

A REPORT ON THE USE OF STONE CLAPPERS FOR THE ACCOMPANIMENT OF SACRED SONGS

A practice found near the town of Iwo in the Western Region of Nigeria.

by

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This report is primarily concerned with the use of stone clappers at the village of Ikire Ile, situated about 6 miles north of Iwo. However there is some slight evidence of the use of a rock gong just outside the town of Iwo itself, and the information on this latter practice is also included herein.

Before proceeding further let me explain the meaning of the terms "stone clappers" and "rock gong". The physical nature of some rock gongs has been well described by Bernard Fagg in a number of papers¹, and a brief description is thus all that is necessary in this report. A rock gong is any slab of rock which, when beaten with stones at a number of definite points, is used to produce a rhythmic background to traditional songs; there may be a number of beaters and they may beat either with one stone each or with two stones, one held in either hand; the beating produces a ringing sound from the rock and this may or may not have a definite pitch. Stone clappers, obviously related to rock gongs, consist simply of two conveniently sized stones which are held one in either hand; the smaller of the two stones is held in the beater's right hand and this is then used for striking the left stone to produce a sharp percussive sound; the clappers are usually employed in groups, i.e. two or more players, and supply a rhythmic background to traditional songs.

The presence of a rock gong at Iwo was first reported by Mr. D. Adeniji, a field assistant working with the Yoruba Historical Research Scheme. The reported rock gong is situated on the north-west side of the hill, known locally as *Oke Orire* (Rock here is my head), which overlooks the waterworks and lies about a mile from the town on the Ikire Ile road.

On the same side of the hill as the reported rock gong there are a number of very large egg-shaped rocks, some reaching a height of twelve feet or more. These large rocks, seven in all, are worshipped as gods, but I have been unable to decide whether the rock itself is the god, or whether it represents or contains the god. Originally only four of these rocks were worshipped, and the three most important were known as *Baba Orire*, *Iyalode* (*Orire's* wife) and *Jagun* (*Orire's* field-marshal). According to local legend the present shrines on the hill were first discovered by a hunter, Ajekoko by name, who so admired the largest of the rocks that he saluted it by touching the ground before it with his forehead, exclaiming "*Oke ori re*" (Rock here is my head). This is said to have occurred during the reign of the 4th. Oba of Iwo, the present incumbent being the 23rd., though of the intervening Obas one reigned for a day only and is thus often not counted.

The reported rock gong is beaten in honour of the *Okeorire* shrine, but there are so many versions of its use that the veracity of some of the following statements is open to doubt:-

1. The first worshipper possessed only one drum, of the *Elegede* family (an idiophonic wooden drum without membrane), and so he used the reported rock gong to supplement the rhythms of his solitary instrument.
2. In the time of the first worshipper, Ajekoko, there was a limited variety of drum families in use among the Yoruba, and these instruments were already consecrated to certain gods with the result that when the reported rock gong was first found it was employed for the worship of *Okeorire*.

3. When the shrine was first worshipped there were no drums in use among the Yoruba, music being made with gourd rattles and stones.
4. Four people beat the rock gong at the same time, and this beating was originally done with small stones. However the beaters' hands became too blistered and so a special stick with an iron head was developed for the beating. These sticks (*gongo*) are no longer in use since the reported rock gong itself is no longer used.
5. Five drummers beat the rock, and then only on rare occasions e.g. during a smallpox outbreak when it is feared that the sound of drums might infuriate the god responsible for the epidemic.
6. The rock gong is only beaten once a year for the *Okeorire* festival, and on this occasion it is only used to commemorate the ancestral practice.
7. The rock gong is no longer beaten because it was once used to settle a dispute in the town, the sound of its beating having caused the death of those disputants in the wrong.
8. The rock gong is beaten by a select company of drummers and, being a slight distance from the *Orire* shrine and hidden from the worshippers by intervening shrubbery, leads the latter to believe that the gods are drumming in the heavens.

The priest in charge of all the shrines, the *Aboke*, admitted that the rock gong was formerly used but was emphatic in denying any present use, stating that the worshippers today use drums of the *Dundun* family.

