PREFACE

What follows is an attempt to depict the religion of African-American Òrîşà worshippers in their Yoruba homeland at a comparatively early period, round about the middle of the nineteenth century. Yoruba religion is today a widespread religious tradition with an extensive following in Nigeria and Benin, Brazil, the West Indies, North America and Europe. Yoruba religious images have become part of world art and culture, fetching high prices in the sale rooms of London, Munich and New York. It is equally known for its numerous Òrîşà—deities, numina, entities or hierophanies—which have shown a great vitality and flexibility in gaining and keeping hold of the religious imagination. Numbers of adherents in the Yoruba homeland may have declined since the nineteenth century, as those of Muslims and Christians have increased, yet the Yoruba Òrîşà cults have largely retained their identity. Over centuries of dispersal they have taken root in the Americas where the numbers of Òrîşà worshippers are increasing rapidly. Yoruba religious cosmology continues to inspire modern Nigerian writers such as the Nobel Prize winner, Wole Soyinka. Its emphasis on "cosmic totality" akin to that in European antiquity and Asia, has a kind of parallel to ideas of globalization in the contemporary politico-economic imagination.

The early study of Yoruba religion from the outside goes back to the travellers and visitors to Yorubaland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Certainly, the early accounts were fleeting impressions, coloured by strong preconceptions and obtained by people 'passing through'—rather like the tourists of today, though not in quite such haste. In the nineteenth century we begin to have material from more permanently-placed missionaries and colonial agents. Towards the end of that century and in the first decades of the present one, there appear the first general surveys by both Yoruba and non-Yoruba. These include James Johnson, of Ijebu origin, on *Yoruba Heathenism* in 1899 and the Scottish missionary S.S. Farrow's *Fact, Fancies and Fetish*, which appeared in 1926. The titles of such works are indicative of the often crude and emotive terminology employed at this time. More wide-ranging studies appear about the same time from the German scholar and traveller Leo Frobenius in *The Voice of Africa* (1913) or *Atlantische Götterlehre* (1926). In the second half of the twentieth century, more objective studies of Yoruba religion have burgeoned, both from Yoruba and non-Yoruba scholars, occasioning a substantial bibliographical article by the Yoruba, Jacob Olupona, who lists a vast number of books and
articles on the subject (Olupona, 1993). Many of these will be noticed in the work that follows.

What the present work proposes to do is to go back behind the works of the last hundred years to material on Yoruba religion provided by the missionaries in the mid-nineteenth century, material not so far employed for this purpose. It seeks to arrange that material in a phenomenology. Such an undertaking is in the spirit of Husserl, one of the founders of phenomenology, whose concepts of intentionality (against ideology), immediacy (against indirect reporting) and the world as it is (bracketing out value-judgments) (Sommer, 1980), are reflected in the catechists and pastors' reports in so far as these are marked by unreflected subjectivity. The strong value judgments expressed are bracketed out as far as possible to reveal the way the world of the Òrîṣà worshippers actually presented itself.

Towards seeing Yoruba Religion as a World Religion: The phenomenological approach provides in addition a kind of yard stick by which to measure the status of Yoruba religion in terms of other religious traditions. Yoruba religion is an ethnic or West African religion and yet it is more than this. For today the Òrîṣà cults number many millions of followers in the Americas as well as in Africa and have taken on an international and inter-continental character. Numerically, Òrîṣà worshippers actually outstrip several of the 'world' religions, including Judaism, Sikhism and Zoroastrianism. It is more than ever the time to abandon finally any one-sided view of world religions East and West (Ling, 1968), and to accord Yoruba religion and any others like it the status of a world religion.

Some practical questions: Where an incident appears in more than one context, it is described in full at some point, sometimes set out there in stages, otherwise it is referred to more briefly. Any reduplication has been reduced to a minimum. The various references to an incident are very often indicated by cross-referencing in the footnotes. Italics are the author's own unless specified as found in the original text.

Yoruba orthography: In many cases one has had to abide by what is given in the sources. In general one has tried to exercise care, without attempting consistency in the modern revised orthography. Òrîṣà in italics is used generically, plain Òrîṣà usually stands for that of the worshipper. Similarly a distinction is sometimes made between oyinbo, strangers in general, and Oyinbo, specific ones i.e. certain catechists or pastors. The names of the Òrîṣà are used with care, as is the case with some titles and place names. But commonly-used place names, such as Ibadan, are without tonal marks, and sometimes the English form 'sh' is used instead of 's'. One was long unable to find an 's' with a dot under it nor to place one under an 's' on one's computer. Early on Yoruba orthographers placed a small stroke under the 's', 'e' and 'o'; and this I managed to do through the help of Dr. Chris Hall of Leicester University's Department of
German. For the measure of correctness achieved with Yoruba orthography I am further indebted to Dr Oluremi Anteyi, formerly lecturer in linguistics, University of Port Harcourt, now living in London. For the mistakes and inconsistencies however I am solely responsible.

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P.McK.

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On the acclamation, Hail Orisha (Hêpà 'Mâlê), see below, Chap. IX, Sn. A2.