UNDERSTANDING ASE AND ITS RELATION TO ESU AMONG THE YORÙBÁ AND ASE.T IN ANCIENT EGYPT

Part I

By Asar Imhotep (January 4, 2012)

MOCHA-VERSITY
The MOCHA-Versity Institute of Philosophy and Research

luntu/lumtu/muntu
Introduction

This is a preliminary article to discuss the possible origins, meaning(s) and applications for the concept in the Yorùbá ìfàngbò tradition called ìṣẹ. We will also take a look at possible connections between the Yorùbá deity èṣù, and the goddess of ciKam-ciKulu (ancient Egypt) js.t (Isis). Throughout this discourse we hope to expand our understanding of this term and its earliest conceptualizations using the analytic tool of comparative linguistics. This project will be broken up into two essays. The first essay will be concerned with the defining of ìṣẹ and its relationship to other African deities. The second essay expands on this research and seeks to discover the most ancient linguistic root of the word ìṣẹ. We will argue that the word ìṣẹ derives from an old Kongo-Saharan word for “hand” and it is the action of the hand by which ìṣẹ derives its popular meaning. Before we begin our analysis for our first essay, we must properly define ìṣẹ as well as present examples of its usage in Yorùbá tradition.

Definition

John Pemberton, III in his article “The Dreadful God and the Divine King” (in Barnes 1997: 123) notes that the “meaning of ìṣẹ is extraordinarily complex.” I will argue later on that the reason this term is so complex, and is highly polysemic, is because it is the result of the merging of two different linguistic roots which share a common theme (to be explained in essay two). Each term, over time, begins to build up derivative and alternative meanings—mainly by way of metaphor—thus expanding the term and its possible usages within the language. One dictionary entry defines ìṣẹ as:

Ìṣẹ: a coming to pass; law; command; authority; commandment; enjoinment; imposition; power; precept; discipline; instruction; cannon; biding; document; virtue; effect; consequence; imprecation.1

This term is comparable to Egyptian s₃ “to read, to authorize, to determine, to decree, to allot, to design, to ordain, to commission;” s₃.t “something decreed, ordained by God; dues, revenues, taxes, impost.”

Pemberton (Barnes 1997: 123) notes that one of the contexts for ìṣẹ is “kingship.” As we can see from the dictionary entry above that this association is derived from the meanings: “law, command, authority and power.” Verger (1966:35) defines ìṣẹ as “the vital power, the energy, the great strength of all things.” It is also the “divine energy manifest in the process of procreation” (Egyptian s₃ “the source of life, to begin;” s₃.t “the goddess of primeval matter”).

As noted by Pemberton, ìṣẹ does not signify anything particular, yet it invests all things, exists everywhere and as the warrant for all creative activity, opposes chaos and the loss of meaning in human experience (Barnes, 1997:124). Kamalu (1998: 142) recognizes ìṣẹ as “vital force.” This vital force is known as se among the Fon of Benin. This se is a part of Mawu (the feminine aspect of the Divine Mawu-Lisa) that permeates through each person and the divine word.

The linguistic root of this term in African languages is -s- and we will see later on that this can also be s-r. This root is present in Tshiluba asa “to begin”; Hebrew swh and Yorùbá se “to come to pass”; Yorùbá ìṣẹ and Tiv tsav “the power to cause to happen;” Hebrew siwwah, Amarigna ez, Yorùbá se “to command,” Egyptian s₃ “ordain, order.” We also have Yorùbá se “do”; isé “work” and Hebrew asah “to do, to make” (Yorùbá sèse).

In Tshiluba we also have esa/enza “to make, act, behave, take the appearance of”; dy-enza “action, treatment”; enji “legislative” (bukalenga bw-enji (j<s/z/s) “legislative power”); enze-ka “cause, happen, occur;” Ngenzì (senza) “officer, manufacturer.” The underlying spirit of this root is “the power to cause to happen, the authority to make changes.” People in legislative office are the ones with the

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authority to make things happen in the nation. This is reflected in the personification of wsr (Osiris) and ṣs.t/js.t (Isis): for not only are they officers/administrators of the state (the first king and queen), they are also progenitors of man and creation according to the ancient Egyptian myths. We will explore this more a little later on in our discourse.

The underlying theme for àṣẹ is “power” and this power is manifested in two primary forms: 1) **biological power** which shapes one’s physical existence for good or ill, and 2) **political power** which shapes people as moral and social beings (Barnes, 1997:124).

It is in its latter branch of meaning by which “kingship” becomes a euphemism for àṣẹ. In the Igbo language, this root is reflected as ozó “title of high degree conferring on the owner privileges and honour as a sacrosanct (sacred, holy, revered, untouchable) being” (s > z). The Igbo word Ezé means “king.” Ezé can also mean “to honor, to participate, and to assume a role of privilege.”

This association of kingship with àṣẹ is also reflected in another meaning for àṣẹ as given by E. Bólájí Ìdòwú in his classic work Olódúmarè (1994: 72): àṣẹ = “scepter.” A scepter is a classical African emblem of power. This same àṣẹ “scepter” in Yorùbá I equate, linguistically, to ws “scepter, staff, rod” in ancient Egyptian [1]. Words that begin with an h- or a w- in ancient Egyptian and Semitic often yield zero for cognate terms in Yorùbá [i.e., Eg. wšt “cleanse,” Yorùbá bò “wash”; Arabic wady “lowland,” Yorùbá ọdo “lowland, river valley, valley”; Eg. wšt “priest,” Yorùbá ọba “king, priest”; Eg. wšt “free woman,” Yorùbá obi “the female of cattle”; ọbọlabe “vagina”; Eg. wd.t “eye of Ra”; Yorùbá ọju “eye”; Egyptian ḥd.t “white crown,” Yorùbá ade “crown”; Egyptian wib “be distinguished, be honored, be strong”; Yorùbá ọba “king”]. Table 1 below provides further evidence for this correspondence.

### Table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Egyptian</th>
<th>Yorùbá</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ws “scepter”</td>
<td>àṣẹ “scepter”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ws “dominion, have dominion, power”</td>
<td>àṣẹ “law, command, authority, power”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ws “honor (due to a god or king), prestige”</td>
<td>òṣọ “elegance, finery, neatness, jewels”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ws “fortunate, prosperous, well-being, prosperity”</td>
<td>ajé “money, the goddess of money”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ws “to batter, to strike, to break, to bruise, to lay”</td>
<td>òṣẹ “hurt, injury”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ws “ruin”</td>
<td>eṣẹ “blow with the fist”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ws “to saw, cut up, trim”</td>
<td>sá (salogbe) “to cut, to wound with a knife”; àsà “a heavy spear or javelin used to kill elephants” (with noun forming prefix a-); oṣẹ “club of god of thunder [Ṣango]” (a striking instrument);</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ws (“power, dominion”) scepter [1] is a symbol that appeared often in reliefs, art and hieroglyphics associated with the ancient Egyptian religion. They appear as long, straight staves, with a stylized animal head on top and a forked end. These are old pastoral emblems that came to symbolize royalty in the Egyptian culture. They may be a predynastic symbol, but is definitely attested in the first dynasty (Wilkinson, 2001: 189). It was associated with the nsw bity “king” as well as the

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2 There is also ìjé “the spirit of a bird” used by women (ìyà àìmí) to invoke powers used for abundance and justice.
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deities (i.e., Set and Anpu). In later times it became a symbol of control over the forces of chaos. It also took the place of, in many reliefs, the $dd$ pillars which are depicted holding up the sky.\(^5\)

The term $\text{w}s$ is also present in the name for the New Kingdom capital of Upper Egypt $\text{w}s.t$, later known as Thebes. There was also a goddess (pictured right) by the name of $\text{w}s.t$ (often written as $\text{wosret}$) which Wilkinson (2003: 169) defines as “the powerful female one.” A better translation would be something more like “feminine energy” based on common articulations in African priestly traditions. Wilkinson (2003) speculates that $\text{w}s.t$ was probably an early form of $ht\text{ hrw}$ (Hathor). I would argue for an early form of $\text{s}.t$ (Isis) based on the root of their names respectively (which we will touch on a little later).

The $\text{w}s$ ($\text{a}s\text{e}$) scepter was not only found in Egypt, but among many pastoral societies across Africa with varying names. Table 2 below shows a few of these staves and their locations across Africa.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: $\text{w}s$ staves in Africa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hangool Staff – Afar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woko Staff – Hamar, Ethiopia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A = Egyptian staff (Cairo Museum)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B = Peul of Sengal (A. M. Lam)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C = Nanakana of Ghana (I’Fan Museum Dakar)(^6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Alain Anselin, *i-Medjat Journal* (Num. 4, February 2010, pg. 17), in his brief article entry titled “Note sur le $\text{w}s$ égyptien et le woko hamar” (Note on the Egyptian $\text{w}s$ [scepter] and the Hamar woko [staff]), provides us with an example from Ethiopia on the possible meaning of the $\text{w}s$ scepter as inspired by its shape in the Egyptian tradition. The emblem is the symbol for the *South Omo Research Center* which is called *shonkor* in Arbore and *woko* in Hamar (Ethiopia). Dr. Hisada, during a dedication ceremony for the center, explained that:

...a hook at one end and a fork at the other end was already known in Ancient Egypt and today is still used in South Omo by the Arbore, the Hamar and others’’

\(^5\) This is reminiscent of the Bakongo concept of *simbi*: an energy force, the God power that “holds up” the universe. See K. Bunseki Fu-Kiau (2006). *Simba Simbi: Hold up that which holds you up*. Dorrance Publishing Co. Inc.

\(^6\) See Lam (1994: 58)

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In Hamar, the woko “is also extended to the realm of ritual where the fork of the staff is used to ward off what is unwanted (disease, drought, war) and the hook is used to draw close what is wanted (health, abundance, peace). Hisada should use the hooked end of the staff, Ivo said, to attract large funds and many scholars to the center, and with the forked side he should keep away poverty, thieves and liars.”

The meaning of the woko staff falls in alignment with the meaning of the àṣẹ staff among the Yorùbá as we will see later on in our discourse when we discuss the relationship between èsù and àṣẹ. Both emblems are a symbol for abundance and prosperity which is why wís is also associated with prosperity in the Egyptian language. I’ve come to know personally that in Tanzania, these staves are present and that these scepters indicate that the holder is a leader of a kraal.

In summary, àṣẹ among the Yorùbá is associated with the very force which is life and brings things into being in the universe. As we will see later on, it is also associated with the power of speech as can be seen in its meanings of “command, ordain, and law.” We will see that there are two primary themes for àṣẹ (power and speech) and these are derived from two different linguistic roots that were pronounced the same in ancient times. These terms have merged over time because of the similarities in associations. We will now demonstrate how àṣẹ is related to the Yorùbá òrìṣà (deity) Èsù and the ancient Egyptian nṯrw [ciLuba ndele(a,u)] Wsr and ʌs.t.

Èṣú, Isis and Osiris: Personifications of àṣẹ

In my 2011 publication Passion of the Christ or Passion of Osiris: The Kongo Origins of the Jesus Myth, I went through painstaking efforts to demonstrate the conceptual and linguistic cognate relationship between Yeshua (Jesus) of the Hebrews, Wsr/Jsr (Osiris) of the ancient Egyptians and Èṣú among the Yorùbá. As it turns out, all three of these names are derived from the same linguistic roots.

As we discovered in that publication, African people tend to develop a central character or deity for their myths that represent an array of themes simultaneously. They do not represent one single concept, but come to embody the crystallization of multiple themes. These characters over time pick-up various attributes that become staples to the identity of the deity. Many of these attributes associated with these characters are derived from lexical items that share the same consonant root structure as the word that has come to initially define the deity itself.

For example, Wsr is the “god” of the Nile River (or water in general). The word for river in Egyptian is itrw (t-r) (Tshiluba mušulu “stream, river”). It is this same root that we get the word nṯr (t-r) from (“god, to cleanse, water”; Azande toro “river,” ma-toro “God”). Here the consonant /l/ in itrw has morphed into /s/ (t>s) in wsr (iSr “water meadows”) which is common in African languages. The s- and t- morphemes could both derive from k- (i.e., Bari kare “river”; Dilling okul, Kondugr ongul “road”7; ) as a palatalized form. The /l/ in Egyptian may have been pronounced as a /s/ sound in early times. We posit a derivation from something like Proto-Bantu *-dOk- “to rain, drip” (water) by way of metathesis.8 The w- in Wsr is a prefix. The root of his name is s-r as has been demonstrated in Imhotep (2011a).

Another example can be seen in Wsr’s association with being a “savior.” As we know Yeshua is the savior of the Hebrew people. The word for “savior” in Hebrew is yshua’ishuwa’. The -r has been replaced by a glottal stop represented by an apostrophe ‘/’. We know it was originally an -r- by examining Kongo-Saharan languages. In Yorùbá we have Sádi “to take refuge under the protection of another”; Sálà “to escape; to flee”; Sâlo “to run away, flee,elope”; Sáli’ “to beg help of another”; sârë/sure “to run, gallop”; Asalà “an escape”; Asalù “having recourse to another for protection”; Asâré “a runner; also called Asúré.” The s-r root is reduced in the Yorùbá term olà “that which saves, salvation, the

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7 Rivers were man’s early highways and roads for boats. So they tend to be the same word.
8 It should be noted that /l/ and /l/ interchange in African languages. The *-dOk- form becomes k-l > t’-l > s-l. Also r and l interchange.
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cause of salvation.” This word in Tshiluba is shila “leave” = shiyila; sula = break free, break its links, liberate”; sulula “untie, free, become loose, undone, let go, liberate, give freedom, extricate.” In the ancient Egyptian we have the (l>n) form in the word snl “to rescue, to save,” śdi (Yorùbá Sádi) “to break, to rescue, to take away, to maintain, to secure, to recover, to cut out.” Here we know the root was originally s-r in Egyptian because of the śdi form which follows an old Kongo-Saharan rule where [l+i>[di]. Wsr (Osiris) being the savior of the Egyptian people is so because his name preserves the s-r root which means “to save, rescue, etc.” This is very important to understand throughout this discourse because Ṣùù is a prime example of this ancient African practice among the Yorùbá people in regards to the merging of concepts.

**Who is Ṣùù?**

Ṣùù is a spiritual force that represents the “owner of the crossroads, the trickster, the divine messenger, the one who carries the staff of god.” He is the force that “activates” or causes things to happen. Ṣùù rules through the ajogun. The good ajogun control wealth, children, wives/husbands, success, love, and so on. The evil ajogun control death, illness, loss, mental unrest and similar forces (Neimark, 1995: 73). Ṣùù, through sacrifice, serves as a messenger between humans and the other dìriṣà and between humans and God. The goddess Òṣùn is Ṣùù’s mother. She is the personification of beauty and sexuality. She represents the generative life-force in the universe, love and rivers. Ṣùù and Òṣùn are different aspects of the same conceptual idea and it will become evident later on in our discourse.

Funso Aiyejainain, in his essay “Esu Elegbara: A Source of an Alter/Native Theory of African Literature and Criticism,” provides us with an indepth articulation of the dynamics of Ṣùù. On pg. 6 (no date given) he informs us that:

In Yorùbá philosophy, Esu emerges as a divine trickster, a disguise-artist, a mischief-maker, a rebel, a challenger of orthodoxy, a shape-shifter, and an enforcer deity. Esu is the keeper of the divine ase with which Olodumare created the universe; a neutral force who controls both the benevolent and the malevolent supernatural powers; he is the guardian of Orunmila’s oracular utterances. Without Esu to open the portals to the past and the future, Orunmila, the divination deity would be blind. As a neutral force, he straddles all realms and acts as an essential factor in any attempt to resolve the conflicts between contrasting but coterminal forces in the world. Although he is sometimes portrayed as whimsical, Esu is actually devoid of all emotions. He supports only those who perform prescribed sacrifices and act in conformity with the moral laws of the universe as laid down by Olodumare. As the deity of the “orita”—often defined as the crossroads but really a complex term that also refers to the front yard of a house, or the gateway to the various bodily orifices—it is Esu’s duty to take sacrifices to target-deities. Without his intervention, the Yorùbá people believe, no sacrifice, no matter how sumptuous, will be efficacious. Philosophically speaking, Esu is the deity of choice and free will. So, while Ogun may be the deity of war and creativity and Orunmila the deity of wisdom, Esu is the deity of prescience, imagination, and criticism—literary or otherwise.

