

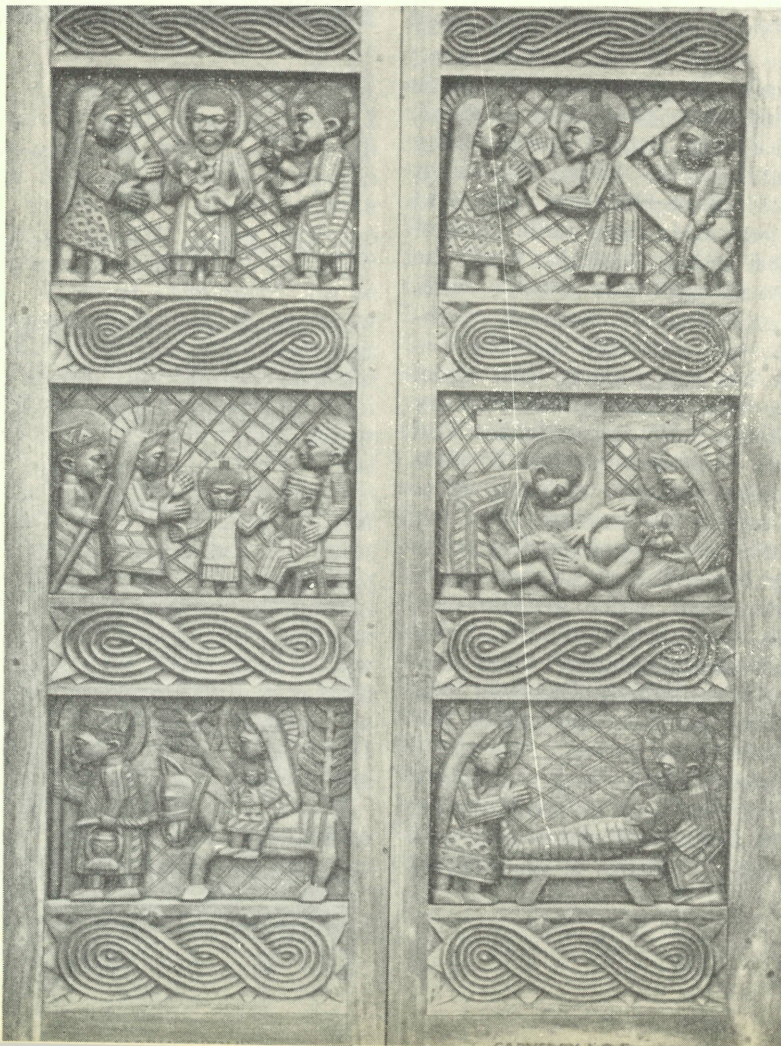
## A YORUBA WOODCARVER

By Father Kevin Carroll S.M.A.

*The traditional woodcarving of the Yorubas (Western Nigeria), famous for generations, was dying out when Father Kