

# SECRETS OF VOODOO

Milo Rigaud

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# 1

## *Origins and Elements of Voodoo*

TO the uninitiated, Voodoo has long been thought of as a primitive form of magic and belief in ghosts. Most of what the average layman knows of Voodoo comes only from misleading use of it in Hollywood horror movies and in paperback thrillers that emphasize "witch doctors" or the sticking of pins in "Voodoo dolls."

But the fact is that Voodoo encompasses an exceedingly complex religion and magic with complicated rituals and symbols that have developed for thousands of years—perhaps longer than any other of today's established faiths. The believer in Voodoo—and there are millions of blacks and some whites who practice it—centers his hopes and fears as strongly on it as does a follower of Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, or Islam. Indeed, the Haitian atmosphere seems ever impregnated with it—as if with a rich, mystical aroma of Africa—to the extent that individuals as well as families are conscious of Voodoo's effect upon their lives with a curious mixture of glory and dread.

This book—the result of more than thirty years of study—will endeavor to bring the reader an understanding of the innermost secrets and mysteries of Voodoo. But, before taking you on visits to eerie midnight ceremonies, it is necessary to provide explanations of some of the elements and outward manifestations of Voodoo—many totally

alien to white culture—so that you can better understand the meaning of what you will see and read.

The origin of the Voodoo rites has necessarily two aspects: the rites proceed on the one hand from a supernatural origin, and on the other hand from a geographical origin. All aspects of the ritual must above all be considered secondary to the idea of the word *Voodoo* itself, which is sometimes spelled *vo-dou* or *vo-du*, since *everything* essential to the knowledge of the mystery is implicit in this word. The clearest explanation of this essential idea is that *vo* means "introspection" and *du* means "into the unknown." Consequently, the rituals form the sum total of this introspection; that is, they are the studied accomplishments that proceed from psychological information. Those who indulge in this introspection into the *mystère* (mystery) will comprehend not only the Voodoo gods, but also the souls of those who are the adepts and the servants of these gods. This is the only way in which the fruitful practice of the rites is possible to produce supernaturally extraordinary phenomena or magic.

The Voodoo rites, derived from the supernatural, proceed from the influence of the sun in the atmosphere. It would be difficult to enlarge upon this fundamental principle of Voodoo since not everyone is endowed with the ability to comprehend the esoterics of magic. Nevertheless, the effects of this supernatural agency can be observed during the course of Voodoo services, for every trained observer will fully appreciate a spectacle whose entire ceremonial pivots upon certain cult attributes that symbolize the sun.

The simplest and easiest proof that the sun is the axis upon which the entire Voodoo cult turns is the revelation that the principal attribute of solar magic is the post or pole that supports the center of the roof of the structure known as the *peristyle* of the *oum'phor*, the Voodoo temple. The peristyle is the covered gallery of thatch or corrugated iron adjoining the holy of holies or *oum'phor* proper. The roof is supported by a wooden centerpost, called the *poteaumitan*, which means to the initiates "solar support." This post is the axis of the rites. Everything in Voodoo rites has reference ultimately to the center-post. The post is an architectural representation of the chief Voodoo god *Legba*. The wood of the post denotes Mercury, the offspring of the sun and the god of the vegetable kingdom and shows that Mercury is at the same time the staff of *Legba*. Upon this staff the two serpents

of the *oum'phor* must normally mount so as to be harmonized or be reunited by Mercury. Consequently, the central post of the Voodoo *peri-styles* is decorated with a spiral band of various colors symbolizing not only the colors of the rainbow but also the serpent gods *Danb-halah* and *Aida Wédo*. Furthermore, this sacred wood represents the structural material of the Temple of Jerusalem—the wood of Lebanon.

Near this post is kept the symbol of the moon, the Voodoo goddess *Erzulie*. This lunar symbol—a model boat—is suspended in the air from the ceiling to complete the significance of the planetary origin of the rites.

In the practice of Voodoo magic, a lighted candle is often substituted for the post and the boat is represented by ritual water.

The Voodoo pantheon of gods is composed of *loas* (gods) that come from all parts of Africa. Tradition has it that the term *oo-du* is drawn from the language of the Fons. Other tribes that contributed Voodoo gods were the Nago people, the Ibos, Congos, Dahomeans, Senegalese, Haoussars, Caplaous, Mandinges, Mondongues, Angolese, Libyans, Ethiopians, and the Malgaches. Moreover, the names of these tribes generally serve to designate separate Voodoo rites themselves. For example, to serve the Mondongue gods, the Mondongue rite is followed, which, although it does not differ basically and fundamentally from the other rites, nevertheless appears superficially different. To serve the Ibo gods, the Ibo rite is celebrated. And this rite too is fundamentally related to the other rites although it may appear different. The Pethro rite, however, which belongs to another "nation" of Voodoo loas, is different from the other rites, being more of a fire ritual. And the rite par excellence is the Ra-Da or Rada—"the royal rite of the sun." Each rite has its distinctive characteristics, although all rites generally speaking arise from the same source, have the same origin, and are completely integral.

The Voodoo rituals of the various tribes of Africa were commingled and modified as a result of the institution of slavery. Imagine, for example, a group of Aradas and of Ibos sold into slavery together. Either they had to combine their separate rites or else the dissimilarity of their rituals would impose upon them a cruel and mutual isolation in the heart of the new community to which the slave trade took them. The result of such tribal fusion was that the two different religious groups more or less combined their beliefs, thereby creating

in the new slave community a Voodoo rite which to this day is not "pure."

Nevertheless, the members of certain tribes, however dispersed they may have been by the slave trade, were able (1) to regroup themselves despite wind and tide and preserve their own rites intact, or (2) maintain the purity of their rites even while living in the midst of other tribes. For this reason true descendants of the Mondongues can still be found extant throughout Haiti, in whose midst are also found Peulh or Bambara elements. They have preserved their rite intact, as well as its true interpretation, despite racial intermingling.

The ritualism of Haitian Voodoo is, then, very diverse, and its distribution over regional zones of influence is a difficult and subtle matter. However, despite this diversity, all the rites are in complete agreement as to their chief gods and their practice of magic. *Legba*, unmistakably, is their solar prototype, the magical archetype, to the science and control of whom all the rituals have reference. All the rituals include *Legba* as the god who "opens the gate." Without him all magic is problematical if not actually unfeasible. A ritual commences with a chanted invocation to Papa *Legba*, the opening words of which are: "*Papa Legba, Ouvri barrie pou nous passer* (Open the way for us to pass)."

Voodoo sinks its roots of origin in the most brilliant and most remote civilizations. The Haitian Voodooist Her-Ra-Ma-El wrote in his book *The Daimons of the Voodoo Cult*: "It is in vain that subtle processes have been employed to envelop in darkness the brilliant phases of the mental evolution of the Negro. Indisputably the antique Ethiopian-Egyptian-Assyrian civilization should be credited to its account. For thousands of years before the advent of Christ, Negro theologians and philosophers working together had organized types of academies dedicated to the study of the problems of the physical world and human destiny. All the theocratic legislation of Moses, that is, the social and religious codes contained in the Bible, bear the imprint of the sacred formulas of the Negro faith. . . ."

"The formation of the idea of religion implies beliefs about the formation of the world, about the soul, and about death. . . . Patient observations of celestial space and of the stars which throng the sky have given rise to that animism which holds that supernatural beings direct the movements of the stars, and from here primitive

intuition has lead to contemplations productive of myth and legend. From here also arose those sciences of observation at the head of which must be placed astronomy. The entire hieroglyphic system of Egypt is based upon the symbolic connection which exists between the various beings and the cosmic forces, between the beings and the *lois* (laws) of creation."

The word *lois*, which means *laws* in French, is emphasized in the above context, inasmuch as it is more frequently spelled *loa* when used as a Voodoo term. The *lois*, (the "laws of creation") create the *loas* (animistic spirits) in visible manifestations such as plants, animals, and men, but chiefly as ancestors, because Voodoo is essentially a cult of ancestor worship. The Africans, believing that the *manes* (souls) of the dead reascend to the heavens, identified them with the stars. For this reason Her-Ra-Ma-El continues, "The beliefs about the soul and about death have naturally given rise to the Cult of the Dead, which in turn leads to the deification of human souls. Souls thus deified, or, as it were, canonized after death used to be called *daimons* by the Greeks. All of these manifestations of religious feeling have not failed to create a body of rites and cult ceremonies, together with appropriate symbols, or to employ all manner of paraphernalia likely to capture the popular imagination, a necessary factor in the recruiting of the greatest possible number of neophytes."

Our attention is thus fixed upon the practical process that, proceeding from the invisible to the world of men, has lead the Voodoo adepts to the rites of magic. As far as the Voodoo rites themselves are concerned, the supernatural origin of the process is the same. It now remains to consider by what accident or by what extraordinary series of occurrences the Voodoo rites were carried over to Haitian soil.

The slave trade extended from the coasts of Africa to both American continents. All the Antilles were deluged with blacks from the holds of the slave ships. They were scattered throughout the United States, but particularly in the Deep South. Brazil received a large number, as did the island of Hispaniola, which later became Haiti. The enforced immigration of black slaves from all the various African tribal populations—Anmines, Fons, Dahomeans, Yoroubas, Congos, Senegalese, and Sudanese—became inconceivably confused. In transplanting these disinherited black Africans among the colonists, the whites refused to believe that they would retain an unquenchable

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faith in their gods. However, there occurred something approaching the miraculous; for, even in irons and bound to the colonial plantations, the transplanted blacks invoked not only their own gods, but began patiently to install various Voodoo rites other than their own in the lands of their bondage. Thus a curious moral consequence of the slave trade was the exaltation of the African religion by an increase of faith in the Voodoo divinities.

The Voodoo rites originally derived from Africa spread to Haiti, to Cuba, to Brazil, and even to sections of the United States. The African ritual areas of Voodoo in Haiti extend north, south, east, and west, as also in the Dominican Republic, and from one end of Cuba to the other. All the islands of the West Indies have such areas: the Bahamas, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, the Bermudas, and Trinidad. And in the United States, Voodoo is practiced in Florida and the regions surrounding Charleston, New Orleans, and Galveston.

The ritual areas of the Voodoo cult in Haiti, according to information collected in the field by Odette Mennesson-Rigaud, are the following: the Nago populations generally inhabit the north, though not exclusively, and their ritual is more or less pure. The Ibos tend to live in the southwest. The Congos, protecting their ritual insofar as possible from any alteration, have preferred to reestablish themselves between the Artibonite valley and the northwest, and in the south in the valley of Jacmel. The Dahomeans are found in the vicinity of Gonaives, in the same region as the Congo tribes. The Anmine or Mina tribes are in the Artibonite. The Mondongues prefer Léogane and its environs in the southwest. The Mandingues live generally in the north as far as Cap Haitien. The African tribe most typical of the race, whose brilliant Rada ritual derives from the solar tradition, is established for the most part in the region northeast of Port-au-Prince, the Cul-de-Sac Plain. Rada (or Arada) is the tribe of Gaou-Guinou, the Arada king, an ancestor of Toussaint L'Ouverture, the Haitian liberator. The Arada tribe likewise produced the mother of General André Rigaud, Toussaint L'Ouverture's rival in the South. Her name was Rose, and she was an Arada Negress.

In the early days of black slavery in America the Voodoo priests carried on their profession without attracting much attention. But in time the "possessions," or mystical seizures that occurred in the slave huts, the veiled sounds of a few conical drums, as well as the desire for independence kindled even in exile by a kind of patriotism, attracted

the attention of the masters. They reacted with ferocity, prohibiting all practice of Voodoo. Slaves found in possession of any symbol of Voodoo were punished with lashings, imprisonments, hangings, and "blanchings" (flaying alive a disobedient slave by laying bare with a knife the subcutaneous white tissues). So it was that the slave system succeeded in destroying in nearly all the Haitian black people the feeling and taste for making sculptures of clay or wood—an art highly integrated in other black cultures and civilizations—to the extent that it is nearly impossible to find anywhere in Haiti a single local sculpture representing an amulet or a fetish of any kind. However, none of the punishments could extinguish that faith which the transplanted blacks kept in their Voodoo gods.

The religious struggle against Voodoo continued for at least three centuries to be waged openly by the organized whites who employed all the highest refinements of cruelty, while the blacks used every possible secret ruse to protect Voodoo. This battle for their faith resulted not only in the extreme exasperation of the Voodooists, but also convinced them of the necessity of recovering with all their might their complete independence. In the beginning, the black slaves could believe that the period of their enslavement was limited, but at length they lost this illusion and priests of Voodoo consulted the gods to learn through supernatural revelations how the religious and political battle would have to be waged in order to be won.

The Voodoo gods superintended the occult government of the African clan that formed the work force of the slave system. This government, wonderfully concealed though real, was directed by the supernatural spirits who were consulted like financial advisors for a "yes" or a "no." The colonial system itself suffered terribly as a sort of imperceptible malingerer encouraged by the Voodoo gods slowed the forced work of the slaves and retarded the economy proportionately. If the native Indians chose to be completely annihilated rather than to apply themselves to clever deceptions, the Africans surreptitiously and cunningly were preparing for better days ahead, devoting themselves to the task with a determination guarded by their gods. Thus, despite the cruelty of the whites, the struggle of the blacks continued its obscure course in Haiti under the supernatural auspices of the Voodoo gods until eventually Haitian black independence was won in 1804.

## The Oum'phor

The *oum'phor* is the temple of Voodoo. It closely resembles the design used by Moses to build the Ark of the Covenant and the tabernacle as described in Exodus. It consists of a large area, covered or uncovered, called a *peristyle*, in the middle of which is a center-post called a *poteau-mitan*. Adjoining the peristyle on one side is a square house that is the *oum'phor* proper, or holy of holies.

In the Voodoo tradition Moses was initiated into Voodoo and perfected his knowledge as a student of the black Midianite teacher Râ-Gu-El Pethro (Jethro). The tradition relates that Moses became the husband of Pethro's daughter Sephora, who bore two mulatto sons by him: Gershom, whose name means *I dwell in a foreign country*, and Eli-Ezer, whose name means *Help of God*. The tradition goes on to say that Aaron and Miriam, the brother and sister of Moses, complained that he never should have married a black, and so to please them Moses finally repudiated Sephora. When Moses built the first Hebrew temple, according to Voodooists, he planted his staff in the place occupied by the *poteau-mitan* in the *oum'phor*. The gods of Voodoo were so angry at Moses' repudiation of Sephora and Voodoo, according to the tradition, that they "struck Miriam with white leprosy."

The *oum'phor* in Haiti is said to have retained the same form as the one used by Pethro in the land of Midian or Ethiopia.

In the square house that is the *oum'phor* proper, there may be one or more chambers. One room, called the *djévo*, is where Voodoo candidates are examined and initiated. This room represents a tomb, because the Voodoo initiate "dies" and is reborn when he becomes an adept of the cult.

In a large *oum'phor* of several chambers, each may be reserved for the worship of a single Voodoo god, each having its own separate altar dedicated to that god. Or, in a smaller *oum'phor*, all the gods may be worshipped in a single holy of holies with several altars, each consecrated to a particular god. A colored hanging may be used to separate the holy of holies chamber into two parts: an antichamber

and the place of worship itself. On the interior walls of the oum'phor there are elaborate ritual designs called *vèvès*.

## The Pé

The altar or altar stone in a Voodoo temple is called the *pé*. It is a square or rectangular platform raised to about the height of a man's chest. Its name comes from the Dahomey word *kpé*, meaning stone. Upon the *pé* are a fantastic assortment of objects related to Voodoo and its rites. These include ritual rattles, bells, thunderstones with supernatural powers, flags, magic arms, chaplets, ritual necklaces, books on occultism, and even drums. In addition there are many covered jars and pots. Some of these jars, called *pots-de-tête*, contain by magic part of the spirits of the people who worship at the oum'phor. Other jars are *govis* into which the Voodoo gods descend for consultation when called.

At the heart of the Voodoo religion is the sacred serpent *Danbhalah Wédo Yé-H-we*, and in earlier times the altar was constructed with a hollow interior as a dwelling place for a live snake whose body was inhabited by the god. Today few oum'phors literally harbor a serpent, and in those that do the snake no longer is kept inside the *pé* but lives in a hole in the ground or in a place prepared for it. Today when *Danbhalah* is called, he comes to dwell briefly in a *govi* on the altar.

## The Peristyle

The peristyle is the partly enclosed and usually roofed courtyard adjacent to the holy of holies of the oum'phor. It is the place where the elaborate mass ceremonies and rituals of Voodoo are performed, and it also is the place where the sick usually are treated.

The floor is of beaten earth and is never paved or tiled. A low wall four to five feet tall borders the peristyle. Curious spectators who are not well known at the oum'phor, or persons not properly dressed for the occasion, may stand behind the wall and still see what goes on in the peristyle without making themselves too conspicuous.

There are benches in the peristyle on which members of the oum'phor may sit. Often a small ship model hangs from one of the crossbeams of the peristyle roof—the ritual symbol of Voodoo's most important goddess, *Erzulie*. Other objects hanging from the crossbeams include calabashes, baskets, oriflammes, and *lairs*, a kind of woven tray.

The Haitian oum'phor always has a picture of the president of the country displayed in the peristyle. This practice probably derives from the fact that African kings held their offices by divine right of the Voodoo gods, but it also serves to soften the enforcement of legal restrictions against Voodoo. On the occasion of large ceremonies garlands of small flags are hung from the crossbeams of the peristyle roof. These flags bear the red and blue colors and the arms of the Haitian republic.

A perpetual fire burns in the oum'phor yard in the center of which is planted an iron bar, traditionally fallen from the sky as a symbol of cosmic sexual desire. This bonfire is called the *forge of the Ogous* and has considerable ritual significance.

## The Poteau-mitan

In the exact center of the peristyle is its most important feature—the center-post, or *poteau-mitan*. All important Voodoo ceremonies revolve around this post, the top of which is considered the *center of the sky* and the bottom of which is the *center of hell*.

The post itself is usually square and it is set into a circular pedestal of masonry. Around the side of the pedestal, or *socle*, there are triangular niches. The pedestal may be constructed of two or three concentric steps, or even of a single step. The pedestal is a form of *pé*, or altar, on which sacrifices to the gods may be placed.

The entire length of the post from floor to ceiling is decorated with a spiral design representing two serpent-gods: Danbhalah Wédo and Aida Wédo, the latter of which represents all the knowledge of the gods. The colors of this decoration vary from one oum'phor to another depending upon the rites and gods served by its members.

The wooden post itself represents the chief god of Voodoo—*Legba Ati-Bon*, whose name means *wood of justice*.

Hung on the side of the center-post is a whip. This whip symbolizes the obligation of penitence as well as redemption from penitence. Its spirit is implicit in the recreation of the material of the ritual sacrifice offered to the gods in propitiation, and it represents the occult sense of the command, magical or otherwise. Thus, the whip stands for both faith in and mastery of Voodoo.

The post is placed in the center of the peristyle because it is the *cosmic axis of Voodoo magic*. In conjunction with the *horizontal* of its socle, the *poteau-mitan*, as the *vertical*, forms a cross, whose peripheral dimensions make regularly and magically the *perfect square*. This geometric perfection maintained in every peristyle leads to its being considered the Master of Magic.

Actually, the peristyle forms geometrically the following (1) the *mitan*, or center—the non-dimensional point; (2) the rectangle, or lengthened square; (3) the circle; (4) the triangle; (5) the straight, horizontal line; (6) the spiral; (7) the curved, horizontal line; (8) the round, vertical line; (9) the square, vertical line; (10) the perfect square; (11) the cross, or intersecting straight lines; (12) the equilateral and the isosceles triangle, formed by the beams which secure the post to the roof.

This geometric scheme carries out the Voodoo belief that the serpent-god Danbhalah corresponds to the Grand Cosmic Architect, or Great Architect of the Universe, who is the Grand Master of Magic—demonstrating that the chief god is first of all a geometrician.

There are exceptions to the location of the *poteau-mitan* in the very center of the peristyle. I have even seen a few peristyles with two posts dividing the peristyle area into three equal parts. Elsewhere, in the region of Gonaives in northwest Haiti, I have even seen the post located not in the center of the peristyle, but rather in the center of the *oum'phor* proper.

There is this to remember: a Voodoo temple may even have no *visible* *poteau-mitan*, but will have, nevertheless, an *invisible* one. This is true in the case of the remarkable Dahomean *oum'phor* of La Souvenance. The peristyle—one of the largest, if not the largest I have seen—has a roof supported on all sides by two rows of posts inside and out, forming a double colonnade. Inside, the *poteau-mitan* is purposely replaced by a raised decagonal figure nailed to the exact center of the ceiling, making a star-shaped ceiling!

## The Tree Reposoirs

The trees in the yard of the oum'phor are called *reposoirs*, or *arbres-reposoirs*. They serve as sanctuaries for the gods. The gods abide in them permanently, and the trees themselves are honored as divinities. There is usually a pedestal or basin encircling the foot of the tree. Square or triangular niches are recessed into the pedestal and in them lighted candles are often placed, surrounded by consecrated food offered in sacrifice.

Frequently a snake, the symbol of Danbhalah Wédo and Aida Wédo, lives in one of the trees. Such snakes are trained to come down from the trees during ceremonies to be fed by the Voodooists.

The reposoirs are decorated and even painted with the favorite colors of the gods to whom they belong. Ritual dances frequently are held around the trees, and on such occasions the Voodoo drums are brought out of the peristyle and placed close by.

Heaps of stones also may serve the gods as reposoirs. As a rule, a Voodoo god can require any object at all to be consecrated to its use as a reposoir, even the body or the heart of an individual.



Flag bearers during a voodoo ceremony.



**A voo-do-sih (voodoo adept) pos-  
sessed by a loa (voodoo spirit).**



**Ritual flag borne by a houn'sih  
(flag bearer).**



**Ritual Congo drums.**

**Author with houn'sih and Pethro drums.**



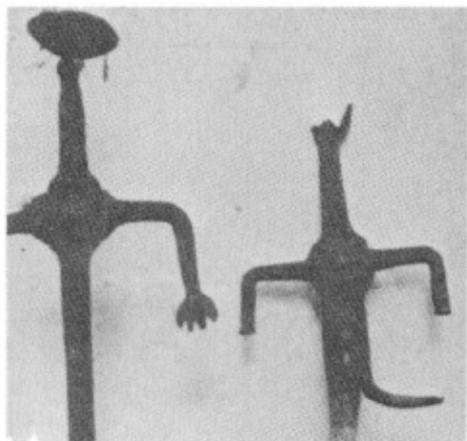
**Ritual Rada drums ( also used for Danhomey ritual).**



**Pethro drums ritually presented to the Sun by houn'sih.**

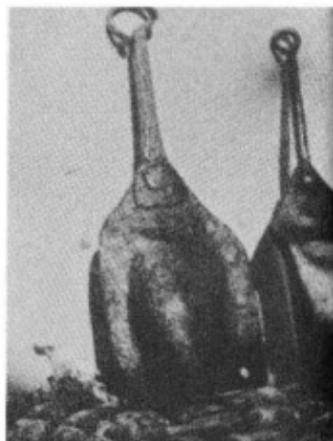


Pethro drums laid down before the Central Post.

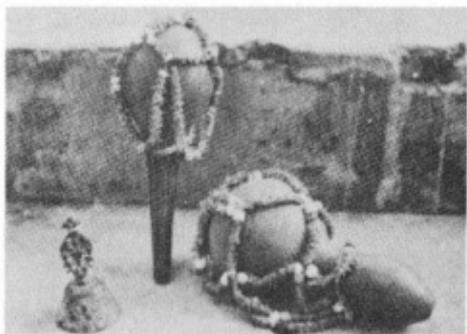


**Asson (in wrought iron).**

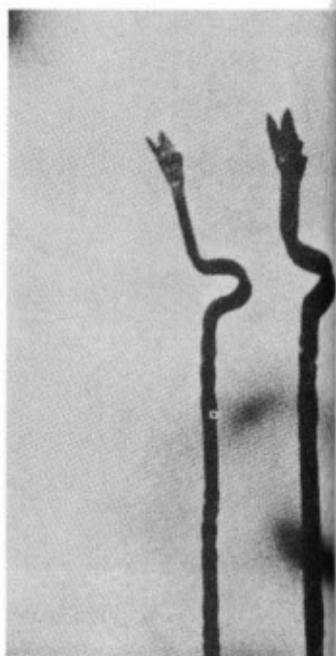
**Asson and ritual hand-bell.**



**Ritual ogan.**



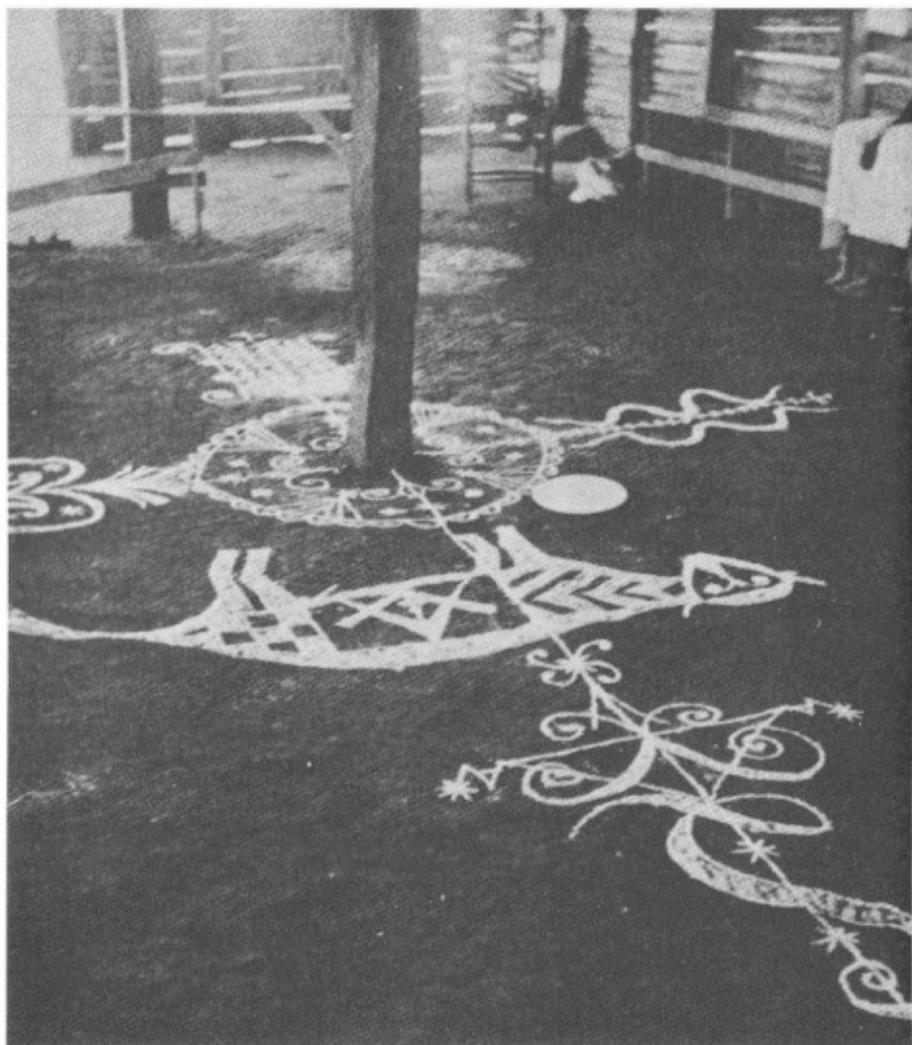
**Ceremonial dishes and pitchers.**



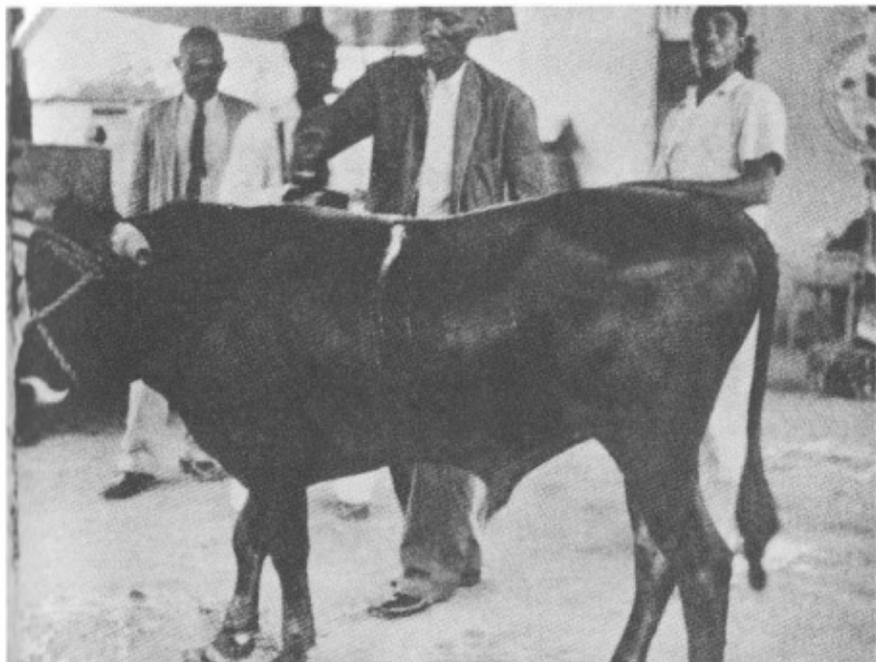
**Wrought iron figures of the voo-  
doo spirits, Danbhalah and Aïda.**



Worshippers during a voodoo ceremony



**The Central Post, surrounded by voodoo diagrams.**



**Bull tied to the Central Post, before the sacrifice.**

**Houn'gan (voodoo priest)  
saluting the loa Legba.**



**Traditional bag of Legba, hung up  
on a temporary altar tree**

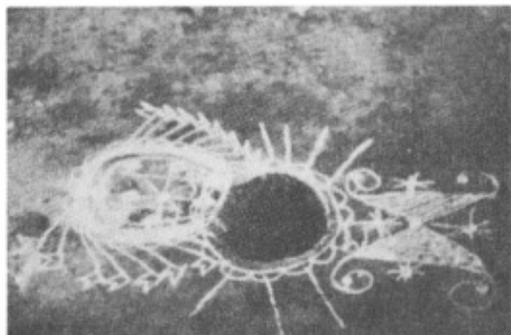




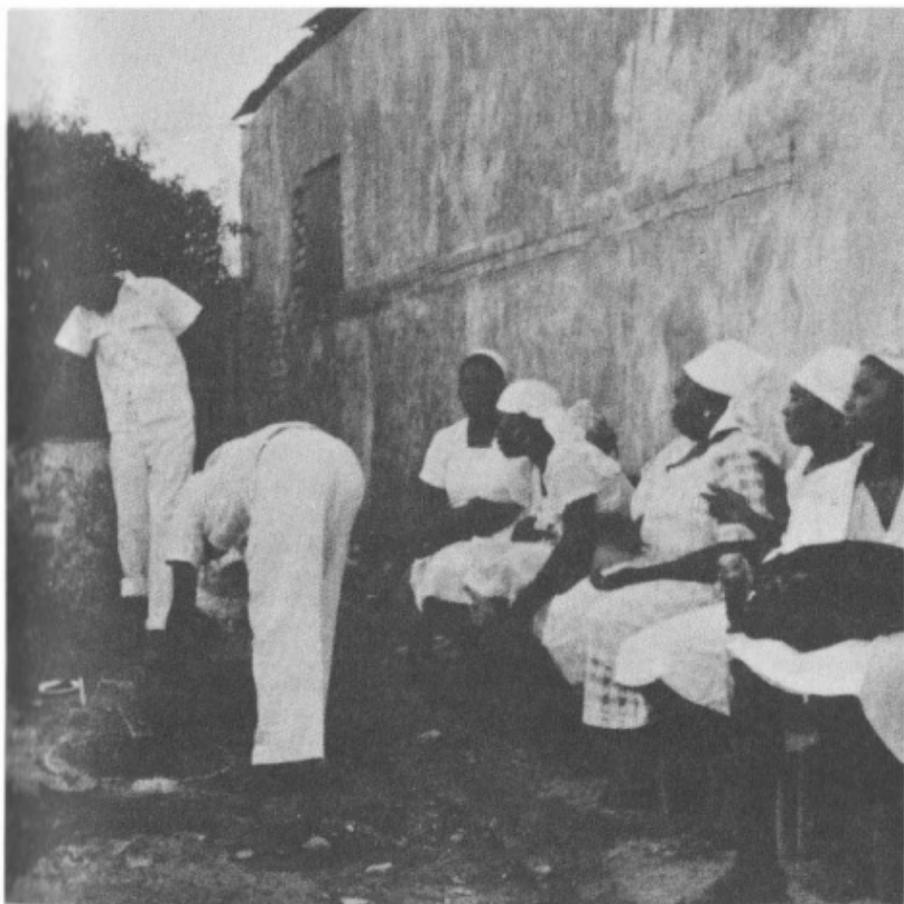
**Ceremonial dishes for Maraça spirits**



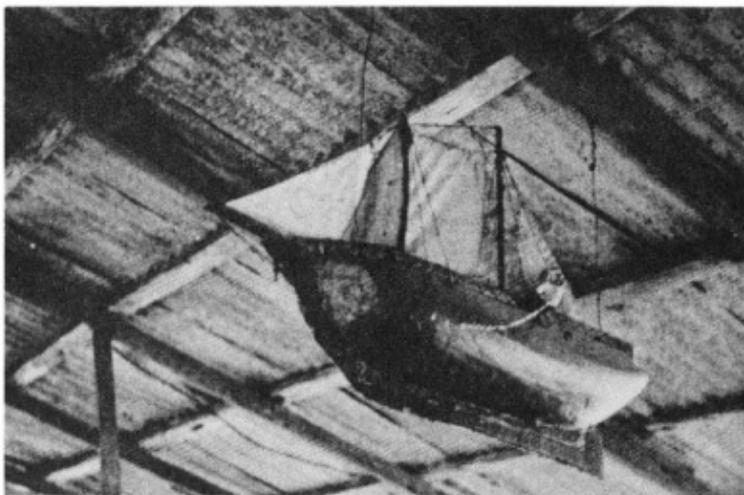
**Inner part of a oum'phor. The ship of Agoueh is on the wall.**



**Ceremonial diagram (vèvè) drawn around the hole in which the sacrifice will be buried.**



**Houn'gan officiating in the oum'phor yard.**



The traditional ship of Erzulie.

Rada drums hung from the ceiling of the voodoo peristyle.



## 2

### *Priests and Priestesses of Voodoo*

UNLIKE other established religions, there is no hierarchy of bishops, archbishops, cardinals, or a pope in Voodoo. Each oum'phor is a law unto itself, following the traditions of Voodoo, but modifying and changing the ceremonies and rituals in various ways. This is because the religious leaders of the oum'phor speak directly with the gods of Voodoo, and are not obliged to answer to anyone else to interpret what the gods tell them. Thus, the structure of Voodoo can best be understood by the layman if he would consider how similar and how different each individual Roman Catholic church would be if for thousands of years each priest had been free to interpret Christianity as he saw fit without any intervention by Rome.

Each oum'phor has two organizational structures; one for the religious leaders, and the other for the lay members. The man or woman who is the chief religious leader of a Voodoo temple is considered royalty. If a man, the emperor of the oum'phor is called a *houn'gan*. If a woman, the empress of the oum'phor is called a *mam'bo*. Their symbol of office is the *asson*, a calabash rattle. Following are the other roles in the religious structure of the oum'phor.

The apprentice houn'gan or mam'bo is called the *confiance* or *mam'bo caille*.

The superintendent of the oum'phor is the *houn'guénicon caille*.

The chorus leader is the *houn'guénicon peristyle*.

The person in charge of separating and distributing the portion of sacrificial food not reserved for the gods is called the *houn'guénicon quartier-maitre*.

The master of ceremonies for the Voodoo rites is called *la place*.

The person who plays a musical instrument called the *ogan* is the *ogantier*. The musician who play the triangle is the *trianglerier*.

The Voodoo drummers as a group are called *houn'tôrguiers*; but each has a title—*manmanier*, *secondier*, and *boulahier*.

The person in charge of preserving order during services and insuring silence while the houn'gan or mam'bo works is called the *reine silence*.

The person who acquires animals to be sacrificed is the *houn'sih ventailleur*. And the person who cooks the sacrificed offerings is the *houn'sih cuisinière*.

The members of the ritual chorus who have been fully initiated in Voodoo are called *houn'sihs*.

Those who may or may not have been initiated but who have not yet been fully refashioned by the Voodoo gods are called *houn'sih bossales*.

Surrounding the oum'phor as a kind of social annex and mutual aid enterprise is the local Voodoo Society. It has officers with titles like those of a national government. It has a president, ministers, senators, deputies, generals, a secretary of state, and district and local commanders.

The Voodoo Societies organize festivities that are partly Voodoo, partly secular. They lend assistance to sister-societies. They maintain a mystical solidarity established in the Voodoo social body from the beginning of the tradition. Their true traditional function is to alleviate the sufferings, moral as well as physical, of their members, to attend to their wounds, both physical and metaphysical, to protect their members, to punish the guilty, and to bury the dead whose close relatives are unable to do so. However, this half-mystical, half-social tradition of mutual aid has lost much of its old-time effectiveness and close observance.

## The Houn'gan and the Mam'bo

The role of the houn'gan or mam'bo goes beyond every definition and every ordinary conception of it. To better judge the role of these emperors and empresses of Voodoo, one should not compare them to the priests or priestesses of any other religion. Instead, their role can only be compared to that of the Pope in Roman Catholicism. On first consideration, the comparison seems daring and exaggerated; but, all things considered, the comparison is not extravagant inasmuch as, while the Roman pope's area of jurisdiction is far more extensive than that of any houn'gan, according to the voodoo cabal the houn'gan is also etymologically a "pope," or a "papa," and that is why he is traditionally called "papa," or "papa-loa." For the same reason every priestess, or "mam'bo," is called "manman" (mama).

The authority of the houn'gan and the mam'bo is all the greater and all the more certain because everything they do proceeds directly from the powers of the invisible—the *loas* or *mystères*, as the gods of Voodoo are called. Their orders or their counsels are those of the *loas*, and, by extension, of the souls of ancestors, or *manes*, since Voodoo is a religion of ancestor worship.

Since the process that permits the soul to attain all of its intellectual power is astrological, the science of the houn'gan turns upon the stars. Therefore, a houn'gan's or a mam'bo's science is fallible only insofar as he or she does not know how to consult an invisible, or cannot, for one reason or another, enter into communion with the invisible.

In these pages we could mention a great number of houn'gans currently practicing in Haiti. Some of them have a certain amount of ability; however, many others have only mediocre magical power. This leads to two situations that are bad for Voodoo. First, for some time there has been far too great a number of houn'gans because life in Haiti offers people too few other rewarding careers. Consequently, initiates to the lower grades of voodoo are too often tempted to "take the asson" (the traditional expression for "becoming a houn'gan"), because this profession is rather lucrative and much respected by the people. Secondly, as a result these houn'gans and mam'bos, far too numerous as they are, often are overly prone to conform to new standards imposed upon them by the perpetual struggle between Voodoo

and hostile foreign religions or the political power that aids them. This produces a syncretism of a low order to which too many oum'phors have surrendered either for purposes of immediate interests or out of cowardice, in fear of the political authority that has closed one or another oum'phor at the demand of the foreign clergy.

Consequently the supernatural gifts which the loa-ancestors confer upon the initiates of Voodoo become fewer or diminish in magical power because the manes, when confronted by such offenses against the orthodox tradition become angry, and one after the other withdraw to Africa, abandoning Haiti to itself. This is how houn'gans or mam'bos sometimes lose their powers, even fall ill, and, without making rigid sacrifices, are unable to regain their positions.

The Voodoo mystères require much greater skill and seriousness from the houn'gan and the mam'bos than they do from the rest of the people since all Haitians, in accordance with the tradition of the loas, are magically placed under the jurisdiction of the Voodoo priests. The slightest failure on the part of the priests injures not only those subject to this jurisdiction but the mystères themselves, because the uninitiated as well as the enemies of the cult are always on the lookout for false indications of its ineffectiveness or indeed of its demonism.

The Voodoo houn'gan or mam'bo is the confessor, doctor, magician, confidential advisor to individuals and to families, to politicians, and even financial advisor to people of highest as well as those of lowest estate. He is a prophet, too, of such a sort that scarcely anything is done without his advice in the community where he is the central figure. In the oum'phor he presides over everything that is done. Here his authority is absolute.

The amount of his knowledge is truly astonishing. The moment his own knowledge fails, he consults the loas in order to increase it. However, it is not only by summoning the loas that he is able to see them. He also often beholds them in dreams or by a supernatural percipient ability based upon sciences such as palmistry, fortune-telling by cards, fire, water, or figure-drawings, in which he is often an expert.

The houn'gan or the mam'bo leans upon the *pé* or altar when, shut up in the oum'phor, he or she calls the loas into the *govi* (a jar into which the mystères descend when called). The loas enter these receptacles from which they may then speak not only with houn'gan

but even with any who happen to be present. However, the "papa" secludes himself in the chamber that serves as the holy of holies, and it is there, out of sight even of the initiates, that he asks the loa to come down into the *govi*. He accomplishes this by certain traditional magic words that, to the persistent rhythm of the *asson*, attract the *mystères* from the astral zones of the invisible.

## The Asson

The *asson*, the calabash rattle that is the symbol of office of the *houn'gan* or *mam'bo*, usually is called a ritual rattle by ethnologists. In any case, the *asson* is a calabash taken from the *calebassier courant* tree, which is the tree-reposoir par excellence of the great *mystère* Danbhalah-Wédo. The *calebasse ordinaire* is pierced with a hole to receive a handle. This is called the *coua-coua*, and is used by the lesser officiants at rites other than the Pethro. The *calebasse courante* has a natural handle. The *coua-coua* is the *asson* of the Pethro rite. While the *calebasse courante* grows on a liana, the *calebasse ordinaire* grows on a tree, the *crecentia cujete* (*bignoniaceae*).

It may be noted that the solar tradition of the great invisibles of Ethiopia ascribes the *calebassier courant* to Danbhalah as his *reposoir*, while Haitian initiates follow an altered version of orthodox teaching which holds that the *calebasse ordinaire* climbs upon the *essence* (i.e. the tree) consecrated to the *mystère*. There is sometimes controversy in Voodoo over this kind of adaptation of symbols. For example, whereas the solar tradition attributes the boat to Erzulie (the Virgin), in Haitian *oum'phors* the boat is made the magical attribute of Agoueh, the marine husband of Erzulie.

The *houn'gan* or the *mam'bo* traditionally holds the *asson* in his hand, along with the *clochette*, or bell, which represents the magic powers of the Occident, or Ethiopia. The *asson* is held between the right thumb and index finger; the bell between the ring-finger and the second finger.

The fruit of the *calebassier courant* and the *calebassier ordinaire* has been chosen as an attribute and a symbol of command, because, it reflects geometrically the *magic principle*, that is, the elevation or the assumption of the raw material of the sacrifices which propitiants deposit ritually upon the *socle* of the *poteau-mitan*. The *asson* or *cale-*

*basse courante* makes a perfect geometric symbol in that by itself—its metaphysical symbol being the abyss and chasm—it represents a sphere or perfect circle; furthermore, it grows its own handle, a fact which, in the symbolic geometric, signifies that the calabash itself is controlled by the straight line formed by the handle.

In reality, by the sphere or the circle, plus the handle which symbolizes the poteau-mitan or the vertical, the asson becomes a *geometric synergy* combining the two activating principles of all magic: the magic wand, which is the handle, and the magic circle.

Inside the asson are stones and the vertebrae of snakes which give the asson its sound. These stones and vertebrae are considered bones of the African ancestors worshipped in Voodoo. So the bones and vertebrae make the calabash a musical instrument for ritual power. When the asson "speaks," the sacred spirits of the ancestors appear. In Africa, the snake whose vertebrae are used to symbolize the ancestors is the Royal Python, which represents the eternity of life. The stones inside the asson are of eight different kinds to represent eight different ancestor-gods and are of eight different colors since the eight means eternity.

Therefore, the sound of the asson represents magically the powers of the ancestors from whom Voodoo is handed down. This element of the orthodox tradition is the vertebra of the snake, since the *mystère Danbhalah Wédo* is supposedly the oldest of the ancestors, and because the snake is *Da* or *Dan*, *Dam*, *Don*, or *Dom*. The vertebrae, which are carefully strung in accordance with a special magical rite followed in preparing the asson, represent *all the astral powers* or *all the powers of ancestors* who are *identified with the stars*, at the head of which the Sun (Legba) and the Moon (Erzulie) magically preside.

Furthermore, the asson is surrounded with a network of porcelain beads of all colors. These beads, too, have a certain significance: they represent all the atmospheric powers of Erzulie, that is to say, all the powers of the *solar prism* consolidated color-wise by the symbol of the *mystère Erzulie on the "point-couleuvre-Aida-Wédo"*—the rainbow.

