By “Ifá divination” we mean Ifá and related systems of divination based on the stories and symbols of the Òdu such as dida ọwọ (divination with the sacred divining chain called ṣe pẹlẹ) and ẹtiti-ale (divination with the sacred palm nuts), eèrèndínlogún (divination with the sixteen cowries), agbígba (divination with a divining chain slightly different from ṣe pẹlẹ), and obi (divination with kola nuts). The purpose of this essay is to examine the intimate connection of Ọṣùn with Ifá divination both in her own right as a person, and through the instrumentality of Ọṣẹ́túúra, her son. We will start with the popular view of the involvement of Ọṣùn in Ifá divination which states that she got to know about Ifá through Ọrúnmílà, her husband. We will then examine the importance of Ọṣẹ́túúra to Ifá divination sacrifice. In the later pages of this essay, I will make the claim that Ọṣùn 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 Ifá started from Ọṣùn from whom it got to Ọrúnmílà 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 eèrèndínlogún is older than didá ọwọ and ẹtiti-ale which are probably later developments of Ifá divinations.

Let us begin with the popular view that Ọṣùn was introduced to Ifá divination by Ọrúnmílà. Several verses of Ifá tell us about this. For example, a verse of Ogbèṣà states that Ọrúnmílà created the sixteen-cowry divination system and gave it to Ọṣùn as a reward for saving his life. In this particular verse, it was after Ọrúnmílà had created the sixteen-cowry system for Ọṣùn 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 Ôsun and Ôrümilà as contained in Ogbèsá, especially because it relates to the importance of egréindíñójùn in the Ifá divination system.

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

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

Báyìí ní Ôrümilà óún Ôsun bá sùn mó raa wọ́n.
Ôrümilà ní trí oore tó sè fún níjẹlọ, 5
Kọ sírú oore kan tó tún le tó èyìn mó.
Kín ní ósun ibá sè fúnwè Ôsun báyìí o?
Idí eléyìí pátáki ló mú kí Ôrümilà

Ô dá egréindíñójùn síle.
Lá bá kó o lé Ôsun lòwá.
Nímíú gbogbo eñòra òọsà tí í lo egréindíñójùn,
Kó sì ókan tó ní in saájú Ôsun.
Ifá ló sí kó o fún Ôsun
Pé kó máa dá a.

Káun náá o máá fi sàvẹ́wá.
Èyí ní Ifá fi san oore lákọ́ẹkọ́ ná.
Báyìí ló fi jè pé Ifá péltú Ôsun

Èsìkan kò le ní ààrin araà wọ́n

Ní Ôrümilà bá fẹ Ôsun níyáwó.
Nífá bá dì ọṣù Ôsun
Nímíú gbogbo ìyéwò pátàpáta,
Egréindíñójùn ló sìkẹ́jì Ifá.¹

According to this particular story in Ogbèsá, even though Ôrümilà was the one who created egréindíñójùn, this system of divination later received its own àṣẹ² from Olódùmarè. It happened as follows:

Nígbá tó bá sì dí ìdún kẹréindíñójùn kẹrindíñójùn
Every sixteen years
Ní Olódùmarè, Òlófin òrun, maa à gbé
Olódùmarè, Òlófin of heaven,³ used to

¹ Egréindíñójùn is next in rank to Ifá.
² Òlófin of heaven
³ Òlófin of heaven
The Bag of Wisdom

Subject diviners of earth to a test. 5
To find out whether they were telling lies to the inhabitants of the earth
Or whether they were telling the truth. 10
This test involved
Calling on Òrùnmílà and other diviners of the earth.

Olódùmarè would say that he wanted to see all of them.
When they arrived, 15
Olódùmarè would ask them to divine for him.
So, Olódùmarè asked Òrùnmílà to divine for him.
When Òrùnmílà finished divining, 20
Olódùmarè asked, “Who is next?”
Òrùnmílà said that the next person was his partner
Who was a woman.

