

21 Africa and Discussion Forum

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Re: Rama

Name: Pa

Comments

I know a few stories and a little bit of background info on the people in our direct lineage. Next time I go to Miami, I hope to meet with a man name Christian who is a very old priest of Shango. He knew some of them personally and hopefully I can twist his arm to share some information.

Ma Monserrate Asinabi came from Africa with Yemoja made. It is assumed that she came from Oyo, but I'm not sure. She made Osha to Shangofunke (Arabia Oviedo) who, with her sisters, created quite a dynasty of Oloshas in Cuba. I have heard that both of these women lived in Matanzas, but that is not verified.

More is known about Adela Oduanla and Rigoberto Oshunyemi, mainly because there are more people still alive who knew them.

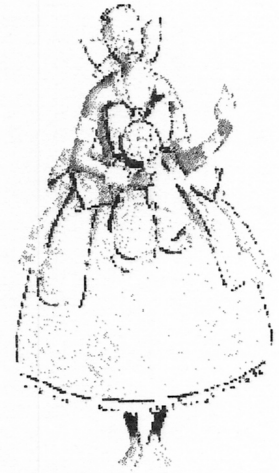
Adela was sort of a "bridge" between Havana and Matanzas, the two stongholds of the religion in Cuba. At one time there were many differences in the way ceremonies were conducted in these two areas. Adela was one of the most important priests who took on the task of bringing these two systems together to create a cohesive and codified religious system for the whole island. It was not only her immense knowledge of Orisha ceremony, but also her geographical location that made this possible. She lived in Madruga, which lies between Havana and Matanzas. She therefore was able to learn much from both religious enclaves, thereby making her knowledge vital to the reformation of the religion in Cuba. Also, since she was one of very few priestesses of Oshanla, many people from both areas came to her to receive this Orisha. It is said that her funeral rites made up the greatest religious spectacle ever seen in Cuba. Her elevated status, her age in Osha, and her stellar reputation as a priestess brought all of the greatest Oloshas from Cuba to Matanzas. El Jimagua, the eldest of the Oriates in the US, told me that her funeral was a virtual contest between Oriates and Babalawos from Havana and Matanzas, to see who could honor her more with their Egun and Orisha chants.

Rigoberto Oshunyemi, Adela's godson, who also lived in Madruga, was one of the true greats of the religion, as well as being a real pioneer with re-linking Cuba to Africa. He was the first Cuban-born Olosha to travel to Nigeria, bringing back with him much knowledge, as well as several indispensable ingredients that had been either nonexistent or in short supply in Cuba. He brought the first African grey parrot to Cuba. Prior to that, Cuban Oloshas would dye pigeon feathers with Mercurochrome to simulate the African Grey's tail feathers, which are used for many purposes in the religion, the most important being the crowning of the Iyawo on the middle day of his/her initiation.

Rigoberto is said to have initiated between 4 and 5 hundred Oloshas. He was the recipient of tremendous Ire from the Orishas, winning the Puerto Rican lottery six times. For this, he rewarded

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Shango with a solid gold pylon. His Orisha shrines were so elaborate and beautiful that, rather than being dismantled upon his death, they serve as the centerpiece of the Afro Cuban museum that is now housed in his former home. His widow, Fredesvinda Rosel, Oyayemi, attends the museum. Interestingly, in addition to being his widow, Oyayemi is also Rigo's goddaughter. Both Rigo and "Freddie", as she is called, were gay. To avoid being put in "reeducation camps" (concentration camps for gays) by Castro, they married and lived together platonically.

Rigo was renowned for mounting an incredible Oshun. Jimagua described her to me as "the most splendid Oshun who ever descended to the Earth." Her predictions, prescriptions, and afudashe were unmatched.

He was no slouch when it came to working the religion either. My grandfather, Olomidara, told me that it was not uncommon for him to initiate 3 and 4 people at a time. He told me of one initiation in which an Ogun, a Yemoja, a Shango, and an Oshun were all being initiated simultaneously, and every one of the Iyawos became possessed at the same time.

One well-known event witnessed by many Oloshas in Cuba that is particularly telling of Rigo's ashe concerns his death and funeral rites. When an Olosha dies, an elder Oriate does a ceremony called "ituto" or "itutu." This ceremony serves several functions. First and foremost, it determines which Orishas will "leave with" the deceased Olosha, and which will be "inherited" by a godchild or family member. The ituto also releases the soul of the Olosha who has passed on. It is well known that Rigoberto gathered his godchildren together, performed his own ituto, and then quietly passed away. That, my friends, is some way to go.

I'll pass on more stories as they come to me and as I learn more.

Pa

Last changed: January 19, 2001