



Ceramic Beads as Yoruba Art Marker of Transcendence and Power

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Abstract. Transcendence and power; *ase*, amidst Yorùbá is expressed through allegories for concretism of relative status of an official authority and to check power limit. Beads (*Ileke*) are one of Yorùbá symbolic arts and voguish paraphernalia to denote kings' transcendence and chieftains' hierarchies with their classificatory criteria at the regnant apex to the monarchic throne and priests/priestesses' office to the religious cults. Traditionally, some beads' designs are sacred to nonmembers of the ruling class or religious cults irrespective of thirst for beauteous and chic elegance. Quasi-religious perceptions and regal designs of these kinds of beads suggest sacerdotal emphasis on the authority of priest and art of gravitas for people in power. Perceptual structure of these arts as power's veneration and motifs on beads as ceramic art, however, requires examination in order to determine their arrangement and significance to Yoruba political transcendence and power. This study is a socio-cultural inheritance pictured in the Yorùbá system of government and practice of the ceramic art. Through the discussion of political significance of beads as conspicuous symbol of transcendence among the Yorùbá, the paper seeks to provide metaphorical account in the patterns of beads as emblem of power and examine the peculiarity of this art to monarchial structure and religious cults. The study depends on the socio-historical perspectives and phenomenological concepts on different official beads that exemplify hierarchical structure of Yorùbá ruling system for its analysis. Photographs of beads were collated for analysis of rule-governed beads in official signification to each office. The findings of the work reveal the import of beads to the preservation of authority among the Yorùbá people despite acceleration of cultural change and unbridled influence of foreign culture. Evidently, appellations are given to each position for mutually-recognizable power.

Keywords: Art, Beads, Ceramics, Transcendence, Yorùbá

1. Introduction

The structure of Yorùbá monarchial administrations are epitomized by the policy of paramountcy and preponderant influence. To these recognitions by the imperium's subjects are emblematic arts, often used for series of ordered ranks within the monarchic hierarchies and chieftains' systems. These arts are utilised to denote gravitas of people in power and their herculean tasks. Sacerdotalism and ineffable arts, however, emphasized the authority of priest/priestess with mutually-recognizable power to their religious cults together with appellations that explicate their classificatory criteria. No doubt, these arts and appellations are institutionally scheduled for the policy of *fait accompli* and to reach most decisive points for the region over which this imperial dominion is exercised. This is evidenced by the themes and power's scope amidst internecine feuds and mutual decision of the proxy holders. The Yorùbá cultural and historical traditions pointedly affirm the significance of emblems to powers' recognitions, particularly, the hierarchical structure of their monarchial system of government. Besides, the Yorùbá socio-political system demonstrates institutionalized arrangement to guarantee the allegiance of the imperium's subjects to the rulers and imperial jurisdiction.

Before the arrival of the unbridled influence of foreign culture, Yorùbá indigenous institution and administration was headed by supreme male monarch of the colony and the powers of the paramount chiefs are progressively checked through symbols and appellations (Ajadi, 2023). This is why, in spite of British conquest and administration, the political and cultural weight of the traditional themes and autochthonous symbols of Yorùbá are still displaying

superhuman strength and power. These endemic symbols fairly well delineate the boundaries of different chiefs as they serve as the founts of honour of the entire system (Ajadi, 2022), and the transcendent art which is seemingly dominating the social relations intriguing to gain authority amidst Yoruba is bead (*Ileke*). This is evidenced by this encomiastic maxim of transcendence by this social group: *Adé ori láà fí mo oba, ilèkè láà fí mon ijòyè* (Crowns are used to identify kings; beads are used to recognize chiefs). This is a Yoruba condensed and memorable saying which embodies some important fact of higher-ranking and superior ruler. Metaphorically, the excerpt of this axiom explicates transcendent realities and some aspects of royalty and chieftaincy in a Yoruba governing system. This is in line with Omolola's (2017) position that:

Royalty as applicable to the Yoruba people of West Africa, defined the people connected with power, people within the grip of royal blood, and with the biological evidence of birth liking children to parent from a royal family, categorized as kings, princes, princesses, kings' brothers and sisters, uncles and paternal aunts, by proxy or respect gain from being in the household of a royal family as kings' representative and the chieftaincy is held by the chiefs with a crucial symbol.

