

# Morphology of Wooden Door Panels in the Palace of Orangun of Ila in Igbomina land

Adeola Abiodun ADEOT<sup>1</sup>, Daniel Odekunle ODETAYO<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomosho*  
[aaadeoti29@lautech.edu.ng](mailto:aaadeoti29@lautech.edu.ng), 08066501678  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2196-4015>

<sup>2</sup>*Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomosho*  
[kunleodetayo49@gmail.com](mailto:kunleodetayo49@gmail.com), 08134249274  
<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-5634-6724>  
 Corresponding Author: Daniel Odekunle Odetayo

## Abstract

*The artistic culture of any society has been the considerable symbol of identification of that society. Suffice it to examine the traditional architecture and Yoruba traditional artworks such as wooden door panels from the same perspective. The study of forms and structure of artistic narratives in the primordial architecture like palace in Yoruba land is beckoning for art historical attention especially in the manner the indigenous means of documenting history is fast drifting out of sight as a result of acculturation. This study expatiates on the morphology of wooden door panels as historical objects in the ancient palace of Ila-Orangun, the fountainhead of Igbomina kingdom so as to documents the findings in the annals of art history. Howbeit, literature abounds on wood carvings in Africa yet, there is dearth of publications on the morphological exploration of wooden door panels in Yoruba palaces. The accomplishment of the objectives of this paper is made possible through the adoption of a descriptive design with a qualitative approach to analyze the data collected. The study reveals the relevance of wooden door panels as cultural heritages of Yoruba traditional arts in the palace of Orangun of Ila.*

**Keywords:** *Traditional art, Wood carvings, Culture, Yoruba, Palace, Igbomina,*

## 1 Introduction

The artistic culture of any society remains as the considerable symbol of identification of her people mindless of the artistic forms. In the same vein, the morphological components of wooden door panels in the primordial settings of palaces in Yoruba land are a composite of various historical ideas that speak volumes of cultures and traditions of Yoruba people. The structure of the images is relatively planned to distinctively narrate a body of myths peculiar to the Yoruba race; though Fakunle (2022:1) observes that foreign cultures have a damaging influence on African lifestyles. African countries of which the Yoruba race is outstanding consist of art philosophies available from divergent cultural collections and evolution. The individual groups with an exceptional art culture, architecture, and traditions reflect their lifestyles. Suffice it to say that art characterized the entire people's lives in Yoruba land and Africa at large; although, art form differs from one location to another (Oyinloye et.al 2020: 389). It is worth noting that the tradition of architectural embellishment started with the prehistoric men in the cave. They developed various art expressions such as using the blood of animals to illustrate drawings, paintings, and engravings on rock surfaces, caves, and ceilings. They also introduced sophisticated carvings of objects and stone-form art. Refaat (2012:265); Akinmolayan (2023:1); and Brommer (1995: 150-152) buttress that even Mesopotamia in the Egyptian art as well as the Rococo in the 18th century developed the idea of beautifying their temples or architecture with artworks. Hence, there is an urgent need for documentation of the remaining art traditions in the palaces before they disappear as a result of modern philosophies.

The incontestable fact remains that the Yoruba people are popular for the production of various artworks like pottery, bronze, textile, weaving, music, and wood carvings, among others; and these artworks are integral symbols of identifying Yoruba culture (Olaiya, 2022). Wood carvings are largely known as the most famous art tradition in Yoruba land owing to the availability of forest trees (Adepegba and Abati 2017:343 & Makinde and Aremu 2014:33). Apparently, the aptitude to preserve traditional architectures in any community in Yoruba

land specifically in Ila-Orangun is imbedded in crafting art objects that are congenial and correlate with religion, culture, traditions, and values of the people (Dicle, 2015:305). Traditional wooden sculptures remain a vital source of information on the provenance and stock of ancestors, migrations, material cultures, and values, through which different ethnic groups in Africa are identified. Usually, the Sub-Saharan African groups are fond of utilizing sculptures to sustain their history (Coleman, 2016: 370). Even the prehistoric men were said to have fashioned various defensive weapons from wood to gratify survival (Okoye *et.al* 2019:84). Since then, it has become a reoccurrence practice among people of countless ages to subscribe to different art pieces such as mural paintings, sculpture, wooden door panels, and house posts to unveil the cultural beliefs and traditions of people through symbolic imagery of themes and myths on traditional abodes, shrines, fences, and palaces.

Generally, Nigeria is saturated with diverse art corpuses amassed from its localities. Some of these art pieces include beadwork, metalwork, and woodcarving of which the woodcarving remains largely the most applauded Yoruba art culture (Onyema 2016; Abati 2020). Such similar art culture in Nigeria that had attracted relish in the cosmos are ceramics wares, Nok sculptures, Benin art, and numerous wood sculptures of Ife (Akintonde *et.al* 2015: 231). According to Adesanya (2023:1), wood carvings have been a conspicuous vocation among the inhabitants of Ila-Orangun where a legendary wood carver-Lamidi Fakeye, and others, began their wood carving career. Many of their works were used as palace embellishments such as door panels and verandah posts.

Anifowose and Olatubosun (2020: 141, 142) argue that the traditional palace in Yoruba land is purposely erected for the sake of preserving the cultural heritages, beliefs, traditions, and values of people. To a reasonable degree, artifacts are esteemed heritages, transferred from ancestors to their conscious descendants and preserved in their day-to-day activities (Onyema, 2016). It is sacrosanct that among these heritages are wooden door panels in the territories of *Obas* in Yoruba land used for documenting Yoruba myths and history. In the Yoruba traditional context, the apparent settings of palaces are the pivotal reflection of a socio-political milieu of people, religious beliefs, culture, and historical setting of *Kábíyèsi* (kings) and their retinues (Folaranmi and Ademuleya 2021: 1, 2). From the foregoing, it is understandable that art plays a momentous character in the narrative perspective of people (Fajuyigbe and Okunade 2015), especially in the ancient city of Ila Orangun where wooden doors of centuries were used to narrate different concepts of myths oscillating from the history of the indigenous town, the forebears, iconographical objects, culture, people's way of life, tradition, and religion. It is a prevalent attitude in Yoruba land for art like wooden door panels to be used as mirror to tell stories about people and their origins.