Owing to all of these geometric, chromatic, and magical virtues, the asson is considered the traditional image of the Orient. Prepared correctly, it should contain all the magic powers of the Orient. And inasmuch as the Orient, in practical magic, is the *master of the astral*, the asson has under its command all the *loas* or *occult powers of the*

*astral ancestors* which we shall presently discover under the forms of the Voodoo *vèvès* or ceremonial diagrams. For this reason one may see the houn'gan strike these ritual designs: *he strikes the vèvès with the asson to release the astral power and then to utilize it.*

## Taking the Asson

In Voodoo, the place in Africa where the spirits abide is the astral city of Ifé; and in Haiti the place where the Voodoo ancestral spirits have come to dwell since the days of slavery is La Ville Aux Camps. In Ifé, therefore the city of the Voodoo spirits' origin, resides the totality of magic powers personified by the *mystère Danbhalah*. So it is natural that for a person to acquire the magic powers of Voodoo, ritually enacted in the *prise d'asson* or "asson-taking" ceremony, the candidate for the Voodoo priesthood must go and take the asson at Ifé in Africa by traveling logically via the line of the center-post that traverses the asson's magic circle.

The center-post is therefore called by its analogical surname of *Papa Loko Ati-sou Poun'goueh*, so named because the recipient must traverse the waters of the abyss (*poun'goueh*) in order to reach Africa in the vertical direction of the celestial city, *Mître Grand Bois*. Therefore, by analogy and homophony, the future houn'gan is taken by his initiators, older houn'gan, to a large wooded place (*grand bois* in French, *phazoun* in African). He is brought here to receive the asson; then he is led to another kind of "large wood," namely the wooden cross of Baron Samedi, lord of the cemetery, to obtain the latter's approval.

In any event, just as the whole system of the *pé* has changed while the old principle has been retained in the *govi*, the ritual prescribed for candidates for the asson is very complex. It is complex because, like initiation into the Masonic Lodge, it partakes more of the nature of an initiatory examination than of an occult performance. It is to the interest of the initiating houn'gans to increase the elaborateness of the essential ritual by multiplying its complexities, thereby lining their own purses.

Since our purpose is to describe the true, original, revealed Voodoo, we shall omit all discussion of these complexities—even though their spectacular charm is certainly undeniable—in order to set forth the

secret of the original ceremonial. This is the requisite ceremonial for creating a new houn'gan, that is to say, for conferring upon him supernatural powers by means of the asson, provided, of course, that the houn'gans participating as initiators are true descendants of the authentic line whose first member was Dan Gbé himself, lord of the astral.

The future houn'gan presents himself to an older houn'gan, the authentic representative of the ancestors or of the serpent-ancestor, and requests that the office of houn'gan be conferred upon him. If the candidate is already a houn'gan's apprentice, and is accordingly a member of his oum'phor, he requests his teacher to confer the asson upon him. The older houn'gan requests the assistance of two other houn'gans—the oldest he can find—by virtue of the esoteric prescription that holds that three masons together form a regular lodge. However, he may be assisted by six houn'gans, thus forming a solar or perfect lodge.

The houn'gan in charge requires the candidates to spend a period of purification in a chamber adjoining the oum'phor proper, called the *djévo*, the chamber from which initiates into the voodoo cult make their entrance. The period of purification is determined, or should be, in principle, by the occult number of the mystère whose "point" the houn'ior, or candidate, is *couché*, or "put to bed." If the candidate is *couché* upon the "point" of Legba, the period is seven days; if of Erzulie, six days. The *couché* of the houn'ior corresponds to the prostration of the cardinals at St. Peter's, in Rome. The cardinals lie prostrate (*couché*) for a ceremony in the course of which they receive the cardinal hat. In Haiti, a houn'ior "put to bed" upon the "houn'gan-point," remains twenty-one days in the *djévo*, which corresponds to the virtues of the Solar Seven multiplied by the Three of the Holy Trinity.

After the purification in the *djévo*, the houn'gan, in a kind of litany of the saints, invokes all the Voodoo mystères, the assisting houn'gan giving the responses. Part of the initiation ceremony follows:

#### First houn'gan:

Ma'p di ou bonjou,	I bid you good morning,
Papa Legba Ati Bon Kata-	Papa Legba Ati Bon Data-rou-
rouleau;	leau;
ma'p di ou bonjou,	I bid you good morning,

Papa Loko Ati Dan Poun'- goueh Ibo Loko; ma'p di ou bonjou, Papa Danbhalah Wédo; ma'p di ou bonjou, Papa Ogou, Ogou-Fer, Ogou Chango; ma'p di ou bonjou, Afrique Guinin Tocan Da- houmin.	Papa Loko Ati Dan Poun'goueh Ibo Loko; I bid you good morning, Papa Danbhalah Wédo; I bid you good morning, Papa Ogou, Ogou-Fer, Ogou Chango; I bid you good morning, Afrique Guinin Tocan Dahoumin.
--	--

Before speaking the houn'gan orients and casts some water to the four cardinal points. Then, pointing out the candidate for the asson, he says:

Main X, cé pitit ou qui vlé ou; li di cé pitit ou, Afrique Tocan. Aida Wédo Tocan Dahoumin, cé tout Guinin li yé. Li cé cheval Marassah, Tocan Fréda Wédo.	Behold X, he is your child who desires you; he says he is your child, Afrique Tocan. Aida Wédo Tocan Dahoumin, he is com- pletely African, he is. He is the Marassah's horse, Tocan Fréda Wédo.
--	--

Response:

Li di cé pitit ou, Afrique Tocan. Aida Wédo Tocan Dahoumin, cé tout Guinin li yé. Li cé cheval Marassah, Tocan Fréda Wédo.	He says he is your child, Afrique Tocan. Aida Wédo Tocan Dahoumin, he is com- pletely African, he is. He is the Marassah's horse, Tocan Mreda Wédo.
---	--

The officiating houn'gan again orients and casts water on the ground, saying:

Djo-là passée . . .	The water has been passed through . . .
---------------------	---

Response:

Djo-là passée . . .	The water has been passed through . . .
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The future houn'gan is then possessed by a loa. The officiant continues:

Cé lan Guinin nous yé . . . We are in Africa . . .

Drunk with the loa who has "mounted" \* him, the future houn'gan

\* The person who is "mounted" is called a *cheval*, or "horse" of the god.

replies:

Ma'p suivé ou, Papa moin . . . (I will follow you, my Father . . .)

The future houn'gan is obliged to recline upon the ground, entirely naked and wearing no jewelry of any kind. Sometimes his head is shaved. He prays to the Voodoo spirit for the remission of all his sins, and swears an oath to consecrate himself as a priest to the service of the loas and never to reveal anything whatever about the initiation. The oldest houn'gan sprinkles him with holy water and raw clairin, and leads him to the *pé*. There he is at Ifé. Totally possessed by the guiding spirit, he staggers, supported by the old houn'gan, who makes him bow down before the stone of the *pé* from which the mystère Dan Gbé Tò bestows upon him the asson and the bell.

Outside the *djévo* the battery of drums, appropriate to the rite in which the ceremony is being performed, resounds. The chorus of houn'sihs sings the ritual chants "sɔ'nt" by the hounguénicon. At this point the newly initiated, "mounted" by the spirit, takes over the service. He is now a houn'gan, because, having "passed through the water" he went to Ifé, where Dangbé delivered to him the asson at the request of the old houn'gans, the custodians of the Voodoo tradition.

For various reasons, Dan-G-Bé sometimes refuses to give the asson. In such cases the petitioner frequently uses the asson anyway, despite the Spirit's refusal. Nevertheless, he is a false houn'gan, and there are certain operations in which he is successful only because he employs devices stolen from authentic houn'gans. The Voodoo tradition holds that such a candidate "did not go under the water" (*li pas té allé en bas d'leau*).

In the Voodoo tradition, Moses had a Pethro asson and related its secrets to the rabbis. The name of the Voodoo asson is *kohelèth-a-dam*, *kohelèth-a-dom*, *kohelèth-a-don*, or *kohelèth-a-dan*. The Voodoo tra-

dition explains the initiatory formula through the general meaning of the book of Ecclesiastes (12, 13): "Fear God, and keep his commandments." The formula is Coeeth, Cò-Lè-Th, Cò-Lé-Tha, or Koheleth (the Preacher). Inasmuch as the book of Ecclesiastes is the Second Book of Solomon or the Second Book of Wisdom, Voodoo tradition considers it the magic of the Temple of David, a Negro king, of Solomon, his son, and the basis of the magic tradition of the oum'phor.

The *kolétheadan* or Voodoo asson reveals by its authority that man is dependent not upon himself but upon the superhuman occult forces called by Voodoo initiates *mystères, angels, saints, or loas*, according to the region in which the Voodoo religion is practiced.

The following is the best explanation of the entire formula:

*coeeth*: cabalistic wisdom or discipline; the tradition of the clergy and the church; *a-*: Grand Master; the square or alpha; *dan*: the serpent, traditionally represented by Danbhalah.

For this reason the serpent in the universal tradition is the animal that initiates man and woman, like the serpent that descended from the tree of knowledge to initiate Eve and Adam, (whose name is found in the *a-dam* of the formula *koheleth-a-dam*), the same serpent that descends from the center-post of the peristyle to initiate the houn'sih-canzos, the houn'iors, the houn'gans, the mam'bos, the houn'guénicons, and others.

The formula indicates also the assembly or gathering of Voodoo initiates in the peristyle of the oum'phor, referred to in a ritual chant that calls them together at the beginning of the ceremonies:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| I.a fanmi semblé; en é o;<br>la fanmi semblé, non;  | Come together, family, en é o;<br>come together, now, family;  |
| E Agouèto, ça hin'dé;<br>na'pé hin'dé o;<br>la fanmi semblé; en é o;<br>na'pé hin'dé Papa Loko Ati-sou. | E Agouèto, that's the call;<br>we shall call, O;<br>come together, family, en é o;<br>we shall call Papa Loko Ati-sou. |
| I.a fanmi semblé; en é o;<br>na'pé hin'dé Grande Aizan<br>Vélékété.                                     | Come together, family, en é o;<br>we shall call Grande Aizan<br>Vélékété.  |
| I.a fanmi semblé; en é o;<br>la fanmi semblé, non,  | Come together, family, en é o;<br>come together, now, family,  |

E Agouètò, Gouètò, ça hin'dé;  
na hin'dé Marassah Do-sou,

Do-sah, Do-goueh.

E Agouètò! Ou ça hin'dé you vrail

E Agouètò, Gouètò, that's the call;  
we shall call the Marassah Do-  
sou,

Do-sah, and Do-goueh.

E Agouètò! You can really call  
them!

In closing this chapter a word must be said about one of the most extraordinary facts concerning Voodoo. If the officiants at an initiation are themselves unable to give correct and complete instruction to an apprentice, the *mystères* themselves give the instruction by "mounting" someone, who then instructs the initiate verbally. Otherwise the *mystères* send him dreams or visions when necessity arises. A great many *houn'gans* are created in this supernatural manner. It is the *loas* themselves who initiate them and give them the *asson*.

### 3

## *Gods and Goddesses of Voodoo*

THE adepts of Voodoo, relying upon the fundamentals of the African tradition, believe the place of origin of Voodoo was Ifé, the name of a legendary city whose replica actually exists in Yoruba in southern Nigeria. At the same time, Ifé is a mystical city from which comes the greatest of the Voodoo *mystères* and it is regarded as a kind of African Mecca.

Ifé is the fatherland of the Voodoo gods. It is from here that the revelation descended into the spirit and the heart of those African Voodooists who established the religion practiced today by their descendants. The Voodoo revelation descends under the double form of the serpents Danbhalah Wédo and Aida Wédo. The serpents represent the African *Almighty*—the Ancestor—Voodoo being religiously and ritually an ancestral cult in which the supreme personage is “the first of the living.”

Needless to say, everything that constitutes the framework and mode of life among the earth's inhabitants springs from Ifé: administration and administrative methods, royalty, presidency of state, culture, the major and minor arts, medicine, architecture, navigation, and especially religion and religious magic, but more particularly that phase of magic called *divination*.

Since royalty is a divine right, it thereby follows that the portrait of the chief of the state, in accordance with a Haitian custom deriving from the tradition of Africa, is always hung in the place of honor in all the oum'phors, because, say the initiates, "the king is the direct representative of God."

Proceeding from the principle that every king or chief of state is the representative of God on earth, the Voodoo tradition identifies Ifé with the celestial position of the sun, and with the sun itself. Hence the king is found to be identified with the sun. The supernatural origin of the Voodoo cult is astrological in nature for Ifé is identified with the sun. Moreover, since the sun is the god *Legba*, the region of the sky where the sun rises is *Legba-Ji*, an expression bearing the general meaning "god of the Creation."

*Legba*, the synthetizing god of Voodoo, is the Orient, the East, the chief cardinal point, the point of space which presides at or governs the magic.

The African origin of the Voodoo gods is somewhat complex, for although *Legba* unquestionably comes from Ifé, the whole Voodoo pantheon by no means comes from the same place. This pantheon is composed of *mystères* originating in different parts of the world: some from Dahomey, some from the Congo, others from the Nago regions, still others from the Sudan. Certain gods come from the land of the Ibos; others are by preference Pethro *mystères*, and a list of the "*nations of voodoo mystères*" would necessarily include the names of all of the tribal regions on the map of Africa: Morocco, Mauritania, Nigeria, Liberia, Cameroon, Angola, Madagascar, and many others.

It is the differences or distinctions established in Voodoo by the "*nations of loas*" which tend to diversify the cult by dividing it into "*rites*," although its fundamental integrity as well as its traditional homogeneity are completely preserved.

Contrary to general opinion, among the countries where the Voodoo *mystères* originated must be included Judea and Ethiopia, for both the Jewish and the Ethiopian cults hold their origin to be from the sun. Among the Jews, the sun is represented by a serpent upon a staff—the serpent called *Da(vid)*; among the Ethiopians, the serpent is represented by a lion—*David*—the Lion of the solar house of Judah (a title preserved by the emperor of Ethiopia). In Voodoo the same serpent, likewise called *Da*, and the same lion, called *Legba*, preside at the head of the cult.

The *mystère* which bears the serpent *Da* is another serpent, *Ai-Da*. This second serpent is, accordingly the Virgin of Voodoo—*Aida Wédo*. As mother of the Voodoo *Legba*, she is the wife of the sun, that is, she is the moon. The Africans call her *Mawu*, but she is best known in Haiti as *Erzulie*.

*Legba*, the origin and the male prototype of Voodoo, is the sun which presides over the rites, while *Erzulie*, the origin and the female prototype, is the moon. *Legba* is the Christ; *Erzulie* the Virgin. The other *mystères* follow in their turn in hierarchical order.

In his outward manifestation, *Legba* is pictured as a man who sprinkles water on the ground. He is the deity recognized in those adepts who at the commencement of every ceremony sprinkle the ground with water. *Erzulie* is represented as a dark-skinned Ethiopian woman. She is necessarily dark since she is burned by her husband the sun. The occult aspect of this is easily understood: this woman, very dark but very beautiful, is identified, in the Afro-Judean tradition, with the very dark but very beautiful Queen of Sheba. Therefore, the serpent, *Aida-Wédo*, seen on the walls of the Voodoo *oum'phor*, is recognized through the process of religious syncretism, as the Ethiopian queen who visited Solomon, the builder of the Temple. By these illustrations the astrological origin of the Voodoo cult and its areas of religious influence throughout the world can be explained most easily.

The African tradition inherited through the Haitian *oum'phors* reveals that the female, or lunar, serpent *Aida-Wédo* seen painted on the *oum'phor* walls is a *path of seven colors* employed by the divine power as a medium for transmitting his orders from the sky to the earth. This path, which conducts God from the sky to the earth is, of course, the rainbow. As a symbol, the rainbow-like Voodoo—has its origin from the sun. In the *oum'phor*, then, *Erzulie*, who in the form of a rainbow plays the role of the lunar serpent *Aida-Wédo*, is the magic principle of wealth and prosperity. She is invoked by all who desire a change of fortune or who wish to become wealthy. The symbol of the moon which she personifies as a voodoo *mystère* is silver, while the symbol of *Legba* (the sun) is gold.

*Legba* is explained by Voodoo traditionalists as having the same origin and attributes as the Greek god Mercury—the symbol of Mercury being two serpents entwined about a staff and the symbol of Voodoo being the two serpents entwined about the center-post of the

oum'phor. The traditionalists further see Christ originating in Legba, a mulatto because he is the son of the sun and the moon.

## Summoning the Gods

The gods of Voodoo—the loas, *mystères*, or *voudon*—reach the place where the houn'gan or mam'bo summons them by leaving the atmospheric abode assigned them by the occult spirit referred to as the "source higher than ourselves." These gods may enter a *govi* (a pottery jar) or may become incarnate by "mounting" a Voodoo follower (the *cheval*, or "horse"). The *cheval* loses absolutely all consciousness. It is the *mystère* alone who acts. He prophesies, dances, and performs magic, without the person who is thus mounted knowing anything at all of what the *mystère* does or says. Even when the *mystère* has departed, the "horse" remains unaware of his actions and his movements until informed of them by a witness. The person is changed physically, insofar as that is possible, by means of gestures, expressions, the voice, clothing, tastes, age, habits, and customs of the *mystère*, which abolishes the very soul of the person possessed. For example, an eight-year-old child mounted by a "*Grande*" (an old woman *mystère*) such as *Grande Erzulie*, will be feeble, practically speechless and squeaking like an old woman 100 years old; while an old man 90 years old possessed by a raging *Ogou* such as *Bacossou* will bound out of his torpor, brandish his sword, and dance better than *Nureyev*.

After the possession, the individual usually falls into a state which, for the most part, is characterized by a complete indifference as to the god's actions during the mounting. It must be added that certain ritual possessions are very exhausting for the "horse," particularly if he is mounted by the more powerful loas. The more powerful the loas, the greater the "horse" is fatigued after the possession.

As a general rule, the personality of the "horse" is so effaced during what is traditionally called the "*crise de loa*" (loa-crisis), that even the sick who are mounted by the *mystères* instantly manifest a complete disregard for their illness or infirmity. It is not unusual to see a sick person who has scarcely dragged himself into the peristyle get up vigorously, after being mounted, and start to dance, to gesticulate frenetically, and even to leap.

At a Voodoo ceremony, someone in the company may be seated or

walking around when all at once he seems to receive a terrible blow in a certain place on his body. Some initiates claim that it is at the nape of the neck; others that it is in the legs. Often he utters a cry or a moan, giving a clear impression that an invisible force means to or is trying to get control of him. He struggles, staggers, nearly always going around in circles, and throws out his arms in all directions in an obvious effort to drive off the force that is trying to possess him.

The "horse" hurls himself violently upon the company, against whose bodies he reclines as though to implore their help. To be sure, some people know certain signs they can make or words they can utter to send the mystère away. But the moment the invisible power has mounted the "horse," he becomes transformed, straightens himself up, and goes about the business of the mystère *who has taken his place in the person's own body*. The mystère gives his greetings, and usually asks for his special emblems.

These emblems consist of arms, costumes, kerchiefs to tie around the head, the waist, the wrist, or the ankles, magic wands, beverages, and perfumes, which stand as symbols of the hermetic colors and forms of the invisibles. The symbolism in these objects permits the loa to perform their magic better.

The loa depart more easily than they arrive. Often they show signs of suddenly losing interest in what they are doing, drop whatever objects they have in hand, sometimes utter a mournful cry, and lean upon someone or slump to their knees, abandoning the physical body of their "horse." At other times they leave their "horse" with such ease that it is difficult to tell when they are gone, so that people sometimes ask if the mystère is "still there." In this case one may occasionally even speak to a person believed to be still mounted, thinking he is addressing the mystère, when, indeed, the mystère is no longer there. This confusion can also work the other way. Often a person is mounted so easily that another may suddenly realize, when talking to him, that he is talking to a loa instead.

A mystère does not necessarily have to be summoned in order to mount a person, and often a loa who has not been called makes his appearance. In any case, whether summoned or not, a mystère can always be sent away either by the houn'gan or by any other person who knows how.

From this it follows that in the oum'phors, the role of the houn'gan or the mam'bo is to attract the loa by the water (which they call

*manman bagaille-là*) and by the sacrifices to the sound of the drums and chants, but in any case by such means as they, as masters, have at their disposal, and from the onset of the loa-crisis right up to the moment when it may be necessary to dismiss them back into the astral or the invisible. The following is witnessed invariably after the descent of a *mystère*: the *mystère* "mounts his horse," then at once is obliged to salute the houn'gan or the mam'bo before concerning himself with his own proper magic in the peristyle, until he judges it time to leave on his own accord or until the houn'gan dismisses him for one reason or another. Occasionally the houn'gan's or the mam'bo's knowledge is used to stabilize a possession which becomes a lamentable struggle in which neither "horse" nor *mystère* is able to get control. The water, chants, and drums play a considerable part in the stabilization process.

Houn'gans insufficiently trained have been known to become insane or ill, and "horses" to be terribly mistreated or even killed because they had been overcome by the *mystère* whom they served. The houn'gan who lacks sufficient knowledge to master the *mystères* is exposed to terrible risks. We have personally witnessed the following moving scene: A houn'gan who was questioning *mystères* in an *oum'phor* and calling them successively in a *govi* was not able to temper the anger of Loco-Ati-sou. Loco struck him on the head, probably with an object lying on the *pé*, not without first having made an infernal *din*. The young houn'gan fell unconscious under the blow. A deathly silence ensued. Another houn'gan who was outside with us was obliged to use his authority and open the door of the *bagui* so as to find the unconscious man who was being hounded by Loco. The man was brought into the peristyle and only with great difficulty was he brought around.

Such confrontation with a Voodoo god sometimes may even result in the death of the houn'gan, when the initiate stands up to a *voudoun* or disobeys his commands. They say that in such cases the *mystère* "touches" them if they fall ill, and "eats" them if they die. This is not an astonishing fact if one realizes that the power of a *voudoun* such as Legba—according to the fundamentals of the tradition—is able to attain a temperature of 30,000,000° C. in the star that represents the town of Ifé, when it pleases the *mystère* to rise this high with his "horse," and that the houn'gan would be unable to temper it. Anything can be devastated in the terrible ranges of this fantastic energy.

Theoretically we note that, if he is capable, the houn'gan is also able to cause a loa to rise to this altitude. At the same time we must admit that contemporary houn'gans no longer possess this ability. This was the case, however, when, to win the wars of Haitian independence over the armies of Napoleon which seemed invincible, the *n'gan*<sup>1</sup> who were among the slaves caused certain of them to arise through the agency of the Ogous, the Marinette Bois Chèches, the Jean Pethros, and the Aloumandias. Independence once acquired, the country was devastated by water, iron, fire, and poison, from Tiburon to Maribaroux and from Môle Saint Nicolas to Grand Gosier because of the temperature to which these *n'gan* had carried the Des-salines, the Capois-la-morts, and the Christophes—all of them "mounted." But this was only after the African priesthood had more or less appeased the loas who had brought to pass this epic by attaining this revolutionary temperature, unique in the history of the world—these loas to whom had been sacrificed all the agricultural and industrial riches of the metropolis in a few hours, not counting the thousands of "white heads."

We say "more or less" because up to the present the loas say that the heroes and the beneficiaries of this supernatural epic have not kept the promises which were made to them. The daily experience with Voodoo proves that it is much better to refuse the services of a *voudoun* than to make him promises which are never kept. For the mystère himself always keeps his promises whatever the difficulties that he must surmount.

## What the Gods Can Do

A mystère can mount a person for the following reasons:

- (1) To protect him.
- (2) To confer upon him a power or a faculty that he needs for the successful accomplishment of a task, and which he does not ordinarily have. To permit him, for example, to swim to land in case of shipwreck, if he does not know how to swim. Many people report that such-and-such a person "did not know how to swim, and when a sailboat on which he was sailing was wrecked, naturally he almost

<sup>1</sup> *Houn'gan* is a phonetic variant of the African terms *N'gan*, *N'ganga*, *Moganga*. *Moganga*, for example, is applied to the fetish-makers of the Oubangui.

drowned, since the accident occurred on the open sea; however, *Agoueh* mounted him and brought him to shore."

(3) To permit him to remove himself with supernatural speed.

(4) To cure him of illness or to prevent him from suffering.

(5) To give him counsel. In this case, those who speak to the possessed person repeat to him the advice that the loa gave during the "loa-crisis."

(6) To give some other person a treatment, or simply to prescribe or to compose a remedy.

(7) To punish the "horse" for some offense. In this case, despite the commands and rebukes of the houn'gan, the *mystère* may refuse to leave—to dismount the "horse"—for hours or days, determined to exhaust him as much as possible. Often we see the consequences of such a punishment: a dislocated limb, or an illness which only the *mystère* who caused it can cure.

(8) To point out some forbidden ritual.

(9) To give warning of danger threatening an individual or the community.

(10) To preside over, or to assist at a ritual ceremony.

(11) To come and get a sacrificial offering.

Because of all these functions—relating as much to the cult as to everyday life—the most important consequences for the mystical life as well as the national life follow from the participation of the Voodoo loas in human affairs. Thus, in everything that particularly concerns Haitian life, Voodoo is like a superior soul, which acts as a counterpart of the soul as ordinarily regarded, and which accompanies man in all his occupations.

## The Magic Center of Voodoo

The magic center of Voodoo is found in the center of or in the middle of the circle of the post or of the globe of the asson. For this reason the handle is fixed in the middle of the asson, and the post in the center of the masonry socle.

The *mystère* who magically guards the wooden part of the asson (the handle) and the wood of the center-post is called *Loko Ati-Sou*, whose name is derived from his magical attributes: *Loko* (the place)

Ati (of the wand) Sou (magic). Hence Papa Loko is not only the mystère who guards the center-post, but also the mystère who serves as treasurer of the oum'phor. Consequently he knows the best magio formulas. So, just as the "magic purity of the astral powers of the center-post" is personified by the loa called Grande Ai-Zan (which signifies "knowledge of the mysteries of the astral through the cross"), the loa Grande Aizan is called Mam'bo Aizan: the magician par excellence of the oum'phor. For this reason Grande Aizan is believed to be the wife of Loko Ati-Sou. The magic entourage of Mam'bo Aizan is composed of mystères of the African "nation" called the "A-Dan I-Zo Y-an Go Nation."

## The Voodoo Pantheon

The origin of the ensemble of Voodoo gods has become extraordinarily complex both on the supernatural level and on the geographic level because of the assimilation of new gods day after day into the pantheon. Some of these new gods come from the noteworthy personalities of dead initiates whose souls have become divinities. Other new gods may come from another rite and are called "strangers to a tribal clan" or "purchased mystères." The ritual of the tribal clan which "purchases" them is complicated by the fact that each mystère has its ritual mode of behavior and its personal attributes that tend to multiply the ritual accessories and augment the ceremonial itself. For example, if, in a particular rite, the mystère *Ogou Bhalin'dio* and the mystère *Ogou Fer* are being "served," their ritual diagrams as well as their colors are different although they are of the same "family" of loas. Their ritual chants also are markedly different; wherefore it may be concluded that, although the planetary origin of these two loas is from the same sidereal source, the separate origins of their personal ceremonials render the Voodoo ritual very diverse.

The following list of mystères will give an idea of the extent of the number of Voodoo gods. It is impossible to name all the loas, especially since every day new ones are created out of the spirits of dead initiates by Voodoo priests.

Atin-Gbi-Ni-Mon-Sé (the omnipotence of Ati-G-Bô Legba)  
Yé Dan-Gbé

Dan-Bha-Lah Wé-Do (Danbhalah Yé-Wé)  
 Ai-Da Wé-Do (Ayidohwédo)  
 Maou-Lihsah  
 Lihsah (Lihsah Gba Dya)—Legba (Leh Gba Dya)  
 Legba Ati-n Bon (Legba Atibon)  
 Québiésou (Héviozo)  
 Grande Ai-Zan  
 Assatò Micho To Kpo Dounou Voudoun  
 A Dan Man Sih Wé-Do  
 Agranman (Caiman, Anolis)  
 Adya Houn'tò (the drums "mounted" by a process known as  
 "à dya")  
 Agaou -Tonnerre  
 Agassou-Allah-Da  
 Erzulie (Maitresse Erzulie, Grande Erzulie)  
 Grande Fleurizon  
 Ogou Fer  
 Ogou Bha Lin Dyo  
 Ogou Bha Tha Lah  
 Ogou Shango  
 Agoueh R Oyo  
 Azagon  
 Agoum (Adoum Guidi)  
 Aglaou Wé-Do  
 Agoueh-Tha Oyo  
 Ogou Ashadah (A Shah Deh)  
 Zocliman  
 Sim'bi Y-An-Kitha  
 Sim'bi Y-An Dch-Zo  
 Sim'bi Y-An Pha-Ca  
 Sim'bi Y-An-Po-Lah  
 Marassah (twins)  
 Marassah (triplets)  
 Marassah (quadruplets)  
 Avadra Bô-Roi  
 Grande Alouba  
 Grande Aloumandya  
 Papa Loko Azam'blo Guidi

Aroyo  
Dan Hwé-Zo  
Boum'ba Maza (a family of loas)  
Lemba Filé Sabre  
Sobo  
Badè  
Badè-sih Cala Houn'sou  
Houn'  
Houn'sih  
Houn'gan  
Houn'guénicon  
Houn'tò  
Ti Gougoune  
Gougoune Dan Leh  
Québiésou Dan Leh (m)  
Canga  
Zin'ga  
Lem'bha Zaou  
Man Inan  
Madame Lah-Oué  
Laoca  
La Sirène (Erzulie)  
La Baleine (Erzulie)  
An Wé-Zo  
Ogou Bha-Da-Gri  
Zaou Pemba  
Manman Pemba (a drum which is simultaneously a cannon)  
O-Sou Maré  
Mackandal  
Silibo Vavo  
Grande Sim'ba  
Ti Kitha Démembré  
Sim'ba Maza  
A Dan Hi  
Cousin Zaca  
Zo  
Zo Man Kilé  
Sophie Badè

Agaou Comblé  
 Bô-Sou Trois Cornes  
 Jakata  
 Danbhalah La Flambeau  
 Zinclin Zain  
 Azaca Médeh  
 Houn'on'gonn' ("the place of sound," personified by Maitresse  
 Hounon'gon, an initiate who directs the ceremonies)  
 Ossangne  
 Ogou Y-Am-San  
 Guédé Nouvavou  
 Guédé Mazaca  
 Guédé L'orage (the Storm)  
 Guédé Cinq Jours Malheureux (Five Days' Misfortune)  
 Guédé Ti Puce lan d'leau (Little-Flea-in-the-Water)  
 Zazi Boulonnin  
 Ogou Can-Can Ni Can  
 Criminel Pethro  
 Pin'ga Maza  
 Roi Ou-Angole  
 Zantahi  
 Zantahi Médeh  
 Ou-An Ilé (the mother of the Dahomean King Tegbésou, after  
 becoming a mystère)  
 Ibo Sou-Aman  
 Brisé Macaya  
 Brisé Pem'bha  
 Nannan Blouklou  
 Ibo Kiki-Lih-bô  
 Erzulie Taureau (The Bull)  
 Erzulie Fréda  
 Erzulie Gé Rouge (Red-Eye)  
 Erzulie Mapian (Louse)  
 Ti Pierre Dantor  
 Ti Jean  
 Ogou Ashadeh  
 Bossou Ashadeh (King Tegbésou of Dahomey)  
 Ashadeh Bòcò  
 Bòcò Legba

Linglessou  
Marinette Bois-Chèche  
Ti Jean Pethro  
Jean-Philippe Pethro  
Grande Sobo  
Adjinakou (the elephant mystère Agaou l'éphant)  
Adahi Loko (Adan-hi Loco)  
Kadia Bossou  
Baron La Croix (The Cross)  
Baron Cimetière (The Cemetery)  
Baron Samedi (Saturday)  
Grande Brigitte  
Guédé Ti Wava  
Guédé Ti Pété (Little-Break-wind)  
Boli Shah (a family of loas)  
Danbhalah Grand-Chemin (The Highway)  
Mademoiselle Anaise  
Mam'zelle Charlotte  
Maitresse Mam'bo  
Marassah Guinin (African Twins)  
Marassah Bois (Twins of the Wood)  
Marassah Bord-de-Mer (Twins of the Seashore)  
Erzulie Dos-bas (Low back)  
Grande Allaba  
Attiassou Yangodor  
Similor  
Guédé Z'eclairs (Lightning Bolts)  
Guédé Nibbho  
Guédé Vi  
Loko Adan-he-co  
Maitre Ka-Fu (Legba, Master of the Crossroads)  
Olishah  
Ossou Gninmin  
Grande Obatalah  
Bayacou  
Sim'bi d'l'eau (Simbi of the Water)  
Ibo L'Asile  
Ibo Can-Man  
Maitre Pem-bha

Dan Pethro  
Sinigal  
Ti Jean Pied-chèche (Dry Foot)  
Ya Bô Fer  
Simalo (the name which Antoine Simon, President of Haiti from 1908 to 1911, gave his goat, which was a loa, following the tradition of divine right in the Dahomean monarchy)  
Roi Louanges  
Jean Zombi  
Captain Zombi  
Guédé Bon Poussière de la Croix (Good-Dust-of-the-Cross)  
Bacossou  
Guédé Doube  
Guédé Fatras  
Guédé Ti Clos  
Guédé Docteur Piqures (Doctor Hypodermic)  
Agu Roi Linsou  
Danbhalah To Can  
Amisi Wédo  
Grande Miroi-Zé  
Erzulie Boum'ba  
Ogou Tonnerre (Baron Tonnerre—Thunder)  
Bélécoun  
Capalou Pem'ba  
Brisé Pem'ba  
Maloulou  
Mavangou (a family of mystères)  
Mitraïlle (Grapeshot)  
Madame Travaux (Mrs. Works)  
Sidor Pem'ba (Colonel Dan Pethro rite)  
Fa-ou Dan-Tô  
Ogou Baba (a general who is a retired trooper)  
Mam'bo Ati-A-Sou  
Guédé Souffrant (Suffering Guédé: Legba as Christ crucified)  
Grand Bois Mégui  
Adélaïde  
Clairmésine Clairmeille  
Ogou Balisère  
Ibo Cossi

Mademoiselle Florida  
 Papa Houn'tò  
 Dame Houn'tò  
 Maître Cimetièrè (Master of the Cemetery)  
 Brutus Jean (Ti Brutus)  
 Général Jules Canmil  
 Guédé Ratalon (the first gravedigger)  
 Guédé Morpion (Guédé Ratalon's pick-man)  
 Captain Debas (an American mystère, also known as Deebat, or Debard)  
 Escalia Boum'ha  
 Trois Feuilles-Trois Racines (Three Leaves-Three Roots)  
 Marinette Picds-Chèches (Dry Feet)  
 Ogou Dan Pethro  
 Cita  
 Zilah Moyo  
 Tiacou-Tiacou  
 Papa Pierre  
 Manman Diamant  
 Marie-Louise (a famous mystère of the War of Independence)  
 Ati-Danhi Ibo Loko (Accident Ibo Loko)  
 Trois Carrefours (Three Crossroads)  
 Jean-Pierre Pongoueh  
 Zo Flanco Pethro  
 Toro Pethro (Pethro Bull)  
 Quita (Kitha)  
 Kanga Pethro  
 Reine Congo Franc (Queen French Congo)  
 Six Milles Hommes (Six Thousand Men, probably Similor)  
 Dérazine  
 Djobolo Bossou  
 Séverine  
 Sarazine Jambé  
 Erzulie-Séverine-Belle-Femme (Beautiful Woman)  
 La Belle Vénus (The Fair Venus—Erzulie)  
 Ogou Palama  
 Grande Bossine  
 Grande Délai  
 Dame Ténaise

Dagoueh Bologoueh  
 Mouché Pierre  
 Ti Pierre (Little Peter)  
 Gros Pierre (Big Peter)  
 Sobo Quersou  
 Bazou  
 Nantiou  
 Zan-Madone

The Voodoo pantheon is far from complete in the preceding list. Scarcely one hundred pages would suffice to mention all the loas included in it, especially if all the etymological variants continually given the names of the loas by initiates were taken into account. For this reason many of the loas seem quite bizarre on account of their names, for example, *Ti Puce lan d'Veau* (Little Flea-in-the-Water), *Mademoiselle Florida* (Miss Florida), *Fleurizon*, or *Grande Fleurizon* (Grandmother Fleurizon), and *Gédé Souffrant* (Suffering Guédé). These are variants of some of the great classical mystères. They assume these unusual names for their own occult reasons.

## Classifying the Gods

The following is an attempt at a classification of the mystères according to the various rites or divisions of Voodoo, such as Rada and Pethro. This classification is necessarily arbitrary, owing to the fact that a mystère generally belongs to whatever rite he is "served" in, with the single exception of the so-called "Guinin" (African) mystères, who because of their traditional purity refuse to "work" in any but their own rites. The Guédés (the loas of death and of cemeteries) who have *noms caillants* (names with the great mystères assume when they do not wish to appear under their real names) are classed separately, since it is difficult to assign them to particular rites because of the multiplicity of their names.

### *The Rada Mystères*

Até Gbini Mon Sé  
 Yé Dan-Gbé  
 Danbhalah Wédo

Danbhalah Yé-Wé  
 Aida Wédo (Ayidahwédo)  
 Mawu-Lihсан  
 Lihсан  
 Legba Ati (n) Bon  
 Québiésou (Héviozo)  
 Grande Ai-Zan  
 Aizan Avélékéthé  
 Assatò  
 Adanmansih Wédo  
 Aganman, Caïman, Anolis  
 Adya Houn'tò  
 Agassou Allada  
 Maitresse and Grande Erzulie  
 Fleurizon  
 Agoueh R Oyo  
 Agoueh Tha Oyo  
 Sim'bi Yandehzo  
 Sim'bi Yanphaca  
 Sim'bi Yanpolah  
 Marassah (Twins)  
 Avadra Bô-roi (Good King)  
 Loko Azamblo Guidi  
 Aroyo  
 Sobo  
 Badè  
 Badè-sih Cala Houn'sou  
 Houn'  
 Houn'sih  
 Houn'guénicon  
 Houn'gan  
 Houn'tò  
 Gougoune Dan Leh  
 Québiésou Dan Leh  
 La Sirène  
 La Baleine  
 An Oué-Zo  
 Silibo Vavo  
 Grande Vavo

Grande Sim'ba  
 A Dan-hi  
 Cousin Zaca  
 Zo  
 Zo Man Kilé  
 Sophie Badè  
 Agaou Comblé  
 Zinclizin  
 Azaca Médeh  
 Guédé Nouvavou  
 Guédé Mazaca  
 Zan Tha-hi  
 Zan Tha-hi Médeh  
 Ogou Bacouleh  
 Erzulie Fréda  
 Ti Pierre Dantor  
 Ti Jean  
 Bòcò Legba  
 Linglessou  
 Grande Sobo  
 Adanhi Loko  
 Baron La Croix (The Cross)  
 Baron Cimetiè (The Cemetery)  
 Baron Samedi (Saturday)  
 Grande Brigitte  
 Danbhalah Grand Chemin (The Highway)  
 Maitresse Mam'bo  
 Marassah Guinin (African Twins)  
 Erzulie Dos-bas (Low Back)  
 Grande Allaba  
 Guédé Nibbho  
 Loco A Dan-hi-co  
 Maitre Ka-Fu (Master of the Crossroads)  
 Bayacou  
 Sim'bi d'eau (Simbi of the Water)  
 Dan Pethro  
 Roi Louanges  
 Guédé Agu Roi Linsou  
 Danbhalah Tò Can

Amisi Wédo  
 Grande Miroi Zé  
 Bélécou-n  
 Grand Bois Mégui  
 Adélaïde  
 Clairmesine Clairmeille  
 Mademoiselle Florida  
 Papa Houn'tò  
 Dame Houn'tò  
 Captain Debas (the American mystère)  
 Papa Pierre  
 Manman Diamant  
 Marie-Louise  
 Ati Dan-hi Ibo Loko  
 Erzulie Séverine Belle-Femme (Fair Lady)  
 La Belle Vénus (Beautiful Venus)  
 Sobo Quersou

*Mystères Belonging To All Rites*

Assatò  
 Aganman, Caïman  
 Adya Houn'tò  
 Maitresse et Grande Erzulie  
 Sim'bi d'Éau  
 Sim'bi Yandehzo  
 Sim'bi Yanphaca  
 Sim'bi Yanpolah  
 Marassah  
 Houn'  
 Houn'sih  
 Houn'gan  
 Houn'guénicon  
 Houn'tò  
 Québiésou Dan Leh  
 Grande Sim'ba  
 Zo  
 Zo Man Kilé

Danbhalah Grand Chemin  
 Maitresse Mam'bo (Grande Ai-Zan)  
 Maître Ka-Fu  
 Papa Houn'tò  
 Dame Houn'tò

### *The Rada-Dabomey Mystères*

Até Gbini Mon Sé  
 Yé Dan Gbé  
 Ayidohwédo  
 Maou-Lihsah  
 Lihsan Gba Dya (Legba)  
 Legba Atin Bon (Adingban)  
 Québiésou  
 Ai-Zan  
 Sobo  
 Badè  
 An Qué Zo  
 Sophie Badé  
 Erzulie Fréda  
 Grande Sobo  
 Zan-Madone  
 A Dan-hi Loko  
 Erzulie La Belle Vénus

### *The Rada-Nago-Congo-Dabomey Mystères*

La Sirène (Erzulie)  
 La Baleine (Erzulie)

### *The Nago Mystères*

Ogou Fer (Dry Nago)  
 Ogou Bha Lin Dyo (Wet Nago)

Ogou Bha Tha Lah (Mixed Nago)  
 Ogou Chango (Nago, Pethro)  
 Adoum Guidi  
 Lem'ba Filé Sabre (Nago, Pethro)  
 Ogou Bha Da Gri  
 Ossangne  
 Ogou Yamsan (Nago, Pethro)  
 Ogou Cancannican (Nago Pethro)  
 Ogou Bhacouleh (Nago, Rada)  
 Ti Pierre Dantor (Nago, Rada, Dantor)  
 Ti Jean (Nago, Rada)  
 Bô-Sou Ashadeh (Nago, Dahomey)  
 Ashadeh Bòcò (Nago, Dahomey, Pethro)  
 Bolishah (Boli Shah)  
 Olishah (Oli Shah)  
 Grande O-Bhathalah  
 Bacossou  
 Ogou-Tonnerre (Nago, Pethro)  
 Ogou Baba  
 Ogou Balisère (Ogou Balisage)  
 Général Jules Canmil  
 Jean-Pierre Pougoueh  
 Ogou Palama

### *The Pethro Mystères*

Ogou Chango (Pethro, Nago)  
 Sim'bi Y-An-Kitha  
 Lem'ba Filé Sabre (Pethro, Nago)  
 Ti Gougoune  
 Lem'ba Zaou (Pethro, Congo)  
 Zaou Pem'ba (Pethro, Congo)  
 Manman Pem'ba (Pethro, Congo)  
 Mackandal  
 Sim'ba Maza  
 Danbhalah La Flambeau (The Torch)  
 Linglinzin (Pethro, Rada)



Ogou Yamsan (Pethro, Nago)  
Guédé Mazaca (Pethro, Rada)  
Guédé L'Orage (The Storm)  
Zazi Boulonnin (or Boulonmin)  
Ogou Cancan Ni Can  
Criminel Pethro  
Prin'ga Maza (Pethro Maza)  
Brisé Macaya  
Brizé Pem'ba  
Erzulie Toro (The Bull)  
Erzulie Gé Rouge (Red-Eye)  
Erzulie Mapian (Louse)  
Ashadeh Bòcò (Pethro, Nago, Dahomey)  
Bòcò Legba (Pethro, Rada)  
Linglessou Bassin-sang (Pethro, Rada)  
Marinette Bois-Chèche (Dry Wood)  
Marinette Lumin-di-fé (Light-the-Fire)  
Ti Jean Pethro  
Jean-Philippe Pethro  
Guédé Baron La Croix (Pethro, Rada)  
Guéde Baron Cimetiè (Pethro, Rada)  
Baron Samedi (Pethro, Rada)  
Grande Brigitte (Pethro, Rada)  
Similor  
Guédé Nibbho (Pethro Rada)  
Ibo Can-Man (Pethro, Ibo)  
Maitre Pem'ba (Pethro, Congo)  
Dan Pethro  
Ti Jean Pied Chèche (Dry Foot)  
Simalo  
Jean Zombi  
Captain Zombi  
Guédé Agu Roi Linsou (Pethro, Rada)  
Ogou Tonnerre (Pethro, Nago)  
Brisé Pem'ba (Pethro, Zandor)  
Maloulou (Pethro, Congo)  
Madame Travaux (Mrs. Works)  
Sidor Pem'ba (Pethro, Congo)

Grand Bois Mégui (Pethro, Rada)  
 Escalié Boum'ba (Pethro, Boum'ba)  
 Trois Feuilles, Trois Racines (Three Leaves, Three Roots)  
 Marinette Pieds Chèches (Dry-Feet: Pethro, Zandor)  
 Ogou Dan Pethro (Nago, Pethro)  
 Marie Louise (Pethro, Rada)  
 Trois Carrefours (Three Crossroads)  
 Zo Flanco Pethro  
 Toro Pethro (The Bull)  
 Kanga Pethro  
 Six Mille Hommes (Six Thousand Men)  
 Djobolo Bossou (Pethro, Congo)

### *11c Dantor Mystères*

Ti Pierre Dan-Tor  
 Ti Jean Dan-Tor  
 Fa-ou Dan-Tor  
 P'apa Pierre (Dantor, Rada, Nago)  
 Erzulie Dan-Tor

### *11c Kitha Mystères*

'fi Kitha Démembré  
 Quita

### *11c Zandor Mystères*

Brisé Pem'ba  
 Marisette Pieds Chèches (Dry-Feet)

*The Ibo Mystères*

Ibo Sou Aman  
 Ibo Kiki Lih Bô  
 Ibo L'Asile  
 Ibo Lélé  
 Ibo Can-Man (Ibo, Pethro)  
 Ibo Cossi (Ibo, Cossi)

*The Congo Mystères*

Sim'bi d'l'eau  
 Grande Alouba  
 Grande Aloumandia  
 Canga  
 Zin'ga  
 Lem'ba Za-ou (Congo, Pethro)  
 Man Inan  
 Madame Lah-Oué  
 Laoca (the Congo Legba)  
 Zaou Pem'ba (Congo, Pethro)  
 Manman Pem'ba (Congo, Pethro)  
 Roi Ou-Angole (Congo, Angola)  
 Marassah Congo Bord-de-Mer (Seashore)  
 Maitre Pem'ba (Congo, Pethro)  
 Sinigal (Congo, Senegal)  
 Roi Louanges (Congo, Rada, Loango)  
 Caplaou Pem'ba  
 Maloulou (Congo, Pethro)  
 Sidor Pem'ba (Congo, Pethro)  
 Zilah Moyo  
 Reine Congo Franc  
 Djobolo (Congo, Pethro)  
 Bazou (Congo, Angola)

*The Boum'ba Mystères*

Cimetière Boum'ba (Boum'ba of the Cemetery)  
Escalia Boum'ba

*A Canga Mystère*

Zoclimo

*The Guédés*

Guédé L'Orage  
Guédé Cinq Jours Malheureux  
Guédé Ti Puce Lan d'Veau  
Guédé Ti Wawa, or Ti Oua-Oué  
Guédé Ti Pété  
Guédé Vi (a child of the Guédés)  
Guédé Bon Poussière de la Croix  
Guédé Sabalah  
Guédé Doube  
Guédé Fatras  
Guédé Ti Clos  
Guédé Docteur Piqures  
Guédé Souffrant  
Guédé Ratalon  
Guédé Morpion (Louse)

It may be observed that although most of the Guédés are listed separately, the most classic forms of Guédé are included among the Rada loas, for example, *Baron La Croix Guédé Nibho (Nébo)*, *Baron*

*Cimetié, Guédé Mazaca, Baron Semedi, Guédé Nowvavou, Agu-Roi Lin-Sou, and Guédé Houn'sou.*

As for the lesser Guédés, such as *Ti Pété* (Little Break-Wind), *Ratalon*, (Level-with-the-Heel, Laid-out, Prostrate), and *Ti Puce lan d'leau*, (Little-Flea-in-the-Water), their bizarre names derive from the caustic character of this race of loas. All the Guédés are pranksters.