Bead is a crucial symbol of royalty, chieftaincy, status seeking, state of being paramount and an indication of preponderating authority in Yoruba cosmology. Bead practices are ceramic art and bead products are usually made from vitreous materials. Historically, bead production is antediluvian in age and practice, primal to human culture for thousands of years (Kalilu, Akintonde and Ayodele, 2006; Berth, 2010; Ajadi, 2017; Ajadi, 2019). The development of beads from the Bronze Age to the high technological vitreous material manifested sequentially in stone, clay, brass (bumpy bead), wood, sea shells, and glass beads technology (Ajadi, 2019). Bead production is also not alien to Yoruba culture. Bead in the Yoruba culture is, however, made from glossy seeds, polished stone, clay, brass (bumpy bead), wood, sea shell and glass derived materials.

Yoruba tribal beads hold a special mythological significance in appearance of power and transcendence. This is not only to the royalty and culture alone, religious expressions are attached to it. Also, the economic values of beads amidst Yoruba were attested during Trans-Atlantic slave trade era as an exchange for human between Europeans and West Africans (Lovejoy, 2009). Scientific study evidences

11th century as the early period of Yoruba bead fabrication. Diverse colours of pulverized glass were combined for bead derivation and polished beads were derived from cullet (Ogundiran, 2002). The evolution of beads' recipe and direction for making local glass formula were not only unveiled in a socio-religious and economic transformation in Yorubaland but also made reparations to the place of sub-Sahara African in the historiographical map of ancient global technology and commerce (Babalola, 2017).

The Yoruba methods of bead practices were considered as the most advanced technology in bead derivation. Their beads were found as most valuable amidst the traded beads discovered by Europeans in West Africa because of the size, techniques of production and other attributes (Busari, 2017). Beads are precious art in Yoruba culture and its high worth prompted some royal and affluent Yoruba names such as *Iyunade* (the precious for crown), *Iyunola* (the precious wealth), *Iyunwande* (the precious reached me), *Iyungunju* (the perfect precious), *Iyunromade* (the precious gripped the crown), and *Segilola* (the precious wealth). These names are alluding to precious or red coral bead (*iyun*) and precious blue glass bead (*segi*).

Precious or red coral (*iyun*) is the common name given to coralloid rubidium and other similar species of marine coral. The distinguishing characteristic of precious corals (*iyun*) is the hard stony attribute and durability, masses in a variety of chromaticity and shapes and often forming reefs. Many of these hard stony skeletons of sea coral that have delicate red and pink colours are used for jewelry. Precious coral holds a special mythical signification in Yoruba society and plays significant role in mythological identification and moneyed appearance. *Segi* is the ancient blue glass bead, usually derived from pulverized waste cullet (Kalilu and Ajadi 2021). It is the symbol of spiritual royalty, divine dominion and terrestrial affiliation.

With Yoruba cultural potpourri, some beads are sacred objects in terms of symbols and usages. Quasi-religious impression and regal designs of these kinds of consecrated beads suggest sacerdotal emphasis on the authority of priest and art of gravitas for people in power. The historical background of some of these beads, however, requires contextual examination and clarification in order to give comprehensible explanation as regards contexts, concepts, styles and themes, and to crystallize metonymical and vague impression towards their usages irrespective of the perceptual experience and viewers' cultural background. Therefore, this study is a socio-cultural

inheritance pictured in the practice of the Yorùbá system of government and ceramic art with the objective of providing metaphorical account in the patterns and structures of beads as marker of power and transcendence.