An examination of the reported rock gong failed to show any signs of contemporary usage, the whole surface being uniformly weathered, but a number of visible indentations might have been caused by past use, though the position of these indentations did not correspond with the beating points indicated by those informants who claimed that the rock is in present use.

My chief informant on the present use of the gong was Mr. Oyegbele Ayandiran, who claims that his family, being drummers and worshippers of *Okeorire*, are the hereditary beaters of the rock gong. I took him to the hill and set to work in an attempt to notate the music he claims to know. Unfortunately his performance was so inconsistent and hesitant that I was unable to make any transcriptions or recordings of value.

Here are the words of the songs that he attempted to sing to a rhythmic accompaniment from the reported gong:-

1. *E jek'ajo se, Oba o pe olo'ke ma bo oke.*
Let us worship together, the Oba does not prevent us from worshipping our rock.
2. *Ade'gbo d'ewe, oke l'o wo mi d'agba.*
The rock, like a medicinal herb, has reared me.
3. *B'olori we'ri oke we'ku mi danu.*
As heads are washed, O rock, wash death off my head.
4. *T'emi ni ngse e ma pemi ni were.*
I am doing what I like (i.e. worshipping the rock) so do not think me mad.
5. *Baba omo mi gba mi ngo ma sin, gba mi.*
Father of my child (i.e. the rock) save me, I will worship you, save me.
6. *E ba ngb'omo oke, lanti lanti.*
Give me a son of the rock, big, big.
7. *Oke l'awa sin, oke l'awa bo.*
It is the rock we worship, it is the rock we sacrifice to.

8. *Alade wa koju, oke gbami ngo masin.*
Kings meet face to face; O rock save me, I will ever worship you. (Sung when an Oba is present; the second king is the rock).
9. *Orisa wo'mo wo'ya l'awoye, wo'ya l'awaye.*
O god (i.e. the rock) keep the child and the mother alive.

Just as I was unable to obtain any standard version of the song melodies and rock gong rhythms that Mr. Ayandiran claimed to remember, so the words of the above songs changed from day to day, but, after much deliberation, the above versions were given as the authentic ones. It is interesting to note that Song No. 6 is also used at Ikire Ile, the words being identical but the melody being quite different from any of the versions offered by my Iwo informant.

From the information offered by the people of Iwo, I have come to two conclusions on the use of the reported rock gong:-

- a. The rock gong has most probably been used in the past for music making in connection with the worship of the rock shrines.
- b. It is no longer in use, its last authentic employment having been at least 20 years ago.

At Ikire Ile I found, after two or three unsuccessful attempts, a shrine similar to that of *Oke Orire* at Iwo. This shrine, situated about ten minutes walk from the village and on the bottom slopes of the large hill which overlooks Ikire Ile, contains only one large rock which is worshipped and known simply as *Oke*. About twenty yards below the actual shrine there is a small sharp fragment of rock which is half embedded in the ground. This is also revered and acts as an acolyte to the large rock being thought to warn the latter of the approach of any humans. Offerings are made to it.

Most of the information that follows came from a Mr. Folahanmi Amoo, one of the worshippers of the rock.

The villagers do not remember much of the history of the shrine, but state that the first settlers in the area were told by an *Ifa* oracle that there was a large rock in the neighbourhood which, if worshipped and properly cared for, would give them many children.

When I first went to the village I was in search of possible rock gongs, and so it was some time before I learnt that the villagers remembered their ancestors using stone clappers to form rhythmic accompaniments to the songs to the rock deity. This practice seemed possibly related to the use of rock gongs, and this would seem to be further borne out by the fact that, upon examination, no rocks suitable for use as gongs were to be found anywhere in the neighbourhood of the shrine. There are many fair sized rocks around but they are all too deeply embedded in the ground to produce anything more than a dull thud on being struck.

Mr. Amoo assembled three female shrine worshippers, to sing the traditional songs, and three male shrine worshippers who claimed to remember the rhythms used by their ancestors in using the stone clappers. They stressed the fact that stone clappers are no longer in use, drums of the *Dundun* family together with gourd rattles (*Sekere*) and iron clapper-rattles (*Aro*) being used today.