Wood sculpture generally, is said to have been a ubiquitous art tradition of several generations but, it is more preponderant in Yoruba land because of the availability of forest trees (Ezekwe and Nwana 2020:638). It has been observed that the artistic narratives ostensible in wooden door panels in Orangun's palace have not been given meaningful scholarly attention. The role of wood carving in the aesthetic descriptions of palaces in ancient times is enormous. It occupies an exuberant position in human life. Akande (2020: 10, 11) attests that the primitive Yoruba building style is an epitome of culture itself. But findings reveal that, as time goes by, traditional arts in ancient Yoruba palaces may likely become less popular in the aftermath of modern acculturation, and alien religious beliefs. Whereas, the conventional style of embellishing palaces in Yoruba land invariably has a cultural and historical undertone. Privilelli (2021:34) regards palaces as a special abode that accommodates several distinguished people of honour from various strata of life with dissimilar views, cultures, traditions, and opinions. So thus, the reasons for the morphology of wooden door panels and verandah posts in Igbomina land.

The word "morphology" in this context will highlight the artistic structure and formal arrangement of the imageries on the wooden door panels in the palace of Orangun of Ila to remove the ambiguity of judging the traditional art in Yoruba palaces as esoteric by the average art critic. In the same vein, explain the forms, styles, and detailed arrangement of the artistic concepts of the wooden door panels and verandah posts, as they contribute to the aesthetic value of the traditional architecture in Igbomina land. More importantly, to document the relics of the Yoruba race which we can regard as "*tiwantiwa*" (indigenous) lest they dissipate with growing contemporary innovations.

### 1.1 Aim and Objectives

This study is confined to the palace of Orangun of Ila; the ancient city of Ila-Orangun in the Igbomina kingdom where the largest variety of primordial art objects such as crowns, verandah posts, wooden door panels amongst other cryptic objects are located in Igbomina land. The paper is aimed at fathoming the symbolic meaning of artistic concepts of wooden door panels in the palace while the objectives are to sustain the historical record of wooden door panels and to document the findings in the reminiscence of art history for future scholars.

## 1.2 Literature Review

There are considerable numbers of articles on traditional art in Africa that indifference from historical records on primordial wooden doors in the ancient palace of Ila-Orangun. The idea of using decorative artworks in traditional abodes was traced to the prehistoric era (Akinmolayan et.al 2023:2-18; & Gofwen et.al 2018: 386-393). Also, Privilelli (2021:34) discusses palaces as abode of power where statesmen converge with wealthy ideas that are beneficial to the socio-political development of their area. The artistic culture in Nigeria was however examined by Onyima (20016:274) as a heritage that every society in Nigeria must cherish and strive to protect as they pass it down to succeeding generations. This same concern is shared by Dicle (2015:305, 306) who observes the urgent need for documentation of indigenous architecture in Africa. Anifowose and Olatubosun (2019a: 79-81 & 2020b:141, 142) point out the relevance of ornamentation in the traditional building in Yoruba land as the image of people's cultural milieu, especially the aesthetic structure of wooden door panels in palaces. Olaiya (2022) suggests that the only way to allow the survival of traditional architecture is to place premium value on traditional art in Yoruba land. Adebayo (2018: 69-73); Aboyeji (2018:68); and Adebayo (2015:1, 2) examine Ila-Orangun as an indigenous town in Yoruba land which doubled as the origin of Igbomina land with dialectical culture and religions. The latter author traces the origin of Ila-Orangun to Oduduwa the forebear of the Yoruba race. Aboyeji observes further how African countries were demeaned with labels as "dark continents" with blurred intellectuality and paganism. Unfortunately, this foolery imagery deluded many African societies to display sagacity towards their conventional culture, beliefs, and traditions. However, Ademola and Oladokun (2017: 53-55) postulate that the applications of wood sculptures with identifiable canons articulate greatly on traditional religion and culture of people. The paper calls for the recognition of wood carvers on the same ground. However, all the scholarly assertions left a vacuum for this study; the morphology of wooden door panels in the palace of Orangun of Ila.

## 1.3 Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive design with a qualitative method to analyze the data. The descriptive design paved the way for a concise analysis of the conceptual imageries of the doors to delineate Yoruba traditions and the indigenous people of Ila-Orangun. Information was sourced from both primary and secondary sources. The primary source involves the direct study and observation during the fieldwork, while the secondary source involves a keen study of extant related works of literature. The important stakeholders in the palace of Ila-Orangun were interviewed and relevant information about the functions of the door panels in the palace was recorded to substantiate the visual primary data. Research instruments such as video recorder and camera were used to capture the images of wooden door panels discovered in the palace. Moreover, the qualitative analysis provides answers to questions of why, how, where, and to what relevance are the wooden door panels in the palaces of Igbomina land.

## 2 Findings/Discussion

### 2.1 Brief History of Ila-Orangun, the Head of Igbomina Land

The antique town of Ila-Orangun comprises of people whose geographical territory occupies a latitude of 80 N of the equator and longitude 40 E of the Universal time not quite far from Ile-Ife Northeast with roughly 145 Kilometers (Adebayo 2015:73). Ila-Orangun shares border with Ekiti State in the East and Oyan and Otan-Ayegbaju in the West. At present, Ila-Orangun retains two-fold qualities of being recognized as an integral feature in the history of Yoruba and simultaneously a strong factor in the annals of Igbomina kingdoms (Ila Charity Club, 2000:2).