We are introduced to some very important associations in this citation. The most important for us here, however, is his attribute as the “keeper of aṣẹ.” We mentioned earlier that aṣẹ represents two major themes: power and speech. We will see how both of them play out in the meaning of Ṣùù. One way to know the attributes of Ṣùù is to examine the praise titles given to Ṣùù or poems dedicated to him:

- Esu is the Divine Messenger between God and Man.
- Esu sits at the Crossroad.
- Esu is the Orisa that offers choices and possibility.
- Esu is the gatekeeper, the guardian of the door.
- Esu safeguards the principle of freewill.
- Esu is the keeper of Ase.
Esu is called the divine trickster that lures man’s emotions creating variety which spices life.
Esu brings out the fool in man.
Esu brings out the symbolic child in man.
Esu’s mischief serves to wake a person up and teach them a lesson.
Esu represents the balance of nature.
Day and night, white and black, construction and destruction. Esu is an old man and a child. Absolute balance of nature.
Esu has a voracious appetite.
Esu has a constant drive and is always ready (erect penis).
Esu counterbalances aspects of our reality.
Esu is the patron of the “underworld” and their way of survival.
Esu---The means justify the end!
Esu must always be appeased first.
Ase O!

Èṣù and Legba (a title of Èṣù) are “keepers of the word” (which is also the life-force) and are masters of language (Kamalu, 1998: 141). In Yorùbá, one of the paths of Èṣù is known as Elegbara. This term consists of two words El “God”+ agbara “power”(Hebrew Gebuwr-ah “power,” Igbo agbara “powerful oracle,” Èbíra Ne Gba’ “spirit”). Elegbara among the Yorùbá became in the Biblical literature the angel Gabri-El (word reversal). El/Olu/Ala all mean GOD (proto-bantu *y-ulu). This is important here because when the Arabs say Allahu Akbar (el + agbara; k > g)—which means “Allah is the Greatest, most powerful”—they are invoking an old African god: Èṣù (the owner of power).

Gabriel is also known as the messenger of God: Gaber-iy-el “the gaber of God.” In Amharic gebre means “servant.” This g-b-r root in Hebrew lets us know that he is not only a messenger of God, but a geber “valiant man,” and a gibbowr “powerful man.” In Yorùbá we have egbere “gnome” and al-agbara “a powerful man.”

Yorùbá: Elegbara, El-egba
Fon: Legba
Ebira: Ne gba (spirit), obi-negba “great spirit” is God
Owerri Igbo: Agbara
Onitsha Igbo: Agbala

What’s interesting about this correlation is that according to SalmanSpiritual.com,9

The phrase ‘Allahu Akbar’ is the opening declaration of every Islamic prayer and is a slogan which was prescribed by the Holy Prophet Muhammad (upon whom be peace) to the mujahids of Islam.

All prayers among Ifá practitioners open with an invocation to Èṣu-Elegbara first before proceeding with any aspects of the prayer (or ritual). The Muslims kept this ancestral practice while de-emphasizing and de-mythicizing the deity aspect of the invocation as to appear to be monotheistic.

This association of Èṣù being the “messenger” is important for the aspect of àṣẹ which deals with “speech.” Èṣù is the keeper of the àṣẹ authority scepter. Èṣù is associated with a “messenger” because of the close association with the word sē “message” (Egyptian sī’t “message”); from Yorùbá sē “do”; isé “work” seen in the word írànṣé “messenger”. As we have stated previously, the Yorùbá àṣẹ scepter is the Egyptian ws $^1$ scepter and has the same connotations. The name Èṣù is a by-form of the word àṣẹ. Both àṣẹ and Èṣù are built off an old Kongo-Saharan -s- root (also s-r):

7| Understanding Àṣẹ and Its Relation To Èṣù Among The Yoruba and Àṣẹ: in Ancient Egypt – Asar Imhotep
Table 3: The Kongo-Saharan -s- root

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hebrew</th>
<th>Yorùbá</th>
<th>Mende</th>
<th>Tiv</th>
<th>Nupe</th>
<th>Chu-chewa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To come to pass</td>
<td>swh</td>
<td>ṣẹ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To command</td>
<td>siwwah</td>
<td>ṣẹ (ékpé)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To cause to come to pass</td>
<td>Saw (imp.s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A command, authority</td>
<td>mi-sewah</td>
<td>ḍẹ</td>
<td></td>
<td>tsav</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The power to cause to happen</td>
<td>ḍẹ</td>
<td>tsav</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>magic</td>
<td>sawa</td>
<td>tsav</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>witchcraft</td>
<td>tsav</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ma-sawe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruler</td>
<td>Etsu</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The angel who holds God’s staff of authority</td>
<td>Ṣẹṣẹ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The authority scepter is a symbol of Èṣù’s possession of āṣẹ\(^{11}\): both the potent word or incantation and the power of Olódùmarè (the Supreme Being) (Kamalu, 1998: 141). In traditional African societies the king would speak to the people through a messenger. You’d know who this messenger was because he carried the king’s staff of authority. In places like China the messenger would have a special seal on a document. So what the messenger stated was in fact the law as spoken by the king as if the king was stating it before the people himself.

The king, however, represents the messenger of the Divine and the ancestors; so he too is associated with Èṣù as the divine messenger of the society at large. In fact, Èṣù is known as a “royal child, a prince, a monarch” (Thompson, 1984: 19). It is out of this tradition for which Yeshua takes his characteristics in the Jesus myth of the Hebrews as “king of kings,” but at the same time being the messenger of the Divine (God’s son). This explains why all prayers must go through Jesus: it is rooted in ancient African kingship customs of speaking to the public through the royal messenger. Like Yeshua, Èṣù takes the prayers (and sacrifices) to the appropriate deities and corresponds directly with Olódùmarè. Wsr is also the bringer of sacrifices. We contend that the s-r root is at play here and is reflected in Egyptian šr “bring, present, to sacrifice, send up, to make rise.”

Èṣù represents a moral power—the power to save and kill;\(^{12}\) the knowledge of good and evil, the efficacy of medicine and poison, the usefulness and destructive potential of fire, water or atomic energy—and this is why Èṣù is associated with good and bad qualities and deemed “a trickster.” One’s ignorance of how to handle power can blind one to reality and ultimately cause conflict in one’s life. All of these attributes are represented by the -s- root and the power of āṣẹ.

A similar association with the potent word and the staff of authority can be seen among the cousins of the Yorùbá: the Igbo of Nigeria. The term for “upright speech” in Igbo is known as Ofo “the power/god of truth, justice and righteousness” (Kamalu, 1998: 142). Among the Yorùbá, ofo is “potent

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10 See Oduyoye in (Saakana, 1991: 75)
11 It is a symbol to convey that the power (āṣẹ) is in the palm of your “hand” (the creative work you do with your hands). More on this in essay two.
12 One is reminded of the scene in the movie Shaka Zulu (1987) where Shaka had to remind the doctors from Europe that it was he (Tshaka) that had the power of life or death in his kingdom when two doctors allegedly brought a woman back from the dead in a previous scene. This is a common feature in African kingship and is personified in Èṣù.

8) Understanding Āṣẹ and its Relation To Èṣù Among The Yoruba and Ase.t in Ancient Egypt – Asar Imhotep
speech and authoritative utterance” (short form of *afọsẹ* "authority of sanction through utterance, the power to cause to happen through verbal command"). Among the Igbo *ọfo* is also a staff or stick held by an elder with the *ọzọ* title. Whatever is said by the elder whilst striking the lineage *ọfo* on the ground is deemed authoritative (because the elder personifies truth). In other words, what he/she says at that moment is law (*dẹsẹ* “law, command, authority”).

**Èṣú and Wsr**

As stated previously, I have already dealt with the relationship between Èṣú and Osiris in Imhotep (2011a). I will not spend much time re-presenting that evidence in this paper. What I want to highlight here is the s/s-r linguistic root which gives Èṣú and Wsr (as a concept) their thrust and potency in their respected African traditions.

As we know Èṣú is built off the same root as the word *dẹsẹ* “power” which makes Èṣú the personification of power (holder of *dẹsẹ*). What I argued in Imhotep (2011a) is that the full root is s-r. The -r as a final consonant is highly amissable in African languages and is dropped in Yorùbá quite often in relation to compared cognates in related languages. The god Wsr, as the primordial king of ancient Egypt, derives his authoritative attribute from the w-s-r root meaning “power” in ancient Egyptian.