Olódùmarè then answered, “Is she also a diviner?” 25
To which Òrùnmílà replied, “That is true.”
Olódùmarè then asked her to divine for him.
When Òṣùn examined Olódùmarè, 30
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 Ìfá.

Olódùmarè asked Òrùnmílà, “What is this one?” 35
Òrùnmílà then explained to Olódùmarè
How he honored Òṣùn with the sixteen cowries.
Olódùmarè said, “It is all right.”
He further said that even though she did not go into details,
He, Olódùmarè gave his assent to it.
He added, “From today on and forever, 40
Even if what eèèrínìnlóògùn says may not be detailed,
Anybody who disbelieves it
Would see the consequences instantly.

It must not wait till the following day.” 50
This is why the predictions of eèèrínìnlóògùn come to pass quickly
Even though the stories may not be impressive.
That was how eèèrínìnlóògùn received Òṣùn
Directly from Olódùmarè.
We will now turn our attention to myths of Ifá divination which tell us about the importance of Òṣùn in Yorùbá religion generally and how Òṣetùúrá became the representative of Òṣùn in Yorùbá divination and sacrifice. The full story goes as follows:

When the Òrìṣà first came to the earth, they must have arrived in waves—not all the four hundred-and-one Òrìṣà arrived at once. In any case, according to this myth from the Odù Òṣetùúrá, there were only seventeen Òrìṣà in the first party, and Òṣùn was the seventeenth. Olódùmarè gave instructions to the Òrìṣà 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 Òṣùn 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Yorùbá</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When they arrived on earth,</td>
<td>Wànl délè ayé,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They created a sacred forest for Orò.</td>
<td>Wànl lagbó orí,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They created a sacred forest for Òpà.</td>
<td>Wànl lagbó òpà.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They made a small road leading to Òfè.</td>
<td>Wànl lánà gbóóró ìtìfẹ̀ ñà.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thus sent people to make okun beads.</td>
<td>Wànl rán ní okìn,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They sent people to make brass objects.</td>
<td>Wànl rán 'nni' ò̀gè.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>But nobody involved Òṣùn in anything.</td>
<td>Èníkàn ó kẹ sí Òṣùn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whereas Òṣùn was the person taking care of them</td>
<td>Èníkàn níi sì i máá à tójù wọn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving them food and other things.</td>
<td>Lò́tìjè, níwá, lèyìn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All the things which the Òrìṣà were doing, none was successful.</td>
<td>Gbogbo ohun tí wọn sè, kò gùn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They prayed for rain, but it did not rain.</td>
<td>Wànl pọ̀jọ, ójọ̀ ò rò.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bitterness engulfed the earth.</td>
<td>Kíkan kíkan gbàyé,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restlessness took over the streets of the city.</td>
<td>Òjọ́jọ́ ó gbóè.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They exclaimed “Did Olódùmarè tell us a lie? What is this? We are doing everything according to his instructions.”</td>
<td>Wànl ní hà! Olódùmarè è ha jé òpurò fàwọn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They 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.</td>
<td>Ènní kíìn lèyìn?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They then asked whether they involved the only woman among them in all they were doing. But Òrùnmìlà replied that since she was a woman, they did not involve her. To which Olódùmarè replied as follows:</td>
<td>Bó wí wí káwọn ò sè è láwọn ní sè è.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Òrìṣà then decided to send Òrùnmìlà to Olódùmarè to find out what actually happened. When Òrùnmìlà 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 Òrùnmìlà replied that since she was a woman, they did not involve her. To which Olódùmarè replied as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Olódùmarè said that he was a creator</td>
<td>Òlódùmarè ní dánídáni lọ̀ìn,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>But he would never create any person or thing twice.</td>
<td>Óṣùn é dáni lèjìmeji.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He told Òrùnmìlà to go back to his colleagues</td>
<td>Ó ní è pàdà sàhùùn,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And that all of them should go and beg Òṣùn.</td>
<td>Ó ní è rẹ̀è bẹ̀ ë.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When Örunmilà got to the earth, he reported back to his colleagues, and all of them started to beg Ösun, but Ösun did not yield until Örunmilà appealed to her. She said:

Begin to beg your ori and your creator
So that the fetus which was in her womb
Would be delivered as a male child.
She assured them that if it was a male child,
Their matters would from then on be straight.
But if it was born as a female child,
War would begin in earnest.13

Örunmilà reported back to his colleagues what Ösun told him. When Oosaala looked at Ösun’s womb with his awo he found a baby girl there. He then pointed his ado asure to Ösun’s womb, and commanded that fetus to change into male with immediate effect. When Ösun 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 Örunmilà, the father, also carried the baby and named him Ösun’s e’tọ̀rọ́. He, Örunmilà, carried the baby with him wherever he went. Whenever anybody was to be initiated as an Òṣà priest, Ösun’s e’tọ̀rọ́ must be involved. Whenever anybody was making a sacrifice, Ösun’s e’tọ̀rọ́, the son of Ösun, must be invoked last before the sacrifice was delivered to Esu. If any person was suffering from illness, as soon as Ösun’s e’tọ̀rọ́ touched the person that person would be well instantaneously. Ösun’s e’tọ̀rọ́ is today a minor Odu of Òṣà but he governs all sacrifices and rituals of Òṣà. Ösun 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,
They must not know Orò,
And they must not enter the shrine of
Éégún.16

Wọn ọ̀ gbòdọ̀ moró,
They must not be observed as a taboo.
Wọn ọ̀ sì gbòdọ̀ wọlẹ́ Éégún
But all other things you are doing,
You must involve Ösun in them.

Pé kéégún ọ́ m̀ òjú wọ́n jàde.
From today on, all women without any exception,
O dèewọ́.
They must not know Orò,
Šùghọn gbòdọ̀ nkan yòò wù ti ẹ̀ bá ní ẹ̀, But all other things you are doing,
E e gbòdọ̀ mó fì ti Ọṣùn sè.
You must involve Ösun in them.
Layé bá ẹ̀ gùn rẹ̀.
Their lives then became smooth.
Wọn ní bòníyàn bá ní gùnýàn,
They said, “If someone is pounding yams
Tí ọ̀ fì Ọṣùn sè,
Without the knowledge of Ösun,
Iyán ọ̀ wọn a lènṣọ. His/her pounded yam will not be smooth.
Bí onìrọ̀kà bá ní rọkà, If someone is preparing ìkà food
Tí ọ̀ fì Ọṣùn sè,
Without involving Ösun in it,
Ọkàa rè ọ̀ sì mèrè. His/her food will not come out fine.
A fímọ̀ jò tÒṣùn o. We will involve Ösun in whatever we do.
A fímọ̀ jò tÒṣùn o. We will involve Ösun in all our deliberations.
Iyee wà,Our great mother,
Who must be present at every important deliberation.
We will involve Òṣun in all our deliberations.

Agberegede àjúbá, Àjúbá agberegede

Divined for Òṣun Sèngèsì,
Owner of a hair comb decorated with ìyín.

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?
Òṣun, whose other name is Òwújì,
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 Òṣun Originate the ìfá Divination System?

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

\begin{verbatim}
20 A bà wọn pé nínú.
	A fimò jọ tÓṣun.
	Agberegède ìjúbá,
	Àjúbá agberegede

25 A dífá fún Òṣun sèngèsì,
	Ó ó òrìṣà àmìímọ̀ṣì è jé.
	a ni n ràbọ,

30 Tí o kẹ sèlèbọ.
	Óṣun, Òwújì,
	A kùnlẹ,
	Ní o sọdè pé títí.
	E jẹ wọlé fòbìnrin.

35 Òhinrin ló bí wa
	Ká tòó dèniyàn.
\end{verbatim}

A wise person tied ídè,²⁰ but it disintegrated.
A sage tied ídè, it became loose.
Only a person who leans his back on Òpẹ
Will tie ídè which will last for long.

