



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

Chapter Three

THE SACRIFICE

"Right after they cleaned all the stuff from my head, my Babalawo started to kill the animals. It took hours to kill everything. If I could have afforded it, it would have taken all day. But, who has that kind of money?"

Only a Babalawo or an Iyalocha may kill. If their patron Orisha is Ogun, their rights to slaughter need only be confirmed in a brief ceremony. The "children" of other Orishas must have the sacrificial knife granted to them over a period of long and involved rituals and initiations, by a Babalawo or Iyalocha who has Ogun as his or her patron Orisha.

"All the animals have to be healthy, beautiful and fat. I spent days running around making sure that they were perfect."

"It's very important that everything be the way the Elders did it when the Orishas are being fed. Because, if the Babalawo doesn't know what he's doing and screws up the sacrifice, the "asentado" won't work. Not only that, you could die, or the people that are there could get sick or their children could get sick. Blood is very powerful, you can't fool around with it."

"You have to feed the Orishas. The blood gives strength to the Orisha and the novice. It made me stronger. People can't do bad 'work' against me. I've been baptized in the all powerful blood, the life of life."

The sacrificial killing establishes a strong bond between the novice and the Orishas. The same benefits extend to those that participate in the sacrifices.

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The animals are kept outside the Igbody (the room containing the altar and consecrated to the Orishas) until the moment of their sacrifice. Animals with four legs are brought into the room first, covered by colored cloths. The color of the covering indicates to which Orisha they will be sacrificed. All the birds have their beaks and legs washed with Omiero.

All the tureens, filled with their Otanes, are placed on the floor and left uncovered. The Babalawo makes an offering of water and coconut to each tureen.

"omi tutu laro ero pesi labe koko lodo per leri wi bo mo iga be ri iga boya iga bo chishe ile mo koko mo peloni intori iku mo peloni intori iku aye mo pe loni intori ofo mo da bi pe loni ebsoe iku obi aro obi aye obi ofo obi lebareo."

"I was feeling a little better, but I had to stay seated on the 'pilon' and was told not to move."

"Two Iyalochas led in a lamb. The Babalawo gave it some sunflower leaves. She ate them. That was real good because it meant that Oshun liked the lamb."

"firolo firolo bale fi ro lo ba le abo fi ro lo fi ro lo bale abo fi ro fi ro lo bale."

"The Babalawo gave me some pepper and a piece of coconut meat to chew up. I spit it back out on his hand and he smeared it on the lamb's head. He brought the lamb close to me and I had to touch her three times with my forehead and rub my forehead and my balls on her."

If the novice is a woman, she rubs against the animal with her breasts and legs.

The Babalawo's assistants tie the animals's legs together and it is placed on the floor on a bed of banana, guava and poplar leaves. The Babalawo takes up the knife.

"yakina yakina."

The helpers respond in chorus as they stretch the animal's neck.

Chorus: "bara yakina yakina yakina lo bara yakina."

The Babalawo stabs the animal in its jugular vein and the fountain of blood is caught in the Orisha's tureen.

"ogun choro choro."

Chorus: "eye ba re ka ro."

"eye ogun moyu re ebima."

As he kills each animal, the Babalawo shouts, "I did not kill it, Ogun, who is great, killed it," removing all guilt and responsibility for his actions.

Chorus: "ebima eye ogun moyu re ibi ma."

"elegua dekun."

Chorus: "eye dekun ye."

"olodumare eye eye."

He cuts the lamb's head off. The Babalawo pours salt in its raw neck wound.

"iyo iyo ma le ro iyo iyo ma le ro."

Chorus: "abala iyo ma le ro abala iyo ma le ro."

The Babalawo smears corajo butter on the bleeding neck stump.

"te epo epo ma le ro te epo epo ma le ro."

Chorus: "abala epo epo ma le ro abala epo epo ma le ro."

He smears honey on the neck.

"ba ra i la wi oñi o ba ra i la wi oñi."

Chorus: "odu ma ma la wi oñi o ba ra i la wi oñi."

