



IFE AXE Creative Designs
By *Gerardo*
Jewelry Inspired by The Orisha

Chapter Four

THE GODS (Orishas)

We are the gods' children.

When Olodumare sends out the souls that will be born on this earth, the Orishas pick and choose among them, selecting the ones they wish for their own. They become our parents.

One does not choose an Orisha. The Orisha chooses his or her "child". Insisting on worshipping and being the "child" of an Orisha who has not recognized the initiate produces absolutely terrible results. The tales tell of physical and psychological disturbances leading to suicide.

No Santeria ceremony, no matter how simple, begins or ends without the ancestors being thanked and the spirits of the dead being placated. The dead are among us on a very intimate relationship. The ghost of an enemy in life is to be feared in death, having more power dead than alive.

The following are necessarily brief descriptions of the major Orishas and ancillary spirits. Geographical differences and inconsistencies in the names and nature of the Orishas are unavoidable in a religion without a written canon. But, it is diversity that has maintained Santeria alive through the centuries. The information is broken down into a few groupings:

The Saint

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The Catholic persona assumed by the African Deity to escape the wrath of the Inquisition.

The Day of the Week

Each Orisha has a favorite day. This is the most propitious time to make offerings, burn candles, consult the oracles, and perform the rites specified through the oracles.

Colors and Collars (Ilekes)

Each Orisha owns a collar of a specific color and shape. The Orisha's "child" must wear it around his or her neck. The collars should not be kept in the pocket or purse or inside a balled up handkerchief. Care should be taken that they remain unsnarled. When they are not being worn, they should be placed on the Orisha's tureen. When there are no tureens, they should be carefully laid out on a white cloth.

The collars are not to be lent to anyone. A Santero or Santera should never sleep, have sex, or shower with them on.

An Orisha's colors are the same as those of the beads that make up his or her Ileke. The Orisha's "child" should wear clothes in the colors that are pleasing to his or her patron. The Orisha's tureen and implements should also be of the appropriate color.

Sacrificial Animals

Each Orisha prefers to feed on the blood of a particular group of animals. His or her sacrifices should consist of those animals.

Sacrificial Food

Like their worshippers, Orishas have their favorite foods and are extremely pleased to have them presented as offerings.

Herbs

Each Orisha has power over a group of healing and magical herbs. The Omiero used to wash the Orisha's Otanés should be made up of the herbs that "belong" to the Orisha.

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The most common recourse for a Santero or any believer in Santeria when confronted by a problem whose solution does not require an animal sacrifice or any other specific Ebo, is to prepare an herb bath (Ewe).

Used externally as a body cleanser, a spirit cleanser, or to clean the house and internally as medicinal potions, they are the most economic and fastest method for resolving problems and dissipating evils.

When working with herbs for various Orishas, it is important that the herbs be piled separately until they are ready to be mixed in the final Omiero. Worshipers also often wash in their Orisha's Omiero to regain their health or to cleanse themselves from impurities.

The herbs for the Ewe or the entire Omiero should be prepared in a deep mortar or over the soup tureen belonging to the Orisha being petitioned. They are never boiled and never used dry. The Otanés may be washed as frequently and as thoroughly as the person invoking the Orisha feels is needed.

As the stones are being washed, a Mayuba should be made to the Orisha that is being washed. Animal sacrifices are not required before or after the stones are washed.

Apataki

These are the traditional African tales of the Orishas and their relationships among themselves and with men. They make up a constantly shifting mosaic of loves, betrayals and intrigue.

Ornaments

The "tools" used by the Orishas and their worshippers to focus their power.

And, a note about the music that always accompanies the ceremonies:

The drum is the music of the African gods. Everything in Santeria is done to the beat of the sacred drums. They take the worshippers' messages to the Orishas.

When the Orishas grant a request, the drums are played in thanksgiving and in joy. They are also played next to the sickbed, at funerals, and for the spirits of the dead.

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Regardless of the occasion, the drums must be well fed and honored before and after they are played. The offerings are made to Osain, the Orisha who "owns" the drums. When the drums are fed and happy, they sound better.



OLODUMARE (Olofin, Olorun)

Saint: Jesus Christ or the dove of the Holy Spirit.

Day of the Week: Thursday.

Colors and Collars (Ilekes): All and none.