Ifá divination was performed for Òrúnmilà
When he and Òṣun were searching for wisdom.

It was Òlódúmarè who called the four hundred divinities (of the right)
And the two hundred divinities (of the left).
Ólódúmarè summoned them to heaven.
When they arrived there,
He told them that he wanted to give them deep wisdom and power.

He told the Òrìṣà 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.
He told them that nineteen days hence he would throw down a bag of wisdom onto the earth. But whether he would throw it into a forest, or a grassland, or into a river, or into a town, or on a road, he would not tell them exactly where. Olodumare 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.” They asked the diviners to check both of them out. The diviners asked Òrúnmílà and Òṣun to perform sacrifice. With the big garments which they were wearing, each should offer a goat, and a house rat.

As well as two hundred-and-one ẹkẹ full of cowries for each person. Òrúnmílà 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?” Òṣun refused to perform sacrifice.

Óṣun’s other name is Ajànà, was his own garment, and surrendered it for sacrifice. He also used a house rat and money for the sacrifice.
Wọn wá àpò ọgbón títi,
Wọn ó rí i.
Gbogbo àwọn inínmọ́́lẹ́ yókú náá,
100

Wọn ó rí i.
Wọn wá a dé ègbá ajá.
Wọn wá a dēsà adié,
Elómú wá a dé Iko Áwúsi.
Wọn wá a dé Idrórómú Áwúṣẹ́.

Wọn wá à dé Iwo nran
Nibi tí ojúmọ́ tí mọ́ ọ́n wá.
Wọn ó rí i.
Nígbá tí dijó kan, ní eká bá sí bó síbí èwú
Ọṣùn tó fì kó,

Ní eká bá jẹ́ ẹ́pò ẹgbá àyàa re lábèmá.
Ní ojú kejí, ní wọn hā tún mūra,
Wọn tún bèrè sí i wá ẹpò ọgbón yí.

Ní Ọṣùn bá rí i.

“Han-in! Ẹpò ọgbón niyí!”
Júá, ọ gbè e jú ẹ́pò ẹ́yà ìwú àgbà.

Ló bá fún ọ́n.

Níbi tí gbè ní sáré é dà igi kójá,
Dátilán jájá,
Pórá ní ẹ́pò ọgbón bá ó ọ̀ tẹ̀
Ní ọgíàgàn ihi tékú ti jẹ́ ẹ́pò.

Ọṣùn sí ní kẹ́ è pe Ọ̀rúnmilà
Pé “Ọ̀rúnmilà, Àjáńà,
Máa bò o, máa bò,
Ọ̀ún tí nápò ọgbón o.”

Bí Ọ̀rúnmilà tí ní lọ,
Ló bá sí rí ẹ́pò ọgbón un nílè.
Ló bá jú ú síntú ẹ́pò èwú àti.

Nígbá tí wón dèlé,

Ọ̀rúnmilà ní, “Ọ̀ṣùn, jẹ́ kí n wo ẹ́pò ọ̀hún.
Ọ̀ṣùn ní láyé yíít kòkùmìn ọ́rí i.

