Programas reapresentado pela TV Senado, em 26 de fevereiro de 2004.

Numa conferência sobre a África, o embaixador e escritor Alberto da Costa e Silva, respondendo a um participante, a certa altura, afirmou:

Costa e Silva: *"Mas que não há vinculação, ao contrário do que se escreveu no passado, entre a arte de Ifé e a arte do Benin, até porque os processos de fundir o bronze nas duas partes, ou o latão ou o cobre nessas duas culturas são sistemas inteiramente diferentes. O Benin trabalhava com látex e Ifé trabalhava com cera".*

— Nossos dois mundos — *erinmwin* e o *agbon* são partes de um conjunto de forças do bem e do mal, cada qual em busca do controle; por isso, em luta permanente entre eles. Da mesma forma — prosseguiu o mestre, mais modesto do que professoral — os seres humanos: possuímos dentro de nós poderosas forças, da mesma forma buscando uma suplantar a outra. Igualmente, em permanente conflito. E elas, meu filho, estão em toda parte de nosso corpo... qualquer parte dele, do importante dedo polegar do pé esquerdo ao mais extraviado dos fios de cabelo em uma cabeça. — O *iguneronmwan* coçou a cabeça, numa relação reflexa à referência ao cabelo, e prosseguiu:— Existem, entretanto, pontos onde uma e outra têm maior concentração. É o que acontece com a cabeça, *uhunmwan,* que é onde reside o conhecimento; o outro é a mão, *obo,* a sede da ação. O primeiro dos *iguneronmwan*, criou a cabeça de uma rainha. Seus sucessores, como eu, também criamos a cabeça das rainhas que passaram enquanto estamos vivos. As cabeças retratam o que vai na sede do conhecimento e das sensações do ser, são assim um desafio para o artista. É extremamente complicado pôr no molde o que os olhos retratados trazem da alma; o que a pele, pelo estado de tensão está dizendo; as narinas e especialmente os lábios. As cabeças que estão aí, por toda a parte, são exercícios que tu estarás realizando, a vida toda, para ser capaz de produzir a cabeça da rainha de tua geração. E ela estará, em verdade, participando de uma competição que se repete desde que Iguegha veio de Ifé, a cidade sagrada dos iorubanos, e ensinou aos artesãos como se transformarem em *iguneronmwan*.

A propósito, meu filho, quando falei que possuímos dentro de nós poderosas forças, da mesma forma buscando uma suplantar a outra, aí temos a explicação para a sábia decisão de nossos antigos de eliminar os filhos gêmeos: nunca se sabe qual dos dois é o agente do mal.

O mestre havia falado mais do que fizera em muitas semanas. Parecia cansado. Exaurido. Como ficava ao fim de uma obra. Mas buscou o que restava para ensinar metade do grande segredo: — Tu não vais jamais criar cabeças de obás, mesmo depois que partir ao encontro de uma das minhas quatorze encarnações.

A outra metade ele contaria depois da iniciação de Kotoú, quando ele adentraria, para cumprir uma rotina perene, na oficina real: seguindo a tradição — Adolô, o obá reinante, iria interrompê-la, mas o mestre não soubera, nem mesmo em suas premonições desse evento futuro — quando da morte do obá sua cabeça é decepada e enviada para Ifé, local de onde viera o primeiro dos *iguneronmwan*, para que, em troca, retorne a cabeça em bronze do obá falecido.

Art, Innovation, and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Benin

de Paula Girshick Ben-Amos
(*Indiana University Press*, Edição de 1999, nas páginas 18 a 21)

From the 1897 expedition through the early part of the colonial period, British officials, including government anthropologists, collected oral data, some sketchily (Roupell in Read and Dalton 1899), others in depth (Talbot 1969, Marshall *1939),12* The best known and most widely used compiler, however, is the Edo historian Chief J.Jacob U. Egharevba. The traditions contained in Egharevba's important *A Short History of Benin* (first published in 1934) are usually taken to constitute the accepted version of Benin history as preserved in oral traditions. But the issue is not, in fact, so simple. Egharevba was an amateur historian who, beginning in the 1930s, assembled a vast collection of disparate oral traditions from titleholders, priests, and elders in Benin, many of whom had been alive prior to the British colonial takeover in 1897. From this collection, Egharevba then created an orderly written history addressed to a dual audience: on the one hand, he wished to present a creditable history to British colonial officials and Western intellectuals, and on the other to satisfy the expectations of the Edo royalty and elite.