"Then, the Babalawo put the head right on my face and I drank the blood. I looked up at the ceiling and spit all the blood up to the Orisha."

The Babalawo twirls around the novice with the head and offers it to the Orishas.

"ato reo ato reo afori mawa orio oba to ba ofori mawa adere mo ni o adere monio fa ra ori lori elewa ode rere monio odere re."

He places the head before the tutelary Orisha's tureen.

"ten ten leri fu mi ba fo wa o ten ten."

The headless carcass is removed from the Igbodu by the Babalawo's helpers. They hold it up by the legs, making sure that the neck stump faces the door. The Babalawo places a rooster or a coconut between its rear legs.

"wo ekun eni le wo ekun eni le wo ekun eni le."

At the door, the carcass is turned to the left and to the right before being taken out.

If the novice's budget permits it, the sacrifice is repeated for each Orisha represented in the Igbodu. After each decapitation, a salt filled gourd is filled with blood and set aside. It will be used to prepare the Orisha's Ashe. Each gourd is painted with the Orisha's emblematic color. There are no gourds for Obatala or for the spirits of the dead, who hate salt.

To clear the reek of blood from the air, the Babalawo spills a little water on the floor.

"iro ko suwo ogu osono."

Chorus: "ero ero koise ero ariku babawa."

The carcasses are skinned outside the Igbodu. The skins are stretched on the floor. After butchering, the pieces are piled on the hides. The offal is thrown up on the roof so that the vultures, Oshun's birds, may also enjoy the feast.

Each butchered animal is presented to the Orisha who demand its death. The topmost vertebra is taken out of the animal's head. This bone is added to the bundle of oracular cowrie shells handed to the Iyawo. It is proof that his Orisha drank the blood of a four legged animal.

"After the big animals, it's time to sacrifice the birds. The Babalawo started with the roosters I'd bought."

Each rooster's head is cut off with a knife. Its blood is considered more powerful than that of the lesser birds, so it is mixed with the sheep's blood in the tureens. The Babalawo offers the bleeding bird to the Orisha.

"akuko mo kua ara aye."

He then sacrifices the remaining birds by tearing off their heads with his bare hands.

"ko si cu ete eye otoko amu otoko epo."

"Every time that he tore off the head of a bird, he put the stump in my mouth so I could drink some of the blood to make me stronger. His assistants also had a little bit from each bird."

Before removing the dead birds from the Igbodu, its neck stump is joined to its legs and the Babalawo touches the floor three times.

"emi lo ku so osin ogun lo kua."

All the feathers, except those of the ducks, are placed inside the tureens and mixed in with the blood and the sacred stones. The person nominated to clean the birds sings:

"etie eku edeku etie eye adeya to lo ma likui ela popo ini eye,"

while cleaning them.

The killing of the guinea hens ends the sacrificial ceremony. Before tearing off the head, the Babalawo twirls the bird above the novice's head.

"loricha fin fe to loricha fin fe to ara bobo loricha fin fe to ara bobo."

When it is dead, the Babalawo ends the ceremony.

"ero ko ishe."

"That was it. I stayed seated on the pylon, the blood dripping down my chest. The Babalawo's assistants brought in the heads of all the animals wrapped in their stomachs and put them in front of the Orishas."

The flesh and organs are left in the Igbody as an offering before the Orisha's tureens for about an hour. This allows the Orishas' essences, manifested in the sacred stones, to absorb the blood in which they have been soaking.

"The Babalawo fed his knife with coconuts. Everyone came in and pitched in to clean the room. All the blood was scrubbed from the floor and the splatters of blood on the walls were washed off."

After the Orishas have fed, the blood is washed off the stones with Omiero. The blood and the feathers must be disposed of in the manner favored by each Orisha: Yemaya's in the sea, Oshun's in a river, Elegua's at a crossroads, etc.

The preparations then begin for the feast that will be shared by all the participants except the Babalawo or Iyalocha that performed the sacrifices.