Sacrificial Animal: None. No animal sacrifices of any type.

Sacrificial Food: None.

Herbs: None.

Ornaments: None.

Apataki:

Olodumare, even though he was king of the other

gods, had a mortal fear of mice. The other gods thought that a king, especially their king, should not be afraid of anything as unimportant and weak as a mouse.

"Olodumare has turned into a weak old woman," they said, for they believed it shameful to fear mice. "It's time that we took away his power and named another king." Besides, they wanted total dominion of the world.

Things continued as they were until the principal Orishas got together again.

"We must take away Olodumare's power," they said. "He is getting old and weak."

Everyone agreed, again. There was a problem, though. Olodumare was old, but he certainly was not weak. He was fierce and terrible and not one of the other Orishas would dare to challenge him in combat.

The Orishas thought and talked and thought some more until one, no one knows who came up with an idea.

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"Let's scare Olodumare to death," said the unknown Orisha.

"How do you propose to do that?" asked the other Orishas, since they themselves were deathly afraid of Olodumare.

"Olodumare is afraid of mice," said the Orisha.

"Everyone knows that," exclaimed the disappointed Orishas. "We thought that you had an idea."

"If he is afraid of one mouse," continued the Orisha, "what would happen if we invite him over to our house and fill it with mice?"

"Tell us," said the other Orishas.

"If Olodumare finds himself in a house full of mice, he will be so afraid that he will run away from here or die. We'll take over his house and we will be the masters of the world."

"That's a wonderful plan," they all exclaimed. Putting their heads together, the Orishas began to plot how they were going to lure Olodumare to their house and scare him to death with mice.

They forgot that Elegua was by the door. He lived by the door, since he is the Orisha that rules roads, routes and entrances. They had forgotten all about him. He heard all their plans.

What did Elegua do? What did the trickster Orisha do? He knew the day that Olodumare was coming. He had listened to the other Orishas' plans. He waited and hid behind the door.

Olodumare arrived, happy to have been invited to a party. He knew that he was not as popular among the Orishas as he used to be. Little did he know that the other Orishas were hidden, waiting to release hundreds of mice. The moment he stepped inside, the door was slammed shut at Olodumare's back. The mice were released.

Olodumare was terrified and ran around the house screaming, "The mice are attacking. The mice are attacking!"

He tried to find a place to hide, but every box he opened and every closet he ran into just had more and more mice.

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Olodumare ran head first at the door, ready to demolish it, just so that he could escape the tormenting rodents. Just as head and door were going to meet, Elegua stepped out and stopped his panicked rush.

"Stop, Olodumare," said Elegua, putting his arms around the terrified old Orisha. "No mouse will harm you."

"Yes they will. Yes they will," cried Olodumare.

"Watch," said Elegua. He started eating the mice.

Elegua ate and ate and ate until he had eaten all the mice.

Olodumare, whose fear had turned to fury, demanded, "Who dared do this to me?"

Elegua said nothing. Smiling like a happy cat, he pointed out the hiding places of all the plotting Orishas.

Olodumare immediately punished them in a very terrible and painful manner. After he grew tired of watching them hop and scream, he turned to Elegua and said, "Now, what can I do for you?"

Elegua scuffed the floor and shook his head. "Oh, nothing," he said.

"Nothing!" roared Olodumare. "You saved me and you saved my crown and you want nothing?"

"Well," said Elegua, "maybe just a little thing."

"You can have whatever you want," said Olodumare firmly.