With this audience in mind, Egharevba took what were a series of king lists held in memory by Edo genealogical specialists, together with widely circulated legends about their reigns, and made them into a dynastic chronology. Re worked out dates, sorted out discrepancies, and generally created order. The dating method was never fully explained, but Bradbury (1973:27) found it remarkable that his proposed dates for the kings since about 1735 are supported by written sources.

ln presenting the material, Egharevba bowdlerized some of the traditions, omitting, for example, the numerous royal adulteries that might have offended British sensibilities (however, in his numerous locally published pamphlets, Egharevba did include accounts of these royal adulteries). And, most important for our purposes, he minimized features of the oral tradition that might have been unpleasant for the royalty. This is most clear in his treatment of the instability of the kingship in the seventeenth century, a crucial issue in understanding this time period. Traditional versions concur that upon the death of Oba Ohuan (in 1641 by Egharevba's chronology) there were no sons or brothers to inherit the throne. According to Egharevba, the result was that "the throne was opened to rotation among different branches of the Royal Family" (1968:34). This is a mild version of the traditions relating to these monarchs and does not explain exactly who participated in this rotation and what were the consequences. As I explain in the next chapter, successions in the mid- to late seventeenth century were marked with struggles between rival claimants to the throne, many of whom

were not directly in the royal line of descent and were thus not totally legitimate (or, in Edo terms, were not "divinely ordained," *eire na ya we).*

Egharevba was not particularly interested in art, but he nevertheless collected traditions that would prove useful to the development of stylistic chronologies by William Fagg and others, most particularly one which claims that:

> *Oba Oguola wished to introduce brass-casting into Benin so as to produce works of art similar to those sent him from Ife. He therefore sent to the Oni of Ife for a brass-smith and Iguegha was sent to him. (1968: 11)*

As I have pointed out elsewhere (1980:17), it is not clear whether Egharevba's account is about the origin of the technique of casting, the introduction of specific objects, or the incorporation of one family into the casters' guild. The guild of brass casters like that of the wood carvers and iron workers is composed of several lineages that have been incorporated at different times and have various origins, some even coming from outside the kingdom. The lineage of the senior titleholder, the Ine, maintains a tradition, which was probably the basis for Egharevba's published one, that until the time of Oba Oguola, brass workers used to come from Ife every autumn to present their work to the king. Oba Oguola succeeded in enticing them to stay permanently in Benin and gave their leader, Igueghathe title of Ine (Bradbury 1951:A-18). The family of the second-ranking titleholder, the Ihama, claims, in contrast, to be autochthonous. According to Chief Ihama (pcl981) brass smiths already existed in earlier times but only began casting major objects like commemorative heads during the reign of Oba Ewuare, who gave his family the title of Ihama.

Actually, Egharevba's account is not the only one available in the literature. The earliest recorded historical report of brass-casting was collected by Roupell and his officials at the time of the 1897 Expedition. They were told that when the white men carne during Esigie's reign, among their number was a man named Ahammangiwa, 18 who made brass-work and plaques for the king and taught many younger men the skill (Read and Dalton 1899:6). Later, the British government anthropologist, P. Amaury Talbot, who was in southern Nigeria in the 1920s, recorded that in the beginning brass objects were imported from Ife but during Esigie's reign, due to the large amount of

metal imported from the Portuguese, the Edo began to have the majority of their work done locally (1969: 157).

As Law has so clearly demonstrated in his analysis of the Ododuwa/Oranmiyan heritage (1973), claims about origins are political statements that place their adherents in various positions of legitimacy. As such they are manipulatable and open to contestation. Therefore, such traditions cannot be evaluated without knowing the sources of the tradition and their particular political agendas, something which scholars using Benin oral traditions have not always indicated.

The oral traditions that we will be discussing throughout the book were collected by Egharevba, Bradbury, this author, and other scholars in the 1950s through the 1980s from members of the royal family, titleholders, court officials, and royal craftspeople and thus can be expected to reflect royal agendas. This does not mean, however, that they are too biased to be useful for understanding the history of that time. Political interests may mandate a need to preserve the memory of past action – successes and failures – as precedents and as explanations of the complexity of the present (Valeri 1990:191). As we have seen, even Egharevba's carefully edited account retains the anomalies and rebellions.