![Image](image)

wsr “make strong, powerful, wealthy, influential”

Richard Wilkinson (2003: 118) speculates that the etymology of the name Wsr derives from wsr which means “power,” therefore making Wsr to mean “mighty one.” I agree with his hypothesis based on the comparative data, but as I discuss in Imhotep (2011a), the name wsr is a synthesis of various different roots which have been crystallized into a mythicized anthropomorphic figure (Osiris). The wís lexeme meaning “fortunate, prosperous, well-being, prosperity”; “honor (due to a god or king), prestige” is just a reduced form of the word wsr above. The -r has been dropped in this term or inverted as *ə=*l/r. The wís root is present in one of the titles for Wsr:

![Image](image)

wsri “a title of Osiris” (Budge 149a)

Wsr was (according to one myth) Egypt’s first king or head of state and the root of his name (s-r) is a word associated with administrative positions in the Egyptian language. The terms with the s-r root are the same terms with the -s- root in Yorùbá as we will see below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Egyptian</th>
<th>Yorùbá</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>sr</em> &quot;nobleman, magistrate (a judge, in other words a law maker and enforcer)&quot;</td>
<td><em>Àṣẹ:</em> law; command; authority; commandment; enjoinderment; imposition; power; precept; discipline; instruction; cannon; biding; document; virtue; effect; consequence; imprecation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>sr</em> &quot;official, great one, chief&quot;</td>
<td><em>ọzọ</em> (Igbo) “title of high degree conferring on the owner privileges and honour as a sacrosanct being”; <em>eze</em> “to honor, to participate to assume a role of privilege”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>sr</em> “foretell, make known, to promise, to reveal, to announce, to spread abroad, to challenge”</td>
<td><em>oṣò</em> “wizard” (seer, diviner (&lt;ṣẹ “to see”) [Arabic <em>haza</em> “to divine,” <em>hazin</em> “astrologer”; Aramaic <em>hazuh</em> “to see”]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9) *Understanding Àṣẹ and its Relation To Èṣú Among The Yoruba and Ase.t in Ancient Egypt* – Asar Imhotep
The term *sr* (s-r) “official, great one, chief” is reflected in Yoruba: *asalu* (s-l) “a title of honor among the Ogboni people” (Egyptian sâr “elevated, prominent”). The ogboni are the wise elders (leaders) in Yoruba traditional society. As we can see the Egyptian term *wls* “dominion, honor” is just an alternate form of *sr/wsr* (Yoruba *asalu, àṣẹ*) with loss of final consonant -r (or is inverted to become i).

There is another variation of the *wls* root in African languages that deal with authority and kingship. As demonstrated in other publications (Imhotep 2011a, 2011b) the 3 sound in Egyptian fluctuated between an /a/ and an /l/ sound in certain dialects. This /l/ would be an /t/ in other African languages. Alain Anselin (2010: 17, ft.1) demonstrates this sound alternation in other African languages:

\[
\text{wlsj/wls} \prec \text{*rus} \text{ “crumble, fall to pieces, ruin” (w governed by the law of Belova,}^{13} \text{ and } 3 = /t/) \text{ Western Chadic: *rus, “destroy”; Hausa: rúsá “trash”; Kuler: ryaas break in to pieces,} \text{ bol: ruus “destroy”; ngizim: rúasá “act on purpose violently (Takacs, 1999: 396).}^{14}\text{Fulfulde: ruus, “collapse” (Seydoni, 1998: 578). Wolof: Ruus, “crumble, is defoliates” (Diouf, 2003: 294)}
\]

This is very informative as we have the linguistic grounds to speculate another variation of *wls* (“dominion, scepter”) as reflected in African languages with the terms *ras* and *órisà*. The word *órisà* in the Yoruba language is defined as “head” in common dictionaries. Henry John Drewal and John Mason in their article “Ogun and Body/Mind Potentiality: Yorubá Scarification and Painting Traditions in Africa and the Americas” (Barnes, 1997: 337) defines *órisà as “anciently selected head.” Neimark (1993: 14) informs us that the *órisà* are “energy” (powers) that, for the most part, represent aspects of nature. This liturgical association between “power” and “órisà” finds synergy with the concept of àṣẹ “power, energy.” We argue that this is so because they both belong to the same linguistic root.

The *órisà*, as conceived by the devotees of Ìfá, are the primordial energy forces that give rise to phenomena in nature. There are two primary reflexes for *órisà* in the Yoruba language. The first deals with “head, first, and leadership”; the second with “patron saints, divine ancestors, divinities” (Oduyoye, 1984: 19).

Ìdówú (1994: 60) defines *órisà* as a corruption of the original term *oríṣé “head-source.” He goes on to further explain that:

*Orió* is “head.” It is the name for man’s physical head. It means also, however (and, I think, primarily) the essence of personality, the ego. *Ṣi* in Yoruba is a verb meaning “to originate,” “to begin,” “to derive or spring (from).” The name *Orió-ṣi* then would be an ellipsis of *Ibiíi-ori-ìti-ṣè “The origin or Source of Orio.” Now, what is this Origin, or “Head-Source?” It is the Deity himself, the Great *Orió* from whom all *óriti* derive, inasmuch as He is the Source and Giver of each of them. I am strengthened in this view of the derivation of the name by the analogy of the Igbo *Chi*. In a general sense, *chi* is the essence of personality, or the personality-soul. The generic name for the divinities is also *chi*. All *chí*, man’s or the chi which is the divinity, derive from *Chi-Uku*, the Great *Chi* which is the Deity. So that either the Yoruba *órió* or the Igbo *chi* means, in the general sense, that essence which derive from the Head-Source, the Great Source of all life and being, the Source from which all take their origin. (ibid.)

Again we are reintroduced to the -sr- root which means “to come into being, to make happen, to come to pass, to derive from, etc.” We see this root in Egyptian *wls* and *wsr* which are both titles for *Wsr* (Osiris).

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13 “According to this rule, the first w- and j- in Eg. triconsonantal roots cannot be always treated as morphological prefixes, but in some cases rather reflect the original PAA [Proto-Afro-Asiatic] internal root vocalism *-u-, *-i- (i.e. Eg. wC1C2 and jC1C2 < AA *CuC2- and *CiC2- respectively). As for PAA (C1aC2, it may eventually yield Eg. jC1C2, but C1aC2 as well though the examples for it are of very limited number.” Takacs in (Rocznik, 1998: 115)

14 A reflex of this term in Egyptian is *sr/sr “threaten” (r-s metathesis).

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10 Understanding Aṣẹ and Its Relation to Èṣú Among The Yoruba and Aṣẹ in Ancient Egypt– Asar Imhotep
It is our contention that \textit{wsr = òrìṣà}. Òrìṣà worship is all across Africa. The \textit{-r-} shows an interchange of liquid consonants (\textit{rl}) and the \textit{-s-} shows a shibboleth/siboleth dialect interchange (\textit{sh/s}) in the roots \textit{-r-s-} and \textit{-l-s-} (Oduoye, 1996: 30). The \textit{-l-s-} root underlies the Yoruba title \textit{Olisà} (Ijebu-Ode chiefs in the rank of Ilaamu were in order of precedence first the \textit{Olisa...}), the Edo \textit{Olisakeji} (title used in addressing the \textit{oba} when he wears a certain dress), \textit{Olisa “God”} in the Igbo name \textit{Olisemeka “God has done great things,” the \textit{LISA in Mavu-LISA}, the Dahomey arch Divinity (ibid.).}

This root is found further south in Malawi: \textit{LISA “God”}; among the Ambo, the Barotse the Bemba, the Kaoonde, the Lala, the Lamba and the Luapula (all in Zambia): \textit{Leza “God”} among the Baluba in the Congo, the \textit{Ila of Zambia}, the Nyanja and the Tonga who are found in both Malawi and Zambia.

