see the bag.”
 But Ọṣun said that she would never show it to
 a man.
 But if a man must see it,
 He would give her two hundred rats,
 Two hundred fishes,
 Two hundred birds,
 Two hundred animals,
 And plenty of money.
 Ọ̀rúnmìlà begged her for long,
 But she did not yield.
 He then returned to his own house.
 When Ọṣun tried to take out the bag from
 her pocket,

<i>Kóun ó tún un wò lẹ̀ẹkan sí í. Ìgbà tí yóó tí ọwọ̀ bọ̀ àpọ̀. Ó di gbùrà. Ọwọ̀ rẹ̀ẹ̀ yọ̀ síta lódi kejì.</i>	So that she could look at it once again, As she put her hands inside the pockets, Her hands entered into a hole, And came out on the bottom part of the pocket.	125
<i>LỌ̀ṣun bá lọ̀ bá Ọ̀rúnmilà níléé tiẹ̀ lọ̀hùún. Ló bá bèrẹ̀ sí í bè ẹ̀. Ló bá bèrẹ̀ sí í sààlò.</i>	So, Ọ̀ṣun went to meet Ọ̀rúnmilà in his own house. She started to beg him. She started to please Ọ̀rúnmilà (with good things).	130
<i>Bí Ọ̀ṣun ẹ̀e kó lọ̀ sílé Ọ̀rúnmilà nù un Tó bèrẹ̀ sí í gbé lódò ọkọọ̀ rẹ̀ Pé kó fi kọ̀un lógbón díẹ̀.</i>	That was how Ọ̀ṣun went to Ọ̀rúnmilà's house To live there with her husband So that he would teach her a little bit of the wisdom.	135
<i>Nígbà wá ẹ̀e bí wọn bá fẹ̀ obìnrin, Kó pọ̀n dandan kó bọ̀kọ̀ ẹ̀ lọ̀lẹ̀.</i>	In ancient times, when people got married, It was not compulsory for the wife to go to her husband's home to live with him.	140
<i>Bí ó ẹ̀e di pé tọkọ̀ taya ní gbé pọ̀ nu un. Ẹ̀wù tí Ọ̀ṣun bó ọ̀ lẹ̀ báyíí, Àsẹ̀ ló fi banu. Ó ní láé láé, àtirandíran obìnrin Kò gbọ̀dọ̀ wẹ̀wù aghádá mọ̀. Ló bá lọ̀ lẹ̀ é sọ̀ ẹ̀wù sígbó.</i>	That was how couples started to live together. When Ọ̀ṣun removed the big garment from her body, She put <i>ase</i> into her mouth, She said that from then on, no woman Must wear the agbada dress. ²⁵ She then went and threw the garment into the bush.	145
<i>Nígbà tí èbẹ̀ pọ̀, Ní Ọ̀rúnmilá bá mú tínúún orú rẹ̀, Ló wáá fún Ọ̀ṣun. Ọ̀un náà ní eéríndínlógún Tí Ọ̀ṣun ní dá un. Àpọ̀ ogbón ojọ̀ náà ní Odù Ifá, Àyájọ̀, òògùn, gboḡdo ogbón ijmlẹ̀ Yorùbá.²⁶</i>	After a lot of pleading from Ọ̀ṣun, Ọ̀rúnmilà took a little bit of the wisdom And gave it to Ọ̀ṣun. That is the eéríndínlógún Which Ọ̀ṣun is casting. The bag of wisdom of that day is Odù Ifá, Medicines and all other profound wisdom of the Yorùbá people.	150 155

In the Ifá verse quoted above, Ọ̀ṣun was the first person to find the bag of wisdom, but when the bag slipped through the broken pocket of her big garment, Ọ̀rúnmilà accidentally stumbled on it and kept it. One can speculate as to the morality of Ọ̀rúnmilà keeping for himself what should belong to his wife. But we must remember that before she discovered that she had lost the bag, Ọ̀ṣun herself had boasted that she would take so many hundred of things as well as plenty of money from anybody who would see the bag of wisdom.

One can further speculate that this myth is telling us that Ọ̀ṣun was perhaps the first person to make use of Ifá — the bag of wisdom — before it was passed on to her husband, and not the other way round. Let us now turn our attention to two other matters which confirm our suspicion.