The foregoing lists of mystères illustrate the difficulty previously mentioned with regard to placing any given mystère in any given rite, for the classification itself recognizes many mystères served in several rites—for example, the mystères which belong indifferently to all rites. and those who belong to the Rada-Dahomey-Nago-Congo group.

I have rejected any rigid classification of loas such as exists, for example, in strictly Haitian Voodoo, since their exclusively Pethro, Zandor, Congo, or Anmine character is subject to dispute; for, as a rule, a loa is "Zandor," or "Congo" simply because it is served in the Zandor or the Congo rite. This concept recalls the words of Sir James Frazer, who in his book *The Golden Bough*, Vol. I, page 165, denies the distinction between Janus and Jupiter which is suggested by certain writers on mythology: ". . . the names of the divinities being identical in substance, though varying in form with the dialect of the particular tribe which worshipped them. At first, when the peoples dwelt near each other, the difference between the deities would be hardly more than one of name; in other words, it would be almost purely dialectical. But the gradual dispersion of the tribes, and their consequent isolation from each other, would favor the growth of divergent modes of conceiving and worshipping the gods whom they had carried with them from their old home, so that in time discrepancies of myth and ritual would tend to spring up and thereby to convert a nominal into a real distinction between the divinities . . . thus it might come about that the same ancient deities, which their forefathers had worshipped together before the dispersion, would now be so disguised by the accumulated effect of dialectical and religious divergencies that their original identity might fail to be recognised, and they would take their places side by side as independent divinities . . ." Frazer is speaking of certain religious concepts found among Greek and Roman peoples. However, the same phenomenon is observed among African tribes. If by his transfer from Greece to Rome

*Zeus* became first *Jupiter Dianus*, then *Janus*, just so, *Héviozo*, migrating from the shores of Africa to the shores of Haiti has become *Quéhiésou Dan Leh*.

By the very fact that the social tradition is of ancestral origin like that of the Voodoo cult itself, it is a simple matter to discover in the pantheon of the loas a governmental form of the social hierarchy. For example:

Legba Adingban	King of kings
Aïda Wédo	Queen of heaven, earth, and angels
Ogou Ferraille	General
Azaca Médé	Minister of the Interior and of Agriculture

All of these important loas are representatives of a power deriving from an occult origin, a power in fact controlled by the *mystère* Legba. Their power is regarded as passing, by means of Voodoo magic, from mere potentiality to useful action. Functionally, they are all under the houn'gan's control who, in point of hierarchy, is their chief. The houn'gan, then, controls a force which, on the human-principal level of Legba, synthetizes all the powers of the loas. Therefore he is the one who, in the course of Voodoo ceremonies, is chiefly responsible for moving from the potentiality to the magical act.

## The Roles of the Gods

For the purpose of clarifying the roles of all the *mystères*, it will suffice to present several traditional interpretations of the important fundamental loas of the Voodoo Cult. These roles show the reasons why the Haitian Voodooist considers the gods vitally inseparable from himself.

Silibo Vavou, or Schibhlo Vavau	Erzulie adorning herself; science; omniscience; prescience: the holy spirit of initiation.
Marassah	The sun as magic regency of the sky through birth and rebirth.
Danbhalah	The return of animal or <i>bossale</i>

	(uninitiated) matter to the sun through initiation.
Ogou Fer	Logic; reason; wisdom; philosophy; armed and intelligent intercession.
Can-zo	The power which directs the raw or <i>bossale</i> matter towards the solar regions.
The Rada Mystères	The loas of intelligence.
Sim'bi Y-An-Pha-Ca	The cosmic culture.
The Nago Oyo Mystères	The voluntary and conscious reflection of initiated matter in the high atmosphere of the celestial constellations through Erzulie; that is, by the principle of the Virgin taken as the "magic mirror" (Agoueh Tha Oyo).
Agoueh R Oyo	The will to be reflected magically in the ritual waters (Agoueh Tha Oyo) or in the abyss represented by the socle of the center-post.
Guédé Houn'sou	The ground of the oum'phor and the asson; the Virgin and Child; the moon and the sun.
Québiésou Dan Leh	Supreme justice, or the thunderstone of the bagui; the religious morality of the oum'phor.
Baya-cou, or Bha Ya Chou	Cosmic work of the day and the night (Je-sus).
Yé-ch-ou	
Bha-ca, or Ba-Ka	The science of talismans, or tele-matic Voodoo, representing magically the two cosmic priesthoods:

	BHA = Orient Sun Man (Legba)	KA = Occident Moon Woman (Erzulie)
The Mavangou Mystères		The loas of necromancy.
Houn'gan		The guardian of the magic powers of the sun.
Houn'guénicon		The ritual prayer and its cabalistic effect; stellar mercy.
Oum'phor		The Holy City; Jerusalem; the Zodiac; the twelve cabalistic abodes of Erzulie; the gates of Zion; the secrets of the astral light.
Legba (Master of the Crossroads)		Geometric separation of the cabalistic matter represented by the ritual water, which produces the magic possibilities of the visible phenomenon; practical consolidation or centralization of the dispersed powers of astral space; geocentric utilization of the stellar atmosphere.
Africa		The galaxy which governs the holy spirit; the geometric and spiritist system of the sun, represented by the mystère Legba Ati-Bon Ati-Dan I-bo Lo-ko.
Ati-Dan I-Bo Loko		The tree-principle; the tree of good and evil; the center-post of the peristyle.

Guédé Ni-Bo, or Râ Nibho      The risen Christ; the rising sun; the vertical line of the center-post; the oriental Voodoo priesthood.

These orthodox interpretations reveal that despite all deformations of the magic formulas of origin, the causes of which are due to the particular psychology of certain sects and tribes, Voodoo is nevertheless based upon the great supernatural loas whose duty is to bring the material body back into the higher atmospheres through initiation and ritual.

These symbolic identifications have such value as to predominate universally among Voodooists. It is therefore useless to attempt to separate the Congo mystères from the Anmine, the Anmine from the Pethro, or the Rada from the Nago. Between these "rites" or "nations of loas," all that matters is the difference in the manner of applying the science of magic; for nothing of a scientific nature can exist apart from these great basic loas. Thus, the "nations of Africa" (because Africa conceals the galaxy which governs the Holy Spirit) have, each of them, a hidden significance which, in the Voodoo frame of reference, is a scientific universality that differs from tribe to tribe. However, from the purely "national-scientific" or "tribal-scientific" level to the purely aesthetic and moral level, the differences between the rites are confirmed. For example, the Rada rite is, as a rule, more moral than the Pethro, since the Rada is traditionally the rite par excellence that governs the moral aspects of the sky under the form of the mystère *Ai-Zan A Vélé-Kétheh*. The mystères *Ai-Da Wé-do* and *Da-nbhalah Wé-Do* are the visible manifestations of Ra-Da, the serpent, in the oum'phor.

The ethical differences in the ruling position of the serpent *Da-n* are therefore placed in relation to the basic rites of Voodoo thus:

RADA	The Star, or Upper Air
NAGO	Metal
CONGO	Water
PETHRO	Fire
IBO	The Word
MINE, OR AN-MINE	The Earth

However, each rite, having inherited the tradition in its entirety, is in itself a complete magic system of such a kind that it contains the entire body of symbolic significations. The only difference is that each rite reveals to its own initiates, by its own system of symbolism, its own individual character and the individual cosmic temperament of the African "nation" with which it is identified.

### Danbhalah - - - the Serpent God

The snake vertebrae that adorn the assons of houn'gans and mam'bos represent Danbhalah, while the cephalo-rachidian axis, as well as the fertilizing seed which makes Legba a phallic mystère, are represented by the center-post of the peristyle. Da, in magic, represents the oldest of the ancestors, a fact that gives him the right to have the "cosmic egg" as his ritual nutriment. Because of his very great age—the age of humanity—tradition holds that Danbhalah Houé-Do never speaks. He expresses himself, rather, by the hissing of a snake—the sound produced by those whom he possesses during ceremonies. In the Pethro rite, the ritual whistle represents this snake-hissing. Since Pethro is the rite of solar fire (*hwé-zo*), the hissing is heard in the roar of the flames.

Voodoo *langage*—the words used in chants—originated from the hissing of the snake, and is, in fact, the direct expression of what is highest placed in the astral-causal. In the Voodoo tradition, then, Danbhalah corresponds to the asson and the bell with which the houn'gan, the highest member of the hierarchy, officiates. The official attributes of the houn'gan correspond to the rattlesnake, otherwise known as the *couleuvre-à-clochette* (bell-snake). This musical serpent is therefore the most significant expression of the musical "wood" and the musical calabashes of the *joukougou*, of the calabash and the wooden handle of the asson, as well as of the circle and the serpent-adorned wood of the center-post.

Since the center-post is, accordingly, a "solar expression," all the sacred music of Voodoo produced by the batteries of Pethro, Rada, Congo, and Ibo drums is likewise a solar expression. The center-post of the peristyle is therefore the "magic support" of Voodoo through the mystère Legba Ati Bon.

Since the "reptilian line of the wood" descends from the astral to possess its "white horses" with the personality of Danbhalah, this mystère appears always to "swim" in grace and to delight totally in metaphysical and hyperphysical pleasure while seeming at the same time to be lost in active and contemplative joy. This phenomenon is due to the three types of beatitudes recognized in theology: the active, the contemplative, and the joyful.

Now the serpent of the oum'phor personifies the total number of beatitudes which the initiates double to fourteen: seven for the body as corporal qualities, seven for the soul as spiritual virtues. So also are all the other mystères to be considered as so many serpents; and while the serpent Danbhalah or Dan-Gbé expresses the geometric perfection of which all the loas and all ritual performance partake, the loas are all serpents more or less perfect, according to the degree of knowledge they possess.

Danbhalah expresses geometric perfection because in his quality as a mystère he corresponds to the gifts of the holy spirit through his beatitudes, for the church's doctors of theology recognize that the beatitudes correspond to the seven gifts of the holy spirit. Danbhalah is therefore aptly named Dan-(Gift)Bhalah Wé-Do. Hence, his geometric expression is total and perfect, because, as in theology, a beatitude is, according to St. Thomas, an "operation and ultimate perfection," while Aristotle has defined it as being contained in "the most perfect operation by reason of its power, its practice, and its object." The ritual attitudes of Danbhalah recall to the minds of initiates the best definition of the word "beatitude" that theology has to offer for the instruction of the uninitiated, namely "the ultimate end of rational nature."

## The Voodoo Virgin

The female energy of Legba is Erzulie, the Virgin of the Voodoo initiates, commonly called Maitresse Erzulie. She personifies another species of serpent, short and coiled upon itself, which feeds upon bananas and which lives chiefly in the water. Etymologically this short, quick-moving serpent which is thought to run over the virgin ground

like a bolt of celestial fire, derives from *érinos*, which means "fig tree" or "banana tree;" and from *Erigone*, the constellation of the Virgin. Consequently, Erzulie is the most attractive mystère of Voodoo. She is precisely the Voodoo heart, which she shares with Legba, and which is also his attribute. Magically, Erzulie is the lover of Legba in the same sense that Erigone is the lover of Bacchus, that is to say, as mistress of the water she is the ritual water, while Legba is the eucharistic wine.

In the Voodoo tradition, Maitresse Erzulie fulfills several roles. She is the mystère of eloquence—the mystère of the word, which she shares as an attribute along with Legba. She is the mystère of jealousy, vengeance, and discord, and on the other hand, the mystère of love, perpetual help, good will, health, beauty, and fortune. Thus, under the same name of *Eris*, or *Eros*, she possesses the "golden apple" which in Greek mythology, is the equivalent of the *figue-banane* of the magical tradition of Voodoo. It is this *pomme-banane* (apple-banana) that she casts among the Three Graces as the mystère of discord, and which she reaps eventually and shrewdly as mystère of beauty and of sacred music under the name of Venus. The tradition then shows her exercising her supernatural powers by means of two serpents that she employs as a magic weapon, at once contradictory and harmonious, brandishing one in each hand, and binding in mysterious fashion in her hair.

The Erzulies of vengeance and of ugliness are the terrible loas that bear the names of Marinette-Bois Chèche, Erzulie Toho, Erzulie Zandor, Erzulie Mapianguéh. These mystères twist in fantastic convulsions, indicating even saturnalian cannibalism. They "walk" on the "point" *z'araignée* (spider).

The Erzulies of wealth and beauty are the great virgins of Voodoo—Tsilah Wédo and Aida Wédo (the serpent-woman of Danbhalah Wédo), who are the two classic wives of Legba. They "walk" on the points of the fruitful earth, of the "sweet and ripe banana," of fidelity, of peace, of pure milk, and of the heart.

The tragic Erzulies of jealousy worship fire. These are the ones who fought in the ranks with the soldiers of the war for the independence of Haiti against Napoleon's armies as artillerymen and as prostitutes who instructed the insurgent slaves. They are fond of alcohol mixed with pepper, raw rum (*taña*) mixed with gunpowder, and their magic

attribute is the heart pierced and bloodied with the dagger of the Ogous.

The pure Erzulies of fidelity and of the fecund earth have as a magic attribute a vèvè of a heart surmounted by a stellar emblem. This heart is decorated with the horns of the Ram of the Golden Fleece which the ritual of the *loa-blancs* (white loas) offers to Agoueh R Oyo, the marine spouse of Erzulie. The heart is marked off in squares to reveal the peace which reigns on the earth when the virtues of the Virgin prevail through her bidding. The points placed in the middle of the squares indicate that this bidding is the solar achievement of the post which is right in the middle of the heart and which, like the center-post, corresponds exactly with the banana tree whose leaves lead to Ifé under the name *bateau d'Erzulie* (bark of Erzulie). This heart is that of the central mystère which Voodoo initiates call "The Queen of Heaven and Earth." Erzulie, as bark or as wife of Agoueh, corresponds to the bed of banana leaves which leads the initiates to the sky.

Following are several names used to call Erzulie in the course of a service: Maitresse Erzulie Fréda Dahoumin, Nègresse Imamou Ladeh, Nègresse To-Can, Nègresse Miroi-Zé, Nègresse Za-Gaza, Nègresse Rada Fréda Dahoumin, Lorvana Fréda-sih Fré-Da, Lih Fréda-sih, Lih Fré-Da et l'Fréda li Dahoumin d'accord, Nègresse Fla-voudoun Fréda, Nègresse Ci-za-fleur voudoun, Nègresse Ci-bracan, Nègresse Thabor Mangnan Voudé.

## Other Voodoo Gods

Ogou Bhathalah is a part of the army of Ogou loas considered in the African tradition as the fathers of alchemy. In the universal tradition, Bhathalah corresponds to the first large blade of the Tarot (the Juggler), whose hat is the sign of the "universal life." This is the *Magus* (Wise One) or spirit par excellence. Bhathalah personifies the "discipline of chaos" because it is he who directs, with the magic wand, the cosmic traffic. Bhathalah "disentangles the roads" by placing himself, like a traffic officer, at the magic crossroads. The scriptural reference to his occult function is found in Ezekiel XXI, 19-21: "The Lord says, Appoint thee two ways, that the sword of the king of Babylon may

come . . . For the king of Babylon stood at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use divination."

The "swordstroke of Ogou" means that the Ogou *mystères* (loas of fire) or "stellar powers, creators of the intellect" are descended from heaven through a fissure shaped like the female sex organ represented by the planet Venus (Erzulie, in Voodoo). These are the *mystères* who are "forgers," like the *aelohim* which descend from the Jewish *Aziluth*, or like the "Lords of the Flame" in Indian mythology. The Ogous in the Voodoo tradition bear the "fire of heaven" or the "luminous fire of Venus" shaped in the forge to represent a short serpent which traverses the planetary earth and sows fire. "Ogou's swordstroke" means also the act of kissing the top of the flagpoles during the course of the ritual Voodoo salutations performed by the flagbearers.

In Voodoo, *Luci-Fer*, whose name is also Ogou-Fer, is Venus, the morning star. It is called "Bayacou star" because it accompanies the sun each morning to explain the "earthly necessities" or "needs."

*Mademoiselle Charlotte* is a loa who manifests herself with the personality traits of a white woman. She is therefore regarded as a European or Caucasian loa who "works" in the Voodoo pantheon. However, she appears during the course of Voodoo ceremonies only rarely, possibly because of her non-African origin.

An extremely fastidious spirit, *Mademoiselle Charlotte* loves the strict observance in her honor of all the niceties of ritual protocol. She prefers to speak French; so it is extremely curious to hear her speak at a Voodoo ceremony, especially since her "horse" is invariably a black Haitian. It is nothing less than astonishing to hear an uneducated peasant, whose ignorance of French is beyond question, suddenly handle the language so perfectly. Whenever *Charlotte* appears, she astonishes people as much as certain *mystères* who enable their "mounts" to speak fluent Spanish or English.

She is "served" in much the same way as *Maitresse Erzulie*. She enjoys sweet rose-tinted, blue-, white-, or cream-colored beverages; water sweetened with syrup; all kinds of non-alcoholic liqueurs; although she never refuses a good drink of *clairin*, a fact that suggests she "walks" not only in the Rada rite but sometimes in the *Péthro* rite as well. Her favorite color is rose. She is passionately fond of *acassan*, a delicious, mushy drink consisting of boiled cornmeal sweetened with cane juice of the kind Haitians call *gros sirop batterie*. This juice, how-

ever, must be exceedingly clear and highly refined; otherwise she will replace it with plain white sugar. She prefers the meat of young chickens as her ritual food offering, but the meat must be extremely tender.

Mademoiselle Charlotte is a *voudoun* whose services are difficult to obtain. She refuses to "work" for just anyone at all, but only for people to whom she takes a fancy.

*Dinclinsin* is another European *mystère*. Legend has it that both *Dinclinsin* and Mademoiselle Charlotte came to Haiti with the colonists. Once the cult had become established on Haitian soil, he began to appear in the Voodoo ceremonies of the African slaves in the same way as the other *mystères*, by "possessing" a ritual "horse."

*Dinclinsin* became a loa of the Rada rite. He is greatly feared because of his extreme severity. He apparently also "walks," like Charlotte, in the Péthro rite as well, since he is not averse to rum, tafia, or clairin. However, he does not drink, but rather pours the liquor into his pockets. His special trick is to pour the liquor into his pockets without getting his clothes wet. The liquor does not remain in his pockets, nor does it trickle out! No one can see where it goes! (Certain other *mystères* drink through the nose, the ears, and even the eyes. One *mystère*, *Pin'ga*, even eats razor blades.)

## 4

### *Symbols of Voodoo*

VOODOO has many important symbols to aid its magic. Only through the use of these symbols is the Voodoo adherent able to attain the assistance of the loas in helping him with his earthly problems.

#### The Vèvès

The *vèvès* are without any doubt the most spectacular ceremonial factor of Voodoo. The *vèvès* are designs traced upon the ground of the peristyle or the *oum'phor*, or upon all sorts of objects, even ritual food. In the region of Port-au-Prince the *vèvès* are made with great care so that they are clearly visible and almost geometrically flawless. Elsewhere, however, it is made carelessly and crudely; and in some regions it is not used at all, for example in the *oum'phors* in the neighborhood of Gonaives.

The *vèvès* represent *figures of the astral forces* in a different way than the *asson* does. Their manufacture in the *oum'phor* is the reproduction by Voodoo magic of the astral forces themselves. This fact

signifies that the vèvès, considered as astral forces, are necessarily personified by the star-ancestors whose cult is Voodoo—these ancestors being themselves personified by the loas, the spirits, the voodoo, or the mystères that “mount” the Voodooists.

In the course of Voodoo ceremonies, the reproduction of the astral forces represented by the vèvès obliges the loas (who are representations of heavenly bodies, stars, and planets) to descend to earth. On first consideration, this may appear improbable; however, nothing is truer, more obvious, or more palpable, and the explanation, given here for the first time, can be easily verified. As a visitor at a Voodoo service, one has only to consider the interrelation of the ritual factors as explained here in order to be easily convinced.

Depending upon the rite, the vèvé is traced with wheat flour, corn meal, Guinea-flour (wood ashes), powdered leaves, red brick powder, rice powder (face powder), and even gunpowder, powdered charcoal, bark, or roots.

As a rule, the milder rites such as the Rada, a solar rite, require white or yellow wheat. Tradition, though not always respected, demands that corn meal be used for the intermediate or less mild rites, whereas red brick powder or red dust or ashes belong to the *fire rites* whose cabalistic agents can, if need be, serve upon the *points-chauds* (hot-points)—not that these rites are fundamentally or necessarily evil, but rather because they have a greater tendency to burn when they are improperly or imprudently employed.

The powder of leaves, if the leaves are of the soothing variety, can be used for the mystères of the *points-frettes* (cold-points). If the powder is made of noxious leaves or merely of the “stinging” variety, it can “walk with” the so-called “Bois-Piquant” (pungent-wood) loas, the loas of the fiery rites: the *Pethro* and the *Zandor*.

Gunpowder serves to precipitate magically the mystères.

Face powder, scarcely used in Haiti, if at all, for vèvès, is traditionally employed for the brilliant mystères that “walk on the resplendent points” of the Sun: *Erzulie Za-Gaza*, the mystère *Jolitière Viscièrè*, and *Legba Brillant Soleil*. For face powder symbolizes the purification, at a very high degree, of the ceremonial and sacrificial material. These brilliant mystères correspond necessarily to the most splendid stellar and planetary elements in the whole Voodoo organization of Legba Ati-Bon, not only because the magic system of Legba is the solar system, but also because the formula which designates the various types

of powder is a part of Legba's own name: *ati-n*. *Ati-n*, then, means *ati-* ("magic wood" or "magic master") and *-n* ("of astral space").

Therefore, in considering this *vèvè* which is a synthesis of space, of the astral, and of their powers through Legba, we see a synthesis of the *vèvè* principle.

In the ritual geometry of Voodoo, most of the *vèvès* include the serpent as a symbol of the transmigration of souls, since God, or the serpent *Da*, in accordance with the Platonic tradition, is primarily a geometrician.

In principle, the Voodoo *vèvès* are three astral planes that are the three "*pneumes*" of the African Cabala, being the three stages of the alchemic "*souffleurs*" or "prompters." These three astral planes are arranged in the diagram according to the magical attributes of the loa. This is the meaning given these planes by the tradition of the Great Solar Invisibles of Voodoo: (1) the invisible source of the stars, or the divine cosmos of omniscience, represented by the father or "*Plerome*," which is the idea of the preexisting light of the sun; (2) the visible stars whose light, coming from the Plerome is filtered by the moon or planetary cosmos of science, represented by the son or "*Paraclete*" which is the light of the sun; (3) the tangible objects, or physical cosmos of omnipotence of omniscience, represented by the mother as incarnate *mystères* (the loa "crisis") or "*Ophanim*."

In Voodoo, the father is "Omnipotent" or "*Até-Gbi-Ni-M-On-Sé*," as "Inexpressible" (the fire-air serpent); the son is the "Knowing One" or "*Lé-Gba Ati-Gbon*," as "Expression of the Inexpressible Invisible" (snake-wood); the mother is the "Omniscient" or *Ai-Da Hwé-Do*, as "Concretion of the Inexpressible Grand Invisible" (earth-eater serpent).

The three astral planes correspond to a serpent-synthesis which is *ophitomorph*ic or *ophitopentamorph*ic, that is to say, which unites together as a macrocosm, all the elements of the microcosm or "human being." Thus it is that as serpent (*ophi-*) and *mystère* (*os* or *so*) with five heads (pentamorph)ic these planes correspond to the five degrees of the Loa:

SOD	.....	Mystères or Loas
THO-RAH	...	.. Letter (of the Loa)
MI-CH-NA-as		Spirit (of the Loa)
THA-EL-MUD		Ritual (of the Loa)
GUE-MA-RAH	.....	Complement (of the Loa)

These are the universal similarities of what Voodoo calls *vèvès*: the *Ky-il-k-or*, which like the *vèvè* is a ritual diagram designed ceremonially by the Tibetans on the ground with colored powders; the *Man-Da-Lah* of the Hindus; the Persian, Arabian, Berber *Tha-pi* or *Tapis*, upon which the faithful squats or kneels in order to arise towards the Invisibles; the magic buckler of the Aztecs and Toltecs; the *Ora-i-Bi Po-Wa-Nu* of the Precolumbian Indian rituals; the Chinese *Lit* or *Lih*; and the sand paintings of the American Indians. The *vèvè*, like its parallels, is a geometric, propitiatory support of planetary origin, and at the same time a condenser of astral forces designed to lead on the sacrificial victims.

Every time the celebrant prepares to trace a *vèvè* he should say, after orienting the material to be used in making the diagram, "By the power of the Loa LETE-MAGIE, Nègre Danhomé, all the *vèvès*, Nègre Bhacoulou Thi-Kaka."

## The Assen

The *assen* is another synthesis in Voodoo, a greater one, it might be said, than the *vèvè*. It is an iron object, a rod surmounted by a round plate fastened horizontally, which from a hermetic standpoint relates to the loas of fire and the forge who, beginning with the sidereal action of the heavenly bodies, are at the base of Voodoo doctrine and revelation. Thus, although the *vèvès* by geometric sympathy attract the astral powers of the loas, in order to oblige them to "work" in the peristyle or in the *oum'phor* or anywhere else, the power of the *assen*, if it has been prepared well, is stronger, in the sense that it is more compact and more concentrated. By its magical principle which is the finest and the most highly developed, it serves, as a ritual object, to make an unfailing success of any intercession in the form of a prayer or a sacrificial offering. For this reason *govis* and candles are placed upon the *assen*, the ritual form of which may be anything from that of a stake or a simple cross to the most complex shapes, more complex, in fact, than the cabalistic form of the *parasol*.

Placed upon the *assen*, the *govis* and candles have a remarkable power of intercession. Consequently, every sacrificial offering presented in proper fashion upon the small iron plate atop the *assen* has

a much greater chance of being accepted by the *mystères* for whom it is intended.

In Africa, at any rate in Dahomey, from the moment a person is initiated into Voodoo, he automatically acquires his *assen*. There are even regular markets specializing in the sale of *assens*.

## Amulets and Talismans

Amulets and talismans, called *ouangas* and *bakas*, represent a sort of superior soul to the Voodoo adherent. The *baka* plays the role of guardian angel, while the *ouanga* fulfills the function attributed to an image, a scapular, a rosary, or a chaplet. The Voodooist usually carries such a talisman and may address it any time external danger threatens him.

The *baka* represents two forces: a superior force or aerial soul, and an inferior force or terrestrial soul. The fusion of these elements lends a rather dangerous character to this magic entity which is the perfect *baka*. A person has only to serve the *baka* incorrectly to have it turn against its owner and do him irremediable harm by reason of the very duality of its composition. On the other hand, whoever knows how to serve the *baka* obtains amazing results from it.

In Haiti, the term *baka* has come to have a somewhat pejorative meaning, most likely because *bakas* have sometimes been employed for doubtful purposes. Whoever possesses a *baka* has at his disposal an evil power as well as a beneficial power. The evil power overcomes the beneficial (as with all other powers) if the owner of the *baka* fulfills his destiny under the influence of the evil power. However, if it is the beneficial power that he "serves," then the *baka* is simply beneficial.

All things considered, an account of the analysis and a description of all the various Voodoo-prepared *ouangas* can be omitted because, considered from the standpoint of magic, they may be included with all such magical preparations as *bakas*, which have in essence and purpose the nature of the two souls—the superior and the inferior.

The Voodoo *baka*, for the person knowing how to prepare or employ one, represents all the legions of angels and demons over which King Solomon had power, according to Voodoo tradition. Solomon was the

perfect initiate, the representative of the "temple." Thus, because he had in his possession a magic figure which embraced all esoteric signs, he made use of both angels and demons as he desired. The sign, which may not be revealed to the uninitiated, has reference to Christ (the Voodoo Legba) as "Master of the Invisibles," and its magic correspondence is the sun.

The Voodooist does not exaggerate, then, when he claims that for himself alone the baka synthesizes the entire ritual and religious constitution and all the magic practice of Voodoo. All the mystères are found in its clever composition. It is simultaneously a magic charm, protection, sacrifice, and performance; a terrestrial soul, a celestial soul, a cult, atheism, a magic weapon, threat, and danger, a magic prohibition, sacrificial victim; the concept of divinity, demonism, riches, catastrophe, health, sickness, life and death.

The Voodoo baka has an importance in magic of such a kind that every great initiate in the cult realizes that it may perfectly represent all possible and imaginable practices of the cult as well as of Voodoo magic. However, it would be wrong to believe that the baka principle, in magic as in religion, is limited to Voodoo alone. Persistent research reveals it everywhere, though under different names. In the learned magic of the Egyptian temples Osiris, as the mystère who guides the souls of the dead, personifies it, playing the same part that Ra Nibho plays in Voodoo magic, since in Egypt the baka has a double function which, for those who understand its employment, is not one of disagreement or occult discord, but rather of harmony, happy union, practical coalescence, and success in magic.

Baka, in the magic of Egypt just as in the magic of Haiti, has the following meaning, understood even by the uninitiated: the mystère *ba* or *bha*—found for example in the name of the mystère Dan-Bha-Lah Wé-Do and of the Nago mystère Ba-cossou—is the superior soul which resides in the material body from its embryonic stage only to inculcate in it the idea of the good. At death it returns to the high solar regions of the atmosphere where the Voodoo cult has its magical origin, letting the dead and decaying body remain with the inferior soul with which it had shared the body during life.

The inferior soul is then the *ka*, or *ca*. Hence, after death the body is said to be *ka-ba*. The *ka* does not rise to the high atmospheric regions of the sun at the death of the body. It remains, by its nature, with the corpse, hovering about and battenning on its noxious stench

as if the earth which contains the decay of the putrifying flesh were its own psyche. It even abides in all the objects that once belonged to the corpse, and it is responsible for all the dread that the deceased's close friends experience in the houses in which he lived. Certain magical operations confer upon it a terrible power. Some houn'gans go and gather up the *ka* in the cemetery, where it naturally stays hovering over and feeding upon the corpse. These houn'gans then make use of it in "sending a 'mort' (dead person)" to take possession of, for example, an enemy, and a special magical operation is required in order to "remove the 'mort' from the body" of the individual whom the *ka* has possessed.

And so, whenever a person brings flowers to place upon a tomb, or "gives a feast" to the dead, it is the *ka* that, consciously or unconsciously, he is symbolically and magically assuaging. A kind prayer, a pretty flower, sweet music, mitigates its pernicious instincts and restores it to the less abyssal regions of the tomb. But the greatest blessing one can bestow upon the *ka* consists in magically purifying it to the extent of elevating it to the high region of the *ba*. Special sacrifices in the Voodoo rites lead to this elevation, and this type of sacrifice comes under the designation of "*boulez zain les morts*" or "*ouanzain*."

In the so-called "froid" (cold) rites, the *ka's* deliverance is brought about by the *cassez-canari* ceremony, which consists, substantially, in breaking one or more *canaris* (jars) with blows of a stick, and then depositing the broken pieces at a crossroads or at some other designated spot. This operation is accompanied by funeral music called "*bô-houn*," produced by beating upon calabashes held over the surface of water.

## The Joukoujou

The notched and graduated pole called the *joukoujou* represents the Tree of Good and Evil—the *arbre-sec* ("dry tree" or Sun) and the *arbre-mouillé* ("wet tree" or Moon). Because of its double-faced magic, it "walks" both in the Pethro and in the Rada rites, the two "polar rites" of Voodoo.

The *joukoujou*, in the powers of the astral, consequently represents the Balance which cabalistically serves to weigh out both good and

evil. On the one hand the Guédé loas personify death; on the other hand the Legba loas personify life. For this reason the *joukoujou* is the traditional symbol of the ensemble of loas.

The pole of Guédé is called "wet," since Guédé is the mystère of the physical fertility which he exemplifies in his behaviour during a ceremony. When Legba uses the pole as his staff, however, it is called "dry," because Legba is the loa of virginal fertility. The two loas together represent, therefore, the two extreme poles of cosmic and cabalistic eroticism. Like the handle of the asson, the wooden pole of the *joukoujou*, through its similar symbolism to the center-post, is one of the principal elements of Voodoo. Both of these instruments are, in fact, images or doublings of the center-post.

The lower part of the *joukoujou* is called the "black horse" or "black dog," (meaning the opposite of life). The upper part is called the "white horse" or "white dog;" wherefore the Guédé loas dress in black when they possess someone, while Danbhalah's ritual horses put on white. Consequently, the lower part of the pole refers to the Guédés' domain of death, and the upper part to the Legbas' domain of life. The black horse or black dog is "mounted," in principle, by the chief mystère of the cemetery: Baron Samedi, the astral Saturn. The white horse or white dog, on the other hand, is "mounted" by the mystère Danbhalah, the astral source of the sun. Hence, in principle, Danbhalah's traditional dress during possessions is white, while the Guédés show a marked preference for black or at least very dark clothing. The extreme difference in taste of these two groups of mystères shows that the pole of the *joukoujou*, in its geometric totality, represents by its notches all stages of Voodoo initiation from that of the houn'sih bossales to that of the houn'gan.

The Balance, which in the Astral is the major symbol of the *joukoujou*, "walks" on the cabalistic points of the calabash that ascends and descends on the notched pole, that is to say, on all the magic points of Erzulie Fréda Dahomé Tocan Miroisé Zagaza, the Magic Mirror. This mirror-pole, marked off in degrees or notches, belongs to Legba and Baron Cemetery (another name for Baron Samedi), and is the same pole that is found in the hands of the Egyptian Thoth or the Greek Hermes. It weighs the qualities that permit the physical body to have a soul matching a particular degree of initiation, the metempsychosis of Guédé being considered as a test of initiation. For this reason the djévos (initiation chambers) of ancient oum'phors were

themselves considered as toms. In the story of Moses' initiation at the hands of Pethro, it is reported that Moses was actually dead during the entire period of his initiatory trial when he was confined in the *djévo*, just as the Voodoo initiates are confined today. Now just as every "degree" of the soul corresponds, in magic, to a "degree" of color, the notches on the joukoujou correspond to the various colors on the center-post of Legba (who stands for the life which successively follows each separate death according to degrees), and these colors in turn not only match the rainbow of Erzulie (upon the "point" of Li-Da Houé-Do, the principal wife of Legba) but they also assume the reptilian form of Danbhalah Houé-Do.

## Perfumes

If the *assen* represents one of the best means of transmitting sacrificial offerings from the earth to the most highly evolved loa of the astral, *perfumes* likewise hold a high place among ritual factors. The perfumes are not employed in the rites without purpose, or simply for vanity's sake, to enhance mortal individuals; rather, they are used in the service of the immortals, who are the loa that mortals serve in the ritual. Perfume may even be applied to all the other components of the ritual, in which they play a pre-eminent part.

It will be recalled that the *mystère* Erzulie has, as her metaphysical attribute, everything that pertains to self-adornment and personal hygiene, such as toilet water, soap, plain water, comb, brush, pins, and brooches. The most prominent of these items are her greatest magical attributes: brooches, dresses, kerchiefs, negligees, silks, lace, embroidery, foulards, and above all, jewelry.

Consequently, since the *mystère* Maitresse Erzulie personifies the *Ceremonial and Sacrificial Material which ascends*, everything pertaining to self-adornment that is composed of the finest material occupies, in magic, a transcendent place. It follows naturally and by analogy that perfumes hold first place in the magic of transcendence. Furthermore, the finest gift that a person can give a loa is a bottle of perfume, or even a drop of perfume. Given perfume, a *mystère* is immediately *ravished*, his immateriality being allowed, as it were, a sort of *super-immaterility*.

Perfume offered is more efficacious if it is the kind that the loa to

whom it is offered prefers. Every mystère has his own particular perfume, inasmuch as this perfume has its counterpart in what the Voodoo Initiatic calls the *Sacred Osmology*, or *Science of Odors*.

Just as every mystère is identified with a degree in the astral atmosphere, every perfume has there its counterpart attaching to its mystère. Consequently, one very often sees the houn'gan sprinkling the *astral atmosphere* of the oum'phor with perfume. Unfortunately, Haitian houn'gans have gotten into the habit of choosing Florida Water as the ritual perfume. This choice is apparently based upon economic considerations (Florida Water is relatively inexpensive), rather than upon the established preference of the mystères themselves. Perhaps the name of this perfume has something to do with the choice: one of the mystical forms of Erzulie is a mystère called *Florizon*, or *Fleurison*!

The leaves that enter into the composition of the magic baths, as well as all other ingredients employed in the magic of the peristyles and of the oum'phors proper, are chosen primarily because of their odors; for the material itself of any object has no cabalistic significance at all, just as if it were entirely bereft of soul or power without its scent.

## Ritual Flags

The magnificent ritual flags are made right in the oum'phor. They are fashioned of colored cloth corresponding to the chromatic temperaments of the mystères under whose influence they are made, and all their beauty lies in the designs which artists, themselves initiates, first create, then embellish with multicolored paillettes. A flag consecrated, for example, to Ogou Fer would be adorned with a paillette design in the colors of the mystère representing Saint James on his white horse battling the infidels.

The ritual flags demonstrate the importance in magic of the acceptance of ceremonial offerings by the mystères to whom the offerings are dedicated. They symbolize this very acceptance which is referred to as "the ravishing of the sacrificial material by the Invisibles." Furthermore they symbolize the material already accepted, already "ravished," in the highest atmospheres of the Astral Light by the "wind

of the spirit" which removes it into the dazzling splendor of the sun "via the canal of the vertical line of the center-post."

This predominant function of the ritual flags illustrates why they are made as lovely as possible, and are as costly as the finances of the oum'phor permit. The prices of some flags are as astronomical as the stars they symbolize. Some oum'phors have gone bankrupt paying for them.

When not in use, the flags are customarily leaned against the pé where they renew their psychic virtue; for they develop a formidable psychic power as soon as they are taken out of the inner oum'phor. This power is further increased, especially as the flag's recessional from the holy of holies is sometimes accompanied by a regular mob of people waving brilliantly colored scarfs and crowding the circuitous path of the flag in the oum'phor area.

The flags are carried by two houn'sihs, usually women, traditionally called *co-drapeaux*. These flag bearers surround a male houn'sih called *la place* or *commandant la place*, who guides their movements. Their movements are exciting, always in accordance with the magic system of a symbolism which requires that the ceremonial material be of an exceptional lightness, in accordance with the condition which naturally effects its "ravishment."

The ritual function of La Place can be understood from Genesis, which states that after Adam and Eve had tasted the forbidden fruit, God "drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the Garden of Eden cherubims and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life." Therefore, "to keep the way" of the poteau-mitan, the Voodoo tradition requires La Place to brandish his machete or his sword across the oum'phor, starting from the east. The post is the *arbre-sé* or *arbre-sec*, the spiritual "tree of life," while the east is the door of the oum'phor which opens onto the peristyle.

As soon as La Place steps out of the oum'phor, he leads the *co-drapeaux* in a perfect performance of the ritual salutations addressed in hierarchic order first to the drums, the center-post, the officiating huon'gan or mam'bo, then to all the other houn'gans and mam'bos who may be present. Finally, a special salutation is given to distinguished guests, initiated or not, who are present though not actually participating in the ceremony.

After the salute to the drums and before the other salutations, La

Place leads the co-drapeaux outside to salute the reposoirs in the yard. During this time especially, the exhibition of the flags is particularly spectacular. The evolutions of the three participants reach a stage in which they become a veritable riot of multicolored silk, in which the ritual sword of La Place executes such a lacework of patterns in the air that it is a wonder how he always manages to keep from injuring anyone.

## Sword of La Place

The sword itself also plays an important role in the ceremony. Magically, it is the emblem and the attribute of the Ogous, loa whose most prestigious religious personification is St. James the Great. From this it necessarily follows that it is the Ogous who in the African tradition "ravish" transcendently the ritual material.

The true name of La Place's sword is *ku-bha-sah*, a word that necessarily implies that "the greatest of the invisibles" (Bha) "has slain or abolished" (kou, ku) "all that which is material, all that which is the depths or the abyss" (sah). In short, it may be said that the movements of the ritual flags in Voodoo are a magical totality and summit. They encompass and epitomize Voodoo.

Because of the sword's action in abolishing the material substance, the *bha-sah* portion of the word *ku-bha-sah* signifies "cutting," while the sword of La Place is the ritual epitome of the sacrificial knives. It is also called the *Ogoubhasah* in that it is the counterpart of the staff of *Ogoubhatalah*. In Africa, La Place's sword has the name of "Father of Cutting Weapon," and it represents traditionally the best work of the ironsmith, since in the Voodoo tradition, it is the mystère who works iron (Ogou Fer) who reveals to men the secrets of Voodoo magic.

Actually this ritual sword should be engraved with geometric designs corroborating the basis of the physical and metaphysical architecture of the oum'phor, a custom now abolished, to all intents and purposes, in the oum-phor of Haiti. The African houn'gans regarded these designs as representing primarily the sun of Legba, the thunderstone or axe of Québiésou, and the triangles, which recall the conical form of the drums. Part of the blade is serrated to represent the pro-

gress of the ritual offerings, slain by the instrument of the Ogous, towards the celestial regions, which are their destination.

