

Candomblé

Candomblé is the cult of the African gods, as practiced in Bahia. The religions brought in the old days by different nations from the African coast were undeniably perpetuated here. The religions from Congo and Angola showed more persistence in *macumba* from Rio de Janeiro, while the religions from Daomé and from the Southwest part of present-day Nigeria were mainly conserved in Bahia, and, in a lesser proportion, in the Xangôs of Recife.

All these religions consist of the worship of ancestor gods. In each sacred yard (*terreiro*) a high priestess (*mãe de santo*) or a high priest (*pai de santo*) is the depositary of the *axés*, or sacred objects that belong to these gods, *nagô orixás* and *gêge* voodoos. Animal sacrifices and food offerings are made to the gods during the private ceremonies. The gods are, after that, summoned and invoked to get back to earth with chants, during symbolic dances executed by the daughters and sons of saints, to the sound of the drums (atabaques) and from a bell called *agogô*. The presence of the gods manifests itself by the entrancement of the daughters and sons of saints, in the body of which the various *orixás* incarnate. Each daughter and son of a saint is possessed only by the *orixá* to which he or she is consecrated.

The main *orixás* that are invoked are *Ogun*, the god of iron, of the blacksmiths and of all those who make use of this metal; *Oxossi*, the god of hunting; *Omolu* and *Obaluayê*, the gods of smallpox and contagious diseases; *Xangô*, the god of thunder; *Oyá*, the deity of the storms and of the Niger River; *Oxum*, the goddess of the rivers; *Yemanjá*; the goddess of the seas; *Nanan Buruku*, the oldest of all water deities and mother of Omulu; *Oxumarê*, deity of the rainbow; *Oxaguian* and *Oxalufan*, two manifestations of *Oxalá*, the deity of the creation of all human beings.

Each *orixá* has colors to which they are consecrated to, and their respective sons and daughters come to dance in public dressed in beautiful garments of such colors and bringing symbolic objects.

The public ceremonies are celebrated with much brightness in more than a thousand holy yards (*terreiros*) of Bahia and always attract large crowds of sincere worshippers

and those who are simply curious. They take place in large shacks decorated with wreaths of paper cut in the colors of *orixás*, that is celebrated in the specific day, and they last many hours, during which *nagôs* songs are sung, conserving thus with great vitality the spiritual patrimony and legacy of their ancestors.

Pierre Verger