The first one relates to *iyerosun*, the sacred yellow powder of divination on which Ifá priests print the marks of Ifá inside a divining board. Why is this powder yellowish like the color which is sacred to Ọ̀ṣun? Did Ọ̀rúnmilà use this powder

as a mark of honor to his wife? We may never know for certain the answer to these questions; but given the intimate connection between Ọṣun and Ifá, especially in respect to the origin of Ifá as a bag of wisdom first found by Ọṣun, it may not be far-fetched to say that the yellow powder has something to do with Ọṣun.

The second issue which I would like to mention here is the simple fact that when one takes a look at the Odù of *ẹ̀ẹ̀rìndínlógún* and those of Ifá, it would seem that the Odù of Ifá are based on those of *ẹ̀ẹ̀rìndínlógún*, and not the other way round. *Ẹ̀ẹ̀rìndínlógún* is based on sixteen single signs of Ifá such as Ọ̀dí, Ìrosùn, Ọ̀wọ̀nrín, etc.; except Èjì Ogbè which is coupled as in the case of Ifá. Ifá, however, does not make use of single signs (even though Ifá literature refers to it). All the signs are coupled either as *ojú odù* (major odù) or as *omọ odù* (minor odù). It stands to reason to say that a single sign such as Ọ̀dí

I
II
II
I

must exist in reality or at least in the mind before it is coupled to become *Odi Meji* (two odi).

I	I
II	II
II	II
I	I

We can go further to speculate that the apparent simplicity of the signs of *ẹ̀ẹ̀rìndínlógún* and even the short nature of some of its literature are indications of its antiquity upon which the more elaborate signs and wider frame of reference of Ifá were based. Whatever the case may be, there is no doubt at all that *ẹ̀ẹ̀rìndínlógún* has not been given its rightful place as a part and parcel of the Ifá literary and divinatory system. In one of the verses quoted above, Olódùmarè, while giving *ase* to *ẹ̀ẹ̀rìndínlógún* stated thus,

From today on and forever
Even if what *ẹ̀ẹ̀rìndínlógún* says may not be detailed,
Anybody who disbelieves it
Would see the consequences instantly.
It must not wait till the following day.²⁷

Conclusion

It is customary for researchers to refer to Ọṣun simply as an Ọ̀rìṣà of fertility. This is true. In fact, a recent chanter of Ọṣun's literature refers to her as

*Ìyá abòbìnrin gbàtò.
Ládékojú, abòkùnrin gbàṣé.*²⁸

Mother who helps women to collect semen
Wearer of a veiled crown, who helps men to
collect menstrual flow.

There are many verses of Ifá which relate to Ọ̀ṣun as a mother of many children both in the biological and religious sense. The city of Ọ̀dró²⁹ (now simply called Ọ̀ró) was where Ọ̀ṣun had so many children that she did not have any more space to sit down in her own house. Since her children had taken up all available space, Ọ̀ṣun was always found standing up.

Ifá also speaks of Ọ̀ṣun as a benevolent mother. She has the habit of bestowing wealth, fame, and honor on her adherents. A verse of Irete Ọ̀ba tells us how Ọ̀ṣun rewarded a poor priest of Ifá who had divined for her when she was childless and made it possible for her to have children. The name of the Ifá priest is Ọ̀jìyàḍmẹ̀gùn; he had two apprentices: Ifon, Ifá priest of Ìdó, and Dùùrù, Ifá priest of Lìkì. When Ọ̀ṣun eventually had children, she rewarded the three of them with costly clothes, beads, and plenty of money. She brought all the presents personally to her Ifá priests, but Ọ̀jìyàḍmẹ̀gùn had traveled out to a far place. Ọ̀ṣun gave the two apprentices a horse each. She also gave them their own share of the rest of the presents. She waited for a long time for Ọ̀jìyàḍmẹ̀gùn. When he did not arrive, she ordered her servants to dig a very deep pit inside which she carefully kept Ọ̀jìyàḍmẹ̀gùn's presents. But she first covered the pit with sand before she dumped the money and the presents there, and then covered it up again with earth. That is why Ọ̀ṣun is saluted as

Oore yèyè Ọ̀ṣun.

Ọ̀ wa yanrìn, wa yanrìn,

*Kówó sí.*³⁰

Hail the benevolent mother Ọ̀ṣun.

