

PREFACE

This is the first published collection of Yoruba folksongs and sacred chants from the island of Trinidad in the Caribbean, and also the first time that an attempt has been made to translate these texts and to examine their references and their literary quality.

Several Yoruba cultural and linguistic specialists have assisted my own efforts in the translation and reconstruction of these texts. Chief among them are Ẹṣẹ Nadi, Tokunbo Adetunji (née Shyllon) and Ademola Onitokuta.

This collection follows on the pioneer research into Shango religious music undertaken in the 1950s by the Trinidad choreographer, Beryl McBurnie. Some of the chants she collected were recorded by Emory Cook Folkways Records of the USA. Shango liturgy also forms part of the extensive Caribbean folkmusic tape recordings made by Alan Lomax, the American musicologist, in the same period. And the Trinidad singer, Edric Connor published a few in his Songs from Trinidad in 1958.

All the same, where African song-texts have been collected in the Caribbean the focus has tended to be exclusively religious. On the other hand, this collection reveals a wider range of human interest and lyric expression.

These songs and poems, the folktale (122) included, have been treated as a body of oral literature. In this

Virtually all the material in this collection was tape-recorded by Maureen Warner-Lewis between 1966 and 1972 from elderly people in various parts of Trinidad - north-east, north-west, Central Trinidad, and County Victoria.

connection, the formulaic nature of Yoruba poetic expression has been pointed out in the footnotes to the texts; at the same time the presentation of variant lines and multiple text versions bear testimony to a counter-vailing flexibility in oral literary reproduction.

The footnotes, in addition, attempt to draw attention, from time to time, to poetic devices such as word- and sound-play, to organizational devices, as well as to grammatical and language peculiarities.

Furthermore, the footnotes as well as the various section introductions aim to sketch in the cultural, conceptual, historical and socio-political data to which the literature alludes or on which it is predicated. These data relate both to the independent, monarchical, urban-cum-agricultural Yorubaland experience as well as to conditions in the plantation-cum-subsistence agricultural economy of nineteenth-century British colonial Trinidad.

Translation of the material has been approached with a view to producing a simple yet rhythmic English equivalent to the Yoruba originals.

The source of these chants, songs, poems, and the folktale has been indicated below each item, and information distinguishing song from poem, or indication of original composition has been included in the footnotes.

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