Here are the words of the songs as sung by the three female worshippers:-

1. *E ba ngb'omo oke, lanti lanti.*
Give me a son of the rock, big, big.

It will be noticed that this song has also been listed as for use at the *Okeorire* shrine at Iwo. My doubts as to the musical ability of my Iwo informant were immediately confirmed on hearing this song in a most definite manner at Ikire Ile.

2. *Omo egbe e sun mo hin,
Bai lele ikoko a sun mo etile.*
Members of the group move near here,
When it is evening time the wolf moves nearer home.
3. *Egbe me domo ayo,
Are la nfomo ayo se.*
My company becomes the sons of ayo seeds,
We use these ayo seeds for playing.
4. *E! mo gbe rumole mi de,
Orisa eni la ngbe genge.*
Eh! I bring my god,
It is one's own god that one worships.

Let us now examine the song melodies together with the accompaniments:-

Song 1.

The total length of each repetition of the song is eight quavers, five for the solo and four for the chorus with an overlap between the two. This overlap leads to an unintentional major third harmony. The song is in a straightforward regular divisive duple rhythm.

Before performing the songs, my informant stated that the same accompanimental rhythm would be used in all the examples (Letter A). As we shall see, this statement is incorrect though the reason for all the accompaniments being considered the same will become clear.

The accompaniment to the present song, being also regular and duple in rhythm, has main beats coinciding with those of the song giving the whole of the music a monorhythmic effect. The accompaniment phrase, four quavers in length, fits twice against each repetition of the song.

The normal practice in all the songs is for the singers to commence and for the accompaniment to start as soon as the former are established in tempo.

Note that the tempo of the present song is given as a quaver=168, this being approximately half the speed of the following songs.

In distinction to the normal practice in Yoruba music, there are no closing sentences to any of the examples quoted. My informant stated that the music finished when the performers were tired or wished to change to another song. In practice the music came to a close when one or more of the performers stopped singing or beating, there being no attempt to end in unison (e.g. as when the closing sentence "*Oro koko ni gbangba l'o nbo*" is used).

The musical score for Song 1 is presented in two staves. The top staff is the vocal line, written in a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 2/8. The tempo is indicated as quarter note = 168. The lyrics are: "E ba n - gbe - mo o - ke," followed by "e". The bottom staff is the accompaniment, also in a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp and a time signature of 2/8. It features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, with a box containing the letter 'A' at the beginning, indicating a specific accompanimental rhythm.

Song 2.

This song has a total length of twenty four quavers. Once again it is of the "call and response" variety, the solo covering 10 quavers and the chorus 17, thus leading to an overlap of 3 quavers between the two parts. The rhythm of the vocal line is irregular and additive. Note the immediate glissando between the 3rd. and 4th. solo notes, and the delayed glissando between the 6th. and 7th. notes in the same part.

The accompaniment in this case is markedly different from that of the first song. Mr. Amoo's belief that the accompaniments were identical is readily appreciated if the two are compared (Letters A and B). The triple rhythm in B is obviously derived from the duple rhythm of A. In fact, in performance it was possible to detect an attempt by the third stone clapper to return to an even closer relationship with the duple rhythm (Letters A and C). In order to test this assumption, I asked the third beater to play his phrase against the 12 quaver length version of the "Standard Pattern" (*kon ko-lo*) so common in Yoruba music, as it is in most other kinds of African music. His attempts to approximate to the duple pattern were then even more marked (Letter D). I conclude that the version quoted under letter C on the score is the ideal, but that lack of practice, the tempo of the music (quaver=324), and the heaviness of the stones would not allow the performance of semiquavers.

Note that the accompaniment to this second song, and to the following examples, is now in 6 quaver length phrases, these fitting 4 times against each repetition of the song verse.

The musical score for Song 2 is presented in three systems. Each system consists of a vocal line and an accompaniment line. The tempo is marked as =324. The key signature is one sharp (F#).

System 1: The vocal line begins with a tempo marking of =324. The lyrics are "O m(ə)le - gbe e sun mo hin,". The accompaniment line features a 3/8 time signature and a 2/8 time signature.

System 2: The vocal line continues with the lyrics "ba - i - le - le i - ko - ko a". A boxed letter "B" is placed at the beginning of the accompaniment line. The accompaniment line features a 2/4 time signature and a 3/8 time signature.

System 3: The vocal line continues with the lyrics "Sun m(ə)le - ti - le". The accompaniment line features a 3/8 time signature and a 2/8 time signature.

Handwritten musical score for the first system. It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 2/4. The vocal line has the lyrics: "bi - i - le - le i - ko - ko a". The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and rests, with vertical tick marks indicating the placement of stone clappers.

Handwritten musical score for the second system, marked with a circled 'C'. The time signature is 3/8. The piano accompaniment continues with the same rhythmic pattern as the first system, with stone clapper ticks.

Handwritten musical score for the third system, marked with a circled 'D'. The time signature is 7/8. The vocal line has the lyrics: "kon kon teo la kon teo - lo, kon kon ko - la". The piano accompaniment continues with the rhythmic pattern and stone clapper ticks.

Handwritten musical score for the fourth system, starting at measure 324. The time signature is 2/8. The vocal line has the lyrics: "E - gbe me, do - mo a - yo". The piano accompaniment continues with the rhythmic pattern and stone clapper ticks.

Handwritten musical score for the fifth system. The vocal line has the lyrics: "a re la n - fo - mo a - yo". The piano accompaniment continues with the rhythmic pattern and stone clapper ticks.

Song 3.

Once again of the "call and response" variety—the Solo covers 10 quavers and the Chorus 14, there being thus no overlapping between the two parts. The rhythm is irregular and additive. In common with many other Yoruba songs, it has a tendency to a use of hemiolas. Counting both Solo and Chorus bars from the beginning, we find the following:— bars 3 and 4 add up to one bar of $\frac{6}{8}$; bars 5, 6 and 7 add up to one bar of $\frac{3}{4}$; bars 8 and 9 add up to one bar of $\frac{6}{8}$; bars 10, 11 and 12 add up to one bar of $\frac{3}{4}$; etc.

The musical score for Song 3 is presented in four systems. Each system includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are written below the vocal line.

System 1 (Solo):
 Vocal: E - gbe me da - mo a - yo,
 Piano: Accompaniment for the first two bars.

System 2 (Solo):
 Vocal: se.
 Piano: Accompaniment for the next two bars.

System 3 (Chorus):
 Vocal: a - re la - n - fo - mo a - yo.
 Piano: Accompaniment for the first two bars.

System 4 (Chorus):
 Vocal: E! ma gbe ru - mo - le mi de,
 Piano: Accompaniment for the next two bars.

System 5 (Chorus):
 Vocal: o - ri - sa e - mi la - ngbe ge
 Piano: Accompaniment for the final two bars.

Song 4.

This song is laid out in exactly the same way as are the two previous examples. The vocal rhythm is irregular and additive, but with no suggestion of hemiola. The Solo and Chorus division of the total twenty four quaver length verse is in the same proportion as in the 3rd. song i.e. 10 quaver length solo, 14 quaver length chorus. Note that the second song is also really divided in this proportion, this being evident if the three quaver overlap of the chorus is ignored.

The musical score for Song 4 consists of two systems. The first system shows a vocal line in 3/8 time, with lyrics: "E l mo gbe nu - mo - lo mi de,". The notes are: E (quarter), l (quarter), mo (quarter), gbe (quarter), nu (quarter), - mo (quarter), - lo (quarter), mi (quarter), de (quarter). The second system shows a rhythmic accompaniment on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The treble clef part has a single note 'nge' on a quarter rest. The bass clef part has a complex rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes, with vertical tick marks indicating the positions of stone clappers.

¹*The Cave Paintings and Rock Gongs of Birnin Kudu*—offprint from the Proceedings of the Third Pan-African Congress on Pre-History, 1955. *The Rock Gong Complex Today and in Prehistoric Times*—Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria, Vol. 1, No. 1, December, 1956.