She who digs up sand, digs up sand,

And keeps money there (for her own people).

The benevolence of Ọ̀ṣun goes beyond bestowing money and riches on people. She nourishes her own just as she nourished the original sixteen Ọ̀rìṣà who first arrived on earth with Ọ̀ṣun as the seventeenth. She nourishes people with different kinds of vegetables, such as *yanrin* and *tete* (special vegetables of Ọ̀ṣun) which are still her favorite foods today. She also likes different kinds of fruit such as pumpkins, bananas, oranges, etc. But she does not like guinea-corn beer. She drinks maize beer instead. Above all, she nourishes with the sweet waters of the sacred Ọ̀ṣun River.

We must not make the mistake of thinking that Ọ̀ṣun is always meek, quiet, and long-suffering. Sometimes she can be a fierce warrior. A verse of Ọ̀gúndá Ẹ̀wòrì (Ọ̀gúndá aràà Dó) tells us how Ọ̀ṣun Àpara (otherwise known as Yemesé³¹) delivered the people of Ìdó³² when their town was conquered and the people were being taken away as slaves. She beheaded their enemies and freed the people of Ìdó. When her people said that they did not know the way back to Ìdó, she fell down on the spot, became a river and flowed back to Ìdó carrying her people along with her. That is why Yemesé is celebrated in Ìdó with the following song:

Yemesé ilé Ìdó pagun ra o.

Ọ̀ṣun àpará pagun ra lónií.

*Ọ̀ pagun ra.*³³

Yemesé of Ìdó annihilated war.

Ọ̀ṣun Àpara annihilated war today.

She annihilated war.

Space will not allow us to go into other areas of the contributions of Òṣun to the religion and culture of the Yorùbá people as a loyal wife of Ṣàngó, her second husband; as a physician who cures with her own water; as a founder of the Ògbóni society³⁴ to maintain truth and justice in the land; or even as the only Òrìṣà who knows how to deceive the “cannibals” of heaven (see first story, above). All these and more are contained in the stories of Òṣun as enshrined in the Ifá corpus, a body of knowledge which she probably founded or at least helped to establish together with Òrúnmìlà. Her role in this regard is often not deeply appreciated.

To understand this ancient Òrìṣà is to know the intelligence, vitality, caring, and nourishing abilities of womankind—long-suffering, cheated, overlooked, and overworked, but always committed to the survival of humanity. In this sense, Òṣun is the icon not only of women, but of all creation.

Omi o!

O! sacred water.

Ota o!

O! sacred stones.

Èdan o!

O! sacred *edan* (symbol of Ògbóni).

È kóre yèyè Òṣun o.

All hail the benevolent mother.

Notes

1. Collected from Babalọlá Ifátòògùn, Ìlobùú, near Òṣogbo, Nigeria.
2. *Ase*. A spiritual and magical power with which Olódùmarè created the universe, and copies of which he gave to the Òrìṣà. Human beings can also access *ase* through the right type of moral and spiritual connection.
3. *Ọlọfin* of heaven. Another name for Olódùmarè. Odùduwà, the founder of Ilé-Ifẹ, is *Ọlọfin ayé* (*Ọlọfin* of the earth which means law-giver of the earth).
4. Continuation of the same verse from *Ogbèsá* chanted by Babalọlá Ifátòògùn.
5. *Orò*. An ancestral spirit who makes use of the bull roarer and precedes the arrival of *Egúngún* on earth. His departure after seven days (in some places, seventeen days) is marked by a curfew during which women must not go out of the house. It is forbidden for women to see *Orò* and *Egúngún*.
6. *Ọpa*. A secret society which originated from Ilé-Ifẹ.
7. A small road which led to Ifẹ. In ancient times small paths led to Ifẹ from other parts of Yorubaland since it was forbidden for ordinary people to visit Ilé-Ifẹ unless they were summoned there for important rituals. This is why there were no broad caravan routes leading to Ifẹ.
8. *Okùn* beads. A costly bead manufactured in Ifẹ in the past. There is at least one family carrying on the tradition in Ilé-Ifẹ today.
9. Brass object. Ilé-Ifẹ was an important center for the production of brass objects in ancient times.
10. Collected from Ònìṣun of Ìlobùú.
11. Part of the same excerpt chanted by Ònìṣun.
12. Continuation of the same verse chanted by Ònìṣun.
13. Perhaps Òṣun said that war would begin in earnest if she had a baby girl because instead of one woman, the sixteen Òrìṣà would have two women to deal with. But if it was

a boy, she would donate him to participate in the things men were doing and the child would then be a bridge between her and the men folk.