Ila-Orangun, being the fountain of the Igbomina land is very noticeable in the historical description of the twenty kingdoms of Yoruba land (Mullen 2004:1) as the ancient town plays a pivotal role in the artistry climate of the Igbomina kingdom with her large domain which advances to the Southeastern confluence of River Niger in Jebba area. Even though oral history has it that all Igbomina land had been bestowed to Orangun Fagbamila by Oduduwa as a possession; hitherto, a substantial part of this territory had slipped from Orangun during the Nupe/Fulani Jihadists attack (Adebayo 2015:2). The town was founded on the mysterious functions of *Àdá Ògbó* and *Òpá Òrèrè* received by Ajagun-nla Fagbamila Orangun from his father (Oduduwa). These two mystical objects were given as pathfinders to establish his territory. It is noteworthy that, the name Ila-Orangun was coined out from the precipitated events that gave birth to the Ajagun-nla. According to oral history from His Royal Majesty, Oba Wahab Oyedotun, the Orangun of Ila, the name 'Orangun' became established right from when Oduduwa exclaimed "*Oran mi gun bayi, mo bi jagun jagun nla*", meaning that my course is made straight, I have

begotten Ajagun-nla. This statement is credited to all the fulfillment of Ifa divinations about Fagbamila. Regarding all the manifestations, Oduduwa deemed it necessary to reciprocate the Ifa oracle with half (Ilaji) of all his possessions to Fagbamila.

In contrast, the second half was later shared with the rest of the princes of the bloodline. It will be remarked that the word “*Ilaji ni mo pin, Oran mi gun*” meaning (I have taken half of the inheritance, my course is straight) coined out ‘Ila-Orangun’. It is quite observable that aside from the images that constitute the different phases of the wooden door panels, *Opá orere* and *Ada Ogbo* (Orere staff and Ogbo cutlass) were carved to symbolize the origin of Ila-Orangun and a part of aesthetics imageries of the wooden door panels (Picture 1e). Aside from this, other images that constitute the different panels of the carved door are there to narrate the culture, values, religion, beliefs, tradition, and indigenous vocation of the people of Ila Orangun.

## 2.2 Wooden Door Panels in Ila-Orangun

Wooden door panel is a notable art tradition that best defines the palace of Orangun as the custodian of art, culture, and traditions of Igbomina because one of the carved doors is the first welcoming art piece when entering the palace premises. Virtually, wood carvings are notable in African countries, especially in Yoruba land which comprises different mythological ideas. The people of Ila-Orangun explore wooden door panels to express their cultures, values, crafts, and religion. Moreover, wood generally in Yoruba land, is a special natural material that defines the intrinsic adornment of palaces and other traditional abodes (Sogbesan and Awonusi 2022:198). In the same vein, the door is hallowed as an integral element of the architecture of every society (Abejide 2020:1). A door is a domestic structure that accommodates exit and entry. Generally, the use of doors in architecture virtually serves as a check against intruders whether human or animal. But, the significance of wooden door panels in palaces transcends the popular slogan in Yoruba land which Abejide reiterates as “*ile ti ko ni lekun ni asinwin n wo*”. Meaning; that a house without a door is accessible to reprobates (ibid). Far above this, the indigenous wooden door panels in the traditional domain of Orangun of Ila are pertinent for catching a glimpse into the ancestries of numerous African institutions, cultural sustainability, art practices, values, and traditions. It is through this sort of traditional art that many African groups were able to generate adequate responses to their bloodline and their ancestors’ roles, which were occasioned by oral history. Numerous antecedent images and relevant stories are invariably carved on doors as reminiscences of the roles of forebears (Coleman 2016:370).

Far beyond aesthetics or secular functions, the concept of Ase (mystic force) in traditional art adduced by Abiodun (1994:68, 69) is felt in wooden door panels in the palaces, especially in Ila-Orangun. The images of the door panels are capable of attracting tourists. Moreover, the Denver Art Museum (2022) views wooden door panels in Yoruba land as elements that can affect the account of notable figures represented on the doors. From a flawless point of assessment, the primordial buildings of Yoruba people are crucial symbols of culture and tradition but, the prevalent experience nowadays is that the thriving of modern innovations is rapidly eroding the values of traditional architecture in Africa (Anifowose and Olatubosun 2020: 141, 142). Yoruba, being next to Hausa communities in size is expected to absolve its environment from the diminishment of cultural artifacts, tourism, beliefs, and traditions that door panels should have engendered. Ordinarily, traditional palace embellishment in Yoruba land is renowned for wood carvings of various forms varying from stools, verandah house posts, pillars, and door panels among other art figures used for ritual and religious purposes (ibid).

The aesthetic contents of the door panels are an embodiment of myths and a subtle reflection of people’s lifestyles in diverse ways. Door panels are fundamental in unearthing some covert mythological philosophies. Drawing from the field study, civilization has now ushered in new ideas of making doors to reflect people’s interests just like the Mesopotamian age of civilization where door panels were carved from different media such as stone and bronze (Ibrahim *et.al* 2022:59, 60). Virtually, the remnant of wooden door panels discovered in the palace of Orangun of Ila is full of symbolic imageries that speak volumes of the origins, cultures, fashions of Igbomina people, environmental tastes, socio-cultural beliefs, and traditional games. However, field investigations and studies of literature have revealed that several palaces in Igbomina land have changed to iron, aluminum, and imported doors.

Being an ancient craft in Yoruba land, wood carvings have been a common art tradition with a special skill that is usually acquired by apprenticeship and inculcation of ideas and techniques into a fresh trainer from an experienced carver (Adepegba and Abati 2017: 344). One of the products of wood carvings is a wooden door panel which was the prevalent door in the olden days because of the abundant availability of wood in the forest of Western Nigeria. However, the common materials that people use to make doors in many houses today are metal and aluminum as against our indigenous wooden doors.

