

Finch & C^o



AN ANCIENT NIGERIAN YORUBA PEOPLES CEREMONIAL BRONZE AND IRON CLUB

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WITH A FRAMED LABEL READING: 'CLUB USED FOR TWIN KILLING, OYO W. NIGERIA, CLUB BELONGED ALAFIN OF OYO: BY HIM 'LICENSED' TO A PARTICULAR FAMILY AS THE 'OFFICIAL INSTRUMENT' IN DAYS WHEN ALAFIN WAS HEAD OF THE YORUBA PEOPLE.

LITERATURE

ONE IN EVERY ELEVEN OR TWELVE YORUBA CHILDREN IS BORN A TWIN AND YORUBA WOMEN HAVE MORE TWIN BIRTHS THAN ANY OTHER PEOPLE IN THE WORLD.

IN THE 17TH CENTURY AND EARLIER ALMOST ALL YORUBA TRIBES CONSIDERED THE ARRIVAL OF TWINS AS AN UNFORTUNATE AND UNDESIRABLE EVENT. MIDWIVES BELIEVED THAT NO MAN COULD BEGET TWO CHILDREN AT ONCE AND SO SHE WOULD KILL ONE OF THEM AT BIRTH.

THE EARLY YORUBA TRIBES LOOKED UPON TWINS AS MYSTERIOUS SUPERNATURAL BEINGS POSSESSED BY EVIL SPIRITS WHO WOULD CERTAINLY BRING MISFORTUNE TO THEIR FAMILIES. ONE OR BOTH OF THE TWINS AND SOMETIMES THE MOTHER AS WELL WERE KILLED AS A COUNTER MEASURE. OCCASIONALLY THE MOTHER AND HER TWINS WERE SENT AWAY TO SPECIALLY ORGANIZED SETTLEMENTS FAR FROM THE VILLAGE COMMUNITY AND IN SOME REGIONS MOTHERS WERE ALLOWED TO RETURN AFTER A PURIFICATION PROCESS.

IN RECENT TIMES THE POWER OF THE 'BABALAWO' OR MEDICINE MAN WAS STILL SO GREAT THAT IF HE DECIDED ONE OF THE TWINS WAS POSSESSED BY EVIL SPIRITS THAT HE WAS UNABLE TO EXORCISE, AND THAT REPRESENTED A DANGER TO THE OTHER TWIN OR THE ENTIRE FAMILY, HE RECOMMENDED THAT IT WAS BETTER FOR THAT TWIN TO DIE. THERE IS MOST PROBABLY A CLOSE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE END OF THE KILLING OF TWINS AND THE BEGINNING OF THE PRACTICE OF CARVING WOODEN 'IBEJI' FOR THE TWIN CULT. IT IS NOT KNOWN WHY THE ATTITUDE OF THE YORUBA CHANGED AND THE KILLING OF TWINS STOPPED, BUT CERTAINLY BY THE TIME THE YORUBA BEGAN CARVING TWIN FIGURES TO HONOUR DECEASED TWINS THE PRACTICE HAD STOPPED.

IN RICHARD LANDER'S 'JOURNAL OF AN EXPEDITION TO EXPLORE THE COURSE AND TERMINATION OF THE NIGER' 1832 HE DESCRIBES MEETING WOMEN IN THE YORUBA AREA WHO CARRIED CARVED FIGURES THAT REPRESENTED THEIR DEAD CHILDREN. THE MOURNING WOMEN WOULD TALK TO THESE FIGURES AND WERE MOST RELUCTANT TO PART FROM THEM. THEREFORE IT CAN BE SAID THAT BY THE MID-19TH CENTURY THE 'IBEJI' TWIN CULT WAS FIRMLY ESTABLISHED AND THAT THE MAJORITY OF THE YORUBA HAD STOPPED THE PRACTICE OF KILLING TWINS.