Diverse accoutrements have received artistic commentaries on hierarchical structure of power and transcendence in Yoruba culture, some of which have gained platitudinous scholarship through their importance in socio-historical study of this social group. Scholastic attentions have been concentrated on sculptural arts as a major art form for expression of power at the expense of the other art forms. Also, it is worthy of attention that the royalty and the nobility had received substantial frequenters by intellectual discourses. All the same, there are myriad art forms that symbolize power of expressions and commentaries of transcendence that have not been studied. Among such art forms are beads. In spite of the fact that comprehensive researches have been carried out by different scholars from fields of art, history, anthropology, archeology and ethnography on bead fashion, bead craft and aesthetics, however, bead as ceramic art and conspicuous symbol of transcendence still demands in-depth attention.

Over and above, the significance of this art as conspicuous symbol of Yoruba power structure and marker of cultural heritage requires scholastic research. In evidence, Busari (2017) examines the history, categories, patronage and varied uses of Yoruba traditional beads as a rich blend of royalty and aesthetics, particularly in its association with spirituality and decorative embellishment. Drewal (1998) affirms that a number of key concepts-temperament, empowerment, protection, potentially desire, wealth and well-being are associated with beads while Drewal and Mason (1998) study beads, body and soul as an art and light in Yoruba universe with the submission that beads stands for unity, togetherness, and solidarity when threaded together like the wrapped bundle of broom (*Igbale*) which symbolizes amity.

Aremu (1999) examines materials, processes and decorative motifs for beaded craft and affirms specifically that beaded crown craft was practiced extensively in most Yoruba towns and villages up to the middle of the 20th century. Babalola (2017) studies the indigenous glass/glass bead industries in South-West society of Nigeria with specific highlights on some of the first recognized indigenous sub-Saharan African glass technology which are dated to early second millennium AD or earlier. Ortmeyer and Porter (2015) explore creative possibilities in the

beading work with the clover's mini loom to produce beautiful bead weaving ranging from bracelets, necklaces to embellishments on cross stitch, need-point, and other handmade items in different methods of multiple wrap, hiding wrap, weft threads, quilt block designs and random sampler cuff bracelet.

Babalola, Ogunfolakan and Lababidi (2020) discuss the process and significance of religious practices to the glass-making and glass-working at Ile-Ife and Bida in Nigeria with focuses on ritual and religious goddess of beads (*Olokun*) as god of wealth and priests/priestesses of this goddess were consulted with undoubted affirmation that religious beliefs are strongly linked to the material practices of glass/glass bead making at Ile-Ife and Bida. Apart from scholastic studies on significance of beads to the socio-political and cultural history of Yoruba, Ajadi (2023) traces the historical background of some motifs on Yoruba sculptural verges and provides their contextual definitions and interpretations for meaningful time-scale oriented study which crystallized metonymical and vague impression towards those motifs. Kalilu (1994) studies gourd carving among the Yoruba of Nigeria with emphasis on motifs and symbols as logically necessary consequence for the perfection of history in African art.

The quantities of Yoruba art styles are enormous and several studies have provided remarkable information on their materials and forms (Thompson, 1976; Willet, 1976; Drewal, 1977, Heyder, 1977, Stevens, 1978 and Azeez, 2017). Also, equipment consisting of miscellaneous artifacts needed for different Yoruba divinities; *orisa*, with their iconic sacred motifs and symbolic arts together with their production process and usages were conceptually explored (Dennis, 1974; Ajadi, 2014; Ajadi, 2017; Ajadi and Akinde, 2019; Ajadi, 2021; Ajadi, 2021). Kalilu (1995) elucidates some of the unheeded issues and metaphorical commentaries that suggest the powers of expression and expressions of power in the visual arts of the Yoruba and considers in a detailed survey, the under-emphasized arts in the nature of Yoruba culture. The results, however general, are important and to whatever degree of these detailed critical survey, studies on most of Yoruba beads have been centered at the history of its origin, categories, patronage, fashion, aesthetics and varied description of a few numbers of its usages neglected its capability on the powers of expression and expression of transcendence in Yoruba monarchical system of government. Hence, perceptual structures of these arts as power's veneration and their production processes as ceramic art, requires

examination in order to determine their usage and significance to Yoruba transcendence and to give informative knowledge on the practice of this art.