The sword, the machete, or the dagger of the Ogous represents the serpent Dan-Bah-Lah (*da, dan*) in wrought iron (*gou, ogou*). For this reason, among the oracular signs of the magic alphabet the African sign of the Ogous is *gou-da* or *ogou-dan*. The sword is considered also to be the male organ of the mystère *Québiésou Dan Leh* (The Thunder). This weapon—knife, sword, machete, or dagger—is what kills (*okou*) the sacrificial victim. It is also called *okou-bha-sah*, and insofar as it is the rod of *Québiésou* or of the Thunder, it has a close connection with the center-post of the peristyle and the socle, the character of both of which is sexual, for *Québiésou* is an ancient *Legba*, one of the wisest of all the *Legbas*. This snake-weapon is therefore one of the most important factors in Voodoo.

## Foods of Voodoo

A discussion of the favorite foods of the loas is fraught with difficulties and should not be based solely on Voodoo as practiced in Haiti. Nor should it be said dogmatically that the menus prepared in the Haitian ritual for the mystères are absolutely orthodox. What Voodoo orthodoxy usually means by the ritual feeding—the *magic trophology*—of the loas will be explained first. Then some notes will follow on the foods which Haitian cultists generally offer.

First, it must be remembered that all the ritual foods have their magical correspondence in the astral. Just as *Erzulie* loves perfume, *Legba* prefers the bones of the animal sacrifices, because these elements correspond to certain degrees of the atmosphere. For in Voodoo the ritual foods are offered in order to nourish, to enliven or fortify, and to make contact with the invisible powers. The better the ritual food is adapted to the loas' requirements, the greater the magical power immediately available.

It is therefore up to the Voodooist to learn the food preferences of the loas whom he invokes and whom he must consequently feed in order to have their power at his disposal. So, if *Legba* prefers bones but he is given tripe, he either gives a poor performance or else he fails altogether to do what is requested of him, because his potential

astral correspondence has been poorly developed or not developed at all.

For the purpose of analogy to which we shall return presently, the sacrificial offering is always placed on the *crossroads* of a *vèvè*, or on whatever part of a ritual design represents the crossroads (since any cross formed by two straight intersecting lines is analogous to a crossroad) in order that its astral recipient will be more disposed to accept it.

Since the crossroads is geometrically and logically related to *Legba Ati Bon* (the Sun), the ritual fact alone proves that the person who makes the sacrificial offering joins, for his own practical purposes, the vertical forces of all astral space with the horizontal forces. For this reason Legba is referred to in some chants as *Legba Grand-Chemin* (Legba of the Highway) and *Maitre Grand-Chemin* (Master of the Highway). The "highway" is, in principle and in essence, the *interferential nucleus* of the cross.

The depositing of the sacrifice on this geometric crossroads for its ensuing consignment to the astral-causal accords necessarily with all the scientific significance of the cross.

Since the cross and the square of the cross are formed respectively by two and by four separate squares, the Square (which is the *Grand Master* of the astral-causal) symbolizes the passive material of the sacrifice which has been rectified, organized, actuated, activated, and balanced by the person who places it at the crossroads of Legba, who is, accordingly, the master of the astral-causal.

In Voodoo, this magic crossroads is synthetized in the *barrier* because, like the crossing of the roads, the barrier opens the ways to permit passage. The following chant explains the concept of this opening of the ways of the astral by which the material of the rectified, organized, and balanced sacrifice will ascend:

Ati Bon Legba, ouvri barriè	Ati Bon Legba, open the barrier
pou moin, ago yél	for me, ago yehl
Voudoun Legba, ouvri barriè	Voudoun Legba, open the barrier
pou moin, pou moin ca ren-	for me, so that I can re-enter.
tré.	
L'hei m'a tounin,	When I return
m'a remercié loa-yo.	I shall thank the loas.

The African formula "Ago Yé!" is the nucleus of this chant, for it means (*Ago*) "attention," and (*Yé*) "to the soul," or "to the psyche represented by the sacrifice." It is the voodoo Mercury who conducts the soul from the visible to the invisibles, starting from the crossroads, and who then leads the invisibles to the crossroads to receive the sacrifice. The Voodoo Mercury has the name of *Simbi*, a loa of many forms. He is the *conductor of souls* who leads the souls of the dead in all directions bordered by the four magic orientes of the cross. He is the Messiah of Legba, the messenger of the sun. Simbi corresponds to the hermetic Mercury of the cabalistic alchemy of the ritual sacrifice. Thus, he is simultaneously Hermes and Mercury—a boundary-god or milestone-god of roads and highways, as well as a genius of points of crossing. Simbi is the creative principle of the seminal vesicle because, in the Voodoo tradition, Legba, as centerpost, is himself the principle of the magic wand and the spinal marrow. In the science of Voodoo as elsewhere, the sacrifice principle is identified with the human principle, the greatest of all sacrifices when placed upon the cross. The analogy of "man-and-cross" then becomes the phallic form attributed to the mystère Ati Bon Legba.

The forming of a cross in order to utilize its power as a force of Nature requires the formula of the loa which represents the most powerful of divine intercessions: the intercession "*grand-maitre-maitre-et-maitresse*" (grand master—master-and-mistress), formed by the African trinity:

Dan-Bha-Lah	GRAND MAÎTRE
LEGBA or LAH	MAÎTRE
ERZULIE	MAÎTRESSE

The magic formula of this intercession is therefore

(Jesus) YE-SOU: YE- = soul, psyche,  
the magic *mirror*

SOU = male, or creator

(Christ) the Cross: produced by the special crossing  
of Danbhalah and Erzulie

The "mirror" is the definitive attribute of Erzulie's adornment and represents Erzulie herself—*Erzulie Mirror Zé* or *Erzulie Miroir Zo-* (meaning the mirror of Legba on the "point" of Jupiter the Thun-

derer, the father of Simbi); while the philological aspect of the soul reveals that the mystère Erzulie is a "silver mirror" (the moon) crossed with Yésou, or "gold" (the Sun). Therefore, because of the spacial crossing of the sacrificial cross of Voodoo, Erzulie is the loa of riches. In Voodoo this means the same thing as omniscience.

This astral aspect of the soul through sacrifice indicates therefore why Voodoo is an animistic cult. Furthermore, the following chant selected from the liturgical repertory of Voodoo clearly suggests this problem:

Grande Aï-Zan, salué Legbal	Grande Aï-Zan (who represents
À l'heu qu'il é	the purity of Legba),
l'argent cassé roche.	salute Legbal
M'a pé mandé coument nous	Now
yé?	silver breaks rock.
Salué Legba.	I am asking how you are?
Créoles sondé miroi Legba.	Salute Legba.
Aï-Zan vié, vié,	Créoles, sound Legba's mirror.
Vié Legba,	Aï-Zan, old one, old one,
Créoles sondé mirori Legba.	Old Legba,
Legba vié, vié.	Créoles, sound Legba's mirror.
Créoles, sondé miroi Ati Bon	Legba, old one, old one.
Legbal	Créoles, sound Ati Bon Legba's
	mirror.

The significance of the expression *sondé miroi*, which occurs in many chants, and may be translated freely "plumb the depths of the mirror," or "search in the mirror," is one of the greatest secrets of Voodoo.

There are certain traditional correlations between the mystères and animals which clarify the animating principle—the very soul-principle—of Voodoo magic, and illustrate it in accordance with the principles of universal magic rather than with those of any dubious tradition. They also reveal through the very animal character of the loas the sacrifices preferred by them as animals (unless for contrary occult reasons the animal sacrifices be among the "forbidden rituals").

Danbhalah (Yé Dan-Gbé)	snake, snake's eggs
Legba . . . . .	lion, white sheep (bones and marrow)

Aï-dan	snake (revealing the character of the snake which the Virgin crushes underfoot, or "eats"); white pigeons
Erzulie	"aziza" or "azili" snake (which corresponds to mirrors, perfumes, toothpastes, powders, silk cloth, lace, etc., because this type of snake signifies "cosmic adornment" or the "purification of sacrificial matter")
Agassou (Ati-A-Sou)	royal leopard (the guardian-loa of the Dahomean Voodoo Tradition)
Loko Ati-Sou	lizard, agama
Ogou-Fer	red bull (the color of fire)
Agoueh-R-Oyo	bull, sheep (black or white, depending upon the purposes of the magic)
Guédé Z'aringnin	spider-crab
Aï-Zan Avélé Kéthé	crab
Assatò (largest of the drums) . . . . .	crab
Assatò or Azinto Micho To-Kpo Voudoun	alligator, crocodile (mystère of Haitian Independence who supervised the strategy of the Rada loas during the ceremonies of the Bois-Caïman and the Trou-Caïman)

The Voodoo sacrifice leads to a comprehension of the cabalistic idea of crucifixion. However, the animal which personifies each loa does not always suffice for the accomplishment of its magic, especially because Haitian Voodoo has lost part of its recollection of these important astro-animal identifications. The magic menu of the loas therefore is broadened to include other food offerings more available for ceremonial presentation, because of the fact that all the traditional

ones are not available in Haiti. Consequently, the loa's menu is at once simpler and more complex. Here are a few examples:

**Ai-Zan:** green bananas, white rice, white glazed cakes, white desserts, white syrup, pure water, sweet liqueurs, pumpkins, yams, tayo malangas, essence of cinnamon, star anise, vanilla, white and brown poultry, sweet fruit of lianas; assorossi, calebassi, grenadines.

**Danbhalah Wédo:** corn flour, wheaten flour, olive oil, castor oil, cakes, Cola Champagne (a Haitian soft drink, substituted homophonically for cola nuts, the divine attribute of the greatest of the African mystères: Apha or Pha, whose geographic counterpart is Ifa or Ifé and La Ville Aux Camps), various fruits, champagne, orgéat served in white cups, pastry on white plates, sweetened coffee, an egg (preferably a snake's egg) upon a white saucer of white flour, white wine, white desserts or those prepared with milk, pure milk, and powdered sugar.

In Voodoo the sun is personified by Legba Ati Bon (Legba Tree-of-the-Good). While Legba represents in anatomy the vertebral column (hence his preference for the bones and marrow), he is also identified with the vertebral bones of the oum'phor—the poteau-mitan. He is also represented by the little magic snake bones (which in turn suggest the bones of ancestors) which decorate the asson with which the houn'gans and mam'bos direct the ceremonies, dances, and ritual chorus. Legba or his post is therefore the "column" of the oum'phor—*boa-la-couleuvre*—from which the columns of the other temples—*Bohas*—will be derived.

This wood-principle, or Bohas-principle of the Voodoo temple consists not only of the post (the Sun) but also of the loa which magically guards it—Ati Dan Lbo Loko.

Because in the Voodoo tradition Legba Ati Bon is considered the greatest medical doctor and the greatest magician, he claims the same tree (ati-n) as Papa Loko Ati Dan: the *médecinier béni*. His corresponding animal, analogous to Loko, is the lizard (*anolis*), which may be interpreted in the sense of the "sacred cycle." The "sacred cycle" is the astral crossroads which the two extremities of the vertical line of the vèvè reproduce in the form of a crossed circle. The *anolis* of the "sacred cycle" then indicates both the principal food offering of Legba as well as Christ of the crucifixion. For this reason the expansible elastic membrane under the throat of the lizard, which he uses to produce sound, symbolizes both the *word* and the *sun*.

In the sun-earth occultism, the harvest is symbolized by the yam or "manger-yam," fresh yams plus other products of the soil, as well as dried fish representing water which is blessed or "virginized" by the sun because the fish is the symbol of Christ when it is dried in a charcoal fire. Now, in the symbolism of the universal ritual *harvest* is the same as the *first labors* of the Earth. This solar-agricultural synthesis of the earth is sacrificially offered in communion or in transubstantiation to the *mystères* as the first sacrifice, and it is due to the importance of Christ that the manger-yam is the ceremony which opens the door to all the loas and to all the faithful, Legba being the "principal door" of the ancient rituals, that is to say, the magic portal of the voodoo ritual. Thus the houn'gan sacrifices the yam, in order to sacrifice the first of the best harvest of the land, exactly as the priest proceeds to the sacrifice of the mass or the body of Christ (the Voodoo yam), which is offered in transubstantiation, and as Golgotha is concerned with the sacrifice of the Messiah.

The yam, as first and principal fruit of the land, is therefore traditionally considered to be illuminated by the cardinal point which is the East or Orient of the Voodoo orientation; for this point of the ritual orientation is the "gateway of Legba."

The first fruits thus harvested and offered in communion as the Voodoo *maza* (*mazda* or *Ahourah Mâzda* of the Persians) give birth to the loas which bathe in the fire at Christmas, in order to symbolize the first labors of the Earth: the *mystères Boum'ba Maza*, who represent the Messianic voyage or boat (*boum'ba*) of Christ (Massah, Messiah, Missah, Maza) as "sacrifice" or "victim." Since Christ is the anointed, the houn'gan generously sprinkles with oil the piles of first fruits piled up before the Voodoo altars.

In the oum'phors that have preserved the tradition of the yams, the ground of the peristyle is completely covered with a bed of banana leaves on the day of the ceremony. The food offerings of the *coucher-yam* are served to the houn'sihs seated around this immense green covering. The yams are presented to them on white plates, and when they have been eaten by the houn'sihs, the rite proceeds to the "voyage to Ifé." It commences with the following chant.

Baco-sou entré,  
Baco-sou rivé  
Dèdè, O Savalou

Ogan, Dèdè ogan Savalou,  
 Dèdè ogan, ogan é é é é é é é é

The bed of green leaves is thought to represent the surface of water which the magic bark of the loas crosses to reach the city of Ifé. Consequently, the Voodoo initiates proceed to travel on it just as regular ships would. They salute the three points—south, centerpost, and west—with a mystic kiss upon the ground which is laid the ritual leaves. Then they lie down at the west. They roll themselves one after the other, but never two at the same time, from west to east. They are accompanied by the houn'gan, asson in hand. When they reach a candle lit on the east side, where for the most part they usually stop on their own accord, they lie there a moment stretched out upon the ground lying on one side. Then they return, rolling themselves again to a candle lit on the west side where the houn'gan helps them to their feet.

One matter is especially important: the houn'sih are invariably possessed by mystères during the crossing in such a way that it is always a mystère coming from Ifé, the East, which helps him to his feet. It is therefore evident that the houn'sih, by rolling on the ground to simulate this magic crossing, imitates not only the rolling and whitening of the waves, but travels to the East (or Ifé) to obtain a renewal of psychic powers.

Inasmuch as the water is ruled by the mystère Agoueh R Oyo, the ritual chant ending the ceremony is:

Bha roulé, Agoueh-tò . . .

Some of the initiates then roll up the leaves which they will bury in a secret way while the choir of houn'sih canzos continues to chant to the rhythmic beating of the drums:

Bha roulé, Agoueh-Tò!

Bha roulé, Agoueh-Tò!

## The Banana Tree

According to the orthodox tradition of Voodoo, supported by the universal tradition, the banana tree is the tree of the first and greatest of the houn'gans (Adam), just as it is the tree of the first and most learned of the mam'bos (Eve, whom voodooists call Erzulie). Now

the Tree of Adam is identified in the traditional magic, with the fig tree of the scriptures.

Just so, the leaves of the banana tree conduct the houn'sihs, the houn'gans, and the mam'bos to Ifé (the heavens, the Earthly Paradise), in the Voodoo rites, because the fig tree conceals the center-post. The Voodoo initiates claim that fruit of knowledge, which the serpent Danbhalah offers to the mam'bos, is a banana. They identify necessarily the banana, which enters very often into the composition of the ritual foods, with the substance of the sun seen above the Voodoo péss, and which is dominated by the traditional serpent of the oum'phors. For this reason the banana leaves lead to Ifé in *Afrique Guinée*, for the sun which is pictured above the voodoo altars represents not only the mysterious city of Ifé or (La Ville Aux Camps), but also the center of the initiation.

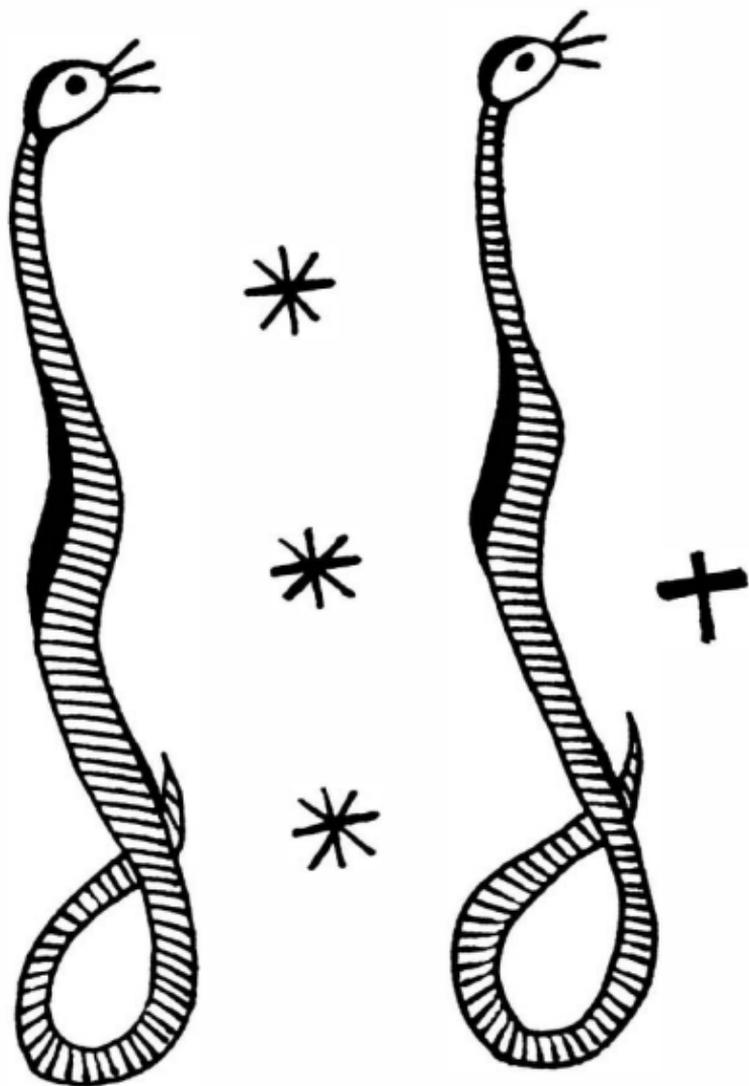
In the Holy Scriptures as in Voodoo, "evil bananas" or "evil *figues*" (*figues-bananes*) signify "evil initiates," "faithless initiates," an allusion to the cursed fig tree of the Bible, while the "good *figues-bananes*" are the initiates who faithfully serve the loas, and who honor and respect the mystères, so that in a larger sense, the "accursed fig tree" of the Bible or the "accursed banana tree" of Voodoo is the church or the oum'phor badly served: the oum'phor without center-post, the church without Christ!

By analogy this means that the reputation of the banana tree makes its fruit not only the most useful of vegetables, but renders a certain serpent called the *bramine* (because of the term *brahmin*, which signifies "priest" and "doctor of religion") exceptionally fond of touching both the shadow and the fruit of the banana tree. This serpent feeds upon bananas, to mention the tradition, in order to be able to live more than 100 years!

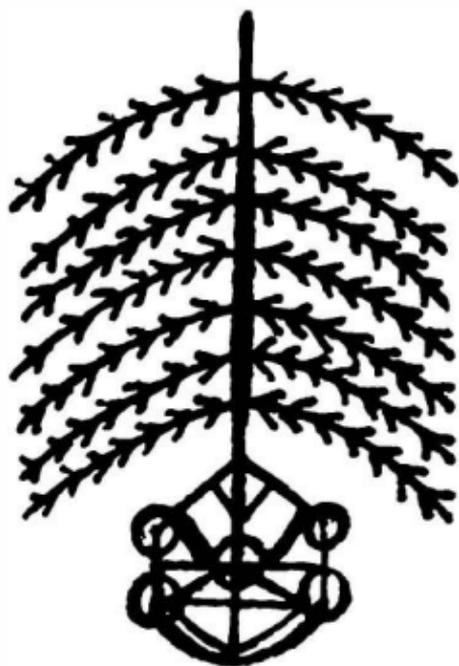
Furthermore, as the centerpost is the Voodoo sun, and inasmuch as the solar life renews itself by its daily rising and setting, the banana tree never ceases to renew itself by its shoots. Its perpetual outgrowings symbolize eternal life. The banana tree is, moreover, like the gods, hermaphroditic as to its flowers.

The rising and setting of the voodoo Sun (East and West in the magic orientation indispensable to every sort of supernatural operation) agrees with the beliefs held by learned mythologists relative to the mystère *Brahmá*, who owes his name to a type of serpent which enjoys eating *figues-bananes*. For, like the mystère of the serpents

Danbhalah Wédo and Aida Wédo of Voodoo, the mystère Brahmâ derives his mastery of magic from the cosmos through the concept of life and death. Papa Legba, as center-post, is accordingly *Para-Brahma*, or *Papa-Brahma*, the single line of the post, the "Sole Being" of all the religious doctrines having the form of the post, the divine cause of all the mysteries, the cosmic essence whence come and whither return all the loas and all the beings subordinated to them. The magic signature of this single line of the post (or of the banana tree) is a triangle with a circle in its center. The triangle represents Danbhalah-Legba-Erzulie (the holy trinity of Voodoo), revealing the magic trinity existing in the sun, the astral symbol of the banana tree, of the *figuier-béni*, and of the post. The circle in the center of the triangle is the Sun-Child (Child Jesus of Voodooism), and this is why the sun is pictured above the Voodoo *pe* as son and as first manifestation of Para-Brahma: Brahmâ, whose two other hypostases are Vich-nou and Shiva. This being the case, it is evident that Para-Brahma or Para-Brahmin, while recalling the bramine serpent of the banana tree, corresponds to the serpent Danbhalah Wédo, and Brahmâ himself, to Legba Ati-Bon, who personifies the magic powers of the houn'gans and mam'bos.



Vèvè of Danbhalah and Aida We'do.

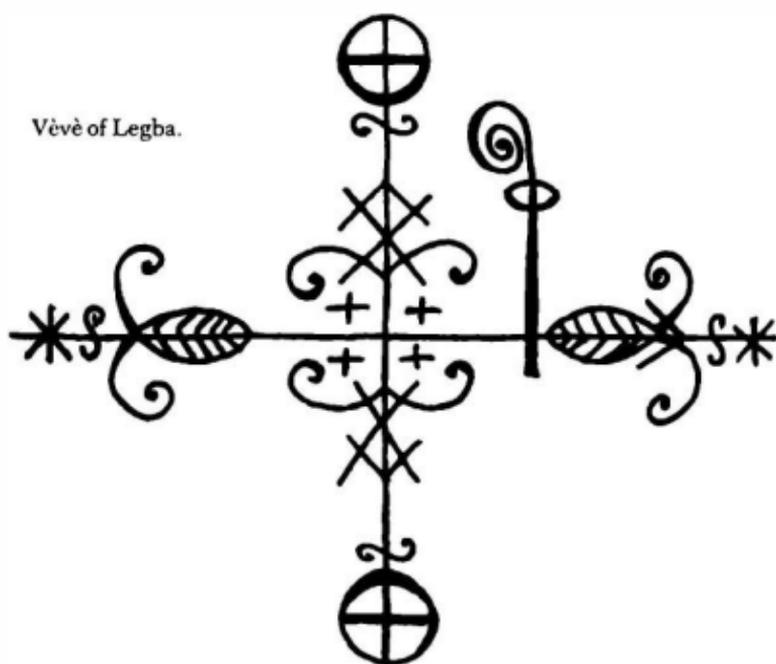


Vèvè of Aizan used in a Radarite.



Vèvè of Ti Pierre Dantor used in a Pethro rite.

Vèvè of Legba.



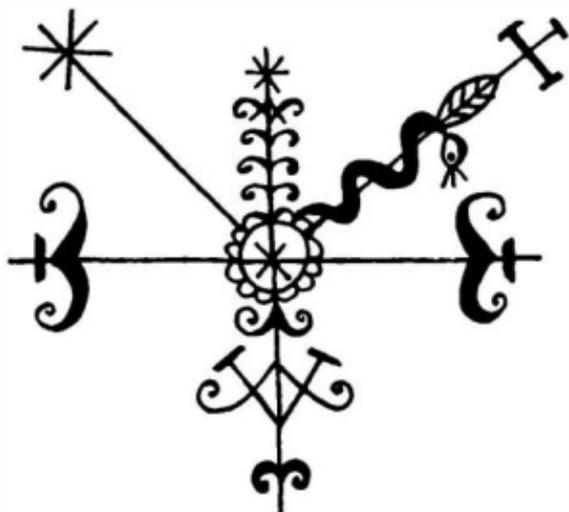
Vèvè of Ogou Fer used in a Nago rite.

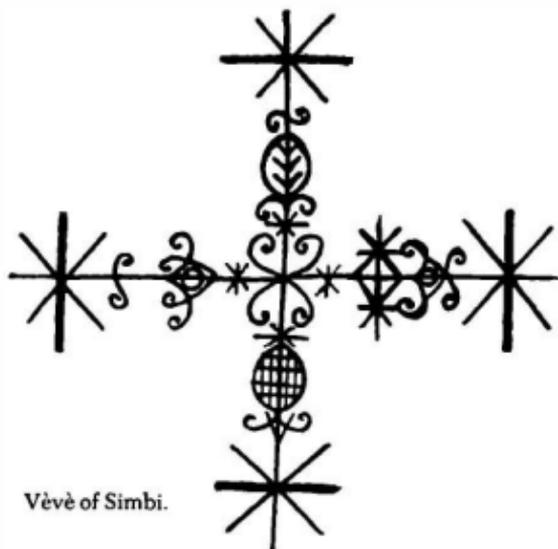




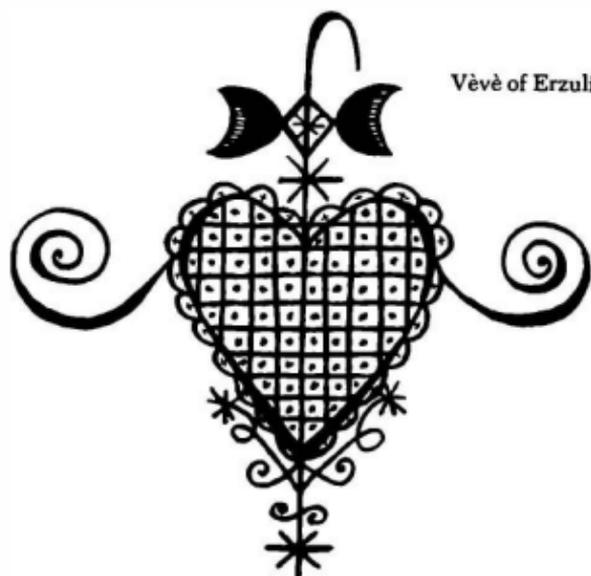
Vèvè of Linglessou bossin-sang (Linglessou bucket-of-blood)

Vèvè of Brisc.

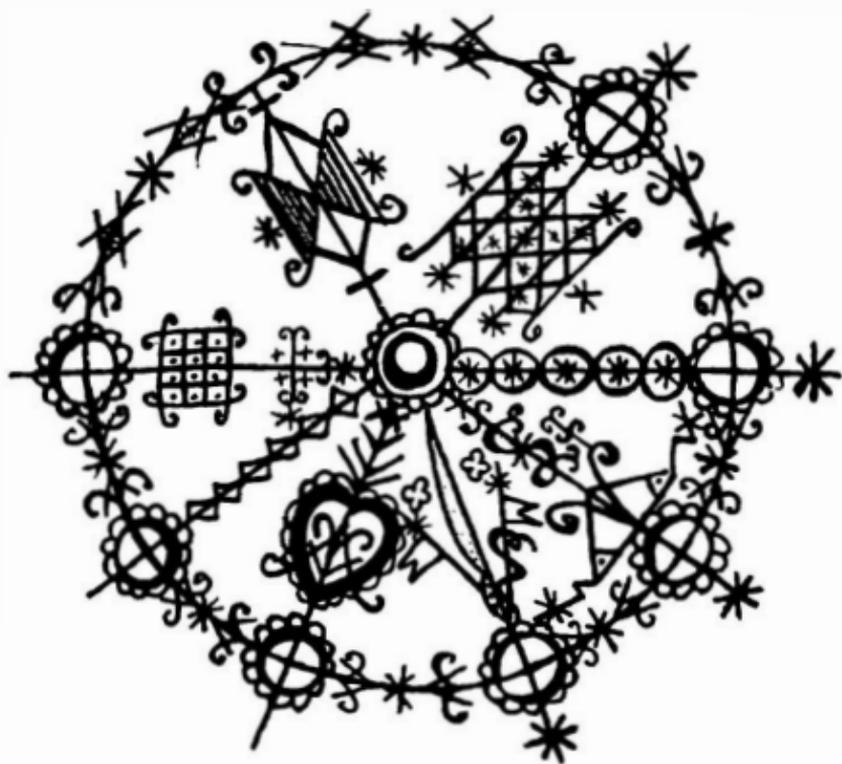




Vèvè of Simbi.

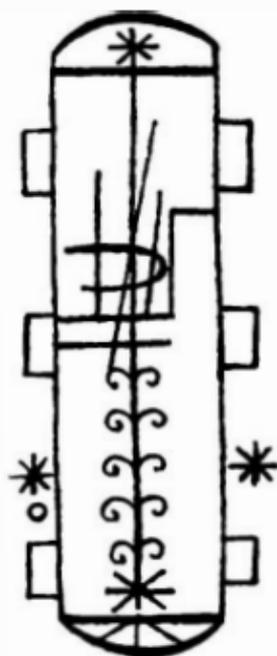
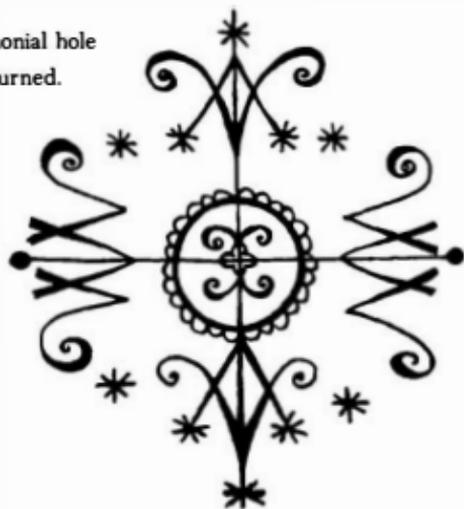


Vèvè of Erzulie.

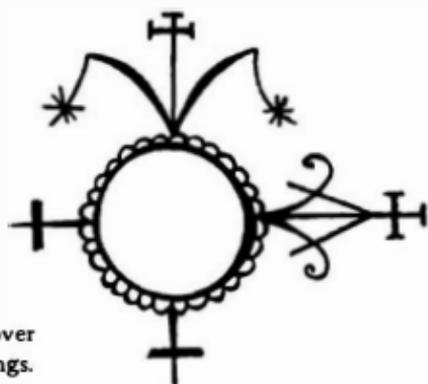


Vèvè of Milo-Can (several spirits).

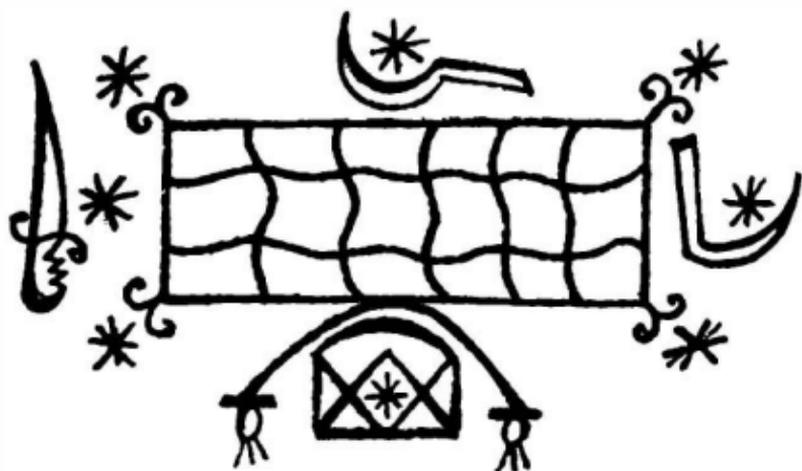
Vèvè traced around the ceremonial hole where the offerings must be burned.



Vèvè in the form of a coffin for magic treatments, following the summoning of Brise.

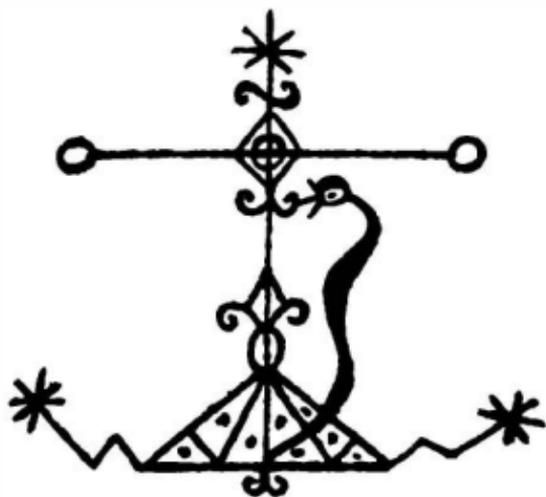


Vèvè traced around a ceremonial hole over which is the table of ritual offerings.



Vèvè of Azaca, loa of Agriculture.

Vèvè of Ossangne Negre Goue-sih Malor, the father of Legba.

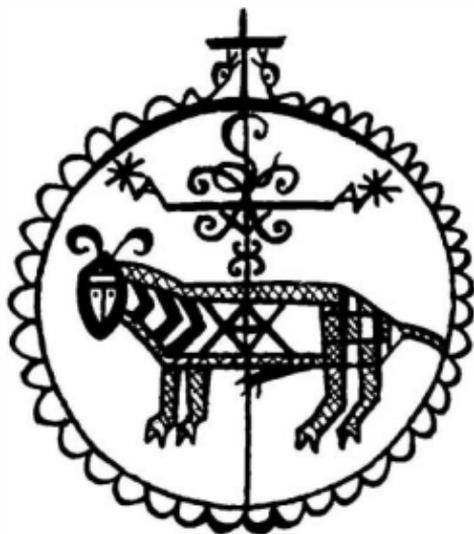




Vèvè of Ossangne

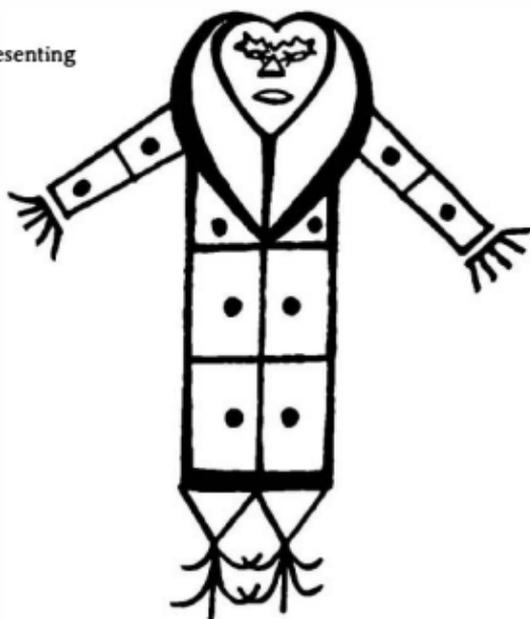
Vèvè of Danbhalah-la-flambeau (Danbhalah-the-torch).

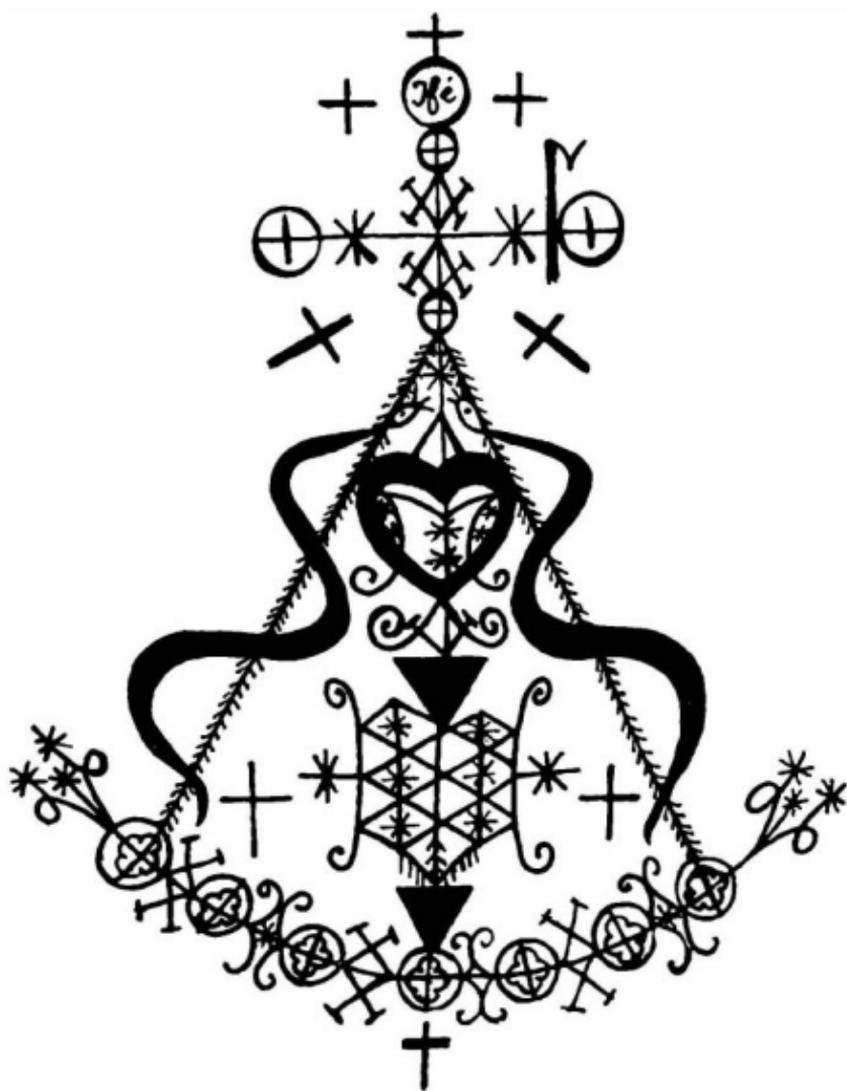




Vèvè of Agouch, spirit of water.

Vèvè of Grand Bois of Ife, representing the occult power of the woods.





Ritual diagram of the boulez-zains-les-morts, also ouan-zain: pots boiling for the dead.



Vèvè of Erzulie Dantor.

## 5

*Sounds, Rhythms, Chants, and Prayers*

THE musical instruments, chants, dances, and prayers that are an integral part of Voodoo and of Voodoo ceremonies each bear symbolic interrelationships that must be clearly understood to comprehend Voodoo itself.

### The Ogan

The *ogan*—an instrument resembling a flattened bell without a clapper—is struck in rhythm with an iron rod by a musician called the *ogantier*. In most Voodoo ceremonies its insistent rhythm is piercing and deafening, and the listener usually wishes it were silent, the better to catch the fascinating rhythm of the drums. Not infrequently it is the *ogantier's* metallic beating upon the *ogan* that leads off the other instruments. However, there are exceptions to this practice, as sometimes the orchestra dispenses with the *ogan*.

In the Voodoo tradition the *ogan* is basically the chromatic director of the ritual orchestra. Its *mystère* is *Ogan-sih Hwé-Do*. Its beat rhythmically controls the sacred Chromatic. Its virtue lies in the cor-

respondence which exists between its rhythmo-choregic function and the esoteric formula implied in the word *o-gan*. For this formula signifies "chief of the magic circle," or "ruler of the ceremonial material."

## The Triangle

The triangle is an iron instrument, triangular in form. The triangle finds its counterpart shape in the triangular niche inset in the masonry of the socle of the poteau-mitan. Sometimes, however, the triangular niche is merely painted on the socle or abyss. This geometric correspondence, when referring to the magical organization of the ritual and of the ritual Chromatic, definitely signifies that the abysses are opened by the triangular form, with Danbhalah Wédo, Erzulie, and Legba at each of the three points of the triangle.

By the fact that the musical triangle opens the abysses, it opens also the ritual water symbolized by the socle set beneath the post. The socle, then, represents Erzulie on the "point" of the abyss, provided the socle is not "open" by having the Masonic triangular niche painted on or inset in its side. But if the socle of the post does contain the triangle, either inset or painted, then Erzulie is said to "walk" upon the "point" of the "brilliant ascension of the Moon and of Venus."

The magic role of this chromatic instrument consists in "opening the path of the air." Thus, as an orchestral instrument which directs the ritual airs, it opens analogically (as *mystère* or *loa* of analogy—of the magic analogy of the ritual air) the path which must conduct all material employed in the ceremonies, as well as the practitioners themselves, into the astral heights of the atmospheric air. For this reason the Universal Tradition calls the triangle the *Luminous Delta*.

We may note that, insofar as the Voodoo cult is concerned, this triangular luminous delta, which is such an outstanding feature of the ritual orchestra, is reflected in the curious but most appropriate shape that the initiates have given the drumstick used with the drum that represents orchestrally the light and the magic powers of the sun, namely the voodoo Legba Ati-Bon. The form of the stick used to beat the second drum (the middle one of the three Rada drums) is that of a "D", the Roman form of the Greek delta.

Just as the Voodoo Legba—as the sun—represents the Orient, uni-

versal Masonry, which has its source in the masonry socle of the poteau-mitan, places its Esoteric Triangle or Luminous Delta above and behind the head of the throne of the Venerable of the Lodge.

Similarly to the placement of the triangle in the lodges, the Voodoo tradition bestows the title of *principal maitre-tête* upon the sun (Legba Ati-Bon), by reason of the fact that while all the other loas may be *maitre têtes*, Legba is above them, as the sun is above the powers of all the constellations.

In the oum'phor, the form of the musical triangle traditionally appears again above the pé, or altar. It is not surprising, then, that, although the equilateral triangle is altered, for hermetic reasons, from the normal form of the musical instrument, the Greek Geometric Tradition, as revealed by Plato and Pythagoras, holds that the best religious altars preferably have the form of the right triangle. Just so, the base of this right triangle (the hypotenuse) is the scientific base of the altar. The following explanation is offered the uninitiated: "The reason for the importance of the right triangle is that 'the square on the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides'."

It is easy to find this algebraic and geometric formula again and again in the architecture of the Voodoo peristyle. The equilateral triangle "Danbhalah-Legba-Erzulie" already exists in the masonry of the socle. Through geometric transcendence it becomes, by duplication of itself, a rectangle, the form concealed within the right triangle—the classic rectangle which is generally the form of the peristyle.

It also is worth noting that through Danbhalah, Legba, and Erzulie, the musical triangle suggests the divine Trinity: the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Doubtless for this reason Xenocrates used to compare divinity to an equilateral triangle. The Freemasons who are said to have had their origin in the Voodoo socle of Legba, have the oculate triangle in the masonry pediments of their lodges exactly as the Voodoo adepts did before them, and still do, in Haiti, upon the perfect circle of the socle of their *poteau-soleil* (sun-post). The eye in the center of the triangle stands for the elevation of Erzulie by Legba.

A curious circumstance, accidental or otherwise, may be noted in the fact that in Voodoo the apex of the musical and Masonic triangle is held by the mystère Danbhalah Wédo who, in the African cabal, is called Danbhalah-Yéwé (or more exactly Ié-H-Wé), while in Freemasonry the Tetragrammaton, represented alphabetically by I. E.

V. E., occupies the ocular center of the triangle. Alexander Westphal, the author of works on Masonry, declares that the origin of the Tetragrammaton of the lodges is under dispute, and that no one really knows the correct pronunciation of the letters, despite all the variations adopted by devotees of solar cults (such as Io, Ia, Ya, Yaveh, Iého-schuah, Jeshuah, Jeho-vah, Joschoueh, Josué, Jesus, and Jesus-Christ). However, Voodooists have always known how to pronounce them, for the simple reason that they realize that the eye in the triangle symbolizes "Erzulie chromatically ravished by Legba and that one of the Ethiopian or solar names of Legba Atibon is Yé-Ch-Ou.

The eye in the triangle is then a synthesis of ritual knowledge through the solar scheme of Voodoo, as a result of which initiates "see" the light proceed from the sun (Legba) under the form of Erzulie or one of her manifestations. At the same time, it is a synthesis of Danbhalah-Yéwé in the astral-causal. In Voodoo, the astral-causal is the dark abyss of the socle of Legba converted into a "basin filled with water," since the abysses are the "depths of the water." In this aspect Erzulie is called "Mistress of the Water."

