Society of Young Nigerian Writer

Yoruba Fact-Finder

Compilations of Yoruba History, culture and tradition

Compiled by: Wole Adedoyin
THE YORUBA PEOPLE AND VOODOO(JUJU) CULTURE.

Voodoo, a derivative of Yoruba, originated in many years ago. It is composed of many sectors, including medicine and religion. Voodoo and the Yoruba religion are alike in many aspects. There are many gods in the both religions, each controlling a different thing. Each god is from a different part of Africa. The medicinal and religious aspects are very closely related. Voodoo has a rich history, with each god having many intricate details.

The structure of voodoo was born in Haiti during the European colonization of Hispaniola. The forced immigration of African slaves from several different tribes provided the circumstances for the development of voodoo. The Europeans thought that separating the members of the tribes would break the community. However, the different tribes managed to come together as a result of the misery incurred by slavery ("Origins of Voodoo".

The essentials of voodoo originated in Yoruba long before the art of voodoo itself. However, it was not until the time of the slave trade that voodoo itself came to be. Voodoo is mingled and modified practices of many of the tribes of Africa. The word "voodoo" comes from a West African word, "vodun." Vodun means spirit. "This Afro-Caribbean religion mixed practices from many African ethnic groups such as the Fon, the Nago, the Ibos, Dahomeans, Congos, Senegalese, Haussars, Caplaous, Mondunges, Mandinge, Angolese, Libyans, Ethiopians, and the Malgaches ("Origins of Voodoo".

In voodoo, there are no accidents. Everything happens for a reason; everything has a life of its own. Everything is part of the One. Ancestors must be honored in voodoo ceremonies. Music and dance are key elements to voodoo ceremonies. It is used to express spirituality and the connection with divinity and the spirit world. Because one's ancestors are part of the spirit world, the voodoo art serves as a connection to one's history and
Voodoo is very powerful for those who believe it. It helped the Africans in Haiti to survive the persecution of the French slave owners. The revolution was conspired from it ("Origins of Voodoo").

Voodoo has had to fight to survive. Even though it is one of the world's oldest religions, it is viewed as barbaric, primitive, and sexually licentious. This, however, is mostly due to Europeans who are afraid of anything African. In many places, the practice of voodoo is punishable by death. However, in many parts of the world, voodoo still survives ("Origins of Voodoo").

The Yoruba religion, upon which much of voodoo is based, has many gods. There is actually one God, known as Olodumare. However, there are many other gods known as "Orishas" who are "personified aspects of nature and spirit." The main ones are Eleggua, Oggun, Ochosi, Obatala, Yemaya (or Yemalla), Oshun, Shango, Oya, Babalu Aiye, and Orula ("Yoruba Religion").

Eleggua is the owner of roads and opportunities. He is the god/human messenger. He is honored first in any ceremony because he has to approve all that is done. He is associated with the devil but is not evil. He is the trickster. Eleggua protects the home from danger and is kept in the house near the front door. Gifts are presented to him every Monday and on the third day of each month. Obtala is the orisha of peace, harmony, and purity and is the father of the orishas. He owns the world. Sometimes Obtala is seen as female. Yemaya is the goddess of the sea and moon. She is the mother of the orishas. Yemaya provides wealth. She gives life and sustains the earth. Oshun is the goddess of love, sexuality, beauty, and diplomacy. She owns sweet waters. She is a great giver but hard to calm when angered. Shango is the fourth kind of Yoruba and is the thunder guard. His storms and lightning are purifying because of their
mortal terror. Oya is the goddess of the window, fire, and the thunderbolt. She represents female power. She is strong, courageous, and independent and can create tornadoes and hurricanes. Oya guards the gates of death ("Yoruba Religion").

The serpent is very prominent in the voodoo faith. The high priest or priestess expresses the serpent's power. In voodoo, natural phenomena are believed to possess holy significance ("Origins of Voodoo"). Drumming and dancing during celebrations prompt altars to be created. After the altars are created, food is offered to the orishas. The rhythms are directed to specific orishas while the people who are present sing call-and-response songs to the orishas. This causes them to descend and possess the priests and priestesses ("Yoruba Religion").

The altars for the orishas are very precise. The altar for Obtala uses transparent white fabric to denote unblemished honesty. It also includes staffs of white metals, tin and silver, a beaded crown, cement columns with silver stones, scepters, and swords. It also has crosses and candles borrowed from the Catholic faith. Obtala is compared with Jesus. Obtala is the first altar. Shango has the color red, a double headed axe, and a symbol of balance. Shango is the regulator of rules and is to remind practitioners not to lose control. His axe represents God's moral judgement ("Face of the Gods").

The ultimate altar is said to be the beach altars of Rio de Janeiro, which were built by thousands of practitioners on New Year's Eve to ask for blessings for the coming year. The miniature candle-lit altars are covered with flowers and adorned with champagne are dedicated to Yemaya and Oshun. They dramatize the ongoing 20th century fusion of African, Christian, and Native American icons ("Face of the Gods").

Voodoo medicine has roots in the Ifa Corpus, a religious text revealed by Orunmila, a mystic
prophet, from over 4,000 years ago in the ancient city of Ile-Ife. Ile-Ife is now known as Yorubaland. In the past 400 years, this practice has spread to South America and the Caribbean Islands. These healing practices are centered around things such as divination, prayer, spiritual baths, meditation, and herbal remedies. The ancient text of the Ifa Corpus is the foundation for the art of divine herbology. The purpose of Yoruba is to do more than just counteract the negative forces of disease, but also to achieve spiritual enlightenment and elevation. This is to free the soul ("Yorubic Medicine"📚).