In a bid to throw more light on the political significance of beads as transcendence and power-preserving art among the Yorùbá, this work, therefore, seeks to provide metaphorical account of the structures and patterns of beads as emblem of power and examine the peculiarities of this art to monarchical structures and religious cults. To the same degree, some discernible misrepresentation and misapplication in the themes and usages of some beads were examined with a view to redressing them. On these premises, the study examines socio-hierarchical approaches in the structural forms, productive techniques and appellative functions of some religious rites of diverse beads that represent transcendent emblems in social and cultural systems of Yoruba society. The examination is for a careful exploration of the distinctive attributes of these arts to socio-political appellations and religious cults. Expressions in the artistic techniques, ceramic practice in the beads derivation and representation of the significance of this art to the sacred cults will equally be studied to determine their quintessence on the system of Yoruba religious beliefs and rituals.

2. Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to retrieve crucial information on materials for bead derivations, bead patterns, and essential relevance of bead forms to the cultural appellations with pictorial examination of their themes:

- Do the usage of beads exhibit transcendence in terms of hierarchy and stress continuity in forms and traditional standards as a way of legitimizing the Yoruba cultural heritage?
- Do the perceptual structure of beads and spatial arrangement of their forms and colours as symbol of authority represent the most important status and relatively important positions in Yoruba society?
- Do the materials for bead production in Yoruba culture emphasize the significant interpretations of the ineffable names of the deities, reveal the sacerdotal emphasis on the authorities of priests/priestesses in Yoruba chiefdom and preserve the distinctive features of religious cults?

3. Objectives of the Study

The above questions were set with the following specific objectives in mind:

- To analyze the traditional standard and superiority-conscious format in the usage of beads in the Yoruba culture and explore the prominent attributes that exemplify their features.
- To clarify the metonymical explanations, literary criticisms and mythological submissions surrounding the Yoruba traditional beads and provide a scholastic contribution to the historical view on Yoruba art.
- To highlight the materials for bead production that exemplifies the significant illustrations of the sacerdotal and ineffable contexts of Yoruba divinities in relation to their religious cults' symbols and priest/priestess identities.

4. Methodology

This study employed the methodologies of socio-historical perspectives and phenomenological concepts. Socio-historical perspectives were utilised for collation of diverse rule-governed beads that exemplify the hierarchical structure of Yorùbá ruling systems. Phenomenological concepts were employed for the study of human experience in connection with their impression and instinctive knowing of beads to the specific doyens' symbols. Photographs of rule-governed beads were collated for analysis of their official signification to each office. Conceptual interpretations were made based on their usage to the distinguishing hierarchies in the structure of Yoruba governance. Also, relevant and appropriate documents to this study were consulted for proper analysis and discussion of Yoruba politics in hierarchies and the formality of their structures.

5. Discussion

5.1 Ceramic Beads (*Ileke*) as Yoruba Transcendence Preserved Art

Ceramic beads; *Ileke*, Plate 1, are one of the Yorùbá symbolic arts and voguish paraphernalia to denote kings' transcendence and chieftains' hierarchies with their classificatory criteria at the regnant apex to the monarchic throne and priests'/priestesses' office to the religious cults. Bead and royal beaded objects differentiate titled persons from non-titled persons (Aremu, 1999). In a sense, the beads are threaded to form bracelets, necklaces, rings, and anklets that promulgate the power of transcendence and the interconnectedness of spiritual and physical realms (Drewal and Mason 1998). The use of beads (*Ileke*) is

to some certain extent, extremely old in Yorùbá culture and researches in various institutions of Yorùbáland have shown that the wearing of beads was known as reverence for power, royalty and hieratical allegory. Aside from veneration, beads

(*Ileke*) are utilized to ensure firm and dependable political paramountcy that characterized the checks and balances of the monarch at the top and diverse preponderant office-holders of body politic with intelligible-defined functions (Afolayan, 1984).