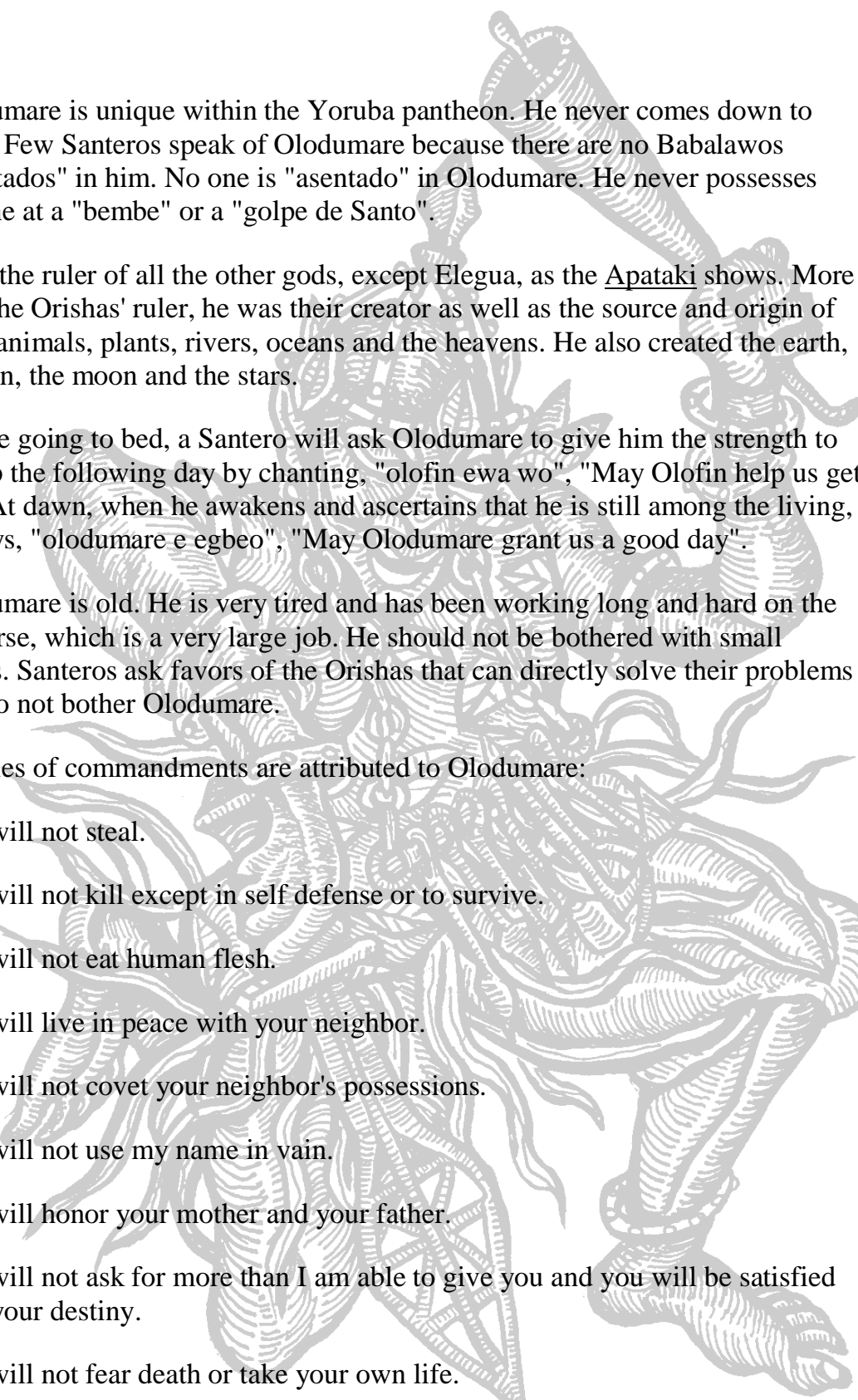
"I want the right to do what I want," said Elegua. He went on with more conviction, ignoring Olodumare's raised eyebrows. "I want the right to do what I will. I want the right to do what I want, whatever that may be."

Olodumare wished it so, and so it was. From that moment on, Elegua is the only god that does as he wills without restraints or limits.

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Olodumare is unique within the Yoruba pantheon. He never comes down to earth. Few Santeros speak of Olodumare because there are no Babalawos "asentados" in him. No one is "asentado" in Olodumare. He never possesses anyone at a "bembe" or a "golpe de Santo".

He is the ruler of all the other gods, except Elegua, as the Apataki shows. More than the Orishas' ruler, he was their creator as well as the source and origin of men, animals, plants, rivers, oceans and the heavens. He also created the earth, the sun, the moon and the stars.

Before going to bed, a Santero will ask Olodumare to give him the strength to get up the following day by chanting, "olofin ewa wo", "May Olofin help us get up". At dawn, when he awakens and ascertains that he is still among the living, he says, "olodumare e egbeo", "May Olodumare grant us a good day".

Olodumare is old. He is very tired and has been working long and hard on the universe, which is a very large job. He should not be bothered with small things. Santeros ask favors of the Orishas that can directly solve their problems and do not bother Olodumare.