## The Drums

The batteries of drums, whose magic rhythm is set by the chromatic ogan and the triangle, form the major attraction of Voodoo in the eyes of tourists who attend the ceremonies as spectators. Nothing inspires more wonder than the drums because of their splendid conical shapes and the fascinating gestures of the *houn'tôrguiers*, or drummers.

The patronymic mystère of the initiates who beat the drums is *Papa-Houn'thor*, whose name is *Ima-Da-Govi*. They are under occult submission to the mystère *Mam'bo Delai Medeh*, referred to in the following song: "*Eyia, houn'to-a he! Delai commandé . . . (Eyia, the drummer, hey! Delai, give your command . . .)*"

Through the preceding explanations about the ogan and the triangle you have learned that the musical instruments form a theological whole. In the *oum'phor*, the ogan, the triangle, and the drums represent the equivalent of all the astral atmospheres from the pyrosphere (or central fire of the earth) to the nucleosphere, the chromosphere, and the photosphere. These are the three atmospheric zones of Legba—the sun. More particularly (and by reason of chemical magic con-

nected with the sacrificial ritual), the ogan, the drums, and the triangle are related to the solar chromosphere, while the sacred dances around the post which are inspired by the music are associated with the atmosphere of the solar nucleus.

A full consideration of the scientific constitution of the drums and their esoteric interpretation in Voodoo would be too advanced for the present work. However, we may describe the physical composition of several traditional orchestras of African origin that lend an African coloring to the religious history of Haitian Voodoo. The three classical batteries of drums are the Rada, the Pethro, and the Congo.

The Rada battery is composed of three drums that chromatically recombine the three atmospheres of the sun (that is, of the mystère Legba—for Legba is the quickening power behind Voodooism). Listed according to size and solar designation they are:

- (1) The *Manman*, related to the Chromosphere.
- (2) The *Second*, related to the Photosphere.
- (3) The *Bou-Lah*, related to the solar nucleus.

Because of their solar relationships and their resemblance in temperament to the Rada mystères, the Rada drums form the most brilliant battery of drums employed in Voodoo.

The word *Rada*, when analyzed and traced back to its geographical and mystical origins, reveals more clearly the significance of the drums of the same name. "Rada" is a simpler form of "Arada," the equivalent of "Allada," and its true sense is "Allah-Da," from which Voodoo very scientifically but very simply derives its serpent *Da(n)*. This is, moreover, the serpent of Judaism, according to the Bible, for the Voodooist has only to reread carefully the testament of Jacob to find it, both under the form of the mystical serpent which is Dan-Bha-Lah, and under the other mystical form of "magic powers"—the Lion which personifies Legba. To the Voodooist the Koran itself proves the existence of the serpent not only by the word *Allah* (*Allah-Da*), but by the serpent *Legba*, which is a perfect translation of *Al-Lah-Dah*, by reason of the meaning of the drum *Bou-Lah*.

Consider now the two drums of the Pethro rite. They are related especially to the awful atmosphere of the solar nucleus. They are the so-called demonic, even cannibalistic drums, not through their own nature alone, but simply because their temperament, being of high temperature, renders them very difficult to control in magical operations. Consequently they are dangerous.

The larger of the two drums is identified with the thunderbolt. Its mystère is the Haitian voodoo *Québiésou Dan Leh* (the Dahomean *Hévio-Zo*, who is the Zeus of the Greeks). This dreadful mystère, otherwise as beneficent as he is dreadful, provided he is "served" correctly, is the guardian of the drums of the oum'phor, the divine and thundering guardian of the pé or the altar stone. He is the "chief of the thunder," or the mystère *Aga Tonnerre*, called *Aga-Ou Tonnerre* because of one of his numerous metamorphoses. The larger of the two Pethro drums "walks" astrologically upon the "points-chauds" (hot-points) of the planet Jupiter, which corresponds to the loa *Québiésou Dan Leh*.

The second, or smaller, Pethro drum is necessarily the complementary opposite of the first, representing, accordingly, the region of the cosmos that hears or receives the "bolt" of thunder. This region of the cosmos is Guinea, which for Voodoo traditionalists signifies "the extremity of the world."

The first drum is identified sidereally with the Southern portion of the sky, the second with the Northern portion which, in Voodoo terms, is "ruled" by the mystère *Sakbha Lah Tha Vovo Lih Vo*. In Haiti this mystère is known under the greatly altered form of *Guédé Sa Bha Lah*, a loa of the cemetery who reveals those diseases and impurities which are properly treated in the oum'phor by the Jupiter of Voodoo.

In the Congo rite there may be two drums or the battery of drums also may contain three other drums which, except for very slight differences, are the same as the Rada drums, and their names are practically the same. These three are called:

- (1) The largest—the *Manman*.
- (2) The middle-sized—the *Grondez*.
- (3) The smallest—the *Ka-Tha-Bou*.

The *grondez* is used for the *second* of the Rada drums, and its name links it with the "tonnerre" (thunder) of the Pethro battery, while the *Katabou* is used for the Rada *Bou-Lah*.

In addition to the previously discussed Voodoo drums, the largest drum of all is the *Assato*. The magic power of this drum is limitless; wherefore, in accordance with this unlimited power, it is not played upon by merely one or even two drumsticks but "by more than a thousand," according to the claims of its devotees. Furthermore, the formidable character of its power requires that during the ritual it be beaten only by adepts who are possessed by the loas: "Let there be

as many drumsticks as there are 'saints;' let there be as many 'saints' as there are drumsticks beating ceremonially!"

The full significance of the Voodoo drums can only be understood by considering their origin. As a geometric consequence of the idea of "Earth-sex," the drum membrane or drumhead is believed to have been the skin forming the external ear of the serpent Danbhalah, wherefore snakes no longer have visible ears. By beating the voodoo drum, the drummer makes himself heard by Danbhalah via a direct, analogical pathway—the drumhead, which is the ear of the greatest of all the mytères; Dan Gbé Tò. Drums differ in form according to rite, because the geometric system upon which their construction is based represents not only a rite but also the dialect spoken by the "nation" of loa of that rite, as well as by the devotees of that "nation" of loa.

For this reason the Rada drums are the "tribal geometry" of the voodoo *langage* spoken by the Aradas. The form of these drums, like that of the others, is determined by the common language, and has been supernaturally revealed to the earliest initiates in exactly the same way and through the same tradition as the form of the tabernacle was revealed to Moses.

All of these traditional, fundamental ideas strongly prove the existence of an insoluble bond between the snake interred in the primordial earth in the form of a cone-shaped drum and the Voodoo *pé* whose form is that of a slightly raised tomb or burial vault. The snake has its abode within the stonework of the *pé* because it was interred in the earth (in Ifé or in Ville Aux Camps) with the alliance-stones which are rediscovered in the form of golden finger-rings belonging to Maitresse Erzulie Fréda Dahomey Tocan Miroizé Zagaza. The gold of these rings represents the sun. They are found on antique drums as large hoops of red copper because of the fact that, in magic terms, copper is the true metal of Erzulie (Venus) and also because the copper hoops give the drums better resonance.

The drums themselves must from time to time "make a trip to Ifé" in order to renew their supply of magic force. In this case they are said to be "put to bed," or "fed." These ceremonies are the *coucher-tambours* ("putting the drums to bed") and the *baille-tambours-manger* ("feeding the drums"). To "put the drums to bed" is the same thing as sending initiates of the various degrees to Ifé in order to have their degrees conferred upon them.

In the ceremony the sacred drums are taken from the great crossed

circle which will be their *oum'phor*—the *oum'phor* in which they are beaten—in order to recline them upon the bed of banana leaves supposed to represent *Guinin*. There a candle is lit on each of them. Not only the drums, but also all the other cult instruments, such as the *ogans*, have to make this voyage. During the time they are on their bed they are given something to eat. Ritual food and liqueurs are sprinkled over them and upon the designs that represent them to give them strength.

While the drums are lying down a distribution is made to the chickens about to be sacrificed of the sacrificial food offerings placed both upon the *vèvès* and upon the drums themselves. Then these chickens are passed and repassed over the *houn'gan* and the kneeling *houn'sihs* for a communication of powers. Then the birds are sacrificed to the instruments. Once killed they are placed upon the *vèvès* whence they will later be taken to be prepared. The *mam'bo* gives a drink of alcohol to the reclining drums by sprinkling the liquor over them. She casts the water in the four holes surrounding the post, also some coffee, the food-offerings of the sacrifice, as well as the liqueurs. The *houn'sihs* come to worship at these holes, kissing the ground before them, placing coins in them, at the same time pronouncing certain prayers while kneeling. The candles are extinguished and placed in the holes, which are then filled. The drums are covered with white sheets symbolizing the purifying atmosphere of the city of *Ifé* in *Guinin*.

Then the machete is stuck in the ground before the drums, and the ritual flags are placed over the white sheets which cover them as though they were dead.

The drums are of necessity "put to bed" to the singing of the *bò-houn'*, or funeral chants, and the audience all at one becomes very sad because the "putting to bed" of the drums is not only a departure but a new death: the gods of the wood are supposed to effect the crossing of the water, just like the sheep of *Agoueh* that is white like the white sheet which cover the drums, to go to Africa and return from there with powers renewed.

With reference to *Ifé*, the place where they go as source of the Voodoo tradition, with reference to the *mystère* of the drums called *Houn'tor*, and with reference to the funerary meaning of the ceremony, the following are the chants that accompany the crossing:

O Houn'tò mrin!  
 Côté ou pr'allez?  
 Ago! Nannan Wédo . . .  
 Houn'tò mrin, papa mrin,  
 Côté ou pr'allez?  
 E, ago é!  
 Ago! Nannan Wédo . . .  
 Houn'tò! Rhélez Houn'tò é,  
 Papa Sobo  
 Qui! Hountò-à . . .  
 Ladougouessan.  
 Sobagui Sobo, nous là;  
 Lò n'a mourì,  
 N'a quitté répos pou yo.

Eya, Bò-Gan,  
 Gò-Gan Ilé (Ifé)!  
 Houn'gan, agol  
 Lé-Guédé, Bò N'gan,  
 Voyiez rhéler Bogan.  
 O, Man-Yanvalou Micho!

Oh, my Houn'tor!  
 Where are you going?  
 Ago! Nannan Wédo . . .  
 My Houn'tor, my father,  
 Where are you going?  
 E, ago é!  
 Ago! Nannan Wédo . . .  
 Houn'tor! Call the Houn'tor,  
 Papa Sobo  
 Yes! The Houn'tor  
 Ladougouessan.  
 Sobagui Sobo, we are here;  
 It is only when we shall die,  
 that we shall give them rest.

Eya, Houn'gan, maker of talis-  
 men,  
 Bò-Gan Ifé!  
 Houn'gan, agol  
 Lé-Guédé, Bò Gan-Gan,  
 Have Bogan called.  
 O, Man-Yanvolou Micho!

The voyage of the white sheep of Agoueh R Oyo, the drums, the initiates, and the houn'gans to Ifé is a resurrection of the flesh offered in sacrifice in all species. In the Voodoo tradition this voyage renews the magic powers properly so-called as much as the administrative and governmental powers of the society. The tradition teaches that it pertains to the Voodoo society and to society in general, a fact which shows why the two are closely associated in the peristyle, for the aim of this mysterious voyage among the loas is to see again the ancestors who are withdrawn into the stars of the vèvès by death. These are the ancestors who retain the powers as well as give them back.

The drums synthetize the principle of the resurrection by the wood and by the skin, shown in Egyptian symbolism by the burial of Osiris wrapped in a skin and inside the trunk of a tree. For this reason, in ordinary teaching, the creation is represented by three skins fastened together above and held up by a solar disk. This sort of trident-form, tied above and held by the sun symbolizes the androgenous or par-

thenogenic function of water pictured by the trident or the three skins and by the fire which is pictured as the sun.

From this it follows, through the syncretism of the cabalas, that the *ti-ké-nou* or the "resurrection by the skin" of the Egyptian rites is equal to the three drums of the Rada orchestra which symbolize the three planes of the Universal Soul or the three divine Hypostases. The following are the parallels:

<i>Voodoo</i>	<i>Egyptian-Jewish</i>
FIRST drum (1st skin)	= NECHAMA (Soul-Spirit)
MANMAN drum (2nd skin)	= NEPHESCH (Soul-Liver)
BOULAH drum (3rd skin)	= ROUACH (Soul-Heart)

The Egyptian *tikénou* reclines, moreover, in or upon the skin, to renew itself spiritually, just as the drummer, the houn'gan, the mam'bo, or the houn'sihs of Voodoo lie down and roll themselves upon the drum in order to renew their forces. For this reason the arm of the Voodoo drummer represents the Alpha and Omega of the Universal cabala, while his hand is the Roman D, the Jewish dalet, and the Greek delta, all of which relates the musical performance of the drums to the following occult identifications:

A - O	= Divine Act
D	= Human Act

Now, as the Rada formula signifies sun (Râ) serpent (Da), it is the life-giving principle of the sun which "recharges" by means of the drumskin the initiates who roll themselves against the cylindrical wood.

## The Voodoo Chorus

The voodoo chorus is composed of houn'sihs, both male and female, and directed by the *houn'guénicon*, who usually is a woman. The *houn'guénicon* is, after the houn'gan, the most conspicuous person in the peristyle. She leads the chorus, "sending" the chants and performing the dance movements, moving back and forth in front of the houn'sihs, and waving her arms and hands about in such a way that they resemble branches of a tree stirred by the wind. She conducts the ceremonies along with the houn'gan, and her function is basically

concerned with the magic of sound by which the loas are "called" and made to "descend" and be present or to participate in the ritual services. Her function is all the more important, in the peristyle and elsewhere, in that she is the one who "sends" the ritual chants necessary for making contact with the loas in the astral. All chromatic magic rests upon her knowledge. She is the sonic soul of the peristyle. Moreover, in view of her knowledge, relative chiefly to liturgical chant, her title is explained in accordance with traditional etymology as follows:

*houn'* = "drum" (or any instrument of sacred music)

*-gué-*, or *-jé-* = "supposed to be"

*-nukon-*, or *-nikon-* = "the first"

*voudoun-sih* = "*houn'sihs*," or "women"

The *houn'sihs* who form the chorus are classically robed in white, preferably in white linen. This rule is not observed, however, if the service is celebrated exclusively for the Pethro loas. In this case the *houn'sihs* may be dressed completely in red. They have even been known to wear purple in a Voodoo service in honor of Ogou Bhalin'dio. But for services of no special importance, *houn'sihs* usually wear their everyday clothes.

The chorus sings the ritual chants which, like the other geometric and chromatic elements of Voodoo, are related to occult forces of the air, the atmosphere, and the astral. The chants which the *houn'sihs*, under the leadership of the *houn'guénicon*, "send," magnetically attract the *mystères* lurking in the area around the Voodoo ceremony. The ritual chants composed for this purpose go out into the atmosphere to search out the loas and magnetize them. Having found them, they magnetize them as forces of the invisible, obliging them to come and incarnate themselves "in the heads" of their "horses." This is the primary ritual function of the chorus of *houn'sih can-zos*. Its next most important function is to assist the battery of drums in getting the incarnated loas as well as the *houn'sihs* not in a state of possession to dance.

In the occultism of Voodoo, the ritual chorus of the *houn'sih can-zos* represents one of the most important factors. In the metabolism of the magic of sacrifice, the airs sung by the *houn'sihs* are what aid the blood of the animal victims and the essence of the food or other offerings in rising via the *mystères* to their astral destination. The chorus plays this most important role since, by reason of a series of philosophi-

cal and chemical analogies it is identified cabalistically with the "heart of the mystère Erzulie." Now since Erzulie is the wife of Legba, the houn'sih of the chorus are, all of them, necessarily wives of Legba, that is to say, wives of the astro-biological system of the cult. Consequently, the person who leads the chorus—the houn'guénicon—is the principal wife of Legba, as Legba in this connection is always considered the cosmic axis of the ritual.

Both Erzulie and Legba likewise have as their ritual attributes the heart and the blood, which they control biologically. Most often it is from among the singers that the mystères, magnetized in the atmosphere by the songs, choose their "mounts." Often a houn'sih is seen to stagger, to whirl upon herself violently, throwing her arms out in all directions in the classic gestures always made in an attempt to ward off the mystère, and then to fall backwards upon the legs of the seated spectators. Once the loa is finally in complete possession of her, she quickly rises, and with a rush, dashes into the middle of the peristyle, her personality completely transformed. She then proceeds with the customary activities of the mystère concerned.

Sometimes the loa who has thus mounted a houn'sih continues to participate in the chorus, even though the possession has entirely obliterated the consciousness of the "horse." After the houn'sih has been "dismounted," she simply resumes her place among the singers. It is extremely rare, incidentally, ever to see a houn'guénicon overcome by the loa-crisis.

## Chants

Inconnection with our account of the chorus, the drums, the ogan, the triangle, and the mode of chromatic communication with the mystères of the invisible who dwell in the atmosphere, the ritual chants—a clear expression of the sacred music—have significance and usefulness.

The repertory of Voodoo chants is so vast that it is impossible to say how many there are—thousands, at least. They show variations, within the same musical mode, from one region to another. For example, a chant sung in one way at Port-au-Prince is sung in another at Port-de-Paix. The chant is obviously the same and has come from the same traditional, magical source, but with variations.

Every rite has its particular rhythm to which its chants are sung, although from one rite to another the difference in rhythm is not so great as to prevent one from realizing that, in any case, he is hearing Voodoo chants. Such is the difference, for example, between the Pethro and the Congo chants.

Accordingly, it is unnecessary to mention that the same phenomenon is observed in the music. The variations in the music correspond to the differences in the repertory of chants. Wherefore, however little a person is acquainted with Voodoo, as soon as he hears the music, he can tell whether it is from a Pethro or a Congo ceremony, a Pethro or a Congo dance, or a Rada or an Ibo service, as easily as he can distinguish the Congo from the Rada simply on the basis of the drum beats.

It happens in the course of a given ceremony that chants of different rites succeed and overlap one another because the *mystères* that appear are themselves different, or because more than one category of loa is being served.

It is useful to observe the double economy of every Voodoo chant. Not only may they belong to different rites—the Ibo, Congo, Rada, Pethro, Caplaou, Mahi, and others—but the sense of their words indicates the ritual and magical significance of their use in a particular ceremony. This means that if, for example, a certain chant asks Legba to “open the way” (speaking in magical terms), Legba is peremptorily charged with opening the way and not doing otherwise. If another chant alludes to Erzulie embarking upon the ocean, it refers either to her actual embarkation or to some very close allusion relating to the result sought by the cabalistic acts of the ceremony. Hence, the magical indications are made in accordance with the words sung.

Here are a few examples of Voodoo chants which mention some of the different rites:

### *Congo*

Caroline saisie; cé loa moin.  
Danbhalah Wédo,  
m'a p' ba ou Bon Dié.  
M' cé Créole Congo,  
m' pas sotto oh!  
Danbhalah Wédo,

Caroline is astonished; she's my loa.  
Danbhalah Wédo,  
I will give you God.  
I'm a Créole from the Congo,  
I'm no fool!  
Danbhalah Wédo,

côté ou yé?  
Soleil-a lévé lan pays Congol

where are you?  
The sun will rise in Congo-land!

### *Caplaou*

Benga, manman moin!  
O, Zoclimo parlé,  
yo pas couté. Ouaille oh!  
Benga, manman,  
si ou allé, pas tounin  
lan pays-a.  
Poussé allé, Zo, oui.  
Poussé allé, kinbois salay,  
Poussé allé, mi salay!

Benga, my mother!  
O, Zoclimo speaks,  
they don't listen. Ouai-oh!  
Benga, mother,  
if you leave, don't return  
to this country.  
Go away, Zo, yes.  
Go away, kinbois salay,  
Go away, my salay!

### *Rada*

O Legbal Commandé,  
Vié Legbal Commandé.  
Commandé-yo.

O Legbal Give orders,  
Old Legbal Give orders.  
Give them orders.

### *Ibo*

Pagnin couvri pagnin,  
nanchon Ibo.  
Pagnin couvri pagnin.  
Min pagnin, Grande Ibo,  
Min pagnin.  
Pagnin couvri pagnin,  
nanchon Ibo.

Basket covers basket,  
Ibo gods.  
Basket covers basket.  
Here's a basket, Grande Ibo,  
Here's a basket.  
Basket covers basket,  
Ibo gods.

*Anmine*

Garde moin là. Tâtél	My talisman is there. Test it!
O! Garde moin là.	O! My talisman is there.
Tâté coffré!	Test it, lock it up!
Bo Ouanminan, Ouanminan,	Bo Ouanminan, Ouanminan,
con ça n'a p' blani yé.	that's how we are serving.
Ouanminan, hé!	Ouanminan, hey!
Garde moin chiré.	My talisman is torn.

*Ibo-Mondongue*

Eh! Roi Zan. Eh!	Eh! King Zan. Eh!
Roi Zan-Zan, Nanchon Ibol	King Zan-Zan, Ibo gods!
Hé, roi nanchon Ibo!	Hey, King of the Ibo gods!
Vive, nanchon Ibol	Hail, Ibo gods!
Côté Grande Ibo? Hé! Roil	Where's Grande Ibo? Hey! King!
Hé! Roi Ibo mangé chien.	Hey! King Ibo eats dog.

*Petbro*

Ahi, manman, hen!	Ahi, mother, hen!
Tambour moin rélé.	My drum calls.
Jou-m' allongé . . . Ahi!	The day I die . . . Ahi!
Ahi! Manman.	Ahi! Mother.

*Salengro*

Trou Sa, Trou Sa,	That hole, That hole,
Rélé trou Salengro.	is called the Salengro hole.
Na rélé trou Salengro.	We'll call the hole Salengro.
Trou Sa, Trou Sa,	That hole, That hole,
rélé trou Salengro!	called the Salengro hole!

*Kitba-Zandor*

Zan-dor! Li allé, Zan-dor!  
 Qui l'heù li yé? Zan-dor!  
 Li allé, Zan-dor!

Zandor! He's gone, Zandor!  
 What time is it? Zandor!  
 He's gone, Zandor!

*Anmine-Makanda*

Ouanminan! Ca ça yé,  
 Ouanminan? Tâté-coffré,  
 Ca ça yé? A-Lah-Da dérivé.  
 Ca li yé, Ouanminan,  
 Garde O?

Ouanminan! What's that,  
 Ouanminan? Test it, lock it up,  
 What's that? A-Lah-Da is adrift.  
 What is it, Ouanminan,  
 O Guard?

Because the chants mean exactly what their words clearly suggest, the chorus "sends" them, addresses them to the loas personally. As we shall see, these ritual chants which request the loas to do one thing or another are adapted to the rites in which the loas "work." For example:

*Yanvalou*

(chant for the mystère Manman Brigitte)

Manman Brigittel Manman moin!  
 O! Ou ouè ça?  
 À l'entour caille-là,  
 gangnin di fé là-dans ni.  
 Nous chaché bois  
 pou nous semblé di fé,  
 nous chaché d'l'eau pou nous  
 toudyé di fé.  
 La plus par tombé.  
 Ou pas oué?  
 Terre-là glissé.

Mother Brigitte! My mother!  
 Oh! Do you see that?  
 Around the house,  
 there's a fire in it.  
 We gather wood  
 to build a fire;  
 we gather water to  
 extinguish the fire.  
 The rain does not fall.  
 Don't you see?  
 The ground is slippery.

*Yanvalou-Fla Vodoun*

(chant for the mystère Jupiter-Québiécou)

Bagui-a lovi, mon roil	The bagui's members, my king!
Cé ça, m'a ouè yo.	That's it—I shall see them.
Ahi! Manmouleh-vi.	Ahi! Manmouleh-vi.
Cé ça, Mahi Gouéto.	That's it, Mahi Gouéto.
Pò diable! Posso nou-deh.	Poor devil! Posso nou-deh.
Hé! An-hél	Hey! An-hey!

*Mabi*

(chant for the mystère Mademoiselle Annaïse)

Annaïse! En Nago,	Annaïse! En Nago,
pitite-là apé crié.	the baby is crying.
Yé, yél Ba-li tété. Yé, yél	Yey, yey! Give him a teat. Yey, yey!
Apé crié, yé, yél	He's crying, yey, yey!
Ba-li tété, Ba-li tete, yé, yél	Give him a teat, yey, yey!
Gadé: m'lan bâton. Yé, yél	Look: I'm benrenek. Yey, yey!
Ba-li tété, yé, yél	Give him a teat, yey, yey!

*Martinique*

(chant for the mystère Nan Kiou)

Cousin Nan-Kiou,	Cousin Nan-Kiou,
cé pa ça ou té dit moin.	that's not what you told me.
Ou té dit moin con ça:	You told me:
Jon oua plaçé avè m'	"the day you become my mistress
oua marié avè m'.	you would marry me."
Nan point robe, nan point	I haven't a dress, not even a
chemise.	shirt.
Grand merci gnou pied mango	There's only a mango tree
qui te gaign en ba-à	that I had there
qui paré l'honneur moin.	to bolster my reputation.

*Crabigne Nago*

(chant for the mystère Ogou Shalodeh)

Liki, liki ô! Liki, liki ô!  
 Ogou Shalodeh.  
 Papa Ogou Jacouman,  
 Papa Ogou Shalodeh.  
 Liki, liki ô! Liki, liki ô!  
 Ogou Shalodeh.

Liki, liki Oh! Liki, liki Oh!  
 Ogou Shalodeh.  
 Papa Ogou Jacouman,  
 Papa Ogou Shalodeh.  
 Liki, liki Oh! Liki, liki Oh!  
 Ogou Shalodeh.

*Congo*

(chant for the mystère Legba)

Legba lan oum'phor moin!	Legba in my oum'phor!
Legba lan oum'phor moin!	Legba in my oum'phor!
Ou minme qui pôté chapeau.	You who wear a hat.
Cé pou paré soleil pou moin.	It is to protect me from the sun.
Legba Congo nan oum'phor moin,	Legba Congo in my oum'phor,
Mondongue-Moussai lan	Mondongue-Moussai in
oum'phor moin.	my oum'phor.

To show more clearly by a convincing synthesis the astral relationships existing among the rites, the mystères, and the chants "sent" to the chorus of houn'sih canzos by either the houn'guénicon or the houn'gan during the course of a *service-loa*, the following examples are given of a few of the chants classified according to the rites in which they are performed:

*Yanwalou*

(chant for Legba, ka of gates and roads)

Legba-Grand-Chemin, nous  
 pr'allé.

Legba-Highway, we are going.

Ago, Ago yé.	Ago, Ago yey.
Legba-Grand-Chemin, nous pr'allé ouè si n'a passé;	Legba-Highway, we are going to see if we shall pass;
Legba-Grand-Chemin, nous pr'allé ouè, Papa, si n'a passé.	Legba-Highway, we are going to see, Papa, if we shall pass.
Si n'a passé grand-chemin, mon roi!	If we shall pass the highway, my king!
Agol Grand-Chemin, nous pr'allé ouè, Papa, si n'a passé.	Agol Highway, we are going to see, Papa, if we shall pass.
O Agol Ago yél	Oh Agol Ago yey.

### *Yawalou*

(chant for Danbhalah and Aï-Da Wédo)

Danbhalah Wédo, gagé pitites ou yo, hé!	Danbhalah Wédo, behold your children, heyl
Aïda Wédo, min pitites ou yo, hé!	Aïda Wédo, here are your children, heyl
Danbhalah Wédo, gagé pitites ou yo, oh!	Danbhalah Wédo, behold your children, oh!
A yé, a yé, oh!	A yey, a yey, oh!
Danbhalah, min z'enfants ou là.	Danbhalah, here are your children.

### *Nago*

(chant for Aloumandia, one of the *maitre-tête* mystères of Dessalines; Aloumandia is here associated with the mystères Ossangne Bacoulé and Ogou Badagri)

Alou Madia hé! Ossangne oh!	Alou Madia heyl Ossangne oh!
Ogou oh!	Ogou oh!
Ossangne Bacoulé qui mandé drapeaux.	Ossangne Bacoulé who asks for flags.
Alou Madia hé! Ossangne oh!	Alou Madia heyl Ossangne oh!

Ogou ohl  
Ogou Badagri qui mandé  
drapeaux,  
Nous tout barré.

Ogou ohl  
Ogou Badagri who asks for  
flags,  
We are all barred.

### *Mabi*

(chant for Erzulie Fréda)

Cé chance ohl O, cé chance ohl  
Cé pas wanga ou gangnin;

cé chance ohl  
Grande Erzulie Fréda,  
cé chance ou gangnin.  
Cé pas wanga ou gangnin;  
cé chance, O Maitresse.

It's luck, ohl O, it's luck, ohl  
It's not a magic charm that you  
have;  
it's luck, oh!  
Grande Erzulie Fréda,  
it's luck that you have.  
it's not a magic charm that you  
have;  
it's luck, O Mistress.

### *Congo-Crabigne*

(chant for Moussondi, or for a Moussongui loa)

Hé ya hél Hé ya Moussondil  
Loa cila-à, cé loa Moussondi.  
Hé ya hél Hé ya Moussondil

Hey yah heyl Hey yah Moussondil  
That loa—that's the Moussondi loa.  
Hey yah heyl Hey yah Moussondil

### *Kiiba*

(degree-chant composed by the mystère Brisé)

L'ennemi barré moin  
caille Santo.  
M' passé déjà.  
Zombi barré moin

The enemy stops me  
at Santo's house.  
I already passed.  
A zombi bars me

caille Santo  
Caille Santo, m'passé déjàl

at Santo's house.  
At Santo's house I already passed!

### *Banda*

(chant for Guédé Nibbho, Lord of the Cemeteries)

Hé! Gros saint, gros loa,  
Guédé Nibbho égaré!  
Hé! Gros saint, gros loa,  
Papa Guédé égaré.

Hey! Great saint, great loa,  
Guédé Nibbho is lost!  
Hey! Great saint, great loa,  
Papa Guédé is lost.

### *Petbro (Banda --- Crabigne)*

(chant for the loa Jean Zombi)

Jean Zombil Oui-oua, bal  
Conduis-m' allé.  
Ya p'boué tafia pou yo fait  
tintin  
devant loa moin.  
Jean Zombil Oui-oua, bal  
Conduis-m' allé.

Jean Zombil Oui-oua, bah!  
Take me away.  
They will drink tafia to make them  
grimace  
before my loa.  
Jean Zombi! Oui-oua, bah!  
Take me away.

### *Ibo*

(chant for the mystère Ayanman)

Ayanman! Ibo Lélé, Lélé, Lélé!  
Ayanman! Ibo Lélé!  
Ayanman ça, con ça;  
Ayanman dansé con ça.  
Ou pilé pied-m',  
ou pas di-m' "padon."  
Ayanman ça, con ça;  
Ayanman ça, con ça;  
ça "padon" t'a fait pou moin?

Ayanman! Ibo Lélé, Lélé, Lélé!  
Ayanman! Ibo Lélé!  
Ayanman, that's the way, like that;  
Ayanman dances like that.  
You step on my foot,  
you don't say "pardon."  
Ayanman, that way, like that;  
Ayanman, that way, like that;  
What would a "pardon" do for me?

## *Caplaou*

(chant for the mystère Zo Climo)

Zo! Comment ça yé?	Zo! How's that?
Zo Benga, Papal Comment ça yé?	Zo Benga, Papa! How's that?
Zo Climan, Papa, comment ça yé?	Zo Climan, Papa, how's that?
Si houn'sih tombé,	If the houn'sih falls,
pas quitté-l' gâté	don't let her spoil (things)
avant yo fouillé trou.	before they dig a hole.

Although this classification shows the rites to which certain mystères belong, it does not imply that they belong exclusively to any one rite. Hence, if an initiate wishes to "serve" a Rada Legba in the Pethro rite, it is perfectly possible to do so. But according to some initiates it is only the *loa-Guinin* (the purest African loas) who refuse to be served on any "point" (that is, in any rite) except their own. Plausible as this assertion may seem, however, the proof to the contrary lies in the fact that most of the loas are found in most of the rites. The purpose which requires the serving of loas first on one "point" and then on another depends upon the form of magic in question, that is, whether the mystères are being invoked with good or evil intent.

When Voodoo reached Hispaniola with the first slaves purchased on the Atlantic coasts of Africa, its ritual chants were in the pure African *langage*, a synthesis of all the African dialects which form the "Great Magic Language" of the tradition. Nevertheless, each rite, or each "nation" of loas has preserved its own langage: Nago, Congo, Pethro, Anmine, and the others. Thus in the vast repertory of Voodoo chants are found those which belong to many different African dialects.

The relations of the slaves with the English, Spanish, and French colonists resulted in the creation of a mixed language which was to become the Creole spoken in Haiti today, an extremely rich and supple language composed of all that the African had been able to retain not only of the hundreds of African dialects, but of French, English, and Spanish. Thus the greatest part of the chants of the ritual repertory of Voodoo have evolved from the pure African language to Creole. Occasionally Creole, French, and African are mingled to make a single chant. Other times the chant is one hundred percent Creole. Further-

more, certain chants have remained absolutely African. These are said to be in *langage*. These for the most part have been retained in a mnemonic tradition, but very few houn'gans or houn'sihs are able any longer to translate them. They somehow "feel" atavistically what they mean. The disturbing result of this transformation, in which the chants in *langage* are unfortunately disappearing more and more, is that the purity of the Voodoo cabal as well as the very power of the loas is being lost at the same time and in the same proportion. It is also to be regretted that the chants in mixed language or purely Creole lack the liturgical poetry of the chants in *langage*, which gives an air so mysterious and at the same time so effective in the ceremonies. Here are some examples:

### *A Voodoo Chant in Pure Haitian Creole*

(Ancient Yanvalou Ritual)

N'a rémècié, n'a rémècié yo . . .	We will thank, we will thank them . . .
Apré Bon Dié, n'a rémècié yo.	After God we will thank them.
Apré Bon Dié, nous là;	After God, we are there;
n'a rémècié yo;	we will thank them;
N'a rémècii Dié douvant houn'gan	We will thank God before the houn'gan . . .
N'a rémèci d'eau dòmi houn'gan . . .	We will thank the water ? houn'gan . . .
N'a rémèci, n'a rémècié yo.	We will thank, we will thank them.
N'a rémècié houn'guénicon,	We will thank the houn'guénicon,
N'a rémèci houn'sih canzo . . .	We will thank the houn'sih canzo . . .
(Voodoo Chant: Mixed Creole, French, and <i>langage</i> ) (Caplaou)	
Benga, manman moin . . .O, Zoclimol	Benga, my mother . . . O, Zoclimol!
Ou pâlé, yo pas couté. Oua yo!	You speak, they don't listen. Oua yo!
Benga, manman, si ou allé, ou pas tounin lan pays-à.	Benga, mother. If you go, you do not return to the country.
Poussez aller, Zo oui . . .	Hurry and go, Zo oui . . .
Poussez aller, kim'boi salay,	Hurry and go, kim'boi salay,
Poussez aller, mi saloy	Hurry and go, mi saloy.

(Voodoo Chant in Pure *langage*) (Yanvalou)

Minoké ago Legba. Ago Legba, ago Legbal  
 Go Legba, Go Legba.  
 Minoké ago Legba . . . . .

(Another Voodoo Chant in Pure *langage*) (Yanvalou)

Zouzou zouzou zi za, i mankou tuilé.  
 Bléo, bléo . . .  
 Marasah-Guinin, a i mankou tuilé;  
 Bléo, bléo . . .  
 I mankou tuilé, Marssah-Guinin;  
 Bléo, bléo . . .

We choose now a certain Voodoo text relative to the Nago loas of Yoruba, translating it into French to show the phonetic divergence which results from the translation from one language to another. The translation into Creole follows the French translation to clarify this divergence and to show how the African *voudouns* can be distorted. This is a Yoruba chant for the mystère A Gbo Gbo, recognized today in the Voodoo practiced in Haiti in the expression "Abobo!" It is a mystère who interrupts the chants and who exalts the Invisibles in its double signification of "Alleluia!"

—Olih kolo mon deh, Abobo!

—A wa na?

—N'wa é, Abobo . . .

Abobo fo laga jigi légan.

—Ikou kati, ko ka mi . . .

I hou mi kpon, é ma gnon

O lou ièbé, Ifé,

To é mé médeh ma non yi ré

Lobi Olo-run.

Translation into Creole:

—C'é moin qui pôté cècueil,  
 Abobo!

—Ah! C'é ou minme?

Je suis le porteur de cercueil,  
 Abobo!

Ah! Ah; C'est toi?

C'est bien moi, Abobo . . .

Je couple l'air (le chant) avec  
 autorité.

Garde-moi de la mort insatiable . . .

Me tuer serait un crime,

Car le Grand Roi d'Ifé,

Le pays où ne vont pas les vivants,

A créé la Lumière.

Translation into English:

I am the bearer of the coffin,  
 Abobo!

Ah! Is it you?

—Oui, c'é moin, Abobol	Yes, it is I, Abobol
M'gain pouvoi pou m' rété chantés.	I have the power to "cut" the chant.
—Empêchez lan-mò prend-m',	Take (me), keep me from death,
P'ace que si ou tuez-m' c'é	For if you kill me, it's
gnou crime,	a crime,
Pisqué c'é Grand Roi d'Ifé,	Since it is the Great King of Ifé,
Côté môtels pas janme allé,	Where mortals never go,
Qui ban nous limiè.	Who gives us the light (i.e., of life).

The symbol of the solar ravishment is the sword or machete of the Voodoo ritual. The following is a ritual chant to bring about the arrest by the police of anyone who steals this symbol:

Kadia Bossou, Yahiwé (Ié-H-Wé),	Kadia Bossou, Yawé,
Yahwé, Yahwé, Ya Bossou,	Yahwé, Yahwé, Ya Bossou,
A Dié, Yahwé mrin, Bossou mrin!	Ah God, my Yahwé, my Bossou!
A Dié; couline ça-a, cé pou	Ah God; that machette, it's for
Yahwé . . .	Yahwé . . .
Cé pou Yahwé-Aida	It's for Yahwé-Aida
Yahwé, Yahwé!	Yahwé, Yahwé!
Cé la police, O ya lagué la police	It's the police, Oh, they will call
'lan cò-ou.	the police against you.
Cé pou Yahwé Camblanmin.	It's for Yahwé Camblanmin.

## Voodoo Dances

In the preceding section the explanation of the performance of ritual chants in accordance with particular rites is sufficient to show that the rites, by the evidence of their names alone, are related to the musical repertory. The relationships between the liturgy and the choreography established in Voodoo by this fact clearly indicate the cabalistic function of the dances and reveal their relation to the legislative and governmental system of the astral upon which the cult of the loas is based.

All the chant rhythms based upon corresponding musical themes that mention both the ritual behavior and the *nations, tribes, or races* of the loas have been preserved in Haitian Voodoo exactly as the slaves brought them to Haiti in the old days from the Ivory Coast, the

Gold Coast, the Grain Coast, from Senegal, Angola, the Congo, Dahomey, Yoruba, Sudan, and elsewhere. Furthermore, the identification of the rites by the names of still existing African tribes clearly proves their origin.

It remains to be noted that while the chants of the various rites differ from one another, there is comparatively far greater difference between the dances. For example, an *Ibo dance* differs more from a *Mahi dance* than an *Ibo chant* from a *Mahi chant*. However, perhaps this judgement is based upon the illusion that the sense of sight is more immediately sensitive to movement than the sense of hearing is to the metaphysics of music.

Nevertheless, as a rule the names of the chants and the dances classed according to rites or to *nations* should automatically indicate the composition of the batteries of drums as well as the manner in which the drums are played. The following list is a modest attempt to classify both the dances and the fundamental rites that are performed in Haitian oum'phors today, omitting those of secondary importance.

### *Rada (3 drums)*

Voodoo dance  
Fla voudoun

### *Petro (2 drums)*

Kitha  
Kitha mouillé (wet Kitha)  
Kitha sec (dry Kitha)

### *Congo (2 or 3 drums)*

Congo paillettes  
Congo mazonne  
Congo Créole  
Congo Franc

Congo Guinée  
 Congo Larose  
 Congo-Pethro

*Ibo (3 drums)*

*Mabi (3 drums)*

*Nago (3 drums)*

*Dahoméé (3 drums)*

Dahoméé z'épaules  
 Djouba Franc  
 Djouba Martinique  
 Djouba Baboule  
 Moussongui  
 Boum'ba-Lem'ba (Pethro)  
 Salengro (Congo-Guinée)  
 Caplaou-Canga

*Asson-Rou (Yan-Valou) (3 drums)*

Yanvalou Franc  
 Yanvalou cassé  
 Yanvalou Nago  
 Yanvalou z'épaules  
 Yanvalou genoux  
 Yanvalou debout  
 Yanvalou dos bas

*Banda (3 drums)**Crabignin, Nago, Congo (3 drums)*

The following dances and rites are also basically of African origin. They were found during the slave period and for some years after, but since that time have gradually disappeared:

- Kitha (still seen today, but as part of the Pethro rite to which it does not properly belong)
- Caplaou
- Caplaou-Canga
- Salengro

The following dances and rites likewise bear names of historical and geographical significance, but are combined in one way or another with the first fundamental group—the Rada—which, moreover, influences voodoo choreography:

- Fon
- Mandingue
- Moundongue
- Foulah
- Soco-lo
- Bambara
- Haoussah
- Mayombeh
- Sobo-houn
- Mascotte
- Congo-Guinin-houn'tò-Gouétò
- Makandal

There are also other secondary dances that can be mentioned, and which are variously related to the fundamental group. However, the exact relationship between them and the fundamental group is never very precise or formal. These are the:

- Carabienne

Pastorelle  
Mout-séché  
Bouleverse

The two great dances of totally popular character whose origin is found in the African mask rituals should not be omitted:

Mascaron (of the Pethro rite)  
Méringue (of mixed rite: Pethro-Rada)

Because of their very origin, these have become the official dances of the two greatest carnival masked bands in Haiti, likewise called the Mascaron and the Méringue.

Last of all, there is another popular dance—the Rara—performed to an orchestral accompaniment dominated by *vaccines*, or bamboo flutes. It is of Voodoo origin, and is usually danced along country roads. It “walks” upon very powerful “points” in magic, because of the instrument used by the “king” or “ra” of these bands: a staff decorated with tin ornaments, with which he does all sorts of marvellous things. Naturally, this staff corresponds to the staff of Legba, for good intent or for evil.

The most important thing to remember about all the Voodoo dances is that, just like all the other factors of the cult, they correspond to elements of the astral which the study of African esoterism attempts to clarify. Like the chants, the *vèvès* or ritual diagrams, and the drums, they are capable of initiating communication with the forces of the invisible, for they represent choreographically the very forces that they reproduce.

## Voodoo Prayers

Voodoo ceremonies always commence with prayers. These prayers are generally quite long, almost interminable. For this reason we shall demonstrate only their principle, with a view to showing the procedure employed by the houn'gan or the mam'bo, with the congregation giving the responses. These prayers are recited as litanies, as moving as they are soporific. They begin with the *Prière Guinin* (African Prayer), which demonstrates the religious syncretism operating be-

tween Africa and Rome, for this *Prière Guinin* is found to be a prayer said only in French, but including the names of Roman Catholic saints. The *Prière Djor*, or *Prière Dio*, follows in Voodoo "language," but mixed with French expressions and the names of saints of the Roman calendar.

The Catholic prayer and the *dior* prayer have as their special purpose the "preparing of the astral" in order to facilitate the ceremonial magic. They place the astral at the disposition of the houn'gan or the mam'bo. Also, these prayers are sung or followed by chants because the ritual chant is psycho-astral: it totalizes the causal spirit which presides over a religious or lay assembly for a greater control of the supernatural presences which are operating. They are these presences which voodooists call *vodoun*, *loa*, *voudoun*, or *mystères*, *anges* or *saints*.

When saying these prayers the houn'gan is usually seated before the centerpost (sometimes before the *pé*), on a low chair, asson and bell in hand with which he accents certain parts of this "spoken chant" comprising the *Prière Guinin* and the *Prière Djor*.

The leit-motif, "Lih-sah Do-lé, Zo . . ." which follows the categories of *mystères* mentioned, shows that the prayer is placed under the influence of Legba, the old and wise, who represents thunder under the name of Québié-sou or Hé-Vio-Zo (the Québiésou Dan Leh of the Haitian oum'phor, supreme guardian of the purity of the Voodoo Tradition, and who personifies the "serpent of thunder.")

The tradition of this prayer allows a charitable and deferential thought for the poor deceased, for the brother masons, for drums no longer used, for the former drummers, for all the old sacred musical instruments no longer usable or lost, for all cult objects broken or thrown away, and even for everything else that may have been forgotten.

Thus, in addition to being a great act of magic incantation having the religious power of concentrating all the traditional *psyche* of the deceased of the great universal tradition of religion, of which the houn'gan is about to serve as minister, the Voodoo prayer is a fantastic thank offering, and an immense tradition of charity. It embraces the three theological virtues upon which the African cabal is based from its origin: Faith, Hope, and Charity.