This root is not confined to Kongo-Saharan languages. It is to be found as well in Afrisan. This same root can be found in Hebrew \textit{ro’sh}, Arabic \textit{ra’s}, Aramaic \textit{re’sh}, and Akkadian \textit{rishu}, all meaning “head” (Egyptian \textit{rs “head, summit, peak”}). The head is used metaphorically to mean “first in rank” or “head in status.” This is reflected in Hebrew \textit{ri’shown “first,”} Arabic \textit{ra’is “President,”} and Ethiopic \textit{Ras “king.”} A slight sound change is detected in Nilotic with the terms \textit{Reth} or \textit{Rwot} or \textit{Ruoth} (\textit{s > t/th}) “chief, king.” The òrìṣà, then, are the venerated, first in rank, primordial forces from which all phenomenal configurations arise (the head, the beginning).

From this concept derives the meanings in association with “ancestors” (the ones who came and went before us: first in rank). The Hebrews of the Bible also venerated the òrìṣà but they knew them as \textit{He-ri’sh-on-iym “the ancestors”} (Psalms 79:8). The following \textit{ri’sh-on-iym (òrìṣà)} are mentioned in Genesis 5:

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{ll}
\textit{’adam} & \text{ (Yorùbá Ædàmú Òrìṣà)} \\
\textit{Ṣet} & \\
\textit{’no”ṣ Óṣò} (Yorùbá eniyan) & \\
\textit{Qeynan} & \text{ (Nok of Nigeria)} \\
\textit{Ma-halal’el} & \text{ (Kiswahili watu m-ṣale)} \\
\textit{Yered} & \text{ (Hunter) \\
\textit{Ḥanò”k} & \text{ (Shona mu-nhu “a person of good character”) \\
\textit{M’tu-Ṣelah} & \\
\textit{Lamek} & \\
\textit{Noah} & \\
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

All of these were the divine spirits or human chiefs of the Hebrews for which they trace their ancestry. \textit{’Adām} (man and woman made he \textit{them}) are the progenitors from which all derive according to the myth which makes Adam the primary òrìṣà (\textit{ri’sh-on ’adam}). Adam is the principle behind all life—the self-reproducing force (Oduoye, 1984: 19; Imhotep 2012).

Comparatively, it is with this understanding for which we gain clarity on the names \textit{Wsr} and \textit{ṣst} and their correct meanings. The word for Asar/Osiris in Tshiluba can be rendered \textit{Ashil, Asha, Ajil, Wa-Shil, Wa-Shal, Mu-jilu, and Mushilu.\textsuperscript{15}} \textit{Mujilu} means “sacred one.” \textit{Ashil} means “to build for;” derived from \textit{asa “to begin”} (Egyptian \textit{s3 “the source of life, to begin”; s3.t “the goddess of primeval matter”). \textit{Wsr} was the first king because he literally represents the “primordial” ancestral spirit that gave rise to the kingdom of ciKam (Egypt). In Imhotep (2011a: 131) I demonstrate, using a modern example in the Congo, how Washil is still considered to be the progenitor of a particular ethnic group which is identified by his name (\textit{Luba-Mushianga; Bashilanga; Egyptian Wsr-’nḥ}). It is from this ethnic group for which the renowned Egyptologist Dr. Mubabinge Bilolo was born and is a living prince of his lineage.

What these people of the Congo state is that Washil is their “primary ancestor.” When they invoke their “totem” they say: \textit{Bashila/Washila/Bajil –X} (-x being whatever their personal name is). For example, if I was of the Baluba of Congo, I would say I am \textit{Bashila-Imhotep} (Imhotep of the Bashila people). Here I am acknowledging my ancestry and my progenitor (my “god”). The exact same practice went on in ancient Egypt with this life-force, progenitor and primary-ancestor: \textit{Wsr/Èsú/WashiliÒrìṣà}.

\textsuperscript{15} See Mubabinge Bilolo (2011: 208); also Bilolo (2009: 143-148)

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Understanding Aṣẹ and its Relation To Èṣù Among The Yoruba and Aṣẹ.t in Ancient Egypt— Asar Imhotep}
This is why all of the deceased took on the name of $Wsr$ (Osiris) as living initiates, and after death, which is evident in all of the *Prt-m-Hrw* (Books of the Dead) (see Ashby 1996, 2001).

Space will not allow us to get into any detail here, but in Africa the concept of “God” is totally different than how we understand this concept in the West. I will go into this topic more in-depth in Imhotep (2012). But for now, God is that from which everything derives. It is the primordial causal agent of all things (the LAW). When one traces one’s lineage, one goes from himself to his parents on to his grandparents and then continues to the first human being that ever lived. From there one continues into the animal world, then the plant world... all the way down to the earthly elements (òrìṣà) which come together to create all life on earth. These elements are further broken-down into chemical agents found in the universe (birthed from stars) which all derive from the Source of all things (ṣẹ, aṣẹ, Ori, Oriṣe). God is our primary ancestor. So when the Congo-Baluba say they descend from Mushilanga, they are saying they descend from “The Source of All Life” ($Wsr$-nh “$Wsr$-life”). Here are a few representations of the name of Washil/$Wsr$ in the Egyptian hieroglyphs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>$Wsr$ with $W3s$ Scepter</th>
<th>Wasri (title of Osiris)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Hieroglyphs" /></td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Hieroglyphs" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Hieroglyphs" /></td>
<td><img src="image4" alt="Hieroglyphs" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eye in Front</td>
<td>With Seat in Front of Eye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Variations</td>
<td>Alternative Variations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Later Forms of Wsir</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is my contention (Imhotep, 2012, 2011a) that the name Wsr can be rendered as: wsr, jsr, sr and rs. I further contend that the switching of the eye [œ] lr/l and thrown [╗] 13s/1 glyphs in some of the depictions were not done by accident or style. With each switch of the glyphs derives a different name which essentially belongs to the same theme. In other words, the phonemes were switched on purpose.

There is evidence to suggest that the ancient Egyptians played around with the reversal of syllables and with reading them forwards and backwards. This is a typical African practice in regards to liturgical vocabulary. As Campbell-Dunn (2006: 144) explains:

Homburger asserts that “Among the Fulbe [Fulani]...the syllables of words are inverted to allow speaking before women and commoners not trained to understand” (Homburger 1949: 36). Fulbe ngari “Fulbe came” becomes befal riga. It follows that these mobile elements were once independent full words. They correspond to Westermann’s reconstructed PWS monosyllables.

The African secret languages exploit this mobility. See Westermann (1930: 187) on Ewe.

(emphasis mine)

The Egyptian language is definitely a priestly language and one of the clues is that it is not very rich in vocabulary. James P. Allen in his book The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts (2005: 13) reaffirms this notion when he states that, “Egyptian [the language] is rich in allegory and metaphor, but relatively poor in vocabulary.” This is compounded by the fact that many of the words are just dialectical variations of each other (see Imhotep 2011b for examples with the word htp “sacrifice, offerings”).

Credo Mutwa (an Amazulu shaman) in his work Indaba My Children (1964: 558) informs us of the oral traditions which assert that the great Bantu tribes originated in the Cameroon/Kongo area in ancient times. He states that the tribes are so old in this area that

[T]hese tribesmen still speak the language their witchdoctors call ‘spirit talk’, which came down to us through the Ba-Kongo and the Ba-Mbara. We use this language when communicating with the very old spirits of the ‘Ancient Ones’. This language is actually the language of the Stone Age – the first efforts by Man to speak. It consists largely of grunts and guttural animal sounds in which the words we use today are faintly distinguishable. (ibid.)

This reaffirms that African communities of memory have secret priestly languages: vocabularies with meanings and pronunciations not privy to the commoner of a society. Another famous African group also has a priestly language and it too has a limited vocabulary.

Laird Scranton discusses this phenomenon among the Dogon of Mali in his book Sacred Symbols of the Dogon: The key to advanced science in the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs (2007: 13). He reminds us that the Dogon possess a secret priestly language called Sigi so, the language of the Sigui ceremony, which includes far fewer words than Dogo so (the common Dogon word language). As he also notes, citing notes from Calame-Griaule’s Dictionnaire Dogon, that the Dogon priests define relationships between their words purely on similarities of pronunciation (Scranton, ibid.). This I have already argued is a staple in the Egyptian language and these similarities on words are amalgamated into a single anthropomorphic entity known as a “deity” (ntr). Not only do I argue this practice for the ancient Egyptians, I argue this is the dominant praxis among traditional African societies across the continent that possesses centers of wisdom (misnomered “secret societies”).