A series of commandments are attributed to Olodumare:

You will not steal.

You will not kill except in self defense or to survive.

You will not eat human flesh.

You will live in peace with your neighbor.

You will not covet your neighbor's possessions.

You will not use my name in vain.

You will honor your mother and your father.

You will not ask for more than I am able to give you and you will be satisfied with your destiny.

You will not fear death or take your own life.

You will respect and obey my laws.

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You will teach these commandments to your son.



OBATALA

Saint: Our Lady of Mercy (La Virgen de las Mercedes).

Day of the Week: Sunday. Thursday is also popular.

Colors and Collars (Ilekes):

His color is the purest white. The collar is made up of all white beads. A variation on the collar is 21 white beads followed by a coral bead repeated to make up the desired length.

Sacrificial Animals:

Female goats, white chickens, white canaries. In cases of grave illness, he will accept a white female calf.

Sacrificial Foods: Yam, rice flour paste, corn meal dumplings and black eyed peas. He hates alcoholic beverages. The only spice that Obatala likes is cocoa butter. He drinks chequete. His water comes from the rain. His favorite fruit is the sweet soursop (guanabana).

Herbs: Amansa Guapo, Chamise (wild cane), madonna lilies, calla lilies, cotton, purslane, almonds, white hamelia, white elderberry, white peonies, sweet basil, sweet soursop, wild mint, marjoram, jimson weed, blite, goosefoot, African bayonet, yucca, witch hazel and sweet balm among others. eguere egun, san diego blanco

Ornaments: Obatala's image must be made of white metal or silver. In one hand, he holds a crown. A sun, a moon, four wristlets, a walking stick with a clenched fist, a half moon and a coiled snake; all made out of silver. Two ivory eggs.

Apataki:

Obatala was the only Orisha that knew where Olodumare lived. This gave him a very important position among the other Orishas. At that time, the Orishas had no power of their own. They had to beg all their power from Olodumare..

"Obatala!" the Orishas would call out. "Please have Olodumare straighten out the fight between Oshun and Chango."

And, Obatala would make the long journey to Olodumare's house and relay the message.

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"Obatala, a person needs healing and love," said Yemaya. "Please have Olodumare give me the power to heal them."

Back and forth travelled Obatala. He gave messages. He granted favors. He ran himself ragged. He became unhappy. He was not ambitious and he knew that the other Orishas were talking behind his back.

"Obatala thinks he is our leader," the Orishas grumbled. "He gives himself airs just because he knows where Olodumare lives."

"Do you see how he listens to us?" complained another Orisha. "It's as if we were his spoiled children. Who does he think he is?"

So, Obatala took all the Orishas to Olodumare's home.

"Good morning, Obatala," said Olodumare. "What can I do for your friends?"

"I'm tired of running back and forth, with all due respect," said Obatala. "I would like for you to give each of my friends some of your power."

"I don't know," Olodumare hemmed and hawed. "Do you think it's the right thing to do?"

"Just think, great Lord," said Obatala. "If you give them a bit of your power, I would not have to come here and bother you about this and that every day."

"You have a point there, Obatala," said Olodumare. "I'll do it."

So, Olodumare gave each of the Orishas a bit of his power, hoping to get a little peace and quiet. Finally, he got to Obatala.

"To you, Obatala," he said, "I give the right to control the heads of all the human beings."

Since it is the head that makes a human being good or evil, a good son or a bad son, Obatala became the Orisha with the most authority over human beings. More than any of the other Orishas.

"Did you see that?" said the other Orishas. "He brought us here just so that he could maintain his power."

Which just goes to prove that you can't please anyone.

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Notes:

Obatala is the supreme divinity on the terrestrial plane. He represents such a refined purity, that it cannot be described through words or songs. He is reason and justice and all that is moral.

Controlling the head, he is considered the father of all human beings. He gives the best advice and is the one to turn to in times of great difficulties.

The relationship between the Santeros and the Orishas is much more intimate and direct than in other religions. The Orishas have human passions and desires. They can be cruel and unjust just like human beings. When the Orishas manifest their cruelty, Obatala is called upon to mediate in the situation and to calm and soothe the furious Orisha.

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ORUNMILA (Ifa, Orula)

Saint: St. Francis.

Day of the Week: Thursday. Sunday is also popular.