This is the form of the Roman Catholic Prayer, often recited by a

*père savane*, or "bush priest," that is, by an acolyte or sacristan of the Roman Church paid by the *oum'phor*—a paradox inasmuch as Rome is fiercely opposed to Voodoo.

Our Father . . .

Hail Mary . . .

Creed . . .

Glory be to the Father . . .

Hail Mary, hear my prayers . . .

Holy Angels, we are on our knees at the feet of Mary . . .

Saint Rose, hear us . . .

Jesus, hear us . . .

Saint Peter, give us the key which opens the gate . . .

Great saints, give us our powers . . .

Saint Anthony, hear us . . .

Come, my God, Come . . .

The angel of the Lord said to Mary that she was pregnant with  
Jesus Christ . . .

Saint Philomena, virgin and martyr . . .

Holy virgins, hear us . . .

Alas, Alas, Mary Magdalene . . .

Oh, Lord Jesus in the Host . . .

Grace, Mary, grace . . .

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost . . .

We hail Thee, O Mary, hear our prayers, and place us in heaven  
to serve you . . .

Great God, intercede for us . . .

Saint Joseph, intercede with Jesus, our Redeemer, for us . . .

Saint Joseph, charm, charm our eyes . . .

Angel of heaven, have pity on us . . .

Saint Andrew and Holy Angels, behold us at your knees at the  
feet of Mary . . .

All saints, all saints, all saints, hear us . . .

Saint Anthony of Padua, hear us . . .

Saint James, hear us . . .

Saint Philipp, hear us . . .

Saint John the Baptist, hear us . . .

—other invocations follow.

This is the form of the *Prière Djor*:

- (1) Litany of the *Djor* saints, a vast syncretism of the oum'phor and Rome:

*Rhélez* (or *helez*, or *appelez* = "call," "summon," "hail") The Great Eternal Father, The *Djor* Saints, Oh! Hail The Great Eternal Father, the Saints *Djor* Docoi Agoueh. Hail The Great Eternal Father, if we are in the hands of Bon Dieu (The Good God), Oh Saints . . .

Apo Lihsah G Bhadia Wangan Ciétò Lihsah Doleh Zo!

Hail the Virgin Mary . . .

Hail the Virgin of Good Help . . .

Hail the Master Creator of heaven and of earth . . .

Hail Saint Anthony of Padua . . .

Hail Saint Nicholas . . .

Hail Holy Ghost . . .

. . . . . Lihsah Doleh Zol

Hail Saint Andrew . . .

Hail Saint Joseph . . .

Hail Saint Moses . . .

The following saints are invoked as above: Saints Augustine, Savior, Gerard, Ulrich, Patrick (Danbhalah Wédo), Comas and Damien (the Mara-sah), John, Luke, Mark, Matthew, Peter, Paul, James, Philipp, Charles Borromeo, Virgin of the Rosary, Virgin of Mercy, Great Saint Ann (Dèla-i-e Médeh), the Immaculate Conception, the Virgin Altagrâce, the Virgin of Charity, the Virgin of Mount Carmel, Saint Clare, Philomena, Alberic, and all the male and female saints in heaven. Occasionally these invocations are interrupted with the cry, "Lihsah Doleh Zo!

- (2) Litany of *Djor* mystères, the purely African loas:

Hail Mara-sah, *Djor* saints, é, Docoi Agoueh, if we are in the hands of the

Bon Dieu (the Good God), Oh Saints . . .

Hail Legba Ait-Bon, *Djor* é . . .

Hail Ai-Zan Vélé-Kétheh . . .

The formula repeated, invoking the following loas: Loco Ati-sou Poun'goué, Marasahs: Do-sou, Do-sah, Do-goueh, Do-i-chou, Do-can, Bois. Hail Danbhalah and Aida Wédo, Lihsah Doleh Zo! Hail Sobò Kè-sou, Badè-sih Croix-la-housih, Aga-sou Yinmin, Silibo Vavou, Agoueh Ta R Oyo, Maitre Agoueh R Oyo, Erzulie Fréda Tocan Miroi-Zan Zangaza, Maitresse La Sirène, Maitresse La Balein, Bo-sou Canblanmin, Agaou Tonnerre, Azaca Médeh, Bélécou Yenou, Ogou Badagri, Ogou Ferraille, Ogou Bhathalah, Ogou Chango, Baco-sou Aladeh, Adoum' Guidi, Ogou Ashadeh (an ancient Dahomean king), Ogou Bhalin'dio, Ogou Palama, Ossange Mégui Malor, Lingle-sou, Grande Bossine, Grande Avélé-Kétheh, Mambo Nanan, Grande Tè-sih Fréda, Grande Dan-i (a very old serpent of the Tradition), Grande Alouba, Grande Aloumandia, é, Baron Samedi, Guédé Nouvavou, Brutus Jean-Simon, Simbi Yandé-Zo Yan-kitha, Yam-Polah, Toutou Houn'gan, Toutou Mambo, Toutou Houn'guénicon, Toutou Houn'sih Can-Zo, Toutou La Place Guinin, Toutou Porte-Drapeau Guinin, Toutou Houn'tò-qui (the drummers), Toutou Ogantieh (the ogan player), Toutou Houn'sih dé-sou-nin, Toutou l'Afrique Guinin. Zo! Lihsah Doleh Zo! Hail all Mambos, Hail all Houn'gans. The following "nations" of loas are invoked: Rada, Pethro, Ibo, Caplaou, An-mine, Ti-Brutus, Mondongue, Mandingue, Sinigal, Canga-Leh, Kitha, Kitha-sè, Kitha mouillé, Congo, Nago, Nago Iki, Ibi-Lihki, Dan-homeh, Zo! Lihsah Doleh Zo!

The choir of houn'sihs kiss the ground while kneeling, and sing, "Miguel . . . Oh, Magnoufoueh!!! (Note: this ritual of general invocation varies linguistically according as it is observed by the Congos, the Ibos, the Pethros, the Radas, the Anmines, or the Nagos).

We have presented one of the traditional forms of the prayers because in our own experience it is difficult if not impossible to indicate any invariable method of reciting the prayers and singing the ritual chants of Voodoo at the commencement of a religious service. The result is that if the tradition itself were fixed, definite, and unchangeable, the different Voodoo societies would in any case progressively alter purely traditional prayers and chants, ending up with their own versions of prayers and chants. Thus, even though all the prayers and chants are basically similar, they differ so much that the houn'sih choir of one oum'phor is not necessarily able to give the responses to prayers and chants "sent" by the houn'gan or houn'guénicon of another

oum'phor. This is frequently observed because the houn'gans and mam'bos of different oum'phors frequently are visitors and lend their aid in maintaining the tradition in other oum'phors. For example, if a houn'guénicon of Port-de-Paix, in northwest Haiti, "sends" the chants in an oum'phor of Croix-des-Missions, in western Haiti, the choir of the oum'phor at Croix-des-Missions may have great difficulty in giving the response.

Nevertheless, to give a more or less definite idea of the manner of reciting these prayers and performing these chants of the voodoo ritual, we have taken the pains to record carefully the regular succession of some of them as is practiced in an oum'phor at Croix-des-Missions. This order of prayers applies to a Voodoo service in the Pethro rite:

**PRAYERS:**

(1) Roman Catholic Prayers:

Our Father	(
Hail Mary	( 1) French
Creed	( 2) Latin
Confiteor	(

**SONGS:** (French)

- (2) The angel of the Lord said to Mary that she would conceive of the Holy Ghost  
Come, My God, Come  
Grâce, Mary, Grâce . . .

(In Creole)

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for the Saints . . .  
Danbhalah-Wédo, assuage your children . . .  
Danbhalah-Wédo, we are all angels . . .

**LITANY OF THE VOUDOUN:**

- (3) (Note: After each invocation the houn'sihs respond: *cé z'anges!*)  
Diabolo Bo-sou . . . cé z'anges  
Agaou Tonnerre . . . "

Sim'bi An-Dé-Zo . . .	cé z'anges
Loumandia . . .	"
Kitha Malor . . .	"
Azagon . . .	"
Houn'gan Saloperie . . .	"
Houn'gan paternels . . .	"
Houn'gan maternels . . .	"

(leit-motif pronounced by the houn'gan):

Danbhalah-Wédo!	We are all angels, Oh, Oh, Oh!
Ogou Bhathalah . . .	"
Ogou Chango . . .	"
Adoum' Guidi . . .	"
Danbhalah-Wédo!	"

VOODOO SONGS (in *langage*, sometimes mixed with Creole):

- (4) Toni rhélé Congo . . .  
 O, Sim'bi, anhé! Manman-mrin, O Iké Mam'bré . . .  
 Moin dit ou, gangan yo . . . ("I tell you, the houn'gans")  
 O, Ouanguileh, kim'boi sala . . .  
 O, Wangol, O, ou a montré-m' la priè qui minnin Africains  
 sòti lan Guinin: trois paters, trois avé Marias . . .  
 An, an! Madioman, an, an . . .

LITANY OF THE VOUDOUN:

	<i>Response</i>
(5) Calfou Boum'ba . . .	An, an! Madioman, an, an, . . .
Toutes loa Kitha . . . (All Kitha loas)	"
Toutes houn'sih dans le ciel . . .	"
Kitha Maza . . .	"
Poun'goueh Gangan . . .	"
Zila Congo . . .	"
Moussai . . .	"

VOODOO CHANTS (in Creole and in *langage*):

- (6) Janmin, janmin, Ti Kitha Poun'goueh . . .  
 O, salue moin! Gangan moin, Bacaya Ba-Ka . . .  
 The same chants continue to accompany the rest of the ceremony:

	<i>Response</i>
Sophie Congo . . .	Baka-Lah, an-hé ô, Baka-Lahl
Houn'gan Maternel . . .	"
Houn'gan Paternel . . .	"
Québié-sou . . .	" v
Sim'bi Y-an-Kitha . . .	"
Zilah Mo-yo . . .	"
Kitha Malor . . .	"
Jean-Pierre Pougoueh . . .	"

These invocations and responses may continue indefinitely. The fundamental principle of Voodoo is clearly observed in the chant "O, Wangol, Ô, ou a montré-m' la priè qui minnin Africains sòti lan Guin-nin: trois Pater, trois Ave Maria" ("Oh Wangol, Oh! You have shown me the prayer which leads Africans out of Guinea, [Africa]: [Say] three Our Fathers, three Ave Marias.") which refers to the voyage of initiation in Africa, to Ifé or Ilé. This principle above all must be remembered in order to understand Voodoo. Ifé or Ilé (*lan z'ilets*, as Haitians say) is therefore the Promised Land: the land which necessarily is found on the other side of the water, and which the Tradition translates as follows:

Ifé, or Ilé: The Land  
Olo, or Oro: Promise

## 6

### *Performing Voodoo Magic*

WITH the previous chapters as a background, the reader needs only to know something of the procedural method in order to attempt to perform a Voodoo ceremony. The instructions that follow are condensed as much as possible because the writer believes that in Voodoo magic, as in every other kind of magic, there are fewer requirements for success than most people generally imagine. Most important is a good understanding of the principles.

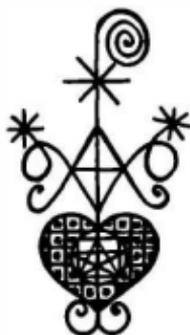
In the foregoing synthesis—a true summary of the principles of magic—the writer has not been content merely to gather information from Haitian Voodoo practitioners and from his own observations, but he has diligently gone back to the African sources of Voodoo that have been somewhat altered by the Créole of the West Indies. Compared with Haitian practices, the truly African procedural method in Voodoo is purer, simpler, and more efficacious, without the useless accumulations which have grown out of individual preferences or are the result of a lack of initiative preparation verging on heterodoxy. The writer's intention has been encouraged by numerous houn'gans who, having steeped themselves in the authentic sources of Voodoo, claim that they "work" with an *asson-Guinin* (an "African asson").

The *Tradition-Guinin*, or African tradition, teaches one thing that the practitioner should not lose sight of when performing a ceremony: the phenomenal designs employed in magic are a simple modification of the "astral fluid of the earth." For this reason the magic signs—the *vévés*—are usually traced on the ground. These designs remain in the place to which the "firmly spoken will" of the celebrant "sends" them. This "astral fluid of the earth" is the "great magical agent" of Voodoo. It is expressed by the *vèvès*, which the loas of this supernatural agency immediately comprehend, to which they yield, and which they obey.

### Procedures To Follow

Houn'gan crosses himself; he recites (or may omit) the *prière dior*;

(1) With flour which has been oriented in the manner described below, he traces a *vèvé*, or synthetizing magic diagram.



The tracing is made upon the ground or upon a sheet of white paper which the celebrant places on a table. He then blows the remainder of the flour from the palm of his hand towards the four cardinal points.

The celebrant crosses himself thus:

on the forehead, or East, saying *Linsah*;

on the breast, or West, saying *Mawu*;

on the left shoulder, or North, saying *Vov-Lin-V-Hwé*  
(Sakpata = Impurity)

on the right shoulder, or South, saying *Hévio-Zo*  
(Ku-Ji = Purity)

He makes the sign of the cross over the ground:

(2) He says in a clear voice, loudly and with determination, three times for each Spirit:

By the powers of Grand Maitre: ATEGBINIMONSE ODAN-  
BHALAH WEDO DANGBE TAU-CAN ZO A-GLA YE-WE,

By the powers of AIDA WEDO,

By the powers of TSILLAH WEDO,

By the powers of LOA-CAN LIH-CAN LEGBA ATI-BON, to  
whom I say "Ké, Ecu-Mâlé, Gba, ké dounou nou Al Pha. Vou-  
doun Yéké, hen-mi ace."

The celebrant orients a candle and some matches; he lights the  
candle and places it on the table or inside the circle.

He orients the water in the same manner, namely East, West, North,  
South.



(3) The celebrant calls out the name of each of the loas of the Ter-  
restrial Fluid three times, and at each name throws three drops of  
water on the ground in the form of a triangle:

By the powers of LEGBA ATIBON CATA-ROULO,

By the powers of GBA ADU,

By the powers of SEGBO LIHSAH,

By the powers of LOKO ATI-ZO,

By the powers of AI-ZAN A VELEH KETHEH,

By the powers of KEVIOZO DAN LEH,

By the powers of SIM'BHI IAN-DE-ZO IAN-PHA-CAN IAN-  
KITHA,

By the powers of MAITRE AGOUEH RO IO,

By the powers of MAITRESSE ASE-I-LIH FRE-DA DAN-  
HOME TAU-CAN MIROI-ZE ZAGAZA DAN-THOR ZAN-

DOR KITHA-SEC IBO CONGO CAPLAOU PETHRO NAGO  
FON FOULAH RADA NAGO,

By the powers of DAN WU-E-ZO,  
By the powers of OGOU FER,  
By the powers of OGOU BHALIN'DIO,  
By the powers of OGOU BHATHALAH,  
By the powers of OGOU BHADAGRI,  
By the powers of Grande FLEURIZON (FLEURI ZO),  
By the powers of BOHO-VI (The Twins),  
By the powers of Docteur PIQUES,  
By the powers of LEM'BHA ZA-WU,  
By the powers of ALOUMANDIA,  
By the powers of all the Voudoun,  
By the powers of FAITH, HOPE, AND CHARITY.

(4) The celebrant places or plants a golden pin (which has been oriented as above) upon or in the table, the stone of the socle, or within the circle of operation. To the pin he attaches a gold or silver chain (likewise oriented).

He sprinkles water upon the area of operation in a triangular pattern saying:

BOLOU



BOYE                      BOCICE

In this way the Earth, as the Astral Light, thus nourished, may forge the magic chain which will produce the supernatural phenomenon. The earth then reacts by liberating the alchemic volatile in order to achieve the results dictated by the will of the celebrant.

The celebrant then announces what he desires the loas to do, terminating with the following potent formula:

KU DYU,  
ATEGBINIMONSE,  
LEGBA,  
AGOO DI PHA HWE.

The following formula may be substituted for the preceding:

SILOE  
AEI-LIH  
AEI-LIH  
AEI-LIH

## LAMMA

SAH-BHA-K-THA-NI (to establish the fluid circuit of the transubstantiation of power)

(5) He assists in the liberation of the "volatile" by spraying out of his mouth the water which he has taken in three draughts, in order to put into operation the transubstantiation of the sacramental material.

He sprinkles with perfume all the ceremonial facilities in order to aid still further the transmission of the powers.

He dispatches the loas with these words:

YE-KE	=	The ensemble of the loas
MAR-CH-ALLAH!	=	"Peace be with you!"
KU M BHA-LAH DYA	=	"Withdraw into the Light."

## Magic Baths of Voodoo

Voodoo practitioners have always attached considerable importance to the "magic baths"—baths which they take in the *oum'phor*, in the ocean, or at home, and about the composition of which they are very much concerned. Peasants are not the only ones familiar with the practice of ceremonial bathing. It is common knowledge that the practice extends to people at the highest social levels. Haitian congressional candidates and even candidates for the presidency are known to have taken "magic baths" to improve their chances of being elected.

One well known bath is the "Christmas Bath." Another is the "New Year's Day Bath." In great numbers bathers wade into the ocean a short distance from the shore carrying seven, ten, or twenty-one pieces of a lime. As they dive in they pray the loas of the sea to prevent any supernatural operations directed against them from touching them. *Agoueh R Oyo* and *Agoueh Tha R Oyo*, loas of the sea, welcome bathers on Mondays and Fridays.

Children who sleep poorly, have worms, or a poor appetite, are bathed by the *houn'gan*. The *houn'gan* plunges the child into a basin of water in which he has previously mashed leaves of the *mimosa pudica* plant, called *honte* in Créole, which means "shame." This

plant has the virtue of halting attacks of fever or other pathological conditions: the malady disappears because it feels "shame"! Often the water is mixed with clairin, all or part of which was previously set ablaze—a process believed to destroy all disease germs. When the bath is finished, but before the water is poured into a hole or thrown into the sea, the vessel which contained the water is "paid;" that is to say, a coin is placed in it to remunerate the water-spirit to whom the prayer had been addressed to protect the person given the bath.

The "charm" bath is given by the *mystère* Danbhalah Wédo rather than by the *houn'gan*, because Danbhalah is the *mystère* believed to have plunged into the "abyssal waters" in order to induce the "abysses" to "give birth to the world." Danbhalah is therefore the bath-giver par excellence. The bath administered by Danbhalah is always a salutary one: it attracts everything pleasant, procures all kinds of favors, reconciles the staunchest enemies, obtains jobs and promotions, and cures all sorts of incurable ailments, at any rate ailments believed to be incurable. In order that the bath may be even more advantageous, it should be taken on a Thursday, Danbhalah's day, upon the "points" of Jupiter—The *mystère* Québiésou Dan-Leh, who is the ravisher or charmer par excellence.

The composition of the "charm" bath requires the most agreeable elements: flowers, jasmine leaves, orgeat, pulverized sweet-almond, much perfume and *agua divina*, and champagne. The "charm" bath should be taken on three consecutive days in order to obtain its full effect.

The "Lady" bath is the bath taken under the magic auspices of Erzulie. Generally speaking, it is desirable to summon the *mystère* Erzulie to come in person and administer the bath, just as in the case of the "charm" bath, it is preferable to call down Danbhalah Wédo into a *hounsih's* head, so that the *mystère* himself will bathe the person for whom the bath is intended. The bath of Erzulie used to be much in vogue, but it is no longer as popular as it once was. Nowadays initiates are content to take a substitute Erzulie bath by rubbing themselves with water in which Erzulie, while possessing somebody, has herself bathed. The bath water used in this fashion is thought to produce good fortune and to cure illness. The "Lady" bath contains three bunches of basilica leaves, seven sweet peppers, a measure of *zodouant* (*Eugenia crenulata* Wild) powder, *baume du commandeur*,

tincture of benzoin, and Florida Water. Perfume may be added in any desired quantity, perfume being the most important element in Maitresse Erzulie's toilette. Taken preferably once a year, this bath must be preceded and followed by the offering of a dessert to the mystère who comes to administer the bath. It is believed to be of great help in winning money; and it "walks" on the "points" of Venus.

Another bath reputed to bring good luck is the Ibo bath. One or more Ibo loas are summoned to administer the bath to those who desire it. The ingredients of the bath solution must never be changed throughout the entire magical operation, that is to say, over a period of seven days. Since the bath solution diminishes in quantity with each use, there ordinarily remains only enough to rub oneself with the last few times. The formula for this bath is as follows: a litre of blazing alcohol; a banana, sea water collected "at the islands;" mushrooms; crushed pineapple; seven holly leaves; a bottle of holy water taken from a holy water basin in a church; and perfume. The "good luck" bath "walks" on the "points" of the Sun.

In order to administer the bath to combat misfortune, the houn'gan completely disrobes the client and makes him lie on the ground. Sometimes, as a special favor, he gives him a small straw mat. The houn'gan then passes a crucifix (Legba being the Voodoo Jesus) and the tail of a codfish over his joints, beginning at the head. The nape of the neck and the jaws respectively are the places of the body where the spirits of the voudouns enter or express themselves. The houn'gan therefore commands the evil spirits to withdraw from the body of the person whom he is preparing to bathe in the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The houn'gan then plunges his client into water containing salt (unless sea water is available), clairin, seven vine leaves, three or seven bunches of parsley, several shallots, perfume, and several pieces of money. This bath should be a very short one, lasting no longer than two or three minutes. Moreover, it should be taken on nine successive Fridays.

In order to increase the magic power of the various baths, it is advantageous to trace on the inside or the outside of the bathtub the *vèvès* associated with the astral influence of the loa under whose influence the bath is administered. For example, if Erzulie descends from the astral to "mount" a "horse" for the purpose of bathing an individual, a heart, or anything that has reference to the heart, is

traced both on the inner and outer walls of the tub. In the case of Ogou, a wrought iron grill or a sword is sketched, in accordance with the geometric tradition inherited from Africa.

## Bringing Vengeance on Enemies

*Manman Brigitte*, or *Mademoiselle Brigitte*, is one of the best known and most popular loas of Haitian Voodoo. Some claim that she is the wife of Baron Samedi, lord of the cemetery, others that she is "the most ancient of the dead," that is to say, of the Guédés. Her tree-reposoir is the weeping willow, the elm, or the médecinier-beni.

Although Manman Brigitte does not have her own cult, which would require a special altar in the oum'phor, she nevertheless has an enormous number of devotees. At one time they used to go to invoke and consult her under a particular tree that grew not far from the cross of Baron Samedi in the principal cemetery of Port-au-Prince. At present the government police prohibit this practice. Nevertheless, Manman Brigitte still inhabits the cemetery, abiding not only in other trees but in various rock piles as well. She is also called Grande Brigitte. Her powers are immense, and her vèvès are among the most interesting in all Voodoo.

In the principal cemetery in Port-au-Prince, where formerly people could be seen invoking her before her favorite tree had been cut down through the combined efforts of the police and the clergy, her clients used to sprinkle the roots of the elm with raw clairin and wheaten flour. They also used to present her with cornmeal and peanuts, which they placed on the ground at the foot of the tree, promising her other gifts if she heeded the prayers addressed to her. To invoke her the devotees would light one or more candles and stick them on the roots or on the lower trunk of the elm tree. The multitudes of these lighted candles which could always be seen by this tree presented a most unusual sight, especially at dusk. Incidentally, this practice was originally employed in addressing prayers to the cross of Baron Samedi, and these crosses today present much the same appearance as the steps of old churches that are literally paved with lighted candles. The Voodooist speaks directly to the elm tree when he addressed Grande Brigitte, just as if someone were standing before him capable of replying. Guédé Nibho, one of the most important of the

African "dead," together with the thirty other Guédés who are his brothers, sometimes claims to be the child of Brigitte. Hence the list contains thirty-one Guédés. However, more than thirty-one are observed, since each Guédé may appear under many aliases; for example, Guédé Nibho is also known as Ti Puce.

Manman Brigitte's clientele is mostly made up of people who are constantly embroiled in disputes with their friends or neighbors—people who always have enemies and who are continually involved in some argument.

On the way to the cemetery to consult the mystère (said to be "the oldest of the dead," hence the wisest), the client cuts a stalk of bayahonde before presenting himself at the elm tree. As he cuts the stalk he says: "In the name of Mademoiselle Brigitte." Arriving at the tree, he pronounces the following words with an air of great authority: "Mademoiselle Brigitte, behold the lash which 'so-and-so' or 'so-and-so' has cut to strike you with." (Implication: ". . . to strike your servant who is one with yourself, since your servant is your child.") "I bring it to you that you may teach him the lesson he deserves."

If one wishes to cause misunderstanding between two people, the prayer must contain the words: ". . . that you may prevent 'A' from becoming reconciled with 'B' or 'C.'"

As the client pronounces these words—words which are immediately echoed in all the cemeteries of the world—he bends down and embraces the ground, then scoops up a bit of earth at the foot of the elm tree, usually seven handfuls. Taking some of it in the palm of his hand, he proceeds to the home of his enemy, and when he arrives he throws the cemetery dirt towards the entrance of the house, taking care not to be observed, and uttering these words: "Mademoiselle Brigitte, here is where the person lives whom I prayed to you to torment."

On the way from the cemetery to the door of his enemy's house, he must not return anyone's greeting. He may do so, however, after he has spoken the above words, and in fact, may speak to anyone he encounters, for the ritual of the magic operation has been completed. Should he return the greeting offered him en route to his enemy's house, or speak to anyone, the magic would be ineffective.

When the anticipated results of the operation have materialized, the promises made to Brigitte in the cemetery must be fulfilled immediately under pain of having the effects of the magic backfire.

The magical operation here described illustrates the magic reci-

procuity established between the Voodoo mystère and the devotee. It is essentially this reciprocity that confers magic power, and which deserves special prominence, since it underlies the entire mystical system of the cult.

## Use of Magic Lamps

The best and simplest way to prepare an "eternal" lamp is to pour a little castor oil and olive oil in a receptacle and hang it from the ceiling in the center of the oum'phor or one's private shrine (in case the person does not have an oum'phor but serves the mystères anyway). The location in the center of the ceiling corresponds to the location of the center-post in the oum'phor which the "eternal" lamp is considered as replacing. The lamp, or its substitute, may also be placed upon the pé of the mystère being served.

There is no objection to adding perfume to the castor oil and olive oil, but before adding anything else, it is advisable to wait until the mystère has made known his wishes in the matter, unless, of course, the person who prepares the lamp has professional knowledge of the necessary ingredients relative to the mystère in question. However, despite the superior knowledge of the houn'gan who prepares a lamp of this sort, the loas may appear and demand the addition of a particular powder or favorite leaf that will precipitate the virtues of the light through their contribution to the power of the elements which produce it. For example, if *baume du commandeur* is added to the oils which produce the light, the lamp will shed a lovely atmosphere of peace over the house where the lamp hangs or is placed. If, on the other hand, gunpowder or pepper is added, the domestic scene will be disturbed.

### *The "Work" Lamp*

A "work" lamp is employed for more personal reasons. Its purpose is to obtain employment for its maker. It is placed under the aegis of Legba, since the tradition reveals that Legba is the mystère who obtains work for Danbhalah. However, the same lamp may be placed under the auspices of one or more subordinate mystères, summoned

to do a piece of work and possessing the houn'gan himself or somebody else.

When properly composed, this lamp has remarkable properties. But it must be remembered that its ingredients draw their magic properties in the first place only from the analogies they bear to the results which the lamp is supposed to produce. For example, if the houn'gan wishes to cure sick people he should add some basic medicines to the lamp oil.

The lamp then summons or attracts patients. To retain his clientele, magic analogy requires that he include in the lamp a few drops of strong glue or bits of gum arabic. The lamp also grants the houn'gan the powers of the loa under whose protection it is placed. If he wants the lamp to attract patients immediately, he must add seven measures of "red precipitate" (red oxide of mercury).

Most of the "work" lamps are of a type that might be called universal, that is to say, they contain universal properties. Into their composition go numerous, somewhat diverse ingredients: olive oil, castor oil, precipitate, *baume du commandeur*, various essential oils, preferably essence of rose, a piece of beef heart, and seven packets of needles or seven needles placed upon a piece of parchment lining the bottom of the lamp. The beef heart is often punctured before being removed from the animal. The lamp also contains wine spirits, juice of the *ave* leaf, red wine, gunpowder, powdered madder, and pure lard; furthermore, these seven articles should be purchased in seven different shops in seven different parts of town.

Apart from the protection accorded this type of lamp by Legba Ati-Bon, it is frequently placed under the aegis of Loko Ati-sou Poun'goueh, of Papa Ogou, or of Papa Danbhalah. Traditionally, the lamp is placed upon the *pé* of the *mystère* under whose protection it lies. In times past, the lamp used to be hung in the tree-reposoir of the *mystère*—a custom which no longer seems to prevail, owing, no doubt, to the practical difficulties involved. The manner of rendering it most efficacious now consists in placing it at the base of some object into which it is possible to summon the desired *mystère*.

The best magic results are obtained from a lamp if prayers are said in front of it always at the same moment of the day or night, while the oil is being replenished, should this be necessary. The stroke of noon is the best time if the lamp is intended to achieve a beneficial aim; midnight, if its purpose is evil. While the person is reciting his

prayer, he mentions his desires, at the same time stirring the contents of the lamp with a green twig. The lamp is ordinarily kept lighted until the request has been fulfilled—six, eight, ten months, or even a year, if necessary. The proper use of the lamp requires that it not be extinguished until satisfaction is obtained. If it is directed against an enemy, means should be found of secreting it at the gate of the enemy's yard.

### *The Black Lamp*

The "black" lamp is composed of castor oil, *piment-chien*, Guinea-pepper, powdered lizard, powder of a decomposed corpse, precipitate, and soot. Preferably it is hung in the yard instead of being left in the house. This magic lamp serves mainly to compel a recalcitrant tenant to evacuate the house that he rents, an enemy to move out of the neighborhood or out of town, to produce discord in politics and public affairs, to disrupt a family, or to cause an enemy to lose his job or even to die.

If the lamp is intended to mitigate an evil, it should be placed under the auspices of a loa of the Rada rite, but if it is to serve evil ends, it comes under the jurisdiction of a Pethro loa. The lamp is made either of half a dried coconut shell, half a pumpkin, or the shell of a sea-crab. Its ingredients should be renewed every Friday for seven consecutive weeks.

The "black" lamp is most often placed under the protection of Agoueh R Oyo, the god of the sea, for when it has produced satisfactory results, either its contents are thrown into the sea or the entire lamp is placed on a tiny raft and floated out to sea where it sinks like a toy boat.

### *The "Bottle" Lamp or "Black Bottle"*

This lamp is composed in much the same way as the last one, that is to say, according to the laws of analogy. It corresponds with the powers of a Voodoo mystère chosen because of his analogical similar-

ities to the lamp's contents. For example, Ogou is chosen because he is associated with fire, Agoueh with water, Erzulie with love and justice. The lamp, or strictly speaking a bottle inside of which a wick is lighted but snuffed out when the bottle is corked, is hung at one end of the yard. Every day at the same hour the houn'gan, armed with a whip, rushes at the bottle and administers a sound thrashing to it. This has the effect of hastening the mystère in the performance of his assigned task.

### *The "Charm" Lamp*

The "charm" lamp is generally placed upon a table at which the person performs the magical operations. It is usually made of half a coconut shell, and contains ingredients which have analogous qualities of sweetness and attraction: a magnet, syrup, sugar, honey, perfume and flower petals, particularly those of jasmine and heliotrope.

The chief constituent of the lamp is a sheep's brain purchased with the idea in mind of purchasing the individual whom one wishes to charm. Olive oil is added, and the lamp is lighted in the name of Legba, who represents the heart, and Erzulie, who represents the sentiment of love. It is kept lighted until results are obtained.

### *The "Disaster" Lamp*

The "disaster" lamp is employed for Machiavellian purposes. Its two principal ingredients are lime juice and the gall bladder of an ox. To this is added raw, unrefined castor oil and soot.

This lamp is usually placed in a hole in the ground. Its constituents are placed in a dirty cooking pot, or if they are already held in another container, the whole lamp is placed in an old pot, and this is placed at the bottom of a hole dug at the foot of a tree consecrated to some mystère in a remote spot in the garden. Inasmuch as this lamp is under the aegis of the Guédé loas, gods of the cemetery, it is capable of producing dire catastrophes.

## Using Blood Sacrifices

The Voodoo initiate increases his power to bring forth the gods or call back the dead by tasting the offerings that are made—even the blood of the animal sacrifices—and by swallowing a part of the material with which he traces the diagrams. This he does at the moment of placing the sacrifice upon the sign of the cross in the diagram. However, if the cross has been traced upon the ground, he buries the sacrifice in this spot. He then consumes a small portion of the food, thereby sharing it with the invisibles; whereupon (or at some time previous) he digs a hole and buries it, repeating his request at the same time.

However, before burying the sacrifices, the celebrant must make three turns with them around the hole in each direction, saying:

- (1) "In the name of Bha"
- (2) "In the name of Dan"
- (3) "In the name of Lah"

He consequently makes six turns in all about the hole, three in one direction, three in the other. The turns to the left signify that he arises to the Orient—the East—of the magical operation, to obtain the power and the grace which he needs. The turns to the right signify that he returns from the Orient to the Occident—the West—in possession of this power and grace. The sacrifice should be dispatched into the Invisible accompanied by a few pieces of money, and it must be consecrated in the following traditional manner:

- (1) orient, then sprinkle it, making the sign of the cross;
- (2) make the sign of the cross over it with flour;
- (3) place over it three piles of "food" in the form of a triangle;
- (4) sprinkle it with the ritual beverages;
- (5) cause part of it to be eaten upon the "key points" of the vèvè.

When offerings other than water are used, the celebrant orients them, strikes them three times against the ground which is to receive them, and says:

"Ké Ecumalé Gba, ku dyo."

Then, after he has declared his wishes, he buries the offerings on the spot where, at the beginning of the operation, he had made the sign of the cross upon the ground.

The volatile essence released by the act of sacrificing corresponds to the dove of the holy spirit descending "upon" or "in the head" of the celebrant at the moment he "casts the water." The descent of the holy spirit is identified supernaturally with the magic conferment of powers and favors sought by the person who controls the omnipotence.

The offerings which are made to the earth, in addition to the water, conform to the special tastes of certain members of the pantheon of the invisibles. Thus, in order to bring about the appearance of a spirit more easily, one must attract it magically by offering what it wants, for example, clothes to wear when it makes its appearance, food, songs, a weapon, beverages, and perfumes—factors which constitute the "chain of magnetic attraction."

Contrariwise, to remove a loa from a given place, the houn'gan does the exact opposite of what he did to attract it. He produces the most disagreeable sounds possible. He spreads foul odors. He insults it, even striking it. He dismisses it with harsh words and chills it by pouring water over it in the name of the holy spirit.

In cases in which the celebrant does not desire to invoke all the loas of the pantheon, but to restrict his invocation to a single loa, he employs only the diagram of this one loa.

In the especially important instance in which the celebrant offers blood as a sacrifice to an invisible, it is preferable that he include, in addition to the magic diagram of the mystère invoked, that of the mystère who controls the blood, for the latter is the complementary opposite of Legba Ati-Bon (Legba Adingban), the invisible who is invoked first to "open the gates" of the fluid of the earth.

The mystère who controls the circulation of the blood is identified with the female genital organs, because the menstrual periods of the woman are affected by the blood and "walk" cabalistically upon silver; while Legba, on the other hand, is identified with the male genital organs which "walk" cabalistically upon gold. Hence the golden pin symbolizes the magician in his omnipotence, and the chain the magic itself of the operation. Therefore, the silver chain is the magic chain of the astral light.

Legba gives; Erzulie receives. So when Legba "raises" or accomplishes the sacrifice to fulfill the wish of the celebrant, the mystère who controls the blood is useful to him, if not indispensable, because this mystère allows the sacrifice to be accomplished by directing the blood of the victim into the hidden places of the terrestrial fluid under

the sign of purity, which is his own attribute. The *mystère* who controls the blood can do anything. She is known as *Erzulih* (*Aze-ï-Lih*), and her assistance is solicited by calling her three time or six times over her diagram, which is one of her numerous astral ectoplasms. This *mystère*, the controller of the sacrificial blood, is the tenth sign of the oracular alphabet of the loas, and it corresponds to the rising of the sun. To invoke this power and to render it beneficent, one must say:

"By the power of *Madame la Lune* (Mrs. Moon), *La Belle Vénus* (The Fair Venus), in the name of the woman *Brillant-Soleil* (Brilliant Sun), in the name of *SAH-MEJI*, *Madame Magie* (Mrs. Magic) who precedes *Loso-Méji* (the *mystère* who takes the *vèvè* and the wish of the celebrant and transports them to the sky), in the name of *Nègresse Gba-à-Dou*, *Nègresse Loko*, *Nègresse Yalodé*, *Nègresse Lihsah*, *Nègresse l'Arc-en-ciel* (Rainbow), *Maitresse Agoueh-Tha-Oyo*, *Maitresse La Sirène*, *Maitresse La Baleine*;

"By the power of *Maitresse Erzulih Fraeyja Danhomé*, *Nègresse Imamou Ladé*, *Nègresse Fréda Rada Congo Pethro Nago Caplaou Ibho*, *Nègresse Fréda-sih Fréda*, *Lih Fréda-sih Fréda* and *l'Fréda Lih Danhomé* in agreement, *Lih Can*, *Nègresse Fla voudoun' Cisaflour voudoun' Nègresse Thabor Mangnan Voudé*, *Nègresse Cibracan*, *Nègresse Cordon Bleu* (Blue Ribbon), *Nègresse Coquille Dorée* (Gilded Cockleshell), *Nègresse l'Océan*."

In the *Pethro-Zazi* rite there are three ways of killing a cock offered as a sacrifice:

- I. (1) Orientation (presentation to the four cardinal points);
- (2) Rubbing the victim against all sides of the center-post;
- (3) Sprinkling with alcohol (or kerosene);
- (4) Making the sign of the cross with flour;
- (5) Plucking the crop, and sticking some of the down upon the socle, the post, and the ceremonial utensils with blood taken from the bird's throat after tearing out the tongue;
- (6) Signing with the cross the plucked neck with flour, sprinkling it with liquid, and holding it momentarily over the "strong points" of the *vèvè*;
- (7) Cutting the throat with a knife, but not enough so as to prevent the bird from breathing and tasting grain which is offered it; then severing the head and pouring the blood on

and around the post (as well as on the iron tongs which are found planted before the post or, more commonly, in the yard in the center of a brazier), to which the delicate crop feathers are stuck with the bird's own blood, and finally pouring the blood upon the ground over the flour-traced vèvè;

- (8) Placing the bird on the ground, whence it will be taken to be cooked. Upon removal, the sacrificed cock is struck three times on the ground.
- II.
- (1) The cock is given something to eat on the ground while the drums beat; (it is not tied up);
  - (2) Sprinkling of victim and vèvè with liqueurs and other alcoholic beverages reserved for the ceremony;
  - (3) Making the sign of the cross over the bird with flour;
  - (4) Orientation;
  - (5) Breaking the feet and the wings (one for each of the cardinal points);
  - (6) Plucking the crop and placing the down upon the socle;
  - (7) Rubbing the victim against all sides of the center-post;
  - (8) The second sprinkling with alcohol;
  - (9) Making the sign of the cross over the bird with the liqueurs and the food offerings which accompany the sacrifice;
  - (10) Holding the bird over the "strong points" of the vèvè;
  - (11) Twisting the neck as though winding a spring: the houn'gan holds the bird by the head and swings it with a circular motion until the head is torn off (or nearly so) by the tortion.
- III. Illustrating the slaying of the victim by the mystère Ogou Balin'dio:
- (1) The mystère moves back and forth with the bird before the centerpost (on the side facing east);
  - (2) He breaks the neck;
  - (3) he orients, then breaks the feet and wings;
  - (4) he tears off the head with his teeth, having first rubbed the bird upon the vèvè which had been traced with flour on the ground of the oum'phor;
  - (5) he throws it upon the vèvè on the ground and sprinkles the vèvè with liqueurs.

## Human Sacrifice

Voodoo initiates call those who have abandoned the tradition *cabrit thomazos* (also known as "Congos and Ibos enchained"). They are members of the so-called "red" or "criminal" sects who shed human blood for sacrificial offerings.

The "red sects" are a type of survival of the secret sects of Africa whose members believe themselves to be animals—mysterious representations of the totems of clans. The members of these sects are "mounted" or "possessed" by these totem protectors in whose skins they perform extraordinary feats. They may become leopardmen, serpentmen, elephantmen, owlmen, pythonmen, crocodilemen, wolfmen, or lionmen.

The werewolves of Haiti are men or women transformed magically into birds of prey that fly in the air like real birds. During their nocturnal flight their bodies give off a luminous trail as well as an odor of hot iron or, some say, of sulfur. They pounce upon those whom they wish to capture, and carry them off into the air as a vulture carries off a hare.

The "red sects," who lean toward the Pethro rite of Voodoo, bear such diverse names as *Cochons sans poils* (Hairless Pigs), *Bissages* or *Bi-sango*, *Cochons Gris* (Gray Pigs), and *Vin'Bain-Ding* (Blood, Pain, Excrement). Their emblem is the destroying sword of St. Michael, which corresponds in astrology to the sword of Orion in the Zodiac, or the bow of Sagittarius. Grouped into sects devoted to ritual destruction, they make use of the sword and the bow in accomplishing their purposes. Tradition holds that they once dressed in white. Today, however, they prefer to wear blood-red. They also wear a curious silver ring ornamented with a tower.

Members of these sects have become ritual destroyers through a false concept of crucifixion. They believe that Legba, the Voodoo Jesus, died upon the *arbre sec* (the center-post or the cross) in order to serve as an edible human sacrifice, a concept which they are encouraged to hold because of the expression employed in the very churches that oppose them: "This is my Body . . . This is my Blood." The Voodoo tradition accuses the "red sect" of having put Jesus to death as a human sacrifice.

The expression *cabrit thomazo* refers to the "impure" Voodooists because of the serpent of the Afro-Judaic temple that is known as *Asch*, *Ast*, or *Ast-Hom*. *Ast-Hom* is believed by traditionalists to be a variation of *Thom-As*, a later African expression signifying "the musical atmosphere of the oum'phor."

Members of the various "red" sects are under the fearful influence of *Erzulie Zan-dor*, who substitutes for the serpent a man who, according to the sect and the locality, is called *Legba Ati-Bon*, *Is*, or *Ahou-râ Mazda*.

Some ill-informed writers attribute the origin of the "red" sects to the cannibalistic character of the *Mandingue*, *Mondongue*, and *Bis-sango* tribes from whom the *Bandor mystères* were inherited. Tradition, however, holds that the schism dates from the historic disagreement between the Samaritans and the Jews.

## 7

### *Rituals and Ceremonies of Voodoo*

MANY of the colorful and exciting rituals and ceremonies of Voodoo are basically designed to help lead the houn'sihs to the light. In a moment we will go into some oum'phors to observe a few of these ceremonies in detail. But first it would be helpful to scan in outline form some of the basic rituals:

*Metté n'anme* (Placing the soul)—a process which magically balances the *ba* and the *ka* of the newborn, that is, the two parts of the soul.

*Lévé nom* (Taking the name)—talisman and magic protection given to children. They consist in taking the name of an ancestor in order to perpetuate the tradition. The child is entrusted to the protective spirit whose name he has taken.

*Garde* (Protection)—magic confirmation of the *Lévé nom*—the loa to which a person is entrusted and to which the person must devote ritual sacrifices as a compensation for the protection. The protected one thus "serves" the loa. This ceremony may take place at any age.

*Lacé-tête* (Washing the head)—ritual baptism, to facilitate by means of water or any other liquid, the entrance of the loas "in the head" of the new initiate, water being the pathway of the loas.

*Can-Zo*, or *Boulez-Zain*: initiatory "putting to bed" on the "houn'sih-

point," or "ordinary putting to bed"—(a) Initiatory "putting to bed" in the *djévo* (*lavé-tête*); (b) Food offered to the head (*manger-tête*); (c) *Can-zo*, properly so-called (Initiation by fire); (d) Coming forth of the initiated *houn'sih* (*lever*); (e) Baptism; (f) Putting on of the ritual necklace.

*Rafraichi-tête* (Refreshing the head)—a further baptism for reinforcing the *maitre-tête* loas by opening wider for them the pathway of the spirit by the magical power of water.

*Haussements* (Lifting, or rising)—ceremonies of the granting of initiatic degrees, including the successive degrees to which the *houn'sih can-zo*, *La Place*, *Houn'guénicon*, *Confiance*, *Mambo*, *Houn'gan*, and others may attain.

*Dé-sou-nin*—recovery of the powers of deceased initiates.

*Prise du mort*—obtaining the spirit of the dead from the cemetery where the person has been buried.