## 2.3 Process of Wood Carving in Yoruba land

The study of Indigenous door panels in palaces of Yoruba land is contemporary with the study of the Yoruba race and the people's history, origin, tradition, culture, belief, and social life. The process of wood carvings of whatever form begins with the originality of the wood carver. In many instances, stupendous placatory sacrifices were invariably carried out by carvers to circumvent and prevent demonic attacks that may besiege the process or probably be possessed by the image and achieve the ultimate goal of itch-free carving. That is why ritualistic figures are often carved in secret. (Oloidi 2014:33).

## 3 Morphological Composition of the Door Panels

### 3.1 Morphology of Forms

Morphology is the study of the forms and structural elements (intrinsic and extrinsic) components that define an object or idea. The use of morphology in this study is to consider the shapes and structures of the wooden door panels together with the verandah posts as they interact with, space, and viewer perspective. According to Alkadier and Klamer (2016: 10), morphological evaluation of art narratives will provide an interpretation of the different imageries of the wooden door panels and verandah posts as they relate to the culture, identity, and traditions of the people of Ila-Orangun. The morphological consideration explains the physiognomy qualities of the door panels and verandah posts that reveal the Yoruba aesthetic indices of Igbomina land.

Virtually, all the wooden door panels were carved in the conventional Yoruba form of carving which is realism. The doors were carved in a variation of forms. Going by the antecedent of the Fakeye family in the account of wood carving in Yoruba land, where they combine traditional techniques of carving with Western training; the latter and other Yoruba wood carvers do have a noteworthy influence on the morphological arrangement of the forms of the wooden doors in Orangun's palace.

The wooden door panels are virtually in low relief (bas) with decorative background. Akinlabi Fakeye tends toward naturalism in Plate 1 while Dejo Fakeye dwells on abstraction in Plate 2. The treatment of the facial structures are prominent; revealing the various activities involved in the door panels. Yoruba artists usually depict relief figures in a manner that will reflect the status of a master from his servant and a king from his subject (Leiris and Delange 1968: 182). The example is in Plate 1.

The glossy reddish-brown colour was used to create shade with a partial reflection of light. The carving technique of Akinlabi Fakeye appears more fluid. The morphological forms of the images in Plate 2 were devoid of the rule of measure. The heads of the whole figures were exaggerated to reflect the Yoruba aesthetic cannons which emphasize the head as a seat of wisdom. Likewise, the intricate irregular composition of divergent ideas, ranging from equestrian figures, copulation, women are in genuflecting form, abstract animal motifs, and other imageries constitute the door panels in Plate 3 and 4. Thus, making the structure of the concepts appear more distinct from that of plate 4 where unvarying rectangular shapes characterized the central panels. Moreover, there is evidence of low relief of symmetrical line design in the door frames (plate 6a, 6b) which appear like embroidery designs commonly found on the garments of Hausa/Fulani in Northern Nigeria. Perhaps, the idea was birthed from the long interactions between Orangun and the Nupe tribe in ancient times.

Worthy of note are the variations in the textural qualities of the wooden door panels. The visage of the images in plates 6 and 7 looked more rugged in sticklike form; having the form of prehistoric imageries. Almost all the wooden doors in the palace of Orangun of Ila have a conspicuous and deep texture; and subtle rough. Moreover, most of the wooden doors of the palace of Orangun of Ila appear more elegant and blisteringly ornamented in the paradigm of Yoruba aesthetic canons.

### 3.2 Morphology of Style

Yoruba has a general style of carving aside from the styles of individual artists which invariably dwells on the central style of naturalism. The wooden doors in the palaces of Orangun of Ila are designed within the central style, but there is evidence of variation of styles which reveals the artist's individuality. The Fakeyes are vast in the traditional carving, plying towards abstract naturalism. Stylistically, Dejo Fakeye said during an interview that it is unprofessional for traditional carvers to incline toward realism. This is highly contravening the rule of Yoruba traditional carving.

### 3.3 Morphology of Themes

Virtually every notable entrance in the Palace of Orangun has a wooden door panel that narrates themes of the people's culture, history, traditions, values, and beliefs. The doors are morphologically segmented into six panels, with divergent narrative concepts or historical images. The door in Plate 1 is located at the entrance of the palace hall of Orangun of Ila. The door has two hands; the one at the left-hand side (a,b,c) contains three traditional pictures, ranging from (a), a cocoa farmer and his wife, harvesting cocoa produce. Cocoa farming is conventional agriculture and one of the sources of income in Yoruba. The picture in (b) is Orangun and his *Ilari* (king's herald) with a woman with a calabash in her hand obeying Orangun. The picture in (c) is a traditional girl dancing with drummers who were beating their drums and on the opposite right side, features (d, e, and f pictures). Picture (d) is a narrative of a palm wine tapper and *iya-Ila elemu* (palm wine vendor), one of the popular vocations among Ila women. (e) is Orangun of Ila holding *Ada Ogbo* (a magical cutlass) in one hand and *Opa Orere* (a sacred staff) in the other hand with *Olori* Oba (Queen) holding a vessel behind the king. At the same time, picture 'f' is a farmer with his wife harvesting and preserving their farm produce by setting it on rows on a wooden pole as an indigenous means of preserving yam.