Ènì tí ó báà sì rí i,
Yóó màa nígbá éku,

Ilòga eja,
Ilòga eyè,
Ilòga èran,
Ọ̀póolọ́pọ́ ówó,

Ọ̀rúnmilà bẹ̀ è bẹ̀ è bẹ̀ è,

Kò gbà.
Ló bá padá síntú ilèè tiè.
LÓṣùn bá ní kí òùn ó tíè mú ẹ́pò náá jàde

They looked for the bag of wisdom,
They did not see it.
All the other Óríṣá
Did not see it either.
They searched for it up to Ègbá ajá.22
They went as far as Èsà adié.23
Some went as far as Êkó Áwúsi.
Others searched for it in Ídòrómú Àwúṣẹ́.
While some looked for it in Íwònán
From where the day breaks24
But they did not see it.
One day a house rat went to the garment
Which Òṣùn 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, Òṣùn 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.
Òṣùn was calling on Òrúnmilà,
Saying, “Òrúnmilà, whose other name is
Àjáńà,
Come quickly, come quickly.
I have seen the bag of wisdom.”
As Òrúnmilà 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,
Òrúnmilà said, “Òṣùn let me see the bag.”
But Òṣùn 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.
Òrúnmilà begged her for long,
But she did not yield.
He then returned to his own house.
When Òṣùn tried to take out the bag from
her pocket,
The Bag of Wisdom

In the Ifá verse quoted above, Ọṣun was the first person to find the bag of wisdom, but when the bag slipped through the broken pocket of her big garment, Ṫúnmílà accidentally stumbled on it and kept it. One can speculate as to the morality of Ṫúnmílà keeping for himself what should belong to his wife. But we must remember that before she discovered that she had lost the bag, Ọṣun 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 Ọṣun 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 Ọṣun? Did Ṭúnmílà 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 Odú of Ẹrindínlógún and those of Ifá, it would seem that the Odú of Ifá are based on those of Ẹrindínlógún, and not the other way round. Ẹrindínlógún is based on sixteen single signs of Ifá such as Òdí, Òrosún, Òwónrín, etc.; except Òjì Ògbè 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 ọjú odù (major odù) or as ọmọ odù (minor odù). It stands to reason to say that a single sign such as Òdí

I
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 Ẹrindínlógún 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 Ẹrindínlógún 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 ẹse to Ẹrindínlógún stated thus,

From today on and forever
Even if what Ẹrindínlógún 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 Ọrìṣà of fertility. This is true. In fact, a recent chanter of Ọṣun’s literature refers to her as

*Iyá Ọbóhinrin gbatô.*

*Ládékojú, Ọbóhinrin 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 Òṣun as a mother of many children both in the biological and religious sense. The city of Òóró²⁹ (now simply called Òró) was where Òṣun 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, Òṣun was always found standing up.

Ifá also speaks of Òṣun as a benevolent mother. She has the habit of bestowing wealth, fame, and honor on her adherents. A verse of Òtẹ̀rẹ̀ Ṭọ̀ba tells us how Òṣun 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 Òjìyàòmègùn; he had two apprentices: Ìfọ̀n, Ifá priest of Ìdó, and Dùùrù, Ifá priest of Lìkì. When Òṣun 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 Òjìyàòmègùn had traveled out to a far place. Òṣun 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 Òjìyàòmègùn. When he did not arrive, she ordered her servants to dig a very deep pit inside which she carefully kept Òjìyàòmègùn’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 Òṣun is saluted as

\[
\begin{align*}
Oọrẹ̀ ẹ̀yẹ̀ Òṣun. \\
Ọ̀ wa yanrìn, wa yanrìn, \\
Kọwọ́ sì.²⁹
\end{align*}
\]

Hail the benevolent mother Òṣun.
She who digs up sand, digs up sand,
And keeps money there (for her own people).

The benevolence of Òṣun goes beyond bestowing money and riches on people. She nourishes her own just as she nourished the original sixteen Ṫrìṣà who first arrived on earth with Òṣun as the seventeenth. She nourishes people with different kinds of vegetables, such as yanrìn and tete (special vegetables of Òṣun) 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 Òṣun River.

We must not make the mistake of thinking that Òṣun is always meek, quiet, and long-suffering. Sometimes she can be a fierce warrior. A verse of Ògùndá Ìwòrì (Ògùndá aràà Dó) tells us how Òṣun Àpara (otherwise known as Yemèsé³¹) 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 Yemèsé is celebrated in Ìdó with the following song:

\[
\begin{align*}
Yemèsé ìlè Ìdó págùn ra o. \\
Òṣun àpàrà págùn ra lómì. \\
Ò págùn ra.³³
\end{align*}
\]

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

To understand this ancient Ôrìṣà 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, Ôsun is the icon not only of women, but of all creation.