All of this to say that in order to get to the crux of the terminologies and their associated iconography, one has to start thinking like an African priest. African priesthoods play on words and even reverse them to expand a common theme (kind of like 5 Percenters do in the United States):

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16 See also Serge Sauneron in his work The Priest of Ancient Egypt (2000: 125-127) as he reaffirms this practice of finding connections and synthesizing words based on similarities in pronunciation in the Egyptian language.

17 Dr. Mubabinge Bilolo demonstrates this practice in essentially all of his works as it pertains to the Tshiluba language. See bibliography.

13 Understanding Àṣẹ and its Relation To Èṣú Among The Yoruba and Aṣar in Ancient Egypt– Asar Imhotep
Table 5: A few examples of reversals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yorùbá</th>
<th>Egyptian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>oṣọ “a seer, wizard (priest), diviner” (&lt;ṣẹ “to see”)</td>
<td>sṣ“Iwise man, sage”,¹⁸ (i = r/l)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sṣ“be wise, be smart”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sṛ “official, great one, chief”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sṛ “prophetize, to prophesy”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sṣ“Iwise man, sage”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sṣ“Iwise man, sage”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ji, jiji “to awake, rouse, enliven”</td>
<td>rs “to be awake, to watch, wake” (conscious)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eṣọ, iṣọ, ọṣ “watch”;</td>
<td>rs“A watcher, keeper”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ọṣẹ “to see”</td>
<td>rs“A watcher, keeper”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aṣe “instruction, discipline, document”</td>
<td>sṣ“Irecognize, to know, perception, knowledge,”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[processes and items for gaining knowledge]</td>
<td>sṣ“Ito notice, be aware of, insight, reason” (i = r/l) (reverse for rs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ọṣ“Ito read, to read aloud”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>asalu “a title of honor among the Ogbóni people.” (ogbón means “wisdom”); eze (Igbo) “to honor, to participate to assume a role of privilege”</td>
<td>tr “respect, worship (god), show respect, to revere”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(t&lt;&gt;s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>tṣ“Iinfluence” (of the dead) (i = r/l)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aṣe “the power to multiply”</td>
<td>sṣ“Ithe god of prosperity, good luck and good fortune”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oṣun “goddess of love and prosperity”</td>
<td>wṣ“Ifortunate, prosperous, well-being, prosperity”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aji “money, the goddess of money”</td>
<td>wṣ“Ihonor (due to a god or king), prestige”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oṣọ (Igbo)”honor, title of high degree”</td>
<td>wṣ“Ihonor (due to a god or king), prestige”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Pulaar wasu “glorification” (Lam, 1994: 44)]</td>
<td>wṣ“Ihonor (due to a god or king), prestige”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aṣe “scepter”</td>
<td>wṣ“Ihonor (due to a god or king), prestige”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>wṣ“Ihonor (due to a god or king), prestige”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>wṣ“Ihonor (due to a god or king), prestige”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>wṣ“Ihonor (due to a god or king), prestige”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aṣe “power”</td>
<td>sw “to win power, to gain power”¹⁹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oni-ise a Yorùbá term meaning “a man of work”</td>
<td>sw “to win power, to gain power”¹⁹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oniṣe, onṣe “messenger, postman, herald, ambassador, forerunner” (see section on Ẹṣù) [from the root ेṣe “to do, work”]</td>
<td>nṣ“Iking” (with n- prefix denoting “one who is” or “possessor of.” So a nṣ“Iking” is a “possessor of power”; aṣe). The king was also the messenger of the ancestors and the Divine: Egyptian ṣt“Imessage”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oṣe “hurt, injury”;</td>
<td>sw “kill, booty, quarry”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ẹṣẹ “blow with the fist”;</td>
<td>sw“Ito break off, be broken, be tired”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ọṣẹ “club of god of thunder [Sango]” (a striking instrument);</td>
<td>wṣ“Ito batter, to strike, to break, to bruise, to lay”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aṣa “a heavy spear or javelin used to kill elephants”</td>
<td>wṣ“Iruin”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oṣẹ “hurt, injury”;</td>
<td>ṭṣ“Iruin, neglect, decay”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aṣẹ law; command; authority; commandment; (oath)</td>
<td>wṣ“Ito saw, cut up, trim”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ọṣ“Isummon, call”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is with this evidence that it becomes clear that the god Wsr and the goddess 3ṣ.t are literally inverses of each other and essentially have the same meanings: they are conceptually and linguistically two-sides of the same coin.

¹⁸ In Africa wisdom is associated with being able to “see”: not only physically in this world, but the “unseen” in the spiritual world. Those who can see on both plains are considered priests.

¹⁹ I argue that this sw derives as a palatalized form of ṣḥw “power (of God), mastery (over work)” which would further validate its relation to Yoruba ẹṣe “to do, work, to create”; aṣe “power, to power to make things happen”; Egyptian ṣ “work,” sw.tI “be great, be powerful,” sw.t “force (of wind), gust.”

¹⁴ Understanding Aṣẹ and its Relation To Èṣú Among The Yoruba and Aṣẹ “Wisdom” in Ancient Egypt—Asar Imhotep
As I noted in Imhotep (2011a: 110-111):

When examining the glyphs for names 3s.t and Wsr, we notice that they both utilize the throne glyph with the js/As sound value. Egyptologists simply render the word 3s as “throne” but this is not an accurate reading. The throne is a symbol for the “seat” of authority where the queen and king make their commands for the kingdom. [the focus is authority]

Examining Aset’s name provides additional insight. The first variation of Aset’s written name consists of a throne with the phonetic value of 3s/js; the feminine suffix -t which is represented by a loaf of bread; and the determinative of an egg which is the symbol for motherhood (child in the womb) which carries the sw.h.t pronunciation matching our swh Afro-Asiatic root [mentioned earlier]. Here we have the visual representations of the two types of aṣe mentioned previously. The throne js represents the aṣe of political power. The egg represents the biological, procreative power (aṣe): the egg is a symbol of new life to be (Egyptian 3ṣ “to begin, the source of life;” 3ṣ “to begin, be the first, spring, originate”). Eṣu also represents this principle of life (being a causal agent). As Thompson notes, “Eṣu represents the principle of life and individuality who combines male and female valences (Thompson, 1984: 28).” We should note that in Kiswahili the name Eshe means “life” as well. I think this strengthens our case for the non-mythologized Yorùbá concept of aṣẹ as being the linguistic and conceptual equivalent to the Egyptian goddess 3s.t (Coptic Ese, Somali AySitu, ciLuba DiSwa/CyAsa). It should be noted that there is an ancient Egyptian god by the name of 3ṣw “the god of prosperity, good luck and good fortune” that may be relevant to our discussion and related to Yorùbá ájé. Oṣun among the Yorùbá is also the goddess of good fortune and prosperity; which we equate with Hebrew shuwa ‘riches, wealth.’ Underlying all of these different renderings for this -s- root is the “ability to make things happen”: to “cause” something to be, to initiate something.

It should be noted, as I stressed in Imhotep (2011a), that the throne js symbol in the names for Wsr and 3s.t is a sign of political power and in this case doesn’t mean “throne” in a physical sense. This is reaffirmed when we reverse js and get sA (sa/sr) in the Egyptian language: sA “protection, drive back, repel, safe-guard” (Tshiluba –sasa “push, push-back, repel”). These are indeed actions and expectations for the King or Queen as heads of any state and the military in response to foreign and domestic threats, or natural disasters.

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20 The feminine aspect of Eṣu is Oshun.
21 Aṣt is also known as the goddess of divine love. Our ciLuba rendering of diswa means “love, will, desire” (<swa “love, want”). DiSwa also means “love yourself, be proud, be self-satisfied.” We’ve already connected Aṣt with the Yorùbá concept of Aṣe. This homophonic root is in the god Eṣu and Eṣu’s mother is Oshun. Oshun is the goddess of “love” among the Yorùbá.