*Boulez-zain mort Ou-an Zain*—a ceremony performed once or three times, according to the degree held by the deceased.

*Ouetté mort fan d'Peau Cassez-canari*—magic ceremonies in which the souls of deceased Voodooists are withdrawn from the depths of the water in order that they may evolve metempsychically.

All these ceremonies have reference fundamentally to three vital plans:

(1) *OLO-KOU-IN'-WE*: This concerns the Voodooist from the age of 1 to 10 years. This plan is connected with the seminal water (the water that mounts), symbolized by the ritual bath of *Danbhalah Wédo*. The child who belongs to the tradition must be placed under the protection of *Legba* by means of amulets, scapulars, and philacteries: *Legba A-Gbo-Gbo* or *Legba Abôbô*, who protects him from all evil-doing.

(2) *OLO-SIH-SË*: This concerns the Voodooist from the age of 10 to 21 years. It is concerned with the "mounting of the ritual water" in the form of *Dan Wédo*, the serpent painted on the post of *Legba*. The Voodooist is therefore removed from his position on the first plan where he had profited from the starting ceremonies like the *Metté n'anme* and the first *Lavé Tête*, now to be placed under the protection of *Legba Sé-Gbo-Lih-Sah*, who is superior to *Legba A-Gbo-Gbo*. This displacement takes place as a *haussement* (a raising, or lifting), because the water begins to "rise" in the form of the serpent, beginning

with the socle of the post (*sah*) and going towards the astral light of the star of Ifé (*Lih*). The houn'sih is therefore thought to go to Ifé in search of his soul (*sé*) through the channel of the post (*lih-sah*). The plan includes the central ceremonies like the *can-zo*, for these ceremonies involve the knowledge that flows down from the star, and which later the houn'gan will be seen to confer when he goes to Ifé under the conduct of his initiators to take the asson.

(3) *OLO-RUN TI-TÉ*: This concerns the houn'sih from the age of 21 years until death. It is concerned with Voodoo omniscience relative to the powers of the "water which rises." These powers take the name of Maitresse Erzulie, and enable the initiate to learn the science that causes the water to rise and descend in the form of the serpent of Voodoo—that is to say, to summon the loas ritually and to utilize them as physicians, counsellors, protectors, runners, generals, initiators, magi, sorcerers, and transmutators. The Voodoo initiate is accordingly considered as being "in the wood" of the center-post, and therefore finds himself under the influence of *Legba-i-Toto*—an affectionate name given to the ritual post. When Voodoo initiates die, they find themselves already in Ifé. This assimilation teaches why all ancestors—houn'sih, houn'guénicon, la place, mam'bo, houn'gan—return to Ifé at their death as powers and as Voodoo loas, since it is in Ifé where they have been to take the asson, or the initiatory grades that precede the taking of the asson. This third plan—the master plan—includes essentially the "taking of the asson." It is the plan of the complete initiation from the grades of la place and hou'guénicon to the grades of mam'bo and of houn'gan.

## Invigorating The Gods

On this night great events are about to take place—sacred rites that are performed only once every two years. The most important ghost-gods of Voodoo will be called out of the Haitian darkness to mount the bodies of the chosen, and they will be reinvigorated with sacrifices and mysterious rituals to strengthen their powers of granting the prayers of their followers.

The gathering place is the oum'phor, presided over by Ramise. She has been a mam'bo—an empress of Voodoo—for many years. Her great

powers are known far and wide. Among her guests tonight are many who have traveled great distances to attend.

As night closes in many people mill about in the courtyard, continually coming and going. The horses of distant visitors are tied up near the entrance gate. Vendors of fried food, candy, and wine-and-herb drinks called *trepés* offer their wares spread out on portable trays. Large trees—the resting places of the ghost-gods—form shadowy masses at the edges of the courtyard. At the foot of the trees candles glow here and there. The low buildings of the oum'phor compound extend into the darkness to the thatched dwellings of Ramise's family and those of other members of her Voodoo Society.

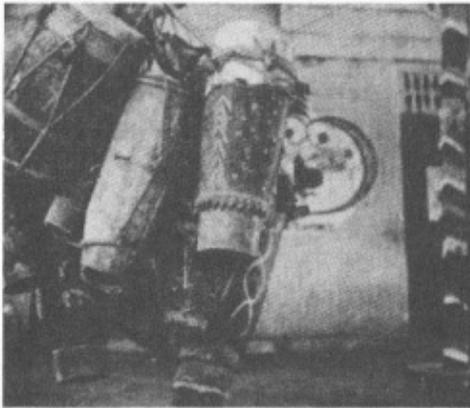
The peristyle of the oum'phor is illuminated by several small kerosene lamps fastened together and hung like chandeliers on either side of the center-post that holds up the gallery's thatched roof. The post has been freshly painted with vivid colors, matching decorations on the walls. These decorations surround a large inscription that reads *Société La Fleur cé nous*—We Are the Flower Society. Below this appears the cult name of Ramise—*Soutini Ladé, Mam'bo Da-Guinin*.

Many houn'gans and mam'bos arrive with their houn'guénicons and houn'sihs, as is the custom. All take their places inside the peristyle on chairs or benches reserved for them.

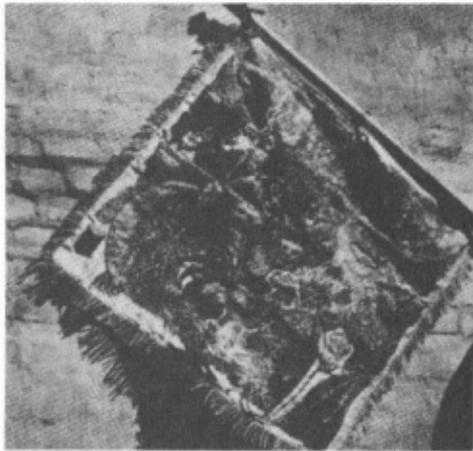
The ceremony commences about eight o'clock in the evening with the usual opening chants. Three drums of the Rada rite are placed along one side, and behind them the houn'sihs are seated on benches. Legba is greeted with the seven traditional chants sung in his honor by which he is implored to open the barrier of the spirits and to permit the living to communicate with the mystères. The rest of the loas are then greeted in hierarchic order.

Presently Ramise comes out of the bagui holding a jug of water. She advances to the center of the peristyle, orients the jug, and approaches the drums. She salutes them, as well as the *ogan* (a musical instrument that is a kind of bell), by sprinkling water three times in front of each. After the *bò tè* (genueflecting and kissing the ground), she turns to the center-post and salutes it by sprinkling water three times as before and kissing it three times.

All the houn'sihs, robed in white and standing in close formation, salute the four cardinal points together with Ramise. They turn around in place, bending their knees in quiet reverence in accordance with the sacred Voodoo greeting.



**Pethro, Congo, and Rada drums.**



**Ritual flag.**



**Temporary altar in an oum'phor's yard**



Voodoo-sih possessed by a loa.



Dishes for the Maraça spirits.



Voodoo priestess (mam'bo).



The Assato drum.

Voodoo drums

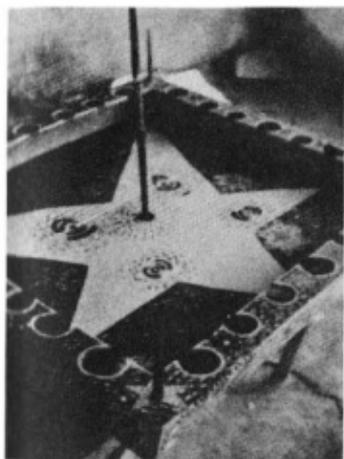




Women tending to the ritual pots.



The black bottle on the Central Post contains liquid used by priests to multiply powers of the spirits.

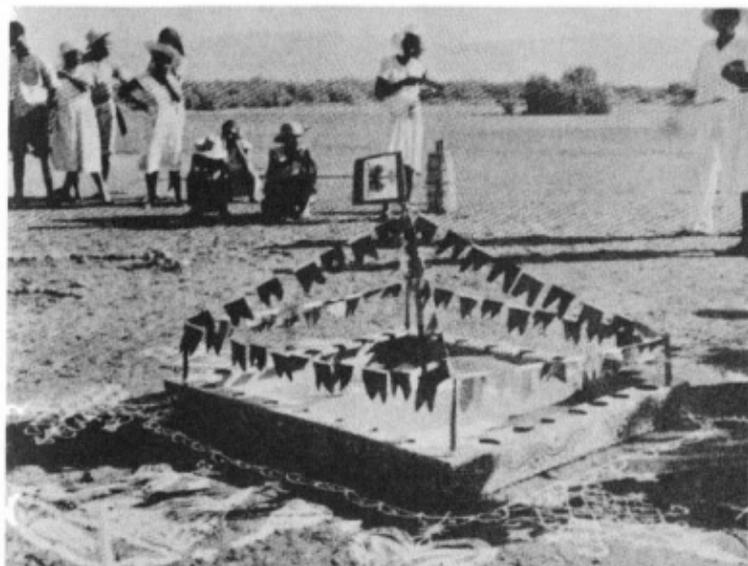


Ceremonial tray.



Houn'sih blowing the *lambi* to call the wind which will take the ship to Aux Ilets (a magic location out at sea).

The ceremonial tray on beach, surrounded by voodoo diagrams and pictures.



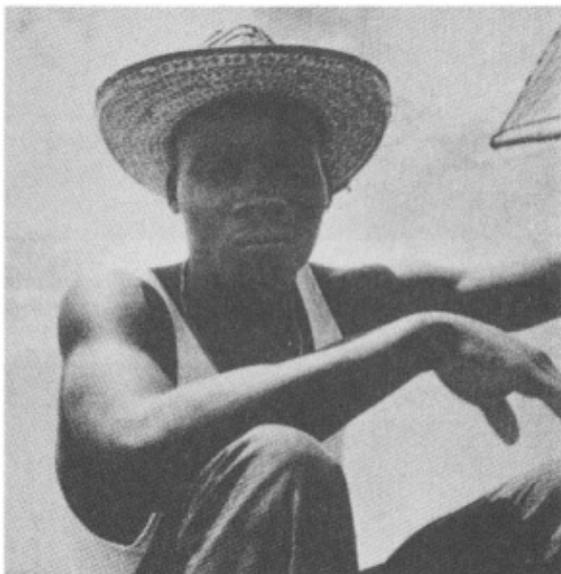


**The ship of Agoueh en route to Aux Ilets, accompanied by the conical drums and a ritual flag.**



The sacred white sheep  
headed for the ship.

The ceremonial steersman.



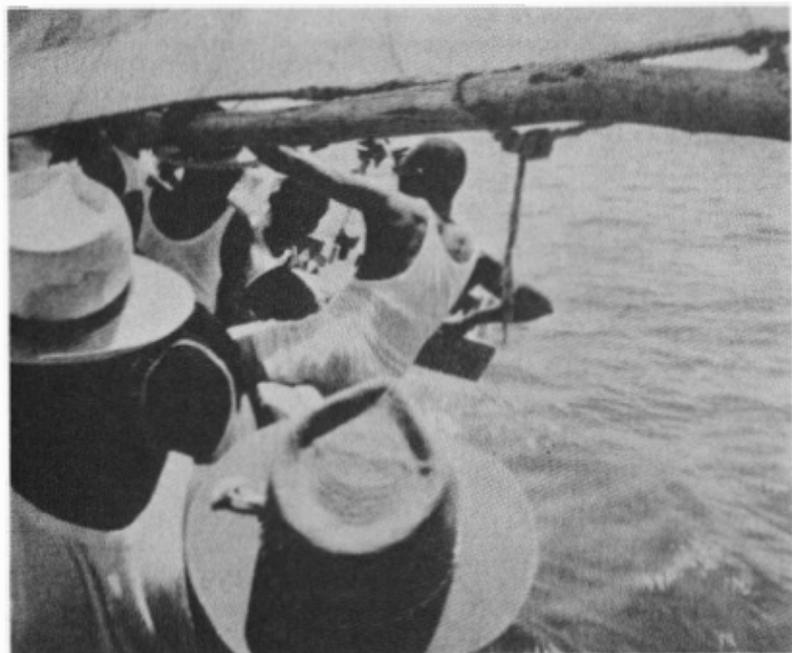
Ritual hens and pigeons, before  
being sacrificed into the sea.



The tray of ritual offerings,  
in the main of the ship.



The sheep, just before  
being sacrificed.



The houn'sih placing the tray in the sea.

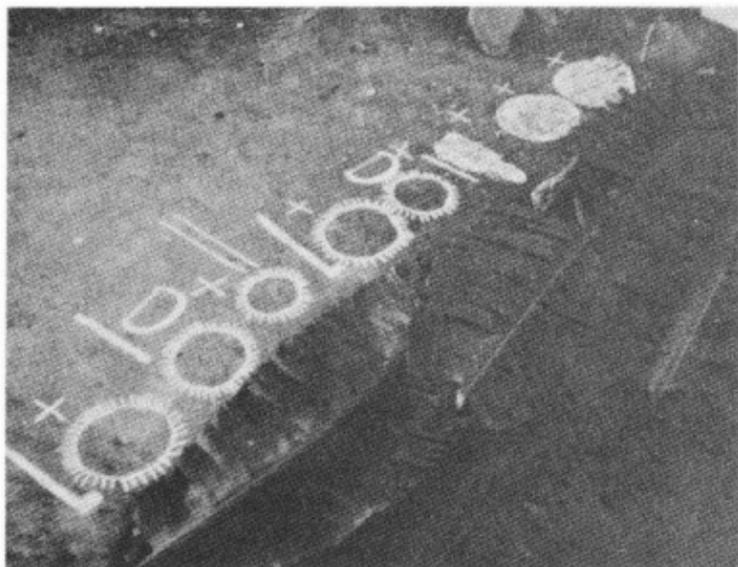
The sheep as it is being thrown to the sea.

The tray capsizing with the sacred dishes.



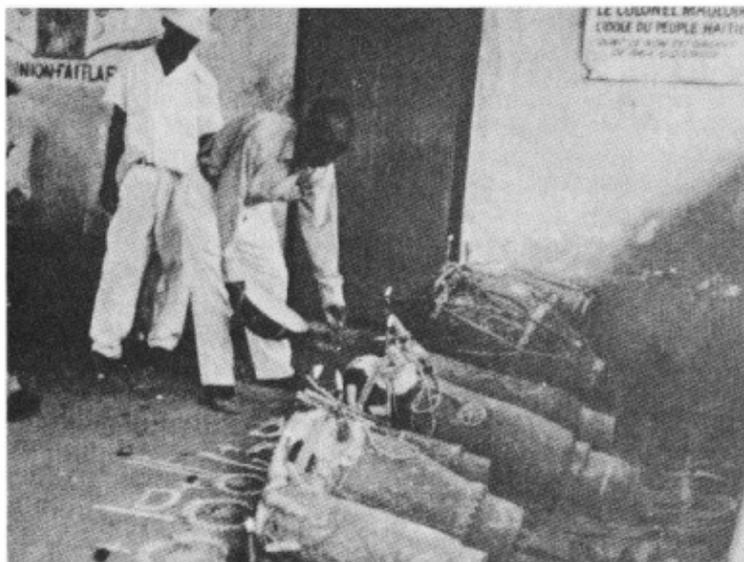


**Voodoo drums before the departure for Ife.  
(In the background, the author taking notes.)**



Ritual bed made of banana-tree leaves representing Ife, where drums are symbolically sent to renew their magic powers.

The priest "feeds" the sacred drums to strengthen them.



Then Ramise, turning to the houn'gan Norvilus from whom she long ago "took the asson," hands him the water jug with ritual gestures, and he in turn salutes the mambo. The jug is passed from hand to hand among all the visiting houn'gans and mam'bos. The houn'sihs come forth in pairs, lined up according to their degree of initiation, turn around and kiss the ground before the drums and the center-post. Next, while the houn'gans and mam'bos exchange ritual greetings to the accompaniment of rattling assons, the houn'sihs curtsy in pairs first before Ramise, then before each ranking member of the company. They then turn in a circle upon one another leaning their heads together. The greetings differ according to the hierarchic degree of the member of the society addressed. The mam'bo is saluted three times by each pair of houn'sihs who curtsy before her and kiss the ground. She takes them by the hand, assists them to their feet, and helps them to make three graceful turns. The peristyle becomes a whirl of white dresses—white being *de rigueur* this evening.

As soon as the chants honoring the loa Sobo are heard, the door of the inner chamber of the oum'phor is flung wide open for the sortie of the flags:

P'apa Sobo lan houmfor;

li mandé drapeaux.

Drapeau cilà, éloué.

Papa Sobo lan houmfor;

li mandé drapeau loa'm lan.

O drapeau-çà, éloué.

Papa Sobo who is in the oum'phor;  
he asks for the flags.

That flag, éloué.

Papa Sobo who is in the oum'phor;  
he asks for the flags of that loa.

Oh that flag, éloué.

Immediately the houn'sihs arrange themselves in two rows. From the wide open door come two women in long white dresses, barefoot, each bearing a splendid flag of embroidered velvet with designs worked in paillettes. *La place*, a long antique sabre in his hand, leads the way. They come out backwards, turning in circles. *La place* is a young man, tall, slender, and very lithe, and he advances to the almost dance-like air of the ritual march customarily performed on such occasions. The movements are smooth and easy, without jerks, beginning from the shoulders and continuing down to the knees which bend in cadence. Mindful of his duty, *la place* leads the two flag-bearers around the center-post; then slowly at first, but with increasing speed, his sabre pointed and the flags unfurled and waving, he proceeds to salute the drums.

He now returns to the center-post and salutes it "to the four faces." He kisses the post three times, then leads the two flag-bearing houn'sihs over to the mam'bo who, asson and bell in hand, faces la place, who points his sabre towards the ground, and the two flag-bearers standing on either side of him. Nearly the entire length of the peristyle separates them. They kneel before the mam'bo three times in a quick curtsy, with a slight bending of the knees and their hips thrust backwards, to the rattling and tinkling of the asson and the bell which is shaken at each salute. In a quadrille-like figure the group forms and reforms four times, in such a way that the mam'bo receives the salutation at the four cardinal points. Finally, la place advances alone to the mam'bo and, with one knee on the ground he offers her the sword hilt to kiss, while he in turn kisses the ground. With one hand she assists him to his feet and guides him in making the three ritual turns. The first flag-bearer then comes forward, and with full and gracious movements passes her blue and red silk embroidered flag over Ramise's head. Three times she advances and retires; then advancing on her knees three long paces, she presents the flag to be kissed at the top of the staff, while she herself kisses the ground. She is helped to her feet as la place was, whereupon the second flag-bearer comes forward.

The same ceremonial takes place before each houn'gan and mam'bo present. At length all the houn'sihs are invited to come forward, kneel, and kiss the sabre and the flags.

After the singing of several chants, three houn'gans come out of the inner chamber of the oum'phor advancing backwards and holding their assons. All three are of the same height—tall and slender—and they move with slow steps, their assons rattling incessantly. One of them holds a lighted candle. They give the impression of attracting and drawing towards themselves something which cannot as yet be clearly seen, something there in the darkness of the inner oum'phor which requires the combined power of all three houn'gans to bring it forth. Now the *confiance* enters the peristyle, his white clothes scarcely visible under all the long strings of multicolored *canzo* necklaces that he wears about his neck, some crossed over the breast, some hung from the shoulder, others over the arm—a heavy, moving mass of cold-sparkling colors. His eyes are closed; his dark, round face expressionless and held high. He staggers, intoxicated by the mystères; he turns, reels, jerks, hops backwards on one foot. The asson calls him, insistent; the chants rise louder, breaking into a regular fanfare. Soon he moves

closer to the center-post, the heavy necklaces swinging with his movements and clinking against one another. He collides with the others, stumbles, seeming almost to lose his balance, and performs gyrations impossible to perform in his normal state.

The three houn'gans lead the confiance to the center of the peristyle where he falls heavily on his knees. Ramise and Norvilus begin to relieve him of his colorful load of necklaces. When the necklaces are no longer on his shoulders, he regains consciousness and, still dizzy, kisses the ground and gets on his feet.

La place and the flag-bearers kneel before the mam'bo who hands each houn'sih a necklace and a *agouéssan*, a white cloth band that is passed over one shoulder and knotted at the opposite hip. The agouéssans and necklaces are worn crosswise front and back. Each necklace is different from all the others, as its colors must match those identified with its owner's personal loas.

One after the other the houn'sihs kneel and receive their ritual adornments, kiss the ground at the mam'bo's feet, and arise. Once again they all fall into rank near the center-post while the call-to-order chants and the repeated shouts of "Abobo!" resound.

A confiance brings the mam'bo a white plate containing cornmeal, on top of which reposes an egg. The cornmeal will be used in tracing the vèvès. In the other hand he holds a lighted candle and a pot of water with which Ramise draws a circle around the center-post and makes a trail of water leading directly to the door of the oum'phor holy of holies.

Having oriented the plate and the candle that she holds with both hands, Ramise pronounces the ritual invocation, raising her arms in a gesture of great reverence, and proceeds to the task of tracing the vèvè, while appropriate chants are made by the chorus:

O vèvè, Voudoun vè, Bon Dié O!  
 O vélà Kounn tié. Vélà Kounn tié!  
 Danbhalah Wédo Kounn tié!

A second Yanvalou song directly follows the first:

O miton ver, Danbhalah Wédo,  
 O miton ver, Ai-Da Wédo,  
 Lada yé, O miton ver, Lada yé.

The design of the vèvè is very complex and includes the symbols of many mystères drawn around seven circles, on each of which a zin, or pot, will soon be placed. It occupies nearly all the free space around

the center-post. When the vèvè is completed, seven tiny reed chairs are set in front of the circles indicated for the zins.

A chant calling the hun'sih-canços is given by the houn'guénicon. Then the houn'sihs proceed to the djévò, or initiation chamber, where all the necessary accoutrements for the *boulé-zin ceremony*, which we are witnessing, have been prepared. On the floor of the *djévò*, spread out on a layer of leaves, is a straw mat covered with a white cloth. On the mat lie bundles of pine wood, leaves of mombin-franc and laloguinin, white china plates (one for each zin), knives, spoons, forks, and spotlessly clean glasses and napkins; likewise a measure of wheat flour, a large *coui*, or calabash dish, full of cornmeal, bottles of olive oil, liqueur, rum, couis of corn grains and roasted peanuts, ground corn, chopped raw food (called the *mangé-dior*), a *coui* containing the *acras-nagos* (small cornmeal balls which were prepared before the ceremony), and a plate of *acassan* (a thick beverage of cornmeal and syrup). As many chickens as there are zins lie upon the mat. Usually these are young birds. A pile of large wrought-iron spikes used to make tripods for the clay zins and the iron Nago zin completes the list. In an earlier ceremony, all the zins had been "signed with the cross." The mam'bo, asson and bell in hand, had pronounced the ritual invocations to the principal mystères of her oum'phor. She had also consecrated the zins by drawing the vèvès of these mystères on their sides in chalk, not omitting the *milocan*—a composite vèvè for all the mystères. Only the Nago vèvès are drawn on the cast-iron zin. The pottery zins are designated for the living (*zins vivants*) or for the dead (*zins morts*). This evening two zins are reserved for the dead. Around the vèvès and on the inner sides of the zins numerous small crosses are marked.

When the houn'sihs reach the *djévò* they kneel in pairs before a houn'gan or a confiance, who orients and gives them their loads. They kiss the ground and rise. Gradually the cortège forms, its entrance into the peristyle suggesting a ballet formation. La place, sabre in hand, opens the way by making three ritual turns on the threshold. All the houn'sihs make similar turns. A slow wheeling of white dresses brightens the dimness of the peristyle. The flags unfurl, wave and revolve about the mam'bo who approaches majestically, asson and bell in hand. The three houn'gans follow her at a short distance holding the lighted candle and the pot of water. The drums go wild with their beating and booming, the chorus bursts into song, while the rattling assons are heard above everything else. Facing the houn'sihs, the

Confiance proceeds backwards with a chicken in each hand, "fanning" them with sweeping movements of his arms. He dances with snake-like contortions leading out the houn'sihs in single file, each of them bearing a particular article of the ritual paraphernalia. Some carry bundles of pinewood sticks apron-fashion in their white skirts. Others bear armfuls of mombin branches. Some hold pitcher-shaped, amphora-like bottles. Still others are loaded with enormous iron spikes, or carry *couis* on their heads, bracing them gracefully with uplifted arms. Large cane baskets are heaped with all the other materials that will be needed for the ceremony. Each zin is entrusted to a houn'sih canzo who carries it with great care.

Chant follows chant in the cool night, while the drums beat and resound in unison. The mam'bo, surrounded by the flags and escorted by *la place*, approaches the foot of the center-post. The Confiance swings the flapping chickens up and down. He takes several steps, always backwards, while the line of houn'sihs pretends to advance. Three times, in accordance with the old Guinin (African) rite, the cortège must pretend to start, each time retracing its steps, always facing the mam'bo. At length they all slowly move into the peristyle singing. They make a turn about the center-post in a special kind of undulating dance, two steps to the right, two steps to the left.

The houn'guénicon, standing at the foot of the center-post, seems inspired, sending one chant after the other. Most of the houn'sihs, more or less "mounted" by their mystères, come forth with their eyes almost closed, reeling, turning about the *vèvès*, yet careful not to step on them and spoil them.

The officiants who are going to "burn the zins" take their places on the small low chairs. The houn'sihs who brought in the ritual materials, one after the other, slowly kneel before the mam'bo, orient their loads, and place them on the ground. Alongside each of the places in the *vèvè* designated by a circle a zin is placed together with its proper ritual materials. The bundles of pinewood and mombin leaves are heaped at the base of the socle.

The prayers are about to begin. The seven houn'gans and mam'bos, each of whom will shortly be in charge of burning a zin, are seated on the small chairs holding their *assons*. The dancing has stopped, and all around them the houn'sihs make a circle, sitting on their heels or upon mats, kneeling or squatting, forming a mass of white dresses that press close upon the ritual designs traced on the bare ground. Bowing

her head and covering her eyes with one hand, Ramise begins the prayers amid deep silence.

First come Roman Catholic prayers, then hymns intoned in a nasal voice, and finally the Voodoo prayer commences. The *Sinn'd'jiò* are reeled off one after the other, interrupted only by the ritual cry "Liss adolé Zo, et Zo, et Zo!" commencing loud and growing gradually weaker, ending with

Hé ya Grand Père Eternel, sinn djiò é,  
 Hé ya Grand Père éternel, sinn djiò docor akoué,  
 Hé ya Grand Père éternel, sinn nan min bon Dieu ho sinn han.  
 Hé ya Marassas Guinin, sinn djiò é,  
 Hé ya Legba Attibon, sinn djiò é.

All the names of the Guinin (African) *mystères* are recited one after the other in fixed order, and always at rhythmic intervals the refrain:

Apò Lissabagui ouangan scié Lissa dolé Zo,  
 Lissa dolé Zo, et Zo, et Zo, et Zo . . .

to which the houn'sihs respond:

é Zo, é Zo, é Zo.

When the name of a *mystère* particularly honored in the *oum'phor* is mentioned, all the houn'sihs are obliged to kiss the ground. At length the *prière Guinin* (African prayer) proper begins. Long psalm-like chants are intoned by the *mam'bo*. Lead by the houn'guénicon, the houn'sihs give the responses in ringing tones that contrast with the subdued voice of Ramise. Occasionally the rattle of the *asson* is heard along with the chanting. The prayers continue a long time. Then comes the chant:

Moin yenvalou yenva, moin yenva, O corani yé.

The prayers finished, Ramise and all the others rise. Taking a jug of water she devoutly raises and orients it to the four cardinal points, pronouncing the ritual invocation. All the houn'sihs turn as one to the point saluted, and, keeping their places, repeat the gesture of salutation by slightly bending their knees. An extraordinarily solemn dignity lends the scene a profoundly religious significance. The houn'guénicon gives the prescribed chant:

O Miguel O, Mayofré, Miguel O éha Mayofré,  
 O Mayofré, Legba Atibon, O Mayofré, Loco Atisou,  
 O Mayofré, Grande Aizan Vélékété. O Miguelo, O Mayofré

The chant finished, the houn'sihs begin their dance again around the center-post under the leadership of the *la Place* and the *flag-*

bearers. Sometimes the direction of the dance is changed: a certain number of turns are "given" to the right, a few to the left. The houn'gans and mam'bos are seated in their places, each assisted by a kneeling houn'sih canzo. All are barefoot in accordance with the Guinin ritual. Each houn'gan pours a little water, wine, syrup, a few grains of corn, peanuts, and bits of a biscuit in a glass that is placed next to a small candle. At this instant the chant rings out:

Ah é planté i poteau é! Legba planté i poteau é . . .

Each houn'gan takes one of the three spikes lying at his side, orients it, and hammers it into the ground with a rock. The three spikes are set in such a way as to form a tripod for the zin, called the *pieds-zin* or *poteaux-zins*. The houn'gan then receives them by orienting and pouring three times in the center of the tripod a bit of the mixture contained in the glass. The candle is lighted and likewise placed exactly in the center. These preparations are all made simultaneously by the seven houn'gans and mam'bos in front of the zins, which are then placed upon their supports. The officiants must set them on the spikes using only their bare feet. The pinewood sticks are taken up in bundles of seven, oriented, and ignited from the candle flame.

The houn'sihs continue the dance close behind one another, often with their hands placed upon the shoulders of the person in front, singing and swaying, and accentuating the rhythm in a kind of African-like quick-step march. The special songs for Legba follow immediately. A lighted pinewood stick is handed to each houn'sih as she passes.

The magic round continues. The flaming sticks form a luminous crown above the dancers who circle faster and faster. The smell of the pine pitch exuding from the burning sticks mingles with that of the ritual herbs. Intermittent flashes of light from these dozens of improvised torches give the perisyle a bizarre illumination. Eyes, teeth, and necklaces flash in the darkness.

The houn'sihs now return the pinewood sticks to the officiants who orient and slip them under the zins. A little water is poured into each, then some olive oil, syrup, and wine, and if the zins are *zins vivants* (zins for the living), a few grains of salt are added. The houn'guénicon begins a new chant:

Hé a Koklo a déni yé, Papa Legba yan ouézo o an ouézo . . .

Each houn'gan takes the young chicken at his side, orients and

crosses it, gives it a few grains of corn to peck at, and then kills it. Some of the mam'bos break the wings and feet of the bird and force open the beak to obtain a little blood with which to stick the feathers plucked from the crop on the "four faces" of the zin. However, many houn'gans claim that this act is not essential to the ritual. The birds are killed, in accordance with the African rite, by twisting the neck (*cou viré*), that is to say, the neck is wrung and the head torn off by a quick twist of the hand. The bodies of the chickens are then handed to the assisting houn'sih canzo. In a moment they are drawn, plucked, cleaned, singed, cut in half, washed with sour oranges, and handed back to the houn'gans and mam'bos. They are then passed over the zins, cut into several pieces, and put in the zins to cook. Meanwhile, the feathers are tied in little bunches that resemble small bouquets of flowers or shaving brushes, and then are placed to one side. These will later be used for greasing the zins.

The houn'sih continue all the while to dance around the vèvés. Around and around they go. Some, drunk with the loas, are staggering and tottering, but swept along by the movement of the dance they continue without losing their places. It is exceptional, however, to see anyone completely possessed during this part of the ceremony. The drums beat madly with intermittent clinking of the ogan heard in the background.

When the chicken has been cooked, each of the houn'gans mixes oil and red wine in a white plate. He then calls several houn'sih canzos to his side, one at a time. He makes them dip their hands into the mixture and take a piece of chicken from the bottom of the zin. Three times the piece is placed upon the mombin leaves before being left there. When the last piece has been withdrawn, some ground cornmeal is placed in the zin, stirred well, and cooked in the same water as the chicken.

In the case of the Nago zin, the first part of the ceremony is exactly the same as for the other zins except that no chicken is required. Instead, little balls of cornmeal, called *acras Nago*, are prepared in advance. They are cooked in the Nago zin. Then they are removed with the same ceremony as the pieces of chicken, and placed in a *coui* (half calabash) or on a white plate.

When the cornmeal mush in the zins has become fairly thick, the houn'gan calls each houn'sih canzo from the dance. One by one they kneel at his side. Each dips a hand into the mixture of oil and wine,

and then with an arm held by the houn'gan like a long wooden spoon, scoops up a bit of the boiling hot cornmeal. She orients this, presses it in the palm of her hand to form a ball, and places it upon the mombin leaves. She then kisses the ground, rises, and moves aside for the next houn'sih. This ritual is called *atoutou*. When no more cornmeal remains, the zin, hot as it is, is removed from its tripod with the soles of the bare feet held against its sides. The Nago zin is removed in the same manner. Although no special precautions are taken there is never any evidence of the skin of the feet being burned.

During the entire length of this prolonged ceremony the houn'sihs never cease to "run around the zins" (*courir les zins*), sometimes in one direction, sometimes in the other, lead by la place and the flag bearers. The singing continues uninterrupted, each song pertaining to the ritual and corresponding to a particular action:

M'pr'al boulé go zin pou Loa Alouba.	I'm going to boil a big zine for Loa Alouba.
Ma pr'al boulé go zin, go zin ça, go zin Dan Ballah Ouéddo.	I shall be boiling a big zin, this big zin, Dan Ballah Ouéddo's big zin.

At times the zins and their attendants seem to be enclosed by a veritable white moving wall. There are so many houn'sihs that they move jam-packed against one another, keeping time with their feet when movement is impeded, and bounding wildly forward as the la place leads them on. Their bare feet strike the ground with a dull, rhythmic, obsessive beat.

The zins are removed from their tripods, scraped clean of the last vestige of corn with a wooden spoon, and smeared with olive oil by means of the small feather brushes. This done, they are replaced, again with the bare feet, on the three supporting spikes. A little more oil is again poured in each of them and more pine wood is placed underneath to make a hot fire. Everyone must now wait until the zins catch fire from the oil inside them.

The chanting redoubles its intensity. A kind of excitement increasing by the minute seizes the crowd. The houn'gans and mam'bos get up and move aside as the heat becomes intense around the small fires. The ground is brushed clean around each fire. The pine wood burns brightly beneath the zins which stand out black in the midst of the orange flames licking them on all sides. Houn'gans and mam'bos all

shake their assons over the zins while uttering the ritual words. The incantations continue. At length a zin bursts into flames. "A bobol A bobol" cries the enthusiastic crowd. All the houn'sihs fall on their knees and kiss the ground, singing:

Go zin moin ap' prend  
di feu. Ai-bobol

My zin is catching  
fire. Ai-bobo!

One, two, three zins ignite. Other lamps are extinguished, and the flames alone light the peristyle, wildly and fantastically. The heat is suffocating, but the houn'gans and mam'bos continue their work without noticing it. "A bobol!" The dance circles faster and faster, lead by la place and the flag bearers, wheeling, turning, revolving. "A bobol!" Loas "mount" several of the women. They stumble and stagger, but keep right on dancing. A houn'gan steps out of the crowd, rattling his asson and bell, and speaking words to prevent the possessions from becoming complete. Several houn'sihs kiss the ground, get up with difficulty, and still completely dazed take their places again in the dance.

Ramise, aided by several confiances, makes her way to the inner oum'phor. She comes out carrying a "dressed up" govi in each arm. Slowly she bends down and passes them one after the other through the flames, then the other govis, *pot-de-têtes*, necklaces, and *paquets*. All the pottery zins are now on fire, and the houn'sihs remove the pine sticks from under them. They burn from their own fuel, little pots blackened and crowned with flames. Scattered on the ground, bits of hot charcoal glow red. The Nago zin has not been scraped clean like the others, and is the only one that has not caught fire. The houn'gan in charge of it comes and shakes his asson and bell over it. His somber face glows in the light of the burning coals, and a look of intense concentration is read in his set features as he utters the invocation in a low voice. Now the Nago zin bursts into flame. The houn'sihs kiss the earth, rise, and immediately give the chant in Nago rhythm. The drums beat madly.

Tolisha Legba m'di yé,  
a hi massah i toto,  
Salué Nago yé!  
Salué Nago, Nègue Nago Royor,  
Ago Tolisha, salué Nago, yél

Ramise quickly passes the *gouis* and the other objects through the flames of the *Nago zin*, then takes a bottle of rum and pours a fair amount of it into the *zin*. Immediately a huge flame leaps up licking about the roof beams in a dazzling light. Ramise sprays the rum from her mouth to the four cardinal points. The possessions now commence in great numbers. Nearly all the *houn'sihs* are "mounted." The eyes dazzled by the blazing fires can hardly distinguish the *loas* moving about in all directions. Some are dancing a frenzied *Nago* rhythm, for the drums are never still; others roll on the ground and are helped up by one or another of the *houn'gans* or *mam'bos*. Fantastic shadows play upon the walls of the enclosure. Some of the *houn'sihs* in quick succession kiss the *vèvès*; others crowd around Ramise, now possessed by the *loa* *Ogou Badagri*. The rest are still dancing, screaming out the *Nago* songs lead off by the *houn'guénicon* who stands near the drummers:

Eh, liki liki eh;  
 Jean-Paul Nago; ya yé!  
 Liki, liki eh, *Ogou* Chalodé,  
 Liki liki o, o Nago ya;  
*Ogou* Ashadé!

When things get a little quieter and the *loas* have taken their leave, the *mambo* gives the signal to pass the left hand and the left foot through the last flames of the *zins*. This ritual is known as the *Dessounin*.

When all the *zins* have burned out, they are removed, as before, with the bare feet. Then the spikes are pulled up, and all the ritual accessories are diligently gathered by the *houn'sihs*. The various foods are separated, and those that belong to the *zins vivants* (*zins* for the living), such as the chickens and the balls of cornmeal (the *acras Nago*), are divided among the members of the Society. The food cooked in the *zins morts* (*zins* for the dead) is set aside in a *coui*. All the ceremonial debris—*mombin* leaves, cold embers, charred pine-wood, feathers, and leftovers in general—are collected. The place where the *zin mort* stood is carefully cleaned, because this is where the hole is to be dug. The *zins vivants* are placed in the *repositoir* of *Legba*, that is to say, at the courtyard gate, while the *Nago zin* is returned to the *oum'phor* holy of holies.

In the cleared place a very simple *vèvè* is traced with ground corn-

meal. It takes the form of a circle circumscribing a cross. A man comes forth carrying a *pince*—a long, pointed iron bar—which he uses to dig a hole within the area of the crossed circle, around the sides of which the dirt is piled evenly. When the hole is sufficiently deep, the sign of the cross is made over it with flour, and water is sprinkled into it together with grains of corn, peanuts, liqueur, and clairin. The food to be buried is now brought, carefully wrapped in a white napkin used in the service of the *zin mort*. The packet of food is then placed upon *mombin* leaves in the bottom of the hole.

The *zins morts* are broken with one of the spikes, and the pieces, together with those of the glass and the plate, are thrown into the hole. Finally, the wooden spoon and all the floor sweepings are also collected and dumped in. The *houn'sihs* kneel in a circle, and all together push back the dirt and fill up the hole. When this work is finished, they rise and form a circle around the hole, each *houn'sih* placing her hands on the shoulders of the *houn'sih* in front of her. With the left foot with which they begin a swaying movement forwards and backwards, they stamp the ground smooth, giving out at the same time a song with a special rhythm:

Dia rélé Dia Dia ké ké, ké, ké dial Diarélé dial  
 Guédé Nibo! Dia ké ké, ké ké dia!  
 Baron Samedi! Dia ké ké, ké ké dia!

These wild, hammering, obsessive sounds accompany the beating of bare feet upon the ground. In a moment the *Guédés*—the loas of the cemetery—begin to possess the *houn'sihs*. All of them are here: *Guédé Nibo*, *Guédé Nouvavou*, *Guédé HounSou*, *Guédé Tiouaoué*. Without breaking the rhythm the *Guédés* join in beating the ground with the others. All in the dance become "mounted." The *Guédés* place themselves in two lines facing each other, and, still holding each other by the shoulders, beat the soles of the left feet upon the ground to accentuate the "Dia ké ké dia!" The "dias" ring out in time to reinforce the hammering of the feet.

When the ground is duly smoothed, *Ramise* traces a *vèvè* over the covered hole with ground cornmeal, and in the center of this design places a lighted candle alongside a plate called "The Adoration." Various people come forth and place small coins upon it to be used for charity the following day.

One by one the *Guédés* take their leave. The ceremony is nearly

ended. The necklaces of the houn'sihs are taken from the kneeling women with the same rituals employed at their distribution, except that the person assigned the duty of carrying them to the inner oum'phor does so in an unobtrusive manner. Next, the flags must also be returned to the oum'phor. The mam'bo is again given the ritual salutation at the four cardinal points, whereupon she chants the song:

O Goli yé, goli yé,  
 oua Po-drapeau, goli yé  
 O Golimin goli yé oua goli yé  
 oua O Po-drapeau.  
 O Po-drapeaul Po drapeau,  
 ban moin lan main pour m'levé!  
 O Goli yé oua, goli yé,  
 oua O Po-drapeau.

This lively song accompanies la place and the two flag-bearers as they circle the center-post, turning, whirling about, dancing, spinning around many, many times, first to the right, then to the left. The flags unfurl and flap in the wind as the houn'sihs bound in their dance, and the bright sparkle of the paillettes clashes with the quick gleam of the pointed sabre. At last la place signals that the dance is over. The doors of the inner oum'phor are opened, and he darts ahead, sabre forward, the flags following his lead—a mere feint. Three times he must approach the doorsill before finally turning around and entering the oum'phor backwards. The doors are immediately closed on the procession.

It is nearly dawn, but under the peristyle the dance continues, for all the mystères must be greeted before the lights can be extinguished.

In all the oum'phors in the region of Port-au-Prince and the Cul-de-Sac Plain, it is customary to celebrate such a *boulé-zins caille* ceremony as we have witnessed at more or less infrequent intervals for the purpose of "warming up" the mystères served in the oum'phor—in other words to give them increased power to be utilized for the benefit of those in whose name the zins are burned. This ceremony may be celebrated every year on the occasion of a General Service; otherwise every three, five, or seven years. In other parts of Haiti, for example in the north and the northwest, it is completely unknown.

The ritual may vary from one Society to another in matters of detail or in accordance with the loas served in the oum'phor. The zins are

small clay or cast iron cooking pots (the latter smaller than the former). Their true, secret name is *ouanzin*, and each rite has its own particular zin: the Rada zin is of pottery, as are also the Congo and the Ibo zins (on the "point" of Rada). The Nago zin, however, as also the Pethro, is of cast iron, is somewhat smaller than the Rada type, and usually has three small, high legs.

Ramise has been a mam'bo for many years. Her oum'phor, a rather important one, is located in the Cul-de-Sac Plain. At the beginning of the General Service which she celebrates every two years, she is accustomed to hold the *boulé-zins caille* in honor of all the loas of her oum'phor. For this occasion she invites several other Societies who come sometimes from great distances to be with her when she fulfills her obligations.

## Sacrificing A Bull For The Simbi

The service about to be described took place in a large oum'phor located in Haite's Cul-de-Sac Plain. Numerous small, one or two room thatched huts—dwellings of the *pitit caille* or members of the Voodoo Society—are scattered about the vast area surrounding the oum'phor. Here, many ancient trees, chiefly mahogany and mango, furnish oases of coolness, a pleasant refuge from the burning heat of the harsh September sun. Most of the trees are reservoirs of Voodoo loas. Round about, fields of sugar cane nod in the breeze. The air is bracing—this is the open country.

The great peristyle is located in the middle of the yard facing the Rada inner oum'phor. The Péthro and Congo holy of holies are a little farther removed and off to one side, and in front of them stands another peristyle; somewhat smaller than the first, but equally ornate inside. Here the service for Simbi is about to be celebrated. Dieucifor, houn'gan and chief of the Society, is engaged in last-minute preparations, surrounded by a bevy of houn'sihs, all of them barefoot and dressed in white and wearing large foulards tied around their heads. Mostly they are dark-skinned country women, sturdy and strong, with supple limbs and laughing eyes.

The dirt floor of the peristyle has been carefully swept and sprinkled. Dieucifor approaches the center-post, orients a jug of water, pours a few drops three times in front of the post, and then traces a

very large vèvè on the ground completely encircling it. The tracing is made with several kinds of flour and assorted powders—cornmeal, ashes, coffee-grounds, brick dust, powdered bark and roots—while the vèvè itself comprises the various symbols of the mystères to whom the food is to be offered. The escorts of these loas are also to be invited.

Inasmuch as a bull will be sacrificed, a symbolic representation of a bull is included in the vèvè along with symbols of Simbi, Grand Bois, Maître Calfou, and several more loas. In the inner oum'phor, in front of the *pé*, a large hole is dug around which another and simpler vèvè is traced. Over the hole stands a table covered with a white cloth.