*Omi o!*  
*Ota o!*  
*Edan o!*  
*E ṣe re yẹyẹ Ôsun o.*  

**Omi o!**  
**Ota o!**  
**Edan o!**  
**E ṣe re yẹyẹ Ôsun o.**  

**O! sacred water.**  
**O! sacred stones.**  
**O! sacred edan (symbol of Ôgbōni).**  

**All hail the benevolent mother.**

**Notes**

1. Collected from Babalọlá Ifatọógún, Òlobúú, near Òṣogbo, Nigeria.
2. *Ase.* A spiritual and magical power with which Olódùmarè created the universe, and copies of which he gave to the Ôrìṣà. Human beings can also access *aṣe* through the right type of moral and spiritual connection.
3. Ôlöfin of heaven. Another name for Olódùmarè. Òdùduwa, the founder of Ilé-Ife, is Ôlöfin ayé (Ôlöfin of the earth which means law-giver of the earth).
4. Continuation of the same verse from Ôgbèsa chanted by Babalọlá Ifatọógún.
5. Ôrò. 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 Ôrò and Egúngún.
6. Ôpà. A secret society which originated from Ilé-Ife.
7. A small road which led to Ifé. In ancient times small paths led to Ifé from other parts of Yorubaland since it was forbidden for ordinary people to visit Ilé-Ife unless they were summoned there for important rituals. This is why there were no broad caravan routes leading to Ifé.
8. Ôkùn beads. A costly bead manufactured in Ifé in the past. There is at least one family carrying on the tradition in Ilé-Ife today.
9. Brass object. Ilé-Ife was an important center for the production of brass objects in ancient times.
10. Collected from Ônìọṣùn of Òlobúú.
11. Part of the same excerpt chanted by Ônìọṣùn.
12. Continuation of the same verse chanted by Ônìọṣùn.
13. Perhaps Ôsun said that war would begin in earnest if she had a baby girl because instead of one woman, the sixteen Ôrìṣà 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 ivoran) is a sacred object of Obatálá with which he sees the future and other hidden things.

15. Adó ọṣùre (sometimes also called iwo ńba) also belongs to Obatálá, and with it he generates ideas which his iwo ńṣe helps to bring to fruition. Obatálá holds iwo ńba (or ọṣùre) on the right, and iwo ńṣe 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 Amusánán who can also know everything about Egúngún even without being initiated as ṣe.

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

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


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

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

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

23. Esà adié. Another place frequently mentioned in Ifá verses.

24. Èko Àwúsi, Èdòrómì Àwúṣẹ, and Èwónrán from where the day breaks. Some Ifá priests think that the Americas correspond to Èko Àwúsi. Èdòrómì Àwúṣẹ refers to Africa, and Èwónrán from where day breaks corresponds to Australia.

25. Àgbádá dress. The flowing garment worn by Yorúbá men. Women now wear a similar flowing garment but without a breast pocket.


27. It is the belief of the Yorúbá that pronouncements emanating from ètònlógún come to pass more quickly than those of Ifá.


29. The town of Òró is situated in the northeast of Yorubaland.

30. This is part of an Ifá chant rendered by Babalá Ifátoogún of Òlobúú.

31. Yemesé. An Òriṣá of Èdòo-Fáborò who is related to Òṣun.

32. Èdó. There are many towns and villages known as Èdó in Yorubaland. This verse, however, relates to Èdòo-Fáborò in Èkìtì state.

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

34. Ègbóni society. An important secret society of Yorubaland. Òṣun is believed to be one of the founders of the Ègbóni society. That is why she had her own èdan (symbol of Ègbóni). Anybody who is protected by Èṣù cannot be judged by the Ègbóni. Other Òriṣá who are intimately related to Ègbóni are Ifá and Obétálá.

References