Plate 1
A Cross Section of Ceramic Beads

Yoruba history and cosmology affirm monarchs as being sacred with self-governing power, idolized as the second-in-command to the gods (*orisa*) (Ajadi, 2021). The significance of beads to Yoruba monarchial institution and its contributions to the elaborated imperial administration is enormous. This art usually transforms monarchs to the status of god (*orisa*) and gives physical and spiritual validation to their authority. Though a critical study of the origin of the Yorùbá socio-political history recognizes many royal paraphernalia as symbols to impose political paramountcy and appurtenance of gods, however, beads, particularly among other appurtenances, are prerogatives of the gods and only those closely associated with them make use of these symbols for intrepid theme (Ajeturmobi, 1989; Robert, 1970).

Traditionally, designs of some beads are sacred to non-members of ruling class or religious cults who may desire them for their aura of elegance and beautiful appearance. Quasi-religious perceptions and values for the beads are bordered on veneration and power's validation for chieftaincy institution in fairly complex socio-political system. The use of bead as political instrument was an innovation which was vested in an individual who combined political, and in some cases, spiritual duties (Afolayan, 1984). Historical tendency and syncretistical illustration of power exemplify beads from other transcendent arts and symbols. These inclinations proliferates beads amidst other symbols of power in Yoruba monarchial institution and as a material for Yoruba arts and designs. Bead as a material for arts and designs among the Yoruba can be found on beaded fan (*abebe*), diviner's hanging panel (*Opa awo*), crown (*Ade*), and verge of king (*Opa oba*). The moment any of these is sighted, due respect is accorded.

Aside, colours of beads are acculturative codes whose vibrations resonate meaningfully (Drewal,

1994). For instance, *pupa resu-resu* (coral red) is noteworthy and it intensifies the royalty and nobility of monarchs and chiefs. Wearing of *funfun* (cool white) by priests and priestesses is to proclaim religion of some white cults such as *Orisa nla*, *Olokun* while *pupa* (hot red) is for both retributive and healing and for the enablement of the presence of the god of thunder (*Sango*). Most of Yorùbá beads possess a specific history, and their meanings and history are often misapprehended in terms of themes and usages. The set of facts that surround the cultural values of some beads on certain occasions are ignored. These are evidenced by jewelries and accessories which are related to religion. To this point, discourse that surrounds the contextual interpretations of diverse Yoruba beads and the logical implication cum relation between their vaguely specified cultural functions will be discussed for thematic clarification of Yoruba indigenous governances in terms of transcendence and power.

5.2 Socio-cultural Appraisal of Beads as Yoruba Art Marker of Power

As earlier reiterated, Yoruba is a unique culture with mutually-graspable symbols that showcase political transcendence and cultural clarification of their religious cults both in structures and hierarchies (Ajadi, 2022). This social group sees beads as the exclusive right of the monarchs (*oba*), chiefs (*oloye*) and gods (*orisa*) and only those who are in positions of power or connected with these gods make use of this art for intrepid subjects. Oladipo (1998) posits that to understand a people through their cultural significations, one must judge each culture through the basic assumptions about realism and objectives. Indisputably, appearance is very significant among the Yoruba people and equally speaks volume in personality both in status and exceptional uniqueness. Although the distinguishing trait of the Yoruba

people is shown in diverse ways, beads in this culture are also used as a means of hierarchical identification and religious delineation.

