

YORUBA PANTHEON

The Yoruba pantheon consists of hundreds of gods, worshipped for an immense variety of purposes, each representative of some natural element or human emotion. Below is a list of the most important.

ESHU is the messenger god, acting as a link between humans and the Yoruba deities (Orishas). He is also the benevolent trickster, using his tricks to teach mankind valuable lessons, and is the patron of roads, opportunities, healers and magicians. This god can be as giving as he can be cruel, therefore he was always the first to be honored during rites and ceremonies. In some traditions, he is associated with the devil (Candomble in Brazil) while in others he is the one who protects the home against dangers (Santiera), and his effigy is kept near the front door. He is also known as Elegua.

IFE is the Yoruba word for the earth, named by the creator Orisha Obatala.

OBATALA is the creator of the earth and mankind in most Yoruba creation stories. He is the patron of mankind, and more specifically of the deformed, whom he created while in a drunken stupor.

OLORUN is the ruler of the sky and the father of the other Yoruba gods (Orishas), and the god of peace, purity, harmony and justice. In some cultures he is seen as an androgynous figure, representing the male and female principles in heaven and earth or even a female goddess. According to some traditions, Obatala owns everything which is white on earth: snow, air, clouds, bones and the brain. He is also known as Yansan, or Ogus in other branches of the Yoruba tradition.

OLODDUMARE is the main creative force for the Yoruba, much like a modern concept of God.

OLOKUN is the god of the sea, and lives in a vast underwater palace with humans and fish as servants. In some traditions this god is also seen as female.

ORISHA is the Yoruba word for god.

OSHUN is the goddess (Orisha) of love and pleasure, beauty and diplomacy. She is very generous and loving to man but also has an extraordinary temper, which is difficult to sway. However, in most cases she teaches mankind to overcome their difficulties through kindness and negotiation. She is also associated with money.

ORUNMILA is the oldest son of Obatala and the god of prophecy. He instructed Obatala on how to create the earth.

OYA is the female warrior goddess of the Yoruba tradition and the fierce Orisha of wind, fire and thunder, as well as the patron of change. When enraged she creates tornadoes and hurricanes, and is the guardian of the gates of death.

SHANGO was once the mortal fourth king of Yoruba, but after his death became immortalized as a powerful Orisha of storms and thunder. Shango's storms are both devastating and cleansing.