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Osiris’ connection to Isis and ìṣẹ is solidified when we examine a late rendering of his name which incorporates the egg $\bullet$ (sw$h.t$) symbol which represents the new life potential and new beginnings.

\[\text{wsr “Osiris”}\]

We have mentioned in Imhotep (2011a: 136) that Èṣú and Wsr are associated with plant life and this is based on the connection between these deities and the “life-force” found in all living things. ìṣ$t$ is also connected with plant life, and can be seen in the following term:

\[\text{s3 ìṣ$t$ “a plant”}\]

Everywhere we look, in association with this -s- root, we find associations dealing with “life, production, coming into being, and the power to create.” Based on our new found knowledge of the practice of reversing phonemes in the Egyptian language, we can also equate ìṣ$t$ with another goddess of ancient Egypt: ìṣ$t$ “the goddess of primeval matter” (<s’s “the source of life, to begin”). As we noted earlier in our discussion, ìṣ$t$ is another form of the goddess w$\ddot{h}s.t$ for which the city of waset was named after (ciLuba ciBanza “capital” [w>b, s>z]; w$\ddot{h}s.t$ was the capital of the new kingdom). 23 As we can see here—like with the examples between wsr and ìṣ$t$—w$\ddot{h}s.t$ and ìṣ$t$ are different forms of the same name; just with the loss of the w- prefix in the name ìṣ$t$.

As noted by Wilkinson (2003), w$\ddot{h}s.t$ is another form of the goddess h.t hrw. H.t hrw (Hathor) is also a form of ìṣ$t$. The reason for all of these different depictions for the same concept is that each “deity” represents a slight distinction on the main theme. It allows the story teller or teacher to highlight a particular effect of that energy. A close examination of the iconography associated with ìṣ$t$ and w$\ddot{h}s.t$ will reveal their close associations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A) w$\ddot{h}s.t$</th>
<th>B) ìṣ$t$</th>
<th>C) h.t hrw</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="A) w$\ddot{h}s.t$" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="B) ìṣ$t$" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="C) h.t hrw" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Different forms of the same goddess

One thing I’ve learned being a student of a living tradition from the continent of Africa is that many people outside of those traditions do not know how to read and interpret African iconography or

\[\text{22 I would argue that this is an herb used in medicines (protection against illness). Thus the ìṣ plays on its inverse s3 “to repel, drive back” in terms of illness.}\]

\[\text{23 The word “capital” means “head.” Òrìṣà (w$\ddot{h}s$) means “head”}\]

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characters in mythology. I am going hip the reader on a few “secrets” on how to read African signs and symbols.

Take note that each figure is associated with the w̄3s “scepter” of authority. The goddess w̄3s.t has the scepter placed on her head. The goddess 3s.t and h.t hrw are holding the scepters in their hands respectively. Whenever you see a figure “holding” an emblem in their hand(s), it is a sign that the holder of the object “possesses” that quality or has mastery over the object or idea for which the object symbolizes.

We mentioned at the beginning of our discussion that the god Èṣú in the Yorùbá tradition is equivalent to the goddess w̄3s.t in the Egyptian tradition. We also noted that Èṣú is the power that controls “life and death” (through the ajogun). If we look at the image of w̄3s.t in Table 6 above, we note that in her hands are three emblems: the ʔn̄h “life,” the 3ms/̄ms “club, sceptre” (and long staff) of authority and the bow and arrow (ʔh3 “arrow, weapon”). What this image is telling us is that w̄3s.t is the force (3ms power) that controls “life and death” as symbolized by the ʔn̄h and weapons in each hand.

The word 3ms can also mean “falsehood” which would indicate a play on words here as w̄3s.t uses the “club” and wisdom to battle “falsehood.” This is reinforced by the w̄3s “scepter” emblem placed on the top of her head. Whenever you see an icon placed on the “top” of the head in African iconography, it indicates that the “person” or “deity” whose head is under the emblem possesses a certain kind of “consciousness” or frame of thought that allows them to use the emblems in the “hand” effectively.

In the Yorùbá Ifá tradition, the Ori/Orìṣà “head” (w̄3s) is associated with “consciousness and destiny.” The goddess w̄3s.t possesses the kind of consciousness and insight to rule effectively. The aspect on “insight” is demonstrated by the addition of the ostrich feather alongside the w̄3s emblem on her head. From personal experience with traditions in Ethiopia, the ostrich feather represents “total vision.” This is so because an ostrich can (appear to) turn its head completely 360 degrees thus being able to “see” all around them. As noted earlier, a priest in African traditions is believed to have the ability to “see” not only the affairs of this world, but the changing landscape in the “other world” as well (what we call in Ifá orun). This association between the ostrich feather and “sight” is confirmed in the Egyptian hieroglyphs as can be seen in the depictions of the goddess m̄3s.t whose name, in part, derives from m̄3s “to see, inspect, observe.”

As we can see from the glyphs, the determinative is of the goddess with the ostrich feather on her head. The root is present in a by-form of the word m̄3s.ty which means “judgment.” One cannot judge a thing unless one is able to “see” (or “perceive”) a thing with clarity (m̄3s “to see, inspect, scrutinize, observe, look, regard”). One cannot discern truth from falsehood unless one can “see” the “evidence” in support of one or the other. In the book of Coming Forth by Day, one can see various depictions of m̄3s.t with a blindfold around her eyes. Some have interpreted this to mean “blind judgment” (objectivity). I would add that it signals the ability to judge based on the totality of evidence. One does this by not only seeing in the world, but having eyes open in the spirit world as well (see Imhotep 201a, Kajangu 2006).

In order to be a good “judge” of anything (i.e., of character), one must have exceptional insight into the matter. And as fate would have it, the word for insight in Egyptian is s̄3 “perception, to understand, recognize, perceive, know, be aware of, knowledge, to notice, wisdom, shrewdness, prognostication”

This word consists of the s-r (3 = 1) root spoken of throughout this essay. This word is reflected in ciLuba: kala “to seek, probe”; kela "develop by repeated practice, to train, educate"; lukelà "training"; mukela “educated man, educated, trained”; -sòôlakaja “clarify, space, separate, determine, analyze” (<-sòôl [s-r] “clear, clear out, prune”); nsòôlelu “format” (plan, arrange, organize, layout); Kikongo zayi
“intelligence,” a-zayi “intelligent.” The /s/ in Egyptian derives from /k/ (see essay two). We note also that the ostrich feather by itself is associated with mìṣẹ.t.

\[ mìṣẹ.t \text{ “truth, righteousness, justice”} \]

We still witness the ostrich feather being used in places like Uganda and Ethiopia after a person has gone through initiation. As I have stated before (Imhotep 2011a), one of the aims of initiation is to help the initiate to learn how to “see” the hidden workings of our world: the not so obvious patterns of existence. This concept is reinforced among the Dagara people of Burkina Faso. Dr. Malidoma Somé (a Dagara shaman) in his work Of Water and the Spirit provides the best explanation, in my opinion, as to the purpose of initiation (education) in the African schools of wisdom which reinforces this notion of “insight.”

Traditional education consists of three parts: enlargement of one’s ability to see, destabilization of the body’s habit of being bound to one plane of being, and the ability to voyage transdimensionally and return. Enlarging one’s vision and abilities has nothing supernatural about it; rather, it is “natural” to be part of nature and to participate in a wider understanding of reality (Somé 1994: 226). (emphasis mine)

African wisdom centers develop sages through a process of initiation. For instance, in his book The Religion, Spirituality, and Thought of Traditional Africa, Dominique Zahan says:

initiation in Africa must be viewed as a slow transformation of the individual, as a progressive passage from exteriority to interiority. It allows the human being to gain consciousness of his humanity (Zahan 1979: 54). (emphasis mine)

The development of the person will take place at the rhythm established by the great periods of bodily development, each of which corresponds to a degree of initiation. As Amadou Hampate Bâ (1972) notes:

The purpose of initiation is to give the psychological person a moral and mental power which conditions and aids the perfect and total realization of the individual.\(^{24}\)

We go through all of this in-depth to make clear that initiation is about gaining “sight” or “consciousness” (Orì/Oríṣàwọnìsùàṣẹ) and as we all know “knowledge is power” (àṣẹ). With this said we can see a living example among the Karamojong of Uganda. The Randa African Art website provides us insight into the Karamojong headdresses which displays the ostrich feather:

"Karimojo men are divided socially into age groups, which are associated with warrior status. When a boy or man is initiated into a new age set he shaves his head. When his hair has grown long again it is plastered with mud, which is painted and set with ostrich feathers. The mud cap and ostrich feathers are symbols of bravery and display his new status."\(^{25}\)

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We show below the headdress of the people and warriors who have undergone various initiations (education) among the Karamojong with another example from the Bumi people of Omo Ethiopia.