Beads are fundamental symbols, perhaps the most important class-conscious influence in the life of the Yoruba. The usages of beads are contextually significant in terms of expressions but are being misapprehended by foreigners who constantly miss their cultural import and practice. Beads give diverse contexts when used by crowned heads and chiefs, and some are sacred arts to nonmember of either religious cults or ruling class irrespective of wishful of beautiful and chic elegance. Oftentimes, beads convey an aura of elegance and peace in one hand and connote a war of wits in the other hand. This is rightly pointed out in these two coral bead (*Iyun*) axioms (Plate 2): *Tewe tagba ni iyun wu, sugbon gbogbo eniyan ko lo le lo* (Both old and young cherish coral bead, but not everybody can use it). *Iyun ni oba ileke* (coral bead is the most precious amidst beads).

Contextually, *iyun* is a symbol of power, transcendence, blood, principality and royalty by Yoruba cognitive content. This bead also connotes affluence among the wealthy, royal and noble chiefs under their respective monarchs as a visible emblem that, by convention, represents power. Aside, this bead is often used as a mark of restriction on king's wives against external sex act which can lead to the sacrifice of an illicit man's blood. Whenever the restricted bead is removed by king's wives, it must be placed in *osùn* as a replacement for blood. This is enounced in this Yoruba proverb: *Ti a ba fi omi si osùn, a di eje* (If water is added to *osùn*, it turned to blood). Also, the colour of this bead is a symbolic representation of monarch's mood in respect to the situation of his territorial dominion.



Plate 2
Coral Bead (*Iyun*)

This is why precious blue glass bead, *segi*, Plate 3, implies adversative symbol of coral beads, *iyun*. *Segi* bead is a symbol of spiritual royalty, divine dominion and terrestrial affiliation. This is evidenced in these two panegyric bywords for *segi*: *Segi, oba birin ileke* (*segi*, the queen of beads) and *segilola ileke abira, awon bi oju oso eleye* (*Segilola* the bead of *abira*, the precious eyes of witches). In context of use, the monarchs often don this bead to show affiliation with spiritual and terrestrial realms and exhibit peace, happiness and unity amidst imperium's subjects. However, the blue *segi* and red *iyun* can equally be donned together by the monarchs to establish peace and aggressiveness respectively.



Plate 3
Blue Glass Beads (*Segi*)

From royal and wealthy affluence of beads in Yoruba society, beads delineate and differentiate the religious cults. The Yoruba theology asserts monotheism with diverse gods (*orisa*), believed to possess the qualities of the Supreme Divinity, *Olodumare* (Ajadi, 2023). In the various cults of these gods (*orisa*) are priests and priestesses in different hierarchies to serve as intermediaries between members of these cults and the gods. One of the essential and relevant materials to recognize their religious cults are beads. For example, cowries bead, *Aje*, Plate 4, which expresses wealth in context of use by Yoruba people. In Yoruba legend, cowries shell represents ocean spirit (*Olokun*) which is the goddess of wealth, femininity and fertility. This shell is commonly being exhibited in the form of jewelry in order to bring good luck and to protect the spirit of the users. This bead can predominantly be seen amidst priests/priestesses and members of cult of water goddess (*Olokun*) and diviners (*Babalawo*) as oracle eye and chain. In another contextual definition, it is a symbol of legal tender (money) cum affluence. An extract from *Odu-Meji* of the *ifa* divination corpus established the popularity of *Aje* on the earth and how people usually desire her presence, as explicated thus:

*Adaba sekele je, adifa fun Aje,
Aje ti orun bowa sile aye,*

*ohun wa oko imoran ni yijan,
Adaba sekele je, adifa fun Orunmila,
ohun ka itan mo abe alailobirin,
ohun fi ojojumo ka owo bo itan,
Adaba sekele je,
Ko si ile ti a o ti mon Aje,
Adaba sekele je,
Ko si ile ti ao ti mon Ifa*

A small dove, divined for *Aje*
On her journey to the earth
Searching for companionate husband to
choose

A small dove, divined for *Orunmila*
Folding torso without wife,
Infixing hands in his laps periodically
A small dove
No land *Aje* is not known
A small dove,
No land *Ifa* is not known

The above *Ifa* literary corpus narrates the widely admired, accepted and sought after *Aje* in entire macrocosm and the universal popularity of this goddess as the custodian of wealth and profuse abundance.