The table is spread with food and various kinds of desserts—cakes, candies, pastries, custards, chocolate, and rice pudding—as well as bottles of syrup, cola, liqueurs, rum, and clairin. All this is for the mystères who will appear. The cooked food will also be served on this table. When the table is cleared, all the food not consumed by the loas is placed in the hole. The choicest portions are, of course, saved, and most of it is given to the houn'gan's family and to the other members of the Society.

About ten o'clock in the morning the ogan clangs in the yard summoning the houn'sihs to the peristyle. They all hurry to enter, and seat themselves on benches and chairs around the central area. Two drummers are in their places, each holding a Péthro drum between his legs. The houn'sihs who form the chorus are grouped around them. The houn'guénicon comes out of the group and entones the opening chant, which is taken up by the chorus. The drums begin the Péthro beat:

Honneur la maison! (ter)	Greetings to the house! (3 times)
Honneur Maitresse caille moin.	Greetings to the lady of my house.
M'crié: Honneur la maison!	I cry: Greetings to the house!
Messieurs et Dames, bonsoir.	Gentlemen and ladies, good evening.

A confiance unfastens the great ceremonial whip from the center-post, and, going outside, cracks it furiously in ritual fashion. The whip-cracking is punctuated by strident blasts of a whistle. A houn'sih comes out of the inner oum'phor with a jug of water and a lighted candle, followed by a few more carrying couis, glass tumblers, and bottles. A salutation is given and all the articles are set down beside the center-post. One of the painted couis contains the *manger djior* (a mixture of corn and roasted peanuts), and another holds a wide

assortment of bread, cassava, molasses-cakes, biscuits, and pastries. A large glass is filled with *eau Guinin*, a mixture of food and water. Other small containers hold custards, chocolate, coffee, and cane syrup. Next to these are bottles of syrup, cola, liqueur, rum, clairin, and finally a bottle of *kimanga* wrapped in green cloth trimmed in red.

The sacrificial animals have been carefully bathed in a solution of leaves and lotion, then dried, and curried for a long time. At the moment of their entrance into the peristyle they are sprinkled with perfume. The young black bull is draped with a red and white mantle decorated with red ribbons. A foulard of fiery satin is tied around the horns. Two male goats, tan and yellow with black spots, wear coverings made of strips of cloth sewn together—each a different hue, for each loa has its characteristic color, although the color of any given loa may vary in accordance with the "point" upon which it is "served." One of the coverings is yellow and rose, trimmed in blue; the other is yellow, red, and green. One goat wears a white satin foulard on its horns, the other a foulard of red satin. The goats are held on leashes, but the bull, somewhat too obstreperous, must be tied to a firm post in the peristyle. The houn'sihs carry an imposing number of roosters and hens with which they have been entrusted. The houn'guénicon starts the second introductory chant:

Legba man hounfor moin. (ter)	Legba, who is in my oum'phor.
Ou minm' qui pôté drapeau,	(3 times)
cé ou minm' qu'à paré soleil	You who carry the flag,
pou moin.	It is you who will protect me
Papa Legba man hounfor moin.	from the sun.
(ter)	Papa Legba, who is in my oum'
Ou minm' qui pôté drapeau,	phor. (3 times)
cé ou minm' qu'à paré soleil	You who carry the flag,
pou loa yo.	It is you who will protect the loas
	from the sun.

Dieucifor comes in and consecrates the vèvè by shaking his asson over its various parts while pronouncing the ritual formulas. The jug of water is presented to him with the customary salutations. He orients it and pours out a few drops three times on all sides of the vèvè. The chanting continues, greeting the Péthro and the Congo loas, while the drums alter their rhythms to give the appropriate accompaniments. The houn'sihs, keeping their places, sway to the music. La

place comes out of the inner *oum'phor* leading two *houn'sihs* who carry the spangled, embroidered and goldfringed flags that flap and sparkle as they are rapidly waved from side to side. Approaching the center-post, *la place* and the flag-bearers salute the four cardinal points, then turn towards *Dieucifor* who faces them, holding the *asson* and *bell*. The *houn'gan* and the flag-bearers salute the four "façades," after which *Dieucifor* makes *la place* and the *houn'sihs* *vîrer* (make the ritual turns) and kiss the sword and the flags three times. The visiting *houn'gans* and *mam'bos* are greeted by means of the same ceremony.

The *houn'gan* seats himself on a low chair that someone has just placed before the *vèvè*, and two *mambos* take their places on either side of him. The prayer begins in the customary fashion, following the Roman Catholic ritual. Then come the hymns, the litanies, and the *prière Dijor*, which enumerates at great length the names of all the *loas*. The *houn'sihs*, deep in meditation, and kneeling or squatting around the *vèvè*, devoutly kiss the ground whenever the *houn'gan* calls out the names of the *mystère*, particularly those who are especially honored in this *oum'phor*. The *prière Guinin* includes only the *Péthro* and the *Congo mystères*, for the *Rada mystères* were greeted during the course of previous services.

The prayers continue for more than an hour and a half. At the final chant *Dieucifor* arises, takes the water-jug and the lighted candle, and solemnly orients them to the four cardinal points. All the members of the Society stand and go through the same gestures. The *houn'gan* casts water on the four sides of the center-post, which he then kisses three times.

For the consecration of the *vèvè*, *Dieucifor* takes successively the various *couis* and other containers that are presented to him by a *houn'sih* with the prescribed salutations. In deep meditation he orients them, all the while pronouncing the invocations. He then kneels and places on various parts of the *vèvè* little piles of the grain and the different foods, to which he adds a bit of the contents of each bottle.

The chants resound once more in the *peristyle*:

Saluez moin Gangan, saluez  
moin.  
A Apo Legba, saluez moin,  
Gangan, saluez.  
Papa m'cé pitit' Boucan Maza;

Salute me, Houn'gan, salute me.  
A Apo Legba, salute me,  
Houn'gan, salute.  
My father is the child of Boucan  
Maza;

Papa m'cé pitit' Brisé Montagne. My father is the child of Brisé  
 Oue, saluez moin, saluez moin o; Montagne.  
 Papa m'cé pitit' Silamoyo. Yes, salute me, oh salute me;  
 My father is the child of Silamoyo.

Recitative:

Ouil Saluez moin, Brisé Mon- Yes, Salute me, Brisé Montagne,  
 tagne, Break-bones, Break-limbs,  
 Crazé-les-os, Crazé-les-membres, Nèg' Kassa Bambila, Bila Congo,  
 Nèg' Kassa Bambila, Bila Congo, Bila Louvemba;  
 Bila Louvemba; Salute me, Houn'gan.  
 Saluez moin, Gangan.

Little piles of gunpowder are finally placed upon the vèvè. A con-  
 fiance brings a firebrand from the ritual fireplace out in the yard.  
 Orienting the firebrand, Dieucifor makes the sign of the cross with it  
 before the face of each houn'sih, then touches and ignites each pile of  
 gunpowder with it. The glowing firebrand is extinguished with water  
 while the whole assemblage cries out: "*Adjioh!*"

Caille moin, senti foulah,	My house feels the spray,
O Toutou Bilango.	Oh Toutou Bilango.
Macaya, m'senti foulah.	Macaya, I feel the spray.
Trois feuilles, Trois points,	Three leaves, Three points,
m'senti foulah!	I feel the spray!
Toutou Bilango.	Toutou Bilango.
Caille ô, O caille ô,	Oh house, Oh house, Oh,
caille moin senti foulah,	My house feels the spay,
Toutou Bilango!	Toutou Bilango!

A confiance brings the houn'gan the bottle of *kimanga*. In accord-  
 ance with the Péthro ritual, the confiance holds it in his right hand and  
 rapidly moves it at chest level to the left, to the right, and back again  
 to the left. He then presents it directly to the houn'gan who quickly  
 grasps it. However, it is not immediately released to him. Held by the  
 two men, the bottle is moved upwards and from side to side until finally  
 the confiance suddenly lets go of it; whereupon the houn'gan raises it  
 over his head and everybody cries out: "*Adjioh!*" Still standing before  
 the center-post, Dieucifor solemnly and slowly "vaporizes" the liquid  
 contained in the bottle to the four cardinal points, blowing it across his  
 bent forearm. More cries of "*Adjioh! Adjioh man!*" All the houn'sihs,

standing, turn in unison toward the four "façades" and curtsy gracefully. Dieucifor turns towards the drums and "vaporizes." He does the same a moment later before the vèvè. Then, turning around, Dieucifor "vaporizes" three times in succession across each arm bent at the elbow. The "vaporized" *kimanga* is referred to as *kiman*.

The houn'sihs who hold the roosters and hens prepared for the sacrifice come forward. Dieucifor, summoning to his side two or three mam'bos, selects and distributes to each a rooster and a hen of matched plumage. In a harmonious, combined movement they elevate and present the birds to the four cardinal points, at the same time pronouncing the formula of orientation in subdued voices. This offertory gesture is made very slowly, and the dignity of the ceremonial is enhanced by the pure whiteness of the houn'sihs' dresses.

Dieucifor and the mam'bos, at first kneeling and holding the chickens in their hands, rise and proceed to place them, one after the other, before the piles of food that adorn certain areas of the vèvè. As a rule, the chickens do not hesitate to peck at it. Dieucifor kneels near the center-post. Each mam'bo comes and carefully passes the hens over him—from head to foot, back, face, and sides. Each completes this ritual by striking him three times on the chest with the chicken. The ritual is repeated over each person participating in the service. The houn'gan begins a chant to summon the mystères. The names are called of all the loas, particularly the Simbis, loas especially important in the Congo and the Péthro rites. At each name the chorus responds in a subdued voice; "*Batala oo Batala!*"

*Houn'gan:*

Batalua oo Batala, hé  
 Simbi Yandézo  
 Simbi Congo  
 Simbi Yan Paka  
 Hé Ian Pong'oué!  
 Simbi Yan Kita

*Chorus:*

Ian Pong'oué  
 Batala oo Batala  
 Batala oo Batala  
 Batala oo Batala  
 Batala oo Batala

(Other names follow, each answered by the chorus.)

The pairs of roosters and chickens are crossed with water and with flour. Some of the *manger djior* and a few drops of liqueur are put on their backs. Dieucifor then "vaporizes" for the last time, and facing the center-post and the inner oum'phor, slowly elevates the first rooster holding it away at arm's length. With quick strokes he breaks

the wings and the feet as he pronounces the ritual formulas. Entering the Péthro inner temple he rips out the tongue and, using blood from the wound, sticks a few of the crop feathers upon various parts of the pé. Returning to the peristyle, he likewise sticks feathers upon the center-post and the vèvè. Meanwhile, one of the mambos has broken the wings and feet of the hen previously paired with the rooster by striking it against the center-post. All the houn'sihs fall on their knees as the two chickens are dispatched with a knife. The spurting blood from the cut throats is collected in a plate that is promptly placed at the base of the center-post. The singing resounds with even greater force. The bodies of the sacrificed chickens flap about on the blood-stained ground, and, quiet at last, are placed side by side with their heads upon the vèvès of the particular loas to whom they have been offered as sacrifices. Another rooster and chicken are now presented for the Marassa Péthro loas while the chanting continues:

Marassas Simbi, m'engagé dans pays-a.	Simbi Marassas, I am involved with this country.
Marassas Guinin, Marassas la Côté, Marassas l'Afrique, n'engagé lan pays-al	African Marassas, Coastal Maras- sas, African Marassas, I am involved with this country.

The second pair of chickens, like the first pair, are placed upon the vèvè of the peristyle and encouraged to peck at the food offerings. Then they are removed to the vèvè in the inner oum'phor of Simbi where the whole performance is repeated. They are likewise passed over the body of the houn'gan and over all those present, consecrated, and finally sacrificed. This time, however, after the wings and legs have been broken and the tongue torn out, their necks are wrung. The remaining score of roosters and hens are simultaneously sacrificed.

All the houn'gans and mam'bos rise, holding the different colored chickens entrusted to them. These chickens are ritually oriented with all the dignity customarily observed on such occasions. The officiants move their lips in the sacred prayers. The four cardinal points are saluted, and the feet and wings of the birds are broken before the final sacrifice. Feathers fly in all directions over the vèvès as the chickens flap about, twitching and somersaulting until they expire.

In accordance with the ritual of the various loas in the train of

Simbi who are served nowadays, the throats of the chickens are usually cut with a knife rather than wrung. The first drops of blood are spilled on the vèvès, and the rest is collected in a dish. Each time the chickens are placed upon the vèvè of the mystère to whom the sacrifice is dedicated.

A woman about fifty years of age suddenly jumps backwards. The mystère Brisé has just "descended into her head." The possessed woman rises at once and proceeds over to the chickens just sacrificed. All the houn'sihs, on their knees now, wait to be raised to their feet by the mystère, whirled around, and given the Péthro salute. This type of greeting is given by gently striking the elbows three times while the arms are three-quarters bent. Brisé sways and gives the impression of dancing, uttering from time to time his customary cry: "Guéguégué!" He grinds his teeth and staggers as though drained of all energy.

When the goats are lead in, the cracking of whips and the sharp blasts of the whistle grow louder outside. The drum beat louder and the singing becomes more intense. The tawny, black-spotted goat is the first to be brought to the foot of the center-post. Its fine silk mantle is a rich adornment, and the red satin bows on its horns contrast vividly with the houn'sihs' white dresses. A large cross is traced on the goat's back, first with flour, next with water from the jug, and then with the "Guinea" water from the glass tumbler. Likewise a little of each pile of food and of each beverage is placed on its back, after which the containers (glasses or couis) are oriented. Next, a handful of *zèrb Guinin* (Guinea grass) is handed to the houn'gan, which he receives and orients as he pronounces the ritual formula. He then goes to the goat, kneels before it, makes the sign of the cross, strikes each side of its head three times, grasps it by the horns, butts his own forehead three times against the goat's head, and rises. Every person in attendance comes up in hierarchic order and kneels before the goat, whose only interest during the proceedings is in chewing a few blades of the Guinea grass.

A little "Guinea water" is poured into a coui and presented to the goat. He drinks. Dieucifor takes the bottle of *kimanga* and sprays the goat "to the four façades." The leash and mantle are removed. Two strong assistants seize the goat, one by the horns, the other by the hind legs. They swing it back and forth three times, raise it off the ground three times, swing it again three times towards the four cardi-

nal points, present it first before the entrance of the Péthro and the Congo inner oum'phor, and finally before the center-post. Some of the houn'sihs form a cortège behind the goat under the direction of la place and the flag-bearers. They circle the post several times in accordance with the ritual, first in one direction and then in the other, while the attendants continue to swing the goat from side to side. Singers and drummers go wild:

Koumba cabrite télékou é.

Koumba, koumba cabrite, télékou é,  
cabrite télékou . . .

With a quick movement the goat is thrown on its back and a cross is traced on its body with a sharp knife held by a confiance. Its testicles are quickly severed and squeezed lightly until a few drops of blood trickle out upon the vèvè and in the interior of the bagui. Still held with its feet in the air, the goat is slain with knife thrust in its neck (the knife having previously been oriented). Blood gushes forth into a large wooden basin reserved for this purpose, into which salt and alcohol had already been placed. The goat is held in the air until only a slight trickle of blood remains. It is then laid on the ground.

The other goat is consecrated and sacrificed in exactly the same way as the first, the ceremony being repeated right up through the final sacrifice. Then a new chant begins:

Toute famille a yo semblé.

La famille semblé.

Hé, créoles, ô nous là.

Ago yé!

La famille semblé.

Nan point Guinin encô.

The whole family is assembled.

The family as assembled.

Hey, Créoles, Oh, here we are.

Ago yé!

The family is assembled.

Africa no longer exists.

The bodies of the goats, together with the severed testicles, are placed upon the vèvè. The sign of the cross is made over them as well as over the heap of dead chickens. A white plate upon which a cross has been graced with flour is placed over them. This is for the "adoration" ceremony to which all those present are now invited in the words of the following song:

Vin payer sang;  
cérémonie-a belle ô.

Come and pay for the blood;  
the ceremony is beautiful.

La famille vin prayer sang,  
non!

Cérémonie-a belle ô.

O Aayo,

la famille vin prayer sang!

The family comes to pay for the  
blood.

The ceremony is beautiful.

Oh Aayo,

the family comes to pay for the  
blood!

Dieucifer comes and kneels before the vèvè holding money in each hand. He speaks at great length with the mystères before placing the money in the plate, first with the right hand, then with the left, as with firm conviction he makes his "demand."

The bodies of all the sacrificed animals are picked up and removed by the houn'sihs who are to prepare them according to ritual practice. The soiled ground is swept, and all the sweepings are carefully collected in a coui and taken away.

The sacrifice of the bull is next. The bull is tied to a post in the peristyle a little to one side. The central area is enlarged by making the people move back their chairs, thus leaving more space around the bull. Dieucifer prepares to consecrate the animal according to ritual, but it is not easy to keep it in check. Only with difficulty does he hold in place the mantle, which has a tendency to slip off on one side because nobody dares get close enough to adjust it. The houn'gan presents the bull with the coui containing the "Guinea water." When the bull has tasted it, the houn'gan offers a handful of "Guinea grass." Placing himself in front of the bull he speaks to it at some length, then holds out some stalks to it. Chant succeeds chant without a break, while the houn'sihs dance in their places or simply sway back and forth.

Simbi lan barrière;  
z'aut' poco connin moin.

Ala nous rivé

nous pr'allé gâté coumandé.

Yé! Simbi Yandézo,

Ian Paka Pong'ouél

M'di: Yé! Kim'boi salay!

Salam a salay!

Simbi lan barrière;

z'aut' poco connin moin.

Simbi is at the gate;

the others do not yet know me.

Well, we have arrived;

we are going to disregard the order,

Yeh! Simbi Yandézo,

Ian Paka Pong'ouél

I say: Yeh! Kim'boi salay!

Salam a salay!

Simbi is at the gate;

the others do not yet know me.

The bull is consecrated. Dieucifer stands beside the animal and

draws crosses down the entire length of its back with water from the jug, with flour, and with the *manger djior* and other food offerings. The nervous animal rears up unexpectedly from time to time as he feels the syrup or the cola trickling over his head and flanks. The chants grow louder and louder:

Zo, Aidé Zo,  
tabatiè'm tombé;  
côté m'a joinn' li?  
Zo, Aidé Zo. (ter)  
Ouil O Kim'boi ma salay!  
Simbi Yan Paka! Simbi Ian  
Dézo!  
Oui! Simbi Ian Kita!  
Grande Adjiaconver, Grande  
Simbal

Zo, Aidé Zo,  
my snuff-box falls down;  
where shall I find it?  
Zo, Aidé Zo. (three times)  
Yes, Oh Kim'boi ma salay!  
Simbi Yan Pakal Simbi Ian  
Dézo!  
Yes, Simbi Ian Kital  
Grande Adjiaconver, Grande  
Simba!

Suddenly a woman is mounted by a bull-mystère who moos loudly. This mystère is Bélécou, but so overwhelming is he that he cannot remain very long. A Simbi loa, Ian Paka Pong'oué, possesses a wizened, gnarl-jointed man about sixty years old. The possession at first is violent. Simbi arrives and departs, his gestures stiff, angular, and bizarre. However, his grim expression softens whenever he greets someone he is fond of: the scowl on his face vanishes, the contractions of his jaws gradually cease. He gives the Péthro salute by striking his elbows against the elbows of the other person, then hooks his little finger in the little finger of the other person to make him *virer* (turn around upon himself).

The houn'gan sprays the *kiman* over the arms of Simbi, and very tightly fastens on him a blood-red foulard. Flaming clairin is poured on the ground in front of the mystère, who then stamps on it with great force. The mystère then takes his leave.

While the houn'gan and mam'bos were consecrating the bull, the houn'sih were greeting Simbi with several songs, among them:

Papa Simbi Racine Coumandé,  
Feuilles-non-bois,  
cé moin-minme, Racine o o o o!  
Simbi Ian Dézo, Racine Cou-  
mandél

Papa Simbi Racine Coumandé,  
Leaves-in-the-woods,  
it is I, Racine, Oh, Oh, Oh, Oh!  
Simbi Ian Dézo, Racine Cou-  
mandél

Feuilles-nan-bois,  
cé nou-minme, Racine o o o!

Leaves-in-the-woods,  
it is we, Racine, Oh, Oh, Oh, Oh!

Dieucifor summons his nephew, a young man about twenty years old, who he also allows to consecrate the bull despite the fact the latter is not a houn'gan. All at once the young man is mounted by a Simbi, the particular Simbi whom his family "serves." He looks utterly different; his perfectly ordinary peasant features become those of a young, fiery god, vigorous, yet somewhat fawn-like. With amazing agility he leaps upon the bull's back, remains there a moment, and then sinks back to the ground. He immediately tries again, and by leaning lightly with one hand on the animal, clears the obstacle. The bull rears, excited, and paws the ground with his hoof. A woman possessed by another Simbi leaps up in turn on the bull's neck and grasps its horns. The first Simbi jumps behind the second, and now both of them together straddle the menacing, foaming animal as he lowers his head and butts against the post with dull thuds, releasing all his pent-up violence. Deafening cries of "Adjioh" and "Bilolo" resound in the peristyle. In this way Simbi demonstrates his satisfaction with the offerings. However, Dieucifor is worried. He would like to temper somewhat the exuberant enthusiasm of the mystères, for he is afraid to let them revel at will. Should they happen to untie the bull and lead it around the neighborhood, he might have a lot of trouble with the local authorities. So he prefers to use persuasion to get the Simbis to dismount before he orders them to depart.

The bull is untied and with powerful strides moves out of the peristyle, preceded by the flag-bearers under the direction of the sword-brandishing *la place*. Everyone is on his feet now. Confusion reigns as all join the procession moving behind the bull toward the gate where Simbi and Grand Chemin are to be greeted. Excitement increases. Flags wave and flap, embroidered pennants sparkling in the bright sun. *La place* makes the flag-bearers double step, reverse their pace, and circle around the tree-reposoirs in a whirl of satin flags. Quick flashes of light dart from his sword blade. The white-robed houn'sihs encircle the bull, exciting him with their songs and cries of "Adjioh" and "Bilolol"

After the salutation at the gate, the cortège returns on the double to the peristyle. From all over the neighborhood members of the cult leave their thatched houses to join the crowd. Three times they go

around the peristyle on the outside, and then proceeding inside make a turn about the center-post. The heavy tramping of the bull can be heard. The general excitement has reached its peak. Children join the adults to dance and squeal with delight. "Bilolo!" A passage is cleared. Everyone rushes in so as not to miss the spectacle.

The bull is lead to one end of the yard to the ritual spot where the bulls are always sacrificed. All of the audience who had joined in the mad procession, singing and dancing, form a large circle and intone a chant appropriate to the occasion, to the hammering, clanking accompaniment of the ogan:

Moin nan sang	korali ouan-nié,	I am in the blood of korali ouan-nié,
En yél		Eh yeh!
Moin nan sang		I am in the blood of
Simbi lan Dézo, Simbi Ian Paka.		Simbi lan Dézo, Simbi Ian Paka.
Allez mander Jean-Pierre Pong'oué.		Go and ask Jean-Pierre Pong'oué.
Ya yé, moin nan sang hél		Yah, yeh, I am in the blood, hey!

The houn'sihs clap their hands in time, swaying to the music, while the official sacrificer slowly orients the knife, traces, a cross upon the bull, makes three feigned strokes, and finally, with a single thrust plunges in the blade just behind the neck. Almost at once the bull falls to his knees and dies in the midst of howling and screaming.

## Mam'bo Miracia Treats The Sick

A sick man whose illness is considered very grave has just been brought to the oum'phor. He is a peasant from the great Cul de Sac Plain, a man in fairly comfortable circumstances, who frequently visits Port-au-Prince to take care of his affairs. He is a well-built fellow about thirty years old, apparently struck down in full health by a malady as sudden as it is violent. From the onset of the attack his family was worried, as his symptoms lead them to fear some supernatural intervention.

Consequently, one of the man's relatives hastened to pay a "visit" to the neighborhood houn'gan who, after laying out a few playing cards in a *layé*, a flat bamboo bark basket, revealed that certain dead

spirits had been "sent" after the poor fellow and that he had been "given" to Baron Samedi, Lord of the Cemetery. Counter measures are most urgently required to forestall his death.

The members of his family got together and decided to ask Miracia, the mam'bo of La Saline, if she would agree to "treat" the sick man. When Miracia understood what they wanted, she immediately referred the matter to her personal mystères—in particular to Brisé, the great "Work Chief" of her oum'phor who, when consulted, promised to undertake the treatment.

After shaking her cockle-shells over the *layé*, Miracia informed the family that not merely one, but three dead spirits had been "sent." She also disclosed several other pertinent items of information. Accordingly, as soon as they had reached an understanding with the mam'bo about the projected treatment, the sick man was brought to the oum'phor; for if no treatment whatever had been attempted, he would surely have died.

That night he was laid out in the peristyle on a mat next to the center-post. He appeared extremely ill and was very nearly unconscious. He neither spoke nor moved, seemed abnormally weak, and had not eaten for fifteen days. The family brought all the items necessary for the ceremony to be performed in accordance with the mam'bo's instructions.

In the *Caille-Guédé*, the inner chamber of the oum'phor dedicated to the loa Guédé, a *vèvé* representing a coffin with handles on the sides was traced on the floor with ashes and coffee-grounds. The patient's measurements had previously been taken by means of a small knotted cord. Two small, old mats were oriented and placed upon the *vèvé*, completely covering it. Then the sign of the cross was made over the mats with ashes.

On a table three small *couis* were prepared containing a mixture of corn grains and roasted peanuts, and in the middle of each a small candle was set, on white, one yellow, and one black. Next to the *couis* was placed a bottle of clairin and a bottle of *kimanga*—a potent alcoholic ritual beverage, usually employed in the Pethro rite and varying in composition according to the tastes of the loas for whom it is prepared. Under the table was placed a large *coui* and two *gamelles* containing a darkish bath liquid consisting of ox-gall and other ingredients.

At length, Maracia orders the patient to be brought in. First, how-

ever, his attendants are obliged to remove their clothes and put them on again inside out—an absolutely necessary precaution.

Nevertheless, the dead spirits are apparently getting suspicious that steps are being taken to drive them away, for the moment the attendants try to bring in the patient, one of the spirits speaking through his mouth declares that, do what they will, he will not depart; they will not succeed in driving him away; instead, he will grow even stronger. Those standing within earshot reply to the effect that "We'll see who's the stronger!"

Only with difficulty can they lift the sick man, even by supporting him below the arms. They nearly have to carry him on account of his extreme weakness. Now and then the voice of one of the spirits can be heard muttering defiance to the *mam'bo*. Clad in a long white night-shirt, the patient at length falteringly enters the *Caille-Guédé* and is made to recline on the mats covering the *vèvè*. His head rests upon a large stone just at the foot of a large cross of black wood. His night-shirt is removed and he wears only a pair of white shorts. Not a word comes from his lips. His eyes are closed, or only half open, and totally without expression.

A white cloth is rolled into a *bande-mâchoire* or chin-band, placed under his jaws and tied on top of his head as though he were a corpse. Another band, narrower, binds his two big toes together. His arms are stretched alongside his body, palms up.

His entire body is "crossed" with ashes. The small *couis* containing the burning candles are placed one at each shoulder and one at the feet. In another *coui* filled with *roroli* (sesame seeds) burns a bit of incense and asafoetida. The brownish stone belonging to *Brisé* is placed in its white plate near the patient's head.

The small chamber serving as the *Caille-Guédé* will scarcely hold a dozen people, inasmuch as the patient, stretched out in the center of the floor, occupies most of the space. An ancient lantern hangs on the wall, while a large taper set upon the masonry *pé* forming the base of the cross furnishes a dim, smokey light. Various wierd objects on the *pé* can be seen in the shadows; other furniture forms a dark, indistinguishable mass. Stones rubbed with oil reflect a dim gleam from the plate on which they repose. Occasionally a row of bottles sparkles in a ray of light. Here and there several *couis* can be distinguished, decorated with the various attributes of the Barons and the *Guédés*—the skull and crossbones, the shovels, the picks and axes

of the gravedigger painted white upon black with a few touches of gray or purple. On the wall hang the old clothes worn by the Guédés when they "mount" their "horses." A grotesque battered stovepipe hat perches crazily on a table next to a cigar.

A short Roman Catholic prayer is spoken by the mam'bo, followed by several others "offered" especially for the task at hand, as for example the prayer of St. Expeditus. Miracia always begins with the same words: "In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, in the name of Mary, in the name of Jesus, in the name of all the saints, all the dead . . ." She concludes by asking all the mystères to lend their presence this evening "with God's permission," in order that He may grant success to her undertaking. When all the *djohouns*, or Voodoo mystères of *Guinée* (Africa) have been thus called, a special invocation is pronounced in *langage*, addressed to certain of these mystères more directly associated with the present task.

At the conclusion of the prayers, small piles of corn and roasted peanuts, as well as the *manger djior*,—a ritual preparation consisting of bread, cassava, plantain, and the peelings of green plantains—are placed upon the abdomen, the chest, the forehead, and in the palm of each of the patient's hands. Miracia takes a chicken—a hen—of dark, variegated plumage, together with a yellowish-white *coq frisé*. The two birds are oriented in turn, and then the hen is held in front of each small pile and encouraged to peck at it, moving from the pile on the right hand to that on the left, then to the abdomen, the chest, and the forehead. The same thing is done with the cock, while Miracia pronounces sotto voce the prescribed invocations. A huge red rooster—a splendid bird with marvellous spurs, such as is used only for this type of treatment—is brought in, oriented, and likewise placed before the little piles and induced to peck at them. However, he does this with such violence that the sick man starts up in fear when the bird reaches his forehead. Miracia reassures him of the beneficial treatment the sick always receive at her place: "My treatment won't make a 'martyr' of anybody." Nevertheless, just to play it safe, someone holds his hand over the patient's eyes. The red rooster is then placed between the man's legs, the head in his crotch, while the chicken and the *coq frisé* are set side by side upon his chest, one on the right side, the other on the left, with their heads stretched out towards his middle.

More invocations and prayers both in *langage* and in Créole are spoken. Then the mam'bo gets up and takes the chicken in one hand and the *coq frisé* in the other. She orients them, pronouncing the sacred words, and "passes" them somewhat brusquely over the sick man, almost touching him. During the entire operation she pronounces the prescribed words: *Tout ça qui mauvais cé pour sorti, tout ça qui bon cé pour entré* (All that is evil, depart; all that is good, enter). As a leit-motiv, the refrain repeats: *Enté, té, té, tété, té . . .*

The mam'bo has a curious habit of crossing and uncrossing the man's arms, all the while holding the chickens just above his body, but only touching or slightly grazing his skin. These movements are principally made over the chest, then over the entire torso, and finally down the length of the arms. From time to time the man starts up violently, but he is ordered to relax quietly and to keep his head on the stone. This order, however, is really addressed to the dead spirits who have taken their abode in his body as much as to the patient.

Tirelessly Miracia requests the mystères to "release" the sick man and to "give him back his life," "with God's permission." The name of Brisé is cited in particular, as well as that of Aguroi-Linsou, who belongs to the Guédé group of mystères and who loves to "dance" in the mam'bo's head. Others invoked are Guédé Nouvavou, Guédé Houn-Sou, and Guédé Mazaca. Interspersed among the names of these mystères appear the names of various deceased members of the patient's family, called the "Danti" or chieftains of his race. The hen and the cock, separately and together, are then carefully passed over his entire body. After each passage the birds are held to one side away from the body and shaken, as though to remove whatever evil influence they may have absorbed from it.

The chickens are then placed upon the ground, and Miracia asks someone to hand her the *coq frisé*, which she turns loose in the yard. People believe that this bird at a given moment mysteriously disappears, possibly within a few days. It is the first hen passed over the sick man, however, which extracts the exorcised spirits. The *coq-frisé*, on the other hand, removes the "lingering evil air."

Next, the three *couis*, in which the small candles have been burning since the beginning of the ceremony, are taken and passed one after the other over the patient from head to foot. They are moved over his forehead in a circle, and after they are placed on the ground again, the stone belonging to Brisé is solemnly oriented and passed over the

patient in the same manner. All the while Miracia continues the invocations with the recurring *Enté, té, té, té, té . . .* The invocation to Brisé spoken by the mam'bo is "by the power of Brisé of the Mountain, Break-bones, Break-limbs, *Neg cassa manbila hila congo, bila louvimba*. After these orders for Pethro, Man of the Tozin pool, Man at the Miragoâne Bridge."

The mam'bo then goes to the basin containing the "bath liquid," takes as much of it as she can hold in her cupped hands, and with a quick, rough movement, fairly slaps it right at the sick man's head and face. This performance is repeated several times, the man starting up suddenly at the unexpected shower. He struggles, tries to raise his head, and growls dismally. An attendant forces him to lie still but the mam'bo remarks *Cé pas faite li; cé pas li minm qu'ap fait ça; cé mort-à!* (It's not his fault; he isn't the one who's doing that; it's the dead spirit.)

To keep this performance going several people in relays continue to thrash the sick man with water—his face, head, neck, and torso. They help him rise to a half-sitting position, the more easily to lash him with packets of leaves, bark, and roots soaked in a brownish liquid. Meanwhile, the chinband falls off in the struggle. The cord that bound his two big toes together is loosed, and he is made to stand up. His whole body drips water. The fellow in charge of this part of the treatment is drenched in perspiration. The dead spirits trouble the man's body, making him start up suddenly; they grumble and howl as though beaten. The mam'bo keeps right on ordering them to depart, threatening to employ any and all means to drive them out. A piece of garlic is put in the patient's mouth. Soon a kind of quiet seems to descend upon him, yet he appears curiously distant. He falls back on the mat unconscious—the dead spirits have abandoned him.

Immediately the mambo leans over his recumbent figure and calls out his name over and over again with great energy: *Ovril! Orvil! Orvil! Cé ou? Cé ou qui là?* (Orvil! Orvil! Orvil! Is it you? Are you there?) Finally a feeble moan and a scarcely perceptible "yes" can be heard. Instantly a confiance takes the bottle of clairin and pours it over the stone of Brisé which lies in a plate, setting it on fire. He takes this burning alcohol and passes it rapidly over the man's entire body. He is held up gently so that this medication can be more easily applied. Tiny bluish flames play over the confiance's hands but quickly flicker out as they come in contact with the patient's damp

body. The mambo seizes the bottle of *kimanga* and sprays it out through her teeth several times over his body. After being vigorously massaged for a while, the patient appears to have regained a little strength. Most important of all: the expression on his face is completely different. His eyes have a weary look, but at any rate there is a human expression in them.

Miracia gives the signal to leave the *Caille-Guédé* and proceed several paces to the oum'phor yard where a large hole has been dug right next to the *repositoires*. The trunk of a small, recently uprooted banana tree leans propped against another tree. It is about as tall as a man, and will be used to "redeem the patient's life."

The hole is encircled by a crown of seven small lamps made of oranges cut in half, scooped out, filled with castor oil, and furnished with a hand-twisted cotton wick. The three small *couis* are also brought out and arranged in the form of a triangle. The patient comes forth supported by the others, but appearing a little stronger than before. He is lowered into the hole in a standing position, facing towards the west, and holding the banana tree in his hands with the roots touching the ground at the bottom of the hole. The hen used earlier in the treatment is again passed over his entire body, while the mambo continues to utter the following invocations: "With the permission of God, the Saints, the Dead, by the power of Papa Brisé, Mr. Aguroi-Linsou, Mr. Guédé Nibo, Mr. Guédé Nouvavou, and All Guédés, I demand that you return the life of this man. I, mam'bo Yabofai, demand the life of this man. I buy for cash, I pay you; I owe you nothing!" The formulas in *langage* follow this invocation.

Next, Miracia takes the small *couis* one after the other, pours the contents in her hand, and rubs them over the man's body. They fall in the hole and remain there, and the *couis* are placed on the edge. She now takes a jug and quickly pours its contents over the man's head, and, holding it by the neck, lowers it behind the man down as far as the hole, breaks it with a solid blow, and lets the pieces fall into the hole.

Miracia then takes the hot oil from one of the small lamps in the hollow of her hand and rubs it on the patient. This action is repeated with oil from each of four lamps, and during this part of the ceremony somebody out in the yard keeps cracking a whip.

The mam'bo takes the chicken, holds it tightly together by bending its head against its body, and places it in the hole down against the

roots of the banana tree. Squatting down, all at once she shoves a great quantity of dirt into the hole, while the *confiance*, supporting the patient under the arms, lifts him out and sets him down again beside the hole. This act is accomplished very quickly, and without losing any time the hole is filled up and the earth stamped down around the tree. The chicken is thus buried alive. Miracia never ceases to utter the necessary formulas designed to insure the success of the operation. The three remaining lamps are placed in the form of a triangle around the tree.

Clairin is poured as it was previously in the *Caille-Guédé* in the plate containing the stone of Brisé. The stone is ignited and passed over the patient who is now standing several feet away from the hole. Three small piles of gunpowder are placed on the ground in the form of a triangle where the man is standing with feet spread apart. After the gunpowder is ignited, Miracia again "sprays" some *kimanga* over and around him to the four cardinal points.

An undershirt, white with red patches, called a *maldjoc*, meaning "evil eye" or "bad luck," is produced, and a corner of it is twisted and slightly burned. Holding this roughened and scorched cloth in her hand Miracia traces several signs in the air before the face and body of the patient. She gives him the *maldjoc* to slip on. The long nightgown is handed to him before he is brought to the peristyle. He no longer needs to be supported, his walk is much steadier, and his eyes are brighter. A definite change has taken place in him.

In the peristyle a white handkerchief is knotted around his head in such a way as to cover it completely. His feet are washed, and he is given a very hot infusion of leaves to drink which had previously been prepared. Then he is told to lie down and keep well covered. The stone of Brisé is placed under his pillow.

The next morning the patient felt much better. He was able to get up by himself and wash. He spoke, and asked for something to eat for the first time since his fifteen days' fast. He was given some tea and vegetable broth. For dinner he requested some potato pancakes and a red herring. A veritable resurrection!

A patient under treatment should not, as a security measure, leave the *oum'phor* enclosure for any reason whatsoever, for he is not yet out of danger. The first hen that was passed over his body during the treatment in the *Caille-Guédé* removed the *expéditions* (the three dead spirits). The *coq frisé*, which was passed over him next, took

away the *reste mauvais air* (remaining evil air). The chicken which was buried alive at the foot of the banana tree, together with the tree itself, is supposed to have *racheter* (redeemed) the man's life. Baron Samedi, chief loa of the cemetery, had been asked to graciously accept this exchange of lives. But it was the Power, given through her Knowledge (*connaissance*), that enabled the mam'bo to induce this mystère to accept the barter.

If the man is to survive, the tree dies. If the tree lives, the man will probably die, the bargain having been refused. The *vèvè* which was traced on the floor of the *Caille-Guédé* cannot be swept away until the man departs, cured or dead.

## Ceremony of the Bark of Agoueh

A small boat is prepared, loaded with all kinds of food and drink offerings preferred by the mystère Agoueh. A watch is maintained all through the night in the *oum'phor* by *houn'sihs*, *mambos*, *houn'gans*, and *houn'tor-guis*. The following day at early dawn it is loaded onto a truck which transports it, together with the *oum'phor* personnel and with drums, a trumpet, ritual flags, *assons*, the ritual flour for the *vèvès*, the ritual machete of *la place*, candles, and other articles, to a beach or to some spot near the shore. There the boat is carefully loaded with everything that is going to be offered in sacrifice to the mystère. A ceremony is held rapidly, after which a series of *vèvès* is traced making a ring around the boat. The trumpet sounds, accompanied by drums and seashells used as horns. The flags, carried by the *houn'sihs cò-drapeaux* (flag-bearers) and lead by *la place* armed with his machete, salute both the ship and its cargo after being oriented to the four cardinal points. A *houn'gan* carries the loaded boat upon his head down to another boat on the shore in which everybody embarks. The boat hoists anchor to the sound of drums, ritual chants, trumpet, and seashells, and heads out to sea.

Meanwhile a *houn'gan* lights an oil lamp made in a white cup, the favorite color of Agoueh, which he places in the center of the bark at the time of embarkation. The customary prayers are recited. The most important member of the ceremony is without doubt the one upon whom most of the attention has been paid since leaving the *oum'phor*, namely a snow-white sheep. The sheep is also placed on board the

boat, and while the prayers are recited preparations are made to offer this sheep to the mystère of the sea, Maitre Agoueh R O-yo, by casting it into the sea along with the bark, a pair of white pigeons, and a pair of white chickens, which the houn'sihs have constantly been waving in the air all during the sailing.

The ritual bark is traditionally sent off to Ifé. It is there that the sheep and bark, pigeons and chickens are thrown into the sea at the moment when the drums and the houn'sihs go into a state of hallucinations and mystic frenzy. Then the bark returns from Ifé. During all the passage, the mam'bo who offers the sacrifice remains standing and leaning on the single mast facing the prow of the boat and agitating symbolically and magically the ritual oar of the Voodoo mystère. At no moment do the drums cease to beat. Upon returning, the ceremony is completed on the shore.

## A Calendar of Voodoo Ceremonies

The following calendar of ceremonies primarily concerns the Voodoo seen in Port-au-Prince and its environs, because all the regions of Haiti do not practice Voodoo in the same manner when it comes to considering the differences in ritual of a single region. Just so, Voodoo is fundamentally the same everywhere, differences being due to the African groups that practice it. To all intents and purposes, these differences make it almost impossible to devise a Voodoo calendar with complete accuracy. For where a particular oum'phor in Arcahaié will hold a service traditionally set, for example, on June 15th, for the mystère Grande Aloumandia, the same mystère might be "served" at Léogane on May 2nd. The following table is therefore compiled from the elements of several oum'phors in order to give a general idea of Voodoo feasts:

### *January*

- |         |   |
|---------|---|
| 2, 3, 4 | Casé gâteaux (Breaking the cakes), a communal form of <i>manger-loa</i> |
| 6       | Les Rois (The Kings)  |

*February*

- 25 Manger têtes d'eau (Ritual feeding of springs)

*March*

- 16 Loko Davi (Eating of the ritual wood and of its guard)  
 19 Saint Joseph (Expression of the jurisdiction of Legba)  
 20 Legba Zaou (Eating consists mainly of a black goat and  
 of *bananes laudanne*)

*April*

- 27 Dan Wédo, Clermeille  
 29 Cassé canarie (Breaking the jugs: deliverance of the souls  
 from purgatory)  
 31 Mangé-les-morts (Feeding the dead: The *managers crus*  
 are offered to the jugs or jars in which the souls are  
 supposed to reside and where they eat; subsequently  
 the *manger cuits* are offered them, particularly *gombo*  
 or okra, *moussah*, Carib-cabbage)

*May*

- 12 Feeding of different loas  
 18 Feeding of Grande Aloumandia  
 20, 21 Sim'bi blanc  
 30 Chanté-messes (Sung masses in the Roman Catholic  
 Churches), Martinique dances, Bamboches

*June*

- 24 Saint John  
 28 M'sieu Guimeh Sauveur; Mystère Gé Agoum' Tonnerre;  
 Table served for Maitresse Erzulie, Maitresse Ténaise,  
 Maitresse Mam'bo (common table)

*July*

- 25 Papa Ogou (alias Saint James the Greater), to whom is  
 offered particularly sheep and goats  
 28 Grande Saint Anne (alias Mystère Grande Délai and  
 Grande Aloumandia; common table)  
 29 Maitresse Silvéric, who only very slightly tastes of the  
 food offered to her  
 Maitresse Lorvana, who smells flowers for her nourish-  
 ment

*August*

- 25 Communion table for Dan Wédo (alias Saint Louis, King  
 of France)  
 29 O-Dan; L'Orient, one of the most important mystères.  
 30, 31 Aga-ou (Offerings: particularly goats, peppers, pepper-  
 mint)

*September*

- 25 Roi Wangol; Mousondi  
 29 Manman Aloumandia  
 30 Maitresse Délai (A very important mystère who "walks"  
 with the *houn'tor*: the voodoo tambourine player)

*October*

- 30, 31      Singing masses in the Roman Catholic Churches  
 Communion table  
 Martinique Dance  
 Armchair ritually covered with 30 or 40 scarves of different colors, exposed in the peristyle and "served"

*November*

- 1, 2      Bamboches for the Guédé mystères: the dead who come out of the cemeteries, possess their "horses," and come into the oum'phors to amuse themselves in the form of souls incarnated or reincarnated  
 25      Manger-yam (Eating the yams)

*December*

- 10      Ganga-Bois  
 12, 13, 14      Agouch R Oyo (Feeding the sea)  
 25      Bath of Christmas  
 Leaf-rubbing (for medical treatments and talismans for magic protection)  
 Ritual sacrifices of pigs and goats  
 Bonfires (boucans) for amusement, to which the loas come to bathe themselves and their protégés  
 Sacrifice of turkeys for Caplaou