THE IFE STONE CARVINGS

IFE, a Yoruba town 80 miles E. of Ibadan, is called by the natives the "cradle of the universe."

From this town the whole human race is supposed to have sprung into existence. The ruler, for the last 200 years at least, has been entitled the Oni, and he is the spiritual but not the temporal head of the Yoruba nation—a sort of Pagan Pope.

Unfortunately, owing to the lack of records, the origin of the Yoruba race is hard to trace. The only evidence that I know of comes from the Arabic chronicles of Bello, first Sultan of Sokoto, who reigned about 1820 A.D.

Therein it is stated that the Yorubas are supposed to originate from the children of Canaan, who were of the tribe of Nimrod. Driven from Arabia by Yaa Rooba, son of Kahtan (who *he* was I don't know), they settled first between Egypt and Abyssinia, and from there they are supposed to have been driven gradually south-westwards across Africa until they reached the land they now occupy.

The Yoruba now is certainly a negroid, but in many of their customs distinct Egyptian traces may be seen, notably in the texture of the wraps, and the way in which they are arranged, for the burial of the dead. Amongst them also are traces of Egyptian features.

So much for past history, but the purpose of this article is to endeavour to trace by whom and when the stone carvings now visible in the town were executed.

As is known, the Yoruba of the present day has no knowledge of working in stone. In no other town in the country do such relics exist. They are one and all regarded by the present generation as sacred and heaven-sent.

To the observant eye, traces of a former great walled town

A. Stool or table of polished quartz, which looks like marble.—B. Granite slab with tortoise in relief.—C. Granite settee.—A. B. and C. are in a fetish grove behind the house of a so-called Christian in the centre of Ife.—D. There are many stones of these kinds and shapes about. They are all of gneissic granite. The holes marked x, y, z are 1" in diameter by 6" deep.

- A. Granite figure of woman with negro features. It appears to be very old, and is much worn from exposure. Now in fetich grove half-a-mile south of the Oni of Ife's residence.—B. Hollowed-out granite slab standing at base of statuette A.—C. Done in sandstone. This image is now held very sacred and is worshipped as the goddess of the breeze. Take her away, and Ife will get no more wind. Note the features, which are scarcely negroid, and the top-knot which is of the kind in vogue to-day.—C'. Side view of same.

Stone relics, 250 yards from the front of the Oni of Ife's residence.—Sketched and measured on the spot, 28.1.08.

A. Statuette of gneissic granite, very much worn by exposure. Features negroid. Now enshrined in fetich grove, one mile S.E. of Oni's residence.—B. Monolith known as *Opa Oranyan*, Yoruba for "Walking-stick of God." It is of granite and studded with iron nails 4 inches long. Stands in fetich grove $\frac{1}{2}$ mile south of Oni's residence.

- (1) Stones of this shape are numerous: I do not know their original object. Present-day mythology calls them "God's anvils."—(2) Alligator carved in gneissic granite.—(3) Earthenware pot: these are found in dozens near every stone carving.—(4) All these stone (granite) relics are in the compound of the Ife's residence: A. Fish—supposed to be "a present from God."—B. "God's anvil"—supposed to be impossible to move.—C. "God's forge," let down from heaven. (Evidently the section of a pillar, the holes being for iron joining-bars.)—D. "God's whetstone"—for sharpening his tools.—C. H. ELORE.

are visible for a radius of two miles round the present town of Ife. Those stone relics which I have seen, and of which I send accurate drawings, are scattered far and wide. The ones light enough to carry are mostly in private houses. Those too heavy are probably in their original positions. In every case fetich groves have been formed round them. Sometimes they have been referred to as the Ife "Marbles." This is incorrect. The stone is either quartz or gneissic granite, both of which abound in the neighbourhood.

I hope to have further opportunities of adding to my researches, but, since a British officer took away with him one of the images, it is difficult for me to obtain a view, as the natives regard every stone of this sort with awe, and are afraid for their own prosperity should one be removed.

I am convinced that the miserable collection which up to now is all that I have been able to see is a poor example of much which remains to be revealed. I hope soon to be able to find inscriptions of some sort which may enable us to identify the creators, and in the meantime send, for what they are worth, the accompanying drawings. A discussion is invited.

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