**Figure 1: Wooden door panel**  
Carved by Akinlabi Fakeye (1987),  
on the occasion of the 20th  
Anniversary of Ariwajoye 1, the  
Orangun of Ila

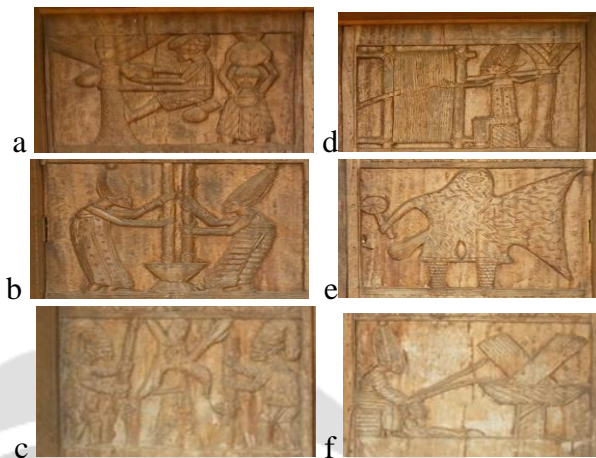


Another historical door panel is Figure 2 located at the Orangun's residential building within the palace. The door was carved by Dejo Fakeye in 2004. Like the door in plate 1, it is divided into six different phases revealing the prevalent indigenous culture of the people of Ila and other places in Igbomina land. From the left side of the door which is picture 2a, is a palm wine tapper and *iya-Ila Elemu* (wine vendor) which is reiterating the preponderance tradition of accustomedness of Ila people with palm wine. It affirms the popular phrase that says *Ila o loogun, emu loogun Ila* means Ila has no medication other than palm wine). Below this image is picture 2b of two Yoruba women with exaggerated coiffures ascending upward preparing *Iyan* (pounded yam) which is the most fascinating local food of Ila-Orangun. The women were carved in abstract form with ordinary *iró* (wrapper) covering their bodies which alluded to the common dressing of women in the Yoruba rural environment in the olden days. The third picture below 2c is about the hunting expedition of two Ila local hunters with imagery of an animal they have killed.

Furthermore, at the top of the second half of the door on the right-hand side (2d), is a local method of cloth weaving which was very ubiquitous in Southwestern Nigeria in ancient times, and in 2e below is the relief carving of *Egúngun Eléwe* (elewe masquerade) peculiar to Ila Orangun and the entire Igbomina land. Elewe remains one of the notable cultural identities that distinguish Ila-Orangun from other kingdoms in Yoruba land while the last picture below 2f is a narration of Yoruba hair plaiting tradition among Yoruba women. The coiffure was elongated in an embellished form to reveal the aesthetic endowment of Yoruba women.



**Figure 2:** *Wooden door panel* at the residential building of Orangun of Ila  
 Artist: Dejo Fakeye in 2004  
 Photographed: Kunle Odetayo (2024)



Wooden sculpture as well as other traditional arts stands as the wheel on which culture rotates (Sogbesan & Awonusi 2022: 197). The door in Figure 3 shows different socio-cultural events and traditions of the Yoruba collection. The first picture on the left-hand side is a traditional event in the community (3a). A woman is paying obeisance to the Ifa diviner while another woman is standing with a vessel in her hand with an arugba (calabash carrier) standing behind the diviner. The scene is about a ritual mission. Their dressing style represents the common traditions and beliefs of indigenous Yoruba people. Below this is 3b, another picture of the social function of a Yoruba dancer with a man spraying money on the dancer. Around the dancer are two traditional drummers colouring the event with their drum beats. The third picture in (3c) is about the Yoruba local food called *iyán* (pounded yam) as it appears in figure 2 as well. At the top of the right-hand side of the door panel is 3d, a picture of a Yoruba warrior riding a horse in the joyous mood of his victory with a drummer using his drum to praise his victory. This followed in 3e with a picture of Ifá oracle holding *Osé Sango* (Sango's wand) and a sacrificial fowl with a drummer and *iyá l'òrisà* (a priestess) during a ritual festival. However, the last picture (3f) below, reminds the people of Ila of the farming tradition which is the major occupation of the Ila people. A farmer was harvesting his maize on the farm and was assisted by his wife. The style of the carving reminds the viewers of the conventional hairdo of Yoruba women known as *Súkú* and *Àdìmólè*. However, the study reveals that some palaces in Igbomina are falling short of traditional art culture as a result of civilization and the effects of Christianity and Islamic religions. Tomori (2014:1-3); Jolaoso (2017); and Sogbesan & Awonusi (2022) also buttress that virtually, a substantial number of traditional architectures in Yoruba land are yet to recover from the iconoclastic attack of the inveterate colonialists and Portuguese travelers in Nigeria.



**Figure 3:** *Wooden door panel* at Orangun's palace museum  
 Artist: David Adeosun Fakeye 1927  
 Photographed: Kunle Odetayo (2024)



Another historical wooden panel is the second door at the palace museum entrance (figure 4) which narrates different primordial occupations in Yoruba land. Wooden doors with sculptural elements are a fundamental part of traditional buildings such as palaces and shrines. (Oloidi 2014: 32-35). The first picture on the left-hand side (4a), emphasizes the degree of accustomedness of palm-wine tapping practice among the people of Ila. The image in 4b is a myth of local hunters in Ila and their intrinsic aesthetics in various hunting

paraphernalia while picture 4c concerns cocoa harvesting in Yoruba land. The second row of the picture (4d) consists of Orangun sitting on his throne with *Ìlari Oba* (king courier) shading the king with an umbrella. Picture 4e reveals the nature of the domestic activities of Yoruba women while picture 4f speaks about the operation of local hunters hunting. Ordinarily, wooden doors in Yoruba land are usually adorned with visual elements of culture that suggest people's life events and are carved in aesthetically attractive forms (Abejide 2020:2; & Alayande 2022: 391)



**Figure 4:** Wooden door panel at the Orangun's palace museum  
Artist: David Adeosun Fakeye in 1927  
Photographed by: Kunle Odetayo (2014)



**Figure 5:** wooden door panel at Orangun's palace in Ila  
Artist: Akinlabi Fakeye in 1987  
Photographed by: Kunle Odetayo (2024)

Similarly, the different six pictures in Figure 5 explain the social life of Ila people. Picture 5a shows the Oba blessing one of his subjects; picture 5b shows traditional game (*ayò olópón*) players while picture 5c shows the festival activity with the presence of *Ìyá Elému* for their enjoyment. At the other side of the door panel (picture 5d) are magic players, one is at the top of a pole while a co-magician is standing at the pole with a small axe in his hand and a woman is shaking *sèkèrè* (rattle gourds). Picture 5e is another image about Yoruba traditional wrestlers and the viewer. The scene is a reminiscence of the Yoruba traditional game in villages, while the last picture (5f) is about a town crier going about disseminating information; and two women are standing, to listen to his message.