Plate 4
Cowries Bead (*Aje*)

The ceremonial bead in Plate 5 is for *Obatala's* cults (*sese efun*), strictly for priests/priestesses of this cult and monarchs that have connection with this god. In Yoruba theology, *Obatala* is the deity of light and brightness. The metaphysical study of Yoruba religion affirms the capability of this deity to change human misfortune and overall circumstances or condition in someone's life. This is proved in *Ìwòrì Méji*. The voice of *Olódùmarè* says:

*Ilé ìgbín gba ìgbín
Ilé ahun gba ahun
Òdèdè ahun kò gba olòjò
Ahun ló kòlé tán ó yò òdèdè reṣe sí bàrà idí
Adifá fún Obàtálá
Tí ohun tún ayé eni tí kò sun wòn ṣe*
The house of a snail suit snail

The house of a turtle suit turtle
The porch of the turtle cannot suit visitant
The turtle built house with porch at the bottom
Divined for *Obàtálá*
That change misfortune of human misery

The excerpt affirms this god with the capability of overturn the misfortune of people with wretched destiny and recognizes this bead as a symbol of unsullied purity, peace, axenic spruce and aged. Kings from the lineage of this deity often used the bead for beaded crown and necklace. Some of the kings with connection to this divinity are *Oni* of *Ife* and *Olufon* of *Orolu* which is evidenced by *Orolu's* eulogistic biographies: *Olufon Orolu, omo alade sese efun.... (Olufon Orolu, the lineage of white-beaded crown....)*.



Plate 5
Obatala's Beads (*Sese Efun*)

Plate 6 is a ceremonial bead in *Ifa's* cult, (*Otutu Opan*). The bead is colligated to wisdom, equanimity, purity, divination and also explicates the rational and systematic way of religion, its influence and of the nature of religious truth. *Ifa* believed in a system of two sides that revolves around each other under their mutual gravitation and antithetic units such as male/female, good/bad, right/left, up/down. The green-coloured bead in Plate 6 represents male (*otutu*) while the venetian red symbolizes female (*opan*). Whenever the bead is used as necklace, it is referred to as *Ide* by this cult and the users cannot bow down to any authority irrespective of status. This bead is usually accorded with monarchial respect and equated with king's crown. The lofty respect is illustrated by this *Ifa* axiom: *Eni oba lo gba ogba, oba n de ade ori, mo gbe ide bo orun* (King's associate receives gracious kindness, diadem signifies monarch, *ide* identifies *ifa's* members).

Apart from *ide* (necklace), *ifa* diviners also use the beads for crown objects and only *ifa's* descendants can wear the crown. This bead is a symbol of power and membership (*awo*) in *Ifa's* cult and nonmember of this religious cult accord the bead with high

respect to forefend cataclysm from this cultus as demonstrated in this admonitory corpus:

À fi ẹni tí kọgilá kọlù
 À fi ẹni tí ó fi asínrín jẹkà
 Ló lè kọlu Èṣù
 Ló lè kọlu Ṣàngó
 À yà fi ẹni tí Ṣàngó ó pa
 Ló lè d'ojú ijà ko omọ Awo

Only insane human beings
 Only smelly rats' eaters
 Can have temerarious heart to head-on Èṣù
 Can foolishly confront Ṣàngó
 Except, those cease to live through Ṣàngó
 Can antagonize Awo



Plate 6
 Ifa's Bead (*Otutu-opan*)

Yoruba theology affirms *Esu* as the deity that possesses highest *ase* and the black bead in Plate 7 represents *Ase*. *Esu's* ceremonial bead (*ileke Esu*), Plate 7 is a symbol of power and sacredness. The red in the bead symbolizes power and the cosmology established that, *ase* of this divinity is located in his phallus. The bead is the sacred object for non-members of this cult except the cults that have affiliation with this divinity.