14. *Awo* (sometimes also called *iworan*) is a sacred object of *Ọ̀bàtálá* with which he sees the future and other hidden things.

15. *Àdó àsúre* (sometimes also called *ìwo àbá*) also belongs to *Ọ̀bàtálá*, and with it he generates ideas which his *ìwo àṣẹ* helps to bring to fruition. *Ọ̀bàtálá* holds *ìwo àbá* (or *àsúre*) on the right, and *ìwo àṣẹ* on the left.

16. A woman is not allowed to enter the shrine of *Egúngún* unless she was born holding the umbilical cord in her hand. Such female children are called *ato*, and they are allowed to know all the secrets of *Egúngún*. Her male counterpart is called *Amúsánán* who can also know everything about *Egúngún* even without being initiated as *òjẹ*.

17. *Agberẹgẹde àjùbà*. Name of an *Ifá* priest which means “He whose large farm has just been cultivated from virgin forest.”

18. *Iyùn* beads. A costly type of bead used by kings and important people.

19. Chanted by *Ọ̀nìṣun* of *Ìlòbùú*.

20. *Ide*. Beads of *Ifá* worn only by *Ifá* priests. There are two slightly different types of *ide*. The one used by *babalawo* in Africa is green and maroon. But the same one used in the diaspora is green and yellow.

21. One *òkẹ* full of cowries. Cowries were measured with a woven straw container called *òkẹ* when the *Yorùbá* were using cowries as currency. One *òkẹ* full of cowries is approximately twenty-thousand cowries. Two hundred-and-one *òkẹ* will then be $200,000 \times 201 = 40,200,000$ cowries.

22. *Ègbá ajá*. A place frequently mentioned in *Ifá* literature. It is probably a place in the *Ègbá* dialect area of *Yorubaland*.

23. *Èsà adìe*. Another place frequently mentioned in *Ifá* verses.

24. *Ìkọ Àwúsí*, *Ìdòròmù Àwúṣẹ*, and *Ìwọ̀nràn* from where the day breaks. Some *Ifá* priests think that the Americas correspond to *Ìkọ Àwúsí*. *Ìdòròmù Àwúṣẹ* refers to Africa, and *Ìwọ̀nràn* from where day breaks corresponds to Australia.

25. *Agbádá* dress. The flowing garment worn by *Yorùbá* men. Women now wear a similar flowing garment but without a breast pocket.

26. Collected from *Babalọ́lá Ifátòògùn* of *Ìlòbùú*.

27. It is the belief of the *Yorùbá* that pronouncements emanating from *ẹ̀rìndínlógún* come to pass more quickly than those of *Ifá*.

28. Chanted by *Mọ́ládùn Ajítòní* in *Ọ̀yọ*, July 25, 1999.

29. The town of *Òrò* is situated in the northeast of *Yorubaland*.

30. This is part of an *Ifá* chant rendered by *Babalọ́lá Ifátòògùn* of *Ìlòbùú*.

31. *Yemesé*. An *Ọ̀rìṣà* of *Ìdóo-Fábòrò* who is related to *Ọ̀ṣun*.

32. *Ìdó*. There are many towns and villages known as *Ìdó* in *Yorubaland*. This verse, however, relates to *Ìdóo-Fábòrò* in *Èkítì* state.

33. This is a song of *Ifá* which the people of *Ìdó* sing in honor of *Yemesé*.

34. *Ọ̀gbóni* society. An important secret society of *Yorubaland*. *Ọ̀ṣun* is believed to be one of the founders of the *Ọ̀gbóni* society. That is why she had her own *ẹ̀dan* (symbol of *Ọ̀gbóni*). Anybody who is protected by *Ọ̀ṣun* cannot be judged by the *Ọ̀gbóni*. Other *Ọ̀rìṣà* who are intimately related to *Ọ̀gbóni* are *Ifá* and *Ọ̀bàtálá*.

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