### 3.4 Morphology of the Media of the Door Panels

Yoruba carvers have a choice of woods for carving. These are classified as hardwood and softwood. Among the hardwoods suitable for door panels, face masks, house posts, or verandah posts include Ebony, *iroko*, *Akpa*,



and mahogany. At the same time, *Omo* is a type of softwood that is easy to carve compared with the group of hardwood (Genesis Art Gallery 2020, Emeka 2016:3). The hardwood is difficult to carve but has a longer durability. A veteran Octogenarian wood carver, Dejo Fakeye clarified during the interview that the *Omo* species is truly soft to carve, yet, it is vulnerable to cracking and losing its natural quality. Although it may appear suitable in appearance, it is not ideal for carving doors or caryatid. Only unprofessional wood carvers will embark on using *Omo* for wood sculpture.

The only approved wood by traditional carvers for wooden doors, face masks; and sculptural figures are *Iroko*, Mahogany, and Oakwood. It is noteworthy that using the last three kinds of wood for wooden doors or any sculptural figures will make the work exist for several decades without significant deterioration in qualities and capabilities. The Octogenarian wood carver noted that going by the hardwoods at the initial stage, the work will look heavy, but the moment it dries properly, it will become light in weight. Virtually, all the wooden doors in the Orangun's palaces are either carved from Mahogany, *Iroko*, or *Akpa* wood. That is why many of the wooden doors in Ila-Orangun are still durable despite their date. The hardwood is difficult to carve but has a longer durability. Occasionally, relief carvings like wooden door panels are carved on a piece of flat wood with the thoughtfulness of the carvers to achieve the needed result. Occasionally, carving may require tracing the ideas in mind on a tracing paper before transferring such ideas to a particular wood species before the carving exercise begins (Fortuna (2019:1). Among the required tools for wood carvings are a chisel, mallet, and adze known as *Edun* in Yorubaland if it is locally produced. *Edun* is used to cut down trees in the forest. Moreover, Yoruba wood carvers have a flat-headed and curve-shaped metal tool used for chipping off the unwanted area from wood into needed form, while *alupe* (a hollow carving tool) will be used to create depth or the illusion of three-dimensional form if the carving is on a flat plank of wood like carved doors. In this age of civilization, wood carvers have diverted their attention to imported tools. Some carvers rarely use the stone to sharpen iron tools but filing instruments or machines. The finishing touches are achieved with a small knife, sandpapered for a smooth texture where necessary (Sanda & Oladokun 2017: 59; Adepegba & Abati 2017:344, 348; and Coleman 2016: 374).

#### 4 Functions of wooden door panels in the palace of Ila-Orangun

Sociopolitical functions: Ila-Orangun is one of the towns in Yoruba land where sociopolitical practices are invariably done. Proud to be is the culture and traditions in the minds of these sub-groups of the Yoruba. Some of these sociopolitical heritages are expressed in a figurative form on the wooden door panel in plate 6). The door panel is located at the palace gate contrasting to the Ajagun-nla statue at the palace roundabout. There are intricate elements of traditional myths on sociopolitical events. This includes how powerful kings in ancient times took hostage less powerful people from another town. Other political systems include the servitude of the pre-colonial era. The pictures were rendered with lines according to Yoruba aesthetic canons; abstraction with little attention to proportion. Symmetrical and asymmetrical lines that flow around the images in repetitive form also beautify the whole idea with a dark background.



**Figure 6:** Wooden door at the King's crown's room in the palace  
Artist: Akobi Ogun Fakeye, supervised by Ogundeji in 1927  
Photographed by: Kunle Odetayo (2024)



**Figure 6a:** Right panel  
Artist: Ores and Obajisun's compound



**Figure 6b:** *Left panel*  
Carved by Oje carvers in Aga's compound  
Ila-Orangun in 1927  
Photographed by: Kunle Odetayo (2024)



**Figure 7:** *Wooden door* at the of the crown's room  
in Orangun's palace, in Ila-Orangun  
Artist: The Fakeyes  
Photographed by: Kunle Odetayo (2024)

**Economic functions:** Being an important vocation of many families in Ila-Orangun, wood carvings have been a major art tradition (Drewal *et.al.* 1989: 25). The practice of wood carving has enriched an individual life to achieve fame and finances. For instance, the door panels in Figures 6 and 7 were contracted to a group of carvers from different families in Ila-Orangun.

**Sociological function:** The door in plate 7 contains symbols of two sets of crowns. The crown at the top represents the nominal crown worn to the crown's room while the other one below typifies the new royal crown worn in the crown's room. Other social events of the people were illustrated with animal motifs on plate 6b and myths of traditional events in the society were revealed through the door panels (figure 5)

**Sociocultural function:** Nearly all the images on the door panels narrate sociocultural elements of Yoruba people in Ila-Orangun. The concepts include palm wine tapper and *Iyá Ilá elému* (palm wine vendor). See Figure 1, 4, and 6.