Colors and Collars (Ilekes): His colors are green and yellow. The collar is made up of alternating green and yellow beads strung to the desired length.

Sacrificial Animals: A goat who has not given birth. Dark chickens.

Sacrificial Foods:

Red snapper and yam puree. Plums are his favorite fruit. He drinks white wine and his water is to come from a spring. His favorite condiment is corajo butter.

Herbs:

Guava, sage, night shade, ginger, dog bane, guanine, myrtle, corn, honeysuckle, night jasmine, pitch apple, guasima, (guazuma guazuma) tree native to Cuba, parami, and corajo among others. san francisco (palo o hierba), don carlos, uvancillo, parami, chinchita

Ornaments:

A hardwood board having various shapes according to the Babalawos's tradition (Ifa's Board). As well as serving as a surface upon which the cowrie shell oracle is cast, the board is also the table upon which many rites are performed. Cowrie shells and oracular collars also belong to Orunmila.

Apataki:

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Orunmila does not fear death. One day, a woman came running up to Orunmila. These were the days that the Orishas still walked on the earth. She clutched at his shoulders and cried out, "Iku is going around and around my house."

This was very serious because Iku is the name of death. When Iku wants someone, she walks outside the house looking for a small hole or opening through which she can get in and take away the person inside.

"Iku is at my house," she cried again. "She wants to take my only son, my little boy. Iku sent in a fever and it's going to kill him if I don't do something." She started to drag Orunmila back to her house. "We have to hurry," she said, sobbing. "I have turned my back. Iku may be getting into my house right now to take away my child."

Orunmila smiled down at her and said, "Don't cry, good woman."

"But, what should I do? You have to help me," she said.

Orunmila patted her head to calm her down. "Don't worry," he said. "Go to the market and buy four baskets full of okra and take them back to your house."

"What about my child?" sobbed the frightened woman. "I will go to your house and make sure that Iku does not go in," said Orunmila. "Go to the market in peace."

The woman followed Orunmila's advice. She went to the market and bought three heaping baskets of okra.

When she got home, breathless from having run with the three baskets, she found Orunmila waiting for her.

"Here are the baskets," she said. "What are you going to do with them?"

"Hush," said Orunmila. "I don't have time for explanations."

He took the baskets from the woman, went inside the house and spread the contents of the baskets all over the floors until they were covered by a thick carpet of okra.

He handed the baskets back to the anxious mother. "Don't worry, mother," he said. "Iku won't be able to do your son any harm."

Exhausted by the run from the market and a fear and anxiety that had not let her sleep for days, the mother collapsed on a cot and went to sleep.

As she slept, the child's fever rose. Iku was thinking that it was time to take the child away, so she made the sickness worse. Iku went up to the door and found that it was unlatched and had not closed all the way. Death slipped in through the crack, hurrying to get to the child before the mother awoke.

Iku strode across the room with her usual firm and silent steps. But, when her hard and bony heels stepped on the okra, the fruit burst open. Iku slipped and slid. All the okra on the floor oozed its sap as Iku slipped from one side of the room to the other. The sap was as slippery as soap. Both of death's feet slipped out from under her. Her long arm bones windmilled trying to regain her balance.

"Oh, crap," she cried. And, before she could say anything else, her bony hips hit the floor, shaking loose all her joints.

Iku had to slip and dig through the mess of okra to find one or two little bones that had come off. She made her way very carefully to the door. Outside, Orunmila waited for her.

"How are you this afternoon, Iku?" he asked very politely.

"Curse you, Orunmila," she spat. "I know that this is all your fault. Curse you and that cursed woman in there for getting you to help her."

"Are you coming again?" Orunmila called out as Iku hobbled off down the path.

She turned and gave him an evil look.

"Are you crazy?" she said. "I'm going to wait a long time and make sure that okra is gone."

Notes:

Orunmila is highly regarded within the Santeria pantheon. He is the Orisha that predicts the future. He is in charge of destiny, both human and Orisha.

He is an invisible presence at every birth, since he also oversees pregnancies and the care and raising of children.