Table 7: Karamojong of Uganda headdress

| A beautiful Karamajong young man’s headdress. Human hair, ostrich feathers, clay, pigment, metal | Bumi man with elaborate mudpack. Lower Omo River, southwestern Ethiopia |

Getting back to our description of the w3s staff on the head of goddess w3s.t with the ostrich feather on top, we are given an example that this depiction of the goddess is a reflection of real life practices in Africa. As the Randa African Art website (op. cited) informs us, in regards to the Latuka people of Uganda/Southern Sudan and their headdresses:

At the beginning of the XXth century, a long, thin staff adorned with weaverbird feathers was fixed to the top of these helmets in order to increase their magnificence still further.

This is exactly what is depicted by the goddess w3s.t in ancient Egypt. We further support our association between w3s (“scepter, power, dominion”) with having the right consciousness and insight to lead, by examining the goddess Hathor in Column C) of Table 6. On her “head” is the sun (hrw) and the sun in African traditions are associated with “light, enlightenment, revelation, intelligence, etc.” (see Bilolo 2010, Imhotep 2012). The cattle horns √ symbolize a person’s “generative” ability (power to make things happen) as cows/bulls were symbols of fertility in ancient times across the world. In other words, it symbolizes someone’s ability to get something done; to produce something; their ability to take ideas and make them manifest (they are not idle talkers). The same meaning is associated with the throne j sign on the head of 3s.t in Table 6 Column B): the seat where commands are made and work gets done.

Snakes generally were a sign of wisdom in the ancient world (see Scranton 2006: 178-187). We are reminded of the old adage, “Be wise as serpents” (Matthew 10:16). And this, we assert, is the meaning and association of the snake depicted on the head of h.t hrw (Hathor) in Column C) in Table 6 above.

So as we can see, the Egyptians didn’t depict snakes on their heads because they “worshiped” snakes. It symbolized “consciousness, wisdom and insight” and they used various different emblems to
represent these concepts (i.e., wāṣ scepter, sun-disk, ostrich feather). One must possess all of those qualities if one is to be a great leader and these icons are reminders of this fact to the readers of ancient Egyptian texts. All of the depictions of the “deities” are just communicating to us that if you want to be leader, these are the qualities you must possess in order to be an effective leader. Deities in African myths are just outward projections of the many characteristics of the human being. The myths are creative stories to teach a community of what can happen when you use your àṣẹ (wāṣ) for good or evil and the kinds of relationships that are created when we misuse or righteously use power.

The god Set in Egyptian lore is also built off this -s-.root and he represents the negative use of power (àṣẹ). These icons are for initiates and initiation (education) is developed by societies to train/educate (si3, kale, lukela, m33, etc.) the next generation of leaders (the soon to be elders) on how to properly obtain, control and maintain power (àṣẹ). It’s a simple equation: if you want to be a leader, you have to be intelligent and have good character. There is no way around it.

Conclusion

As we have discovered here, àṣẹ is the vital power or energy that animates and brings forth phenomena in the universe. Africans in various wisdom traditions have sought, since time immemorial, ways in which they can harness this energy for their physical, spiritual and political needs. The aim has always been to discover strategies and resources for which one can tower over the one thousand and one challenges of life. The ancient Africans noted that with great power comes great responsibility. To reinforce this adage and to keep this truth in the public memory, the great and creative sages developed myths and anthropomorphized the different aspects and dimensions of this energy source. The aim was to demonstrate how energy moves in the universe and the kinds of relationships that ensue when different types of energy or personalities meet.

Part of the ancient method of teaching was to divide these concepts into “masculine” and “feminine” personages. This makes it easier to understand the relationship between interacting forces. It is to be understood that many of these forces derive from the same conceptual theme and each culture has provided a method to demonstrate that relationship between concepts. In Yorùbá-land and in Ancient Egypt, the method most often used was to give the deities a “family” relationship. In the Egyptian myth Wsr, is.t, and s.t are “brothers and sister.” This is to say that they come from the same source and often this is based on a linguistic relationship as well. This family relationship in Yorùbá-land is given by Oṣun and Èṣú, but the relationship is mother and son respectively. All of these “deities” represent, on some level, “the power to make manifest” or “the source of change or being.” Anyone who has this power is considered a Big Willy in any human society. This is why these terms are associated with royalty, administration, leadership and the Creator itself.

In ancient Egypt the myths reflected the living culture of the people. When the Egyptian royal couple acknowledged each other as “brother and sister,” they weren’t literally immediate kin; they are stating we share the same “ancestor.” In Africa the ancestors not only include former living human relatives, they include all of the natural elements that are anterior to them that came together to form the human relatives. It is within this framework that we are to understand why Africans acknowledge rocks, trees, minerals, sky, air, water, animals, stars, fire, etc., as ancestors because all of these entities, forces or powers came together to create the human being. All of these elements are endowed with energy and consciousness. This is not mythology but a scientific fact (see Imhotep 2012, 2009). All of these elements, including the composite which is the human being, traces its ancestry to the Source of all things, making God our greatest and oldest Ancestor.

This essay is Part I of a 2-part series. Part of the goal of this essay was to help the reader better understand and provide the intellectual tools necessary to properly understand African myths. When one

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26 See Dr. Amos Wilson’s book Blueprint for Black Power (1998) for an excellent discourse on this topic in the modern world.

27 Which is why the same word for God is often the same word for man in African languages.

20| Understanding Àṣẹ and its Relation To Èṣú Among The Yoruba and Asa.t in Ancient Egypt– Asar Imhotep
is empowered by the tools of insight, of knowing languages and cultures intimately, one can unlock the secrets of these age-old traditions. But the more one digs, the more one understands that these aren’t secrets at all. These are just time-tested insights and wisdom developed by wise sages who just wanted to remind us about how we are supposed to act and treat each other. When we learn how to do that, then we increase our self-healing power: our àṣẹ.

Àṣẹ, as a term, has come down to us in many forms throughout history and a few of them have been revealed to us throughout this discourse. Some of its forms have come to us in the form of characters in myths; others in the titles of living human beings. The ancient Egyptians were the first to record the science of Àṣẹ and personified this force as Isis and Osiris: both the masculine and feminine qualities of the force. If we are to vocalize Osiris in modern African languages, it would be pronounced: [in full] Washil (w-s-l <swr) (Tshiluba); [in reverse] Ṫishal/Orish (Yorùbá), Ras (Ethiopic); [reduced] Ésú (Yorùbá). The goddess Aset/Isis would simply be vocalized as: [in full] Ras (Ethiopic), Olisà (Yorùbá); [reduced] Ese (Coptic), Àṣẹ (Yorùbá), Eshe (Kiswahili). Part II of this series will deal with the etymological root of the word àṣẹ and how it relates to “hands” and “speech” linguistically. Until then, may the Creator continue to grant you peace, victory, and satisfaction (ḥtp); and may the ancestors (in all their forms) open the channels for increased health, wealth and knowledge of self (Àṣẹ).

Ancestrrally,

Asar Imhotep (MuJîlu MuTâpà)
www.asarimhotep.com

PRESENTATION DE L’AUTEUR (à compléter)

Asar Imhotep is a computer programmer and Africana researcher from Houston, TX whose research focus is the cultural, linguistic and philosophical links between the Ancient Egyptian civilizations and modern BaNtu cultures of central and South Africa. He is the founder of the MOCHA-Versity Institute of Philosophy and Research and the Madu-Ndela Institute for the Advancement of Science and Culture. He is also the author of The Bakala of North America, the Living Suns of Vitality: In Search for a Meaningful Name for African-Americans, Passion of the Christ or Passion of Osiris: The Kongo Origins of the Jesus Myth and Ogun, African Fire Philosophy and the Meaning of KMT. Asar is a noted speaker and philosopher and is currently organizing efforts in a nation-wide venture titled The African-American Cultural Development Project—a national project aimed at creating a framework for an African-American culture which will help vitally stimulate the economic, political, scientific and cultural spheres of African-American life in the United States.

CONTACT DE L’AUTEUR :
info@asarimhotep.com

Madu-ndela
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Pamela Smith Ph.D & Adebusola Onayemi FRCPC