**Historical function:** Average images in plates 1 and 6, are about ancestors' role in Ila-Orangun. Akinmolayan *et.al* (2023:1) opines that the study of Yoruba palaces from the historical edge is like surveying art provenance in Yoruba land. To present, numerous ancient countries in Africa are using some of their arts to generate responses to their ancestries. Such artwork is ranging from songs, dance, drama, and wooden sculpture (Coleman, 2016:53).

**Aesthetic function:** All the wooden door panels not only serve the functions above but also add to the beautification of the palace. The doors were carved in line with Yoruba aesthetic canons with deliberate exaggeration of *Orí* (head) as the center of coordination of the whole body (Abiodun 1994:77) and the representation of Yoruba tradition in the context of *àse* (virtue of authority) to achieve cultural value is synonymous to aesthetics (Abiodun 2001:18; Drewal *et.al* (1989:16). A careful employment of the concept of *ojú inú* (insightfulness), *ojú-onà* (connoisseur) to guide the carver in the attribute of *sùúrù* (patience) and *ifarabale* (tenderness) as prerequisite power to maintain *ojú-onà* (connoisseur) and *iluti* (attentiveness) to ancestors' control and to achieve *tító* (perfectibility) (Abiodun 1990:75-83) within the frame of Yoruba aesthetic canons.

## 5 Conclusion

By and large, this study observes that regardless of the imperativeness of wooden door panels to the documentation of Yoruba ancestries, cultures, traditions, and protrusion of Yoruba identity, the indigenous art tradition is almost being decimated in Yoruba palaces under the siege of Western civilization, education, and acculturated beliefs, values, and religions. Whereas, Yoruba carved doors are a complete representation of people's way of life, traditions, values, beliefs, and political system which must not be trivialized on the altar of modernization. This paper therefore urges for a rejuvenation of interest of Yoruba carvers to the survival of African art traditions in the annals of art historical context.

## 6 References

- Abati I. O. (2020). A Study of the Work of Hassan Makinde and Rafiu Olaogun of the Adugboloye family of Woodcarvers in Abeokuta, Ogun State. Pp. 1-3
- Abiodun R. (1990). The Future of African Art Studies: An African Perspective. *African Art Studies: the State of the discipline*, Washington DC; National Museum of African Art; 63-89
- Abiodun R. (1994). Understanding Yoruba Art and Aesthetics: The Concept of Ase. *African arts UCLA*, 27(3): 68-103, Coleman African studies center, University of California-Los Angeles.
- Abiodun R. (2001). African Aesthetics. *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, winter 2001, 35(4):15-23, Published by: University of Illinois Press; Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.com/stable/3333783>
- Abejide F. M. (2020). Progressions in Ornamented Doors of Domestic Buildings in Yorubaland. *Journal of Culture, Society and Development*. ISSN:2422-8400 An International Peer-reviewed Journal. Volume 55 pages 1-9, DOI: 107176/JCSD/55-01
- Aboyeji O. S. (2018). Trends in the Religious beliefs of the Igbomina since the Twentieth Century. *Ilorin Journal of African Religious Studies (IJOURALS)* 8(2): 67-84.
- Adebayo R. I. (2015). The Historical Development and Challenges of Islam in Ila-Orangun, Nigeria. *IJIMS Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Society*. 5(1): 1-28
- Adebayo B.A. (2018). Proliferation of Muslim Honourary Chieftaincy Titles: Means of Fostering Unity among Muslims of Ila-Orangun, Osun State, *Journal of Islam in Nigeria*; 3(1): 69-82
- Ademola S. F. and Oladokun T. O. (2017). Art in the Service of religion: A Study of Selected Carvers of Ifa Sculptures and Objects in South-Western Nigeria. *International Journal of Architecture, Arts, and Applications*; 3(4):53-62. Doi:10.11648/j.1jaaa.20170304.12, Received: November 11, 2016; Accepted: April 2017; Published: June 16, 2017.
- Adepegba K. and Abati, O. (2017). Yoruba Woodcarving: New Characteristics, New Uses. *Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies (JHUCS)* Volume 2, pp. 341-351.
- Adesanya A. (2023). Old Wine, New Wineskin: The Woodcarvings of the Fakeye of Ila-Orangun. Place of Publication: Ibadan, Published on Open Edition Books; Modern History of Visual Art in Southern Nigeria (Online), DOI: 10.4000/books.ifra.3190. pp. 2-12.
- Akande A. (2020). Manifestation of Ori (head) in traditional Yoruba Architecture. *AFOR Journal of Cultural Studies*, 5(2): 5-19. DOI: 10.22492/ijcs.5.2.01
- Akinmolayan F., Pelumi, & Mgbemena (2023). Influence of Yoruba Art on Traditional Modern Architecture in Ile-Ife. *Thesis for BSC Architecture, ResearchGate*, DOI: 10.13140/RGF.2.30929.30569; pp. 1-103.
- Akintonde M. A., Akinde T. E., Abiodun S.G., & Okunade M. A (2015). Outdoor Sculpture in Ife School. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, MCSER Publishing, Rome-Italy. DOI: 10.5901/ajis.2015.4(3): 219-232.
- Alayande S.A. & Okpako J. R. (2022). Reviving Vernacular Architecture - a Panacea to Issues in Contemporary residential Buildings in Yoruba Context. *International Journal of Innovative, Science and Research Technology*, 7(11): 1390 - 1399. ISSN No: 2456-2165.
- Anifowose T. and Olatubosun J. (2020). Significance of Ornamentation in Yoruba traditional Architecture, *International Journal of Advances in Scientific Research and Engineering (IJASRE)*, DOI: 10.31695/IJASRE .2020.33738, ISSN: 2454/8006. 6(2):Feb.2020, 141-144.