Yoruba is has close ties with ancient Egypt. The history begins with the migration of an East African population across the Nile River area to the Niger River area, led by King Oduduwa. They settled peacefully in the Ile-Ife during the Bronze Age. It is believed that they originated in Egypt because of similarities in languages, religious beliefs, customs, and names of persons, places, and things. Some of the ancient papyri discovered hint at Egyptian origin as well.

Like many things in the Egyptian lifestyle, the development of science and medicine was led by priests and had very apparent magical origins. Charms were the preferred way to prevent and cure disease, rather than medicines. Disease was believed to be caused by possession by devils. Spells and the roots of some plants and other concoctions were used to treat them. It is now believed that the reason some of these spells worked were psychosomatic. For example, a cold could be exorcised by words such as

Depart, cold, son of a cold, thou who breakest
the bones, destroyest the skull, makest ill the
seven openings of the head! . . . Go out on the
floor, stink, stink, stink!
Besides just this spell, a foul tasting concoction was given to ward off the demon housed in the body ("Yorubic Medicines").

The Hippocratic Oath, taken by medical professionals still today, originated with Yorubic medicine. Also, the Rx signed on prescriptions today is from early Egyptian and Yorubic medicine. It means "I curse your health in retrograde," or death. It's good to know that our doctors wish death upon us. The ideal of Yorubic medicine was "that the qualities of animals or things are distributed throughout all their parts." This has magical principles ("Yorubic Medicine").

Public sanitation was first promoted at this time. However, their ideas and current ideas of public sanitation differ tremendously. The frequent use of enemas was of dire importance in Yorubic society. This principle was taken from the "ibis," a bird who counteracts the constipating quality of his food by using its extra long bill as a rectal syringe. However, they were beginning to make the connection between food and disease. Certain foods, in excess, can make one ill ("Yorubic Medicine").

The first fetal sex tests, though primitive, were conducted by an Egyptian herbalist. Urine was collected from the pregnant woman. However, the method was much different. Bags of wheat and bags of barley were soaked in the urine. If the barley sprouted, the child was going to be a female. If the wheat sprouted, the child would be male. This test was rediscovered and developed in 1933 ("Yorubic Medicine").

The frenzied dancing and music is the voodoo participants way of using their bodies to communicate with the Creator, nature, and spirits to continue to receive the gifts given to them for the medical and other purposes they are used. They are vehicles for carrying profound knowledge of the human spirit. Man is allowed to energize and intensify life to a surprising
degree. Europeans may be frightened by this because typical Europeans were brought up very
superstitious ("Yorubic Medicine").

Although many aspects of voodoo is in reality healthy and good, there are some aspects that
most people are rightly frightened by. Some aspects of voodoo are closely related to "black
magic." Voodoo curses are easily accessible online. They range from minor (bringing
unreasonable fear upon a person: Binding by Fear Ritual/ This is the image of my would be
victim/ it I hang from a single thread/ in a place no one shall see/ it will bring fear in the heart of
him who shall harm me/it will bring fear in the heart of him who would harm me/ He will be
binded by fear from harming me further/he will be binded by fear from harming me at all/ I will
tie a knot in the thread when I wish to secure the fear/ until I break it/so mote it be) to deadly
(Bones of Anger, Hex; Gather bones of chickens and dry them in the sun for a few days. Then
when you are ready to do this hex make sure you are worked up into a frenzy of anger and
hatred. This will add to the potency of your hex! Be thinking of all this while doing this hex and
when it says 'With these bones I now do crush" take a hammer or use your feet to stomp and
crush these bones as if they were your enemy before you! When you are done sweep them up
and place them in a bag. You will then want to sprinkle the dust and remains of the bones on
your enemies property around his house. If you have a bell ring it 3 times and say,
"I call upon the Ancient Ones from the great abyss to do my bidding/ I invoke Cuthalu, God of
Anger and the creatures of the underworld/ hear me now, /"Bones of anger, bones to dust/ full
of fury, revenge is just/ I scatter these bones, these bones of rage/ take thine enemy, bring him
pain/ I see thine enemy before me now/ I bind him, crush him, bring him down/ With these bones
I now do crush/ Make thine enemy turn to dust/ torment, fire, out of control/ With this hex I
curse your soul"/So mote it be!" ("Black Magic"."
The Yoruba people, from whom as has already been said, much of voodoo evolved, currently occupy the southwestern corner of Nigeria. Their theology states that humankind originated in Ile-Ife, which is still part of Yoruban land. They only recently have begun to consider themselves a single people rather than merely citizens of Oyo, Benin, Yagba, and other nearby cities ("Yoruba History").

After voodoo spread so quickly in South America and the Caribbean, it was sometime before it began to spread through the United States. The reason it did not originally is because the United States was much more violent in reprimanding the slaves who practiced voodoo. There was a potential for the death penalty. Recently, though, the religion has undergone a surge of popularity and interest in the United States. In many places, the voodoo religion was strong enough, even with the violent punishments, to survive virtually intact, along with all of the rites, beliefs, music, dances, and myths of the Yoruba origin. Many transplanted voodoo-ists have been able to travel back to the origins of the faith ("Yoruba History").

Voodoo is an interesting faith. Those who practice it become very strong people. It is very practical, with the followers not leaving anything to chance. The gods control everything and everything has a reason. The Yoruba and Voodoo faiths will likely be along for a very long time.