Plate 7
 Ceremonial Beads of *Esu*

Kele Sango, Plate 8, can only be found amongst *Sango* priests/priestesses cum devotees. This bead

usually combines red and white colours (symbolizing checks and balance). The symbolic representation of red in the bead is danger, fire, power and caution, for the reason that *Sango* kills without interrogative sentence. This is established in this *Sango* cautious byword: *Sango ki pa ẹni ki ayan iko mu, ẹni Sango pa a pa gbe* (*Sango* kills without apprehension, *Sango* kills without reprimand or repercussion). And the white bead explicates purity and peace in the heart of this divinity. In structure and arrangement, the two beads are usually teensy-weensy in size with big sepia bead at the conspicuous position.



Plate 8
Sango beads (*Kele Sango*)

Ceremonial bead of water goddess, (*ileke iyemonja*), Plate 9, is a symbol of femininity and fertility. When the bead is in use by any woman, it is in the belief of Yoruba that it will make provision for gestation and help in the period of difficult delivery. Yoruba cosmology affirms *Iyemoja* as *Sango's* mother and a very powerful woman. This is why Yoruba usually eulogizes her as thus: *Iyemonja o ta ta, a ri eyin pon Sango si, Iyemoja le, Sango omo e le* (*Iyemonja* the powerful woman with strong dorsum for *Sango*, *Sango* is tough just as his mother, *Iyemoja*). Plates 10, 11, 12 and 13 are beautiful and associative beads. These beads can be found amidst anybody in the society.



Plate 9

Water Goddess' Beads (*Iyemonja*)

Akun, *idun* and *enla*, Plates 10, 11, and 12 respectively are regular beads, mostly worn in Yoruba society at wedding, naming coronation ceremonies. *Ileke egbe*, Plate 13, is a symbol of connectivity and oneness for a formal organization or group. *Enla*, Plate 12, is a symbol of affluence, wealth and nobility in the society. Richness exemplifies *enla* amidst other beads in Yoruba



Plate 10
Ileke Okun



Plate 11
Idun



Plate 12
Enla



Plate 13
Ileke Egbe

culture and *Enla* simply means *eni n la* or *eni ti o ti la* (wealthy person). Ultimately, the Yoruba traditional institution and religion have established beads as major symbol for power recognitions and asseverated in this monarchical salutation, rendered thus: *Ki ade o pe lori, ki ileke o pe lorun* (may the crown stay long on the king's head, may the beads last long on the king's neck). This salutation metaphorically signifies that the neck beads are a symbol of king's status and relevance in his kingdom jurisdiction.

6. Conclusion

The need to retrace how the Yoruba conceptual structures are presented before the advent of Western culture and other contemporary influence that impact perceptual experience and representation of power prompted this study. In Yoruba tradition, monarchical institutions, religious cults and people who occupy highly revered positions in the society use symbolic objects as markers of transcendence and power. The perspective and practice of these symbols are rooted mostly in outward packaging and appearance. No doubt, ceramic bead has been recognized as one of the key objects for power recognition.

At the same time, some beads are outfit for celebration and societal occasions. In these regards, attempt has been made to study the contribution of ceramic beads to the hierarchical classification system of Yoruba monarchical institutions and traditional religions. Identity, structural arrangement, theme and colour of diverse beads as an integral part of kings, chiefs and gods have been contextually defined with pictorial illustrations. The article, therefore, reveals the import of beads to the preservation of authority among Yorùbá despite acceleration of cultural change and unbridled influence of foreign culture. Evidently, appellations that are given to each position for mutually-recognizable power were highlighted.

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