- Brommer G. F. (1995) *Discovery Art History*, Third Edition, Davis Publication Inc.
- Coleman A. (2016). Preservation of Indigenous Wood Carving Knowledge of African Traditional People through the use of traditional Wood Carver database Framework (TWCDF) *Indian Journal of Traditional knowledge* 15(3): 370-377), July, 2016. Received: 07 October, 2015, Revised: 05 February, 2016.
- Denver Art Museum (2022). Door Panel Late 1800s. Native Art Acquisition Funds 1973.357, Active dates 1900-1914.
- Dicle A., Yaldiz E. & Suheyla B. S. (2015). Evaluation of Domestic Architecture via the Context of Sustainability: Cases from Konga city Center. *International Journal of Architectural Research*, 9 (1): pages 305-317.
- Drewal H.J. & Pemberton III J. with Abiodun R. (1987). Yoruba nine Centuries of African Art and Thought. *The Center for African Art*, Publisher: New York.
- Emeka E. O., Maureen O. U. and Afamefuna P. E. (2016). A Documentation of Some traditional Aspects of Wood Consumption in Anaocha, Nigeria. DOI: 10.1177/2158244016649417, 6(2):1-8. April, 2016.
- Fajuyigbe M. O. & Okunade M. A. (2015). Art and Architecture of the Owa's Palace in Ilesa, Nigeria. *Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)* e-ISSN: 2279-0837, p-ISSN: 2279-0845; Publication Date: 2015, Publication name: IOSR. 20(8): 37-45.
- Fakunle O. A. (2022). Yoruba Traditional Dress as a Piece of Art, *Humanus Discourse* 2(3): 1-8, ISSN 2787-0308.
- Folaranmi S.A. & Ademuleya A. (2021). Palace Courtyard in Ilesa; A Melting Point of Traditional Yoruba Architecture. *Yoruba Studies Review*, 2(2): 1-25, DOI: 10.32473/ysr.v2i2.129887.
- Fortuna F. (2019). The Art and Process of Wood Carving as a Meaningful Occupation. *The Open Journal of Occupational Therapy*. Article 14, Volume 7, Issue 2. <https://doi.org/10.15453/2168-6408.1616>. Gofwen C. N., Ola-Adisa, and Daniel A.A. (2018) Contemporary Architecture in Nigeria: Evolution or Decadence. *Journal of Science and Engineering Research*, ISSN: 2394-2630; 5(5): 389-393.
- Ila Charity Club (2000). The Principal City of Igbomina People. Publisher; *Swift Prints Nigeria*, ISBN: 9783532944, 978978-3532946.
- Jolaoso B. A. and Bello, O. A. (2017). Character-extinction of Yoruba Architecture: an Overview of facades of Residential Building in South Western Nigeria. 8 (3): 143 - 150; 174 *Journal of Emergencies Trends in Educational Research and Political Studies*. (ISSN 2141-6990).
- Leiris M. and Delange J. (1968). African Art; Translated by Michael Ross; Edited by Andre Malraux and Andrew Parrot
- Makinde D. O. and Aremu P. S. O. (2014). Nigerian Art: The Problem of Identity. *Art and Design Studies* [www.liste.org](http://www.liste.org) Volume 23 2014.
- Okoye C. B. and Ukanwa O.E. (2019). Igbo Traditional Architecture: A Symbol of Igbo Cultural Identity. *International journal of Scientific and Engineering Research*; 10 (11).
- Olaiya A. (2022). Yoruba Art and Isele-A Concept of Traditional art and Orisa Religion. *African Cultural Centre/Institute*
- Oloidi, J. (2014). Traditional wood carving and Economic history of Ekiti of Southwestern Nigeria, 1900-1960; *Journal of Tourism and Heritage Studies*; 3(2): 31-44.

- Onyema B. N. (2016). Nigerian Cultural Heritage: Preservation, Challenges and Prospects. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/og.v2:1.15>, 247-295.
- Oyinloye M. A., Dipeolu A. A., Omolola F. S., Adeyemi A. O., and Siyanbola A. B. (2020). In Search of True African Art from Perspective of Relative Discipline: Case Study of Architecture and Archaeology. *KIU Journal of Social Sciences* ISSN: 2413-9580; 6(1): 389-398.
- Privilelli G. (2021). Restoring Authority Reflection from Verdala Palace (part 1), *Academic edu. Publishing Blog Academia* 2024; pp. 27-34).
- Refaat F., Mahmoud M. H, and Brania A. A. (2021). Analytical Characterization of Rococo Paintings in Egypt: Preliminary Results from El-hawhara Palace at Cairo. *International of Conservation Science* 3(4): 265-274.
- Sanda F. A. and Oladokun T. O. (2017). Art in the Service of Religion: A Study of Selected Carvers of Ifa Sculptures and Objects in South-western Nigeria. DOI: 11648/j.ijaaa.20170304.12 Received: November 11, 2016; Accepted: April 21, 2017; Published: June 16, 2017. 3(40):53-62.
- Sogbesan O. Z. and Awonusi F. S. (2022). Documentation of Yoruba traditional Institutional Building: The case of Afin Irefin. *Journal of Architecture, Art, and Applications*. 8(4): 197-205; ISSN 2472. 1107 (print) ISSN 2472- 1131 (online).
- Tomori M. A. (2014). The Significance of New Olubadan Ultra-Modern Palace. Urban Management Consultant. Pages 1-11. *City of publication*; Publisher Website: [www.macosconsultancy.com](http://www.macosconsultancy.com)

#### Oral Interviews

An Oral Interview with His Royal Majesty, Oba Wahab Oyedotun Bibire 1, the Orangun of Ila on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April, 2024 in his palace in Ila-Orangun (Age: 75 years)

An Oral Interview and phone calls interview with Pa Dejo Fakeye; traditional wood carver in Ila Orangun on 3<sup>rd</sup> of April, 28<sup>th</sup> of May, & 2<sup>nd</sup> of August, 2024 at his workshop in Ila-Orangun (Aged 83 years).