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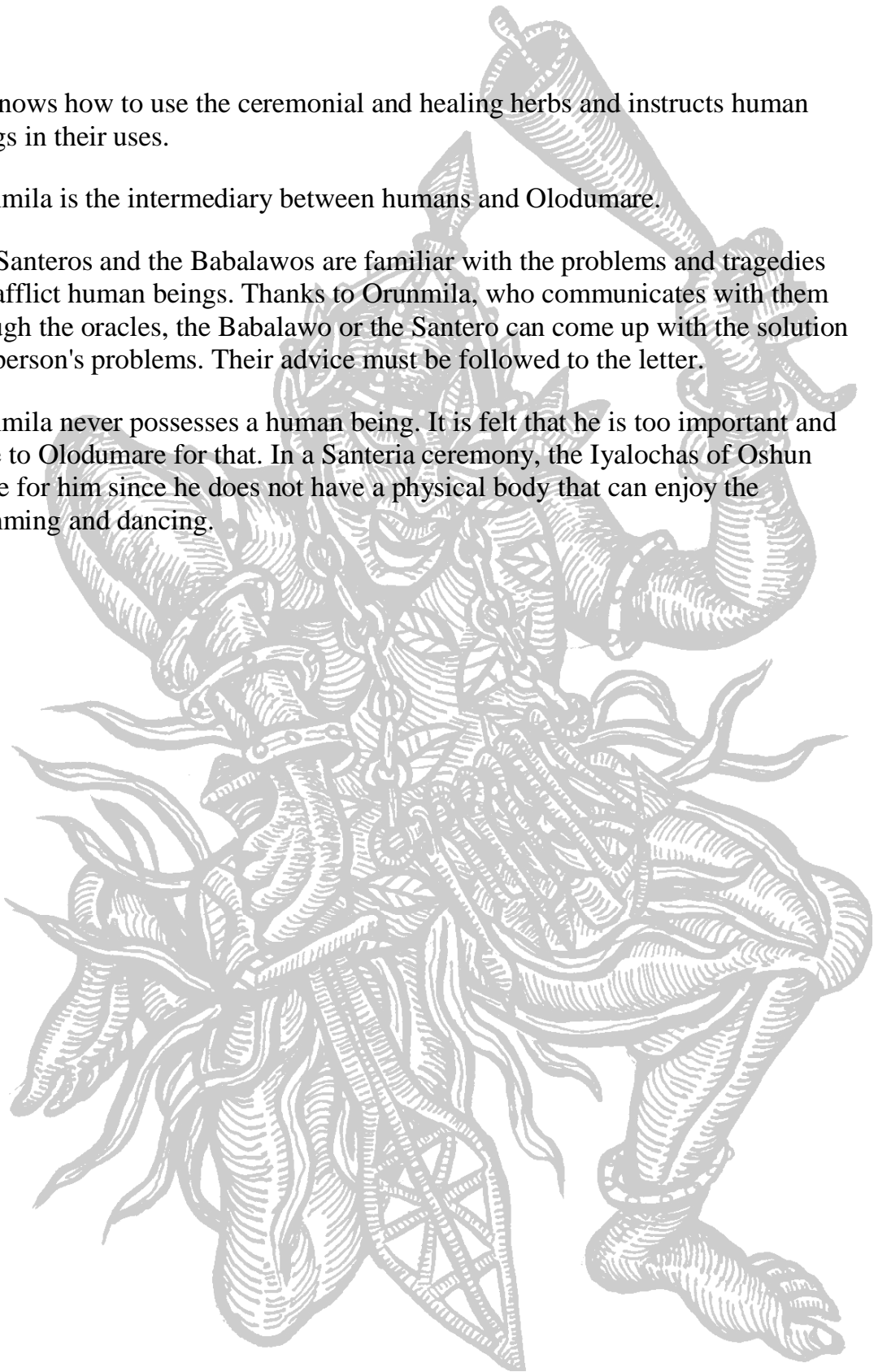
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He knows how to use the ceremonial and healing herbs and instructs human beings in their uses.

Orunmila is the intermediary between humans and Olodumare.

The Santeros and the Babalawos are familiar with the problems and tragedies that afflict human beings. Thanks to Orunmila, who communicates with them through the oracles, the Babalawo or the Santero can come up with the solution to a person's problems. Their advice must be followed to the letter.

Orunmila never possesses a human being. It is felt that he is too important and close to Olodumare for that. In a Santeria ceremony, the Iyalochas of Oshun dance for him since he does not have a physical body that can enjoy the drumming and dancing.



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