"That night, I slept on a mat laid out in front of the altar. One of the Iyalochas stayed with me to take care of me."

"When I woke up the next morning, the Babalawo gave me a little bit of smoked fish and some smoked jutia and three drinks of Omiero."

"I took off all my clothes again and got inside the tub of Omiero. After all the blood and everything had been washed off, I put on some new clothes, a yellow shirt and red pants, because those are Oshun's favorite colors."

"The Santeros helping him put on my collars. Then, the Babalawo painted my head again. He helped me sit on the 'pilon'. I sat there, barefoot all day long. All the Santeros and Santeras were sitting in front of me on a mat, clapping and laughing."

"All my friends and relatives came by and congratulated me and left money in a big gourd in front of me. So, that helped to pay for a lot of it."

The third day is reserved for the oracles that will guide the novice in his future path within Santeria.

"On the fourth day, right before I had to go back to work, I dressed up in my best white clothes, got into the rented limo with the Babalawo and his assistants, and went shopping. We bought baskets full of all the fruits and foods that Oshun likes, and some food for the other Orishas, because it doesn't pay to make them jealous. Then, we took everything back to the house."

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The Iyawo is now "married" to his Orisha. The initiation is over. He or she goes home. During the following year, life will not return to normal.

"Sleeping in separate beds is something my wife didn't like very much. But, I said, 'Look, I have to do this. If I sleep with you, Oshun will kill me.' Even if I were single, I couldn't be with a woman. That was the roughest part of the 'asiento' I couldn't be with a woman for a year."

"I couldn't shake hands with anyone. Nobody could tell dirty jokes around me. I was pretty anti-social, let me tell you."

"I had to sleep with my head covered with a white handkerchief that whole year."

The novice will also wear white socks every day. Her or she will change bed sheets every day. He or she will wear clean white clothes every day and change them immediately if they have become slightly soiled. Cleanliness is extremely important during the first year after the "asiento".

The women will not wear any make-up or shave their bodies. They are to avoid mirrors. They will have their own comb and will have a separate place in the house for all their personal objects. No one must touch their personal belongings.

"I couldn't visit anyone who was sick, or go to a funeral or a cemetery. The first three months were the hardest. I couldn't sit at the table with my wife or with anyone else. I had to eat in the kitchen. And, I could only eat with my hands or with a spoon."

"I couldn't go out at night. I couldn't go out in the rain. I almost got fired. I couldn't even take off my hat in the store."

"Three months after my 'asiento', I had to go get confirmed. I took all my tureens to the Ile (house where he was initiated), and went and did Ebo."

All the Otanes will be washed with their respective Ewes and offered fruits, sweets and feathers. The Babalawo sacrifices birds.

"In the afternoon, we fed the Orishas and gave them food, blood and Mayuba. Everybody had a great time. We just ate and danced till dawn. When we are happy, the Orishas are happy."

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By the time the last initiation Ebo comes around, a year has passed since the "asiento". In that time, the novice has had the responsibility to learn and follow the basic laws of Santeria:

How to attend his or her Orisha.

The offerings that belong to each Orisha.

The stories of each Orisha.

The Orisha's sacrificial animals.

How the animal is to be killed and cooked.

How to prepare the Igbodu for an initiation.

Memorize his or her "asiento" oracle and follow its advice.

Learn the responses to the chants and prayers.

Learn to perform the minor rituals.

Learn to throw the coconut shell oracle (Biague)

Learn to invoke the spirits of the dead, the Orishas and the spirits of the elders (Mayuba).

Learn the ingredients needed for the rituals.

Learn his or her rights and responsibilities towards the elders in Santeria.

"At the end of the year. I had to do another Ebo. It was more important than the three month one, because it wasn't just a bird sacrifice. I had to feed the Orishas sheep and goats."

"All the Santeros and Santeras that came to my 'asiento' were invited and I gave them each gifts and money."

At the end of twelve months, the Iyawo is considered a Santero or Santera. At that time, he or she is allowed to participate in an initiation and in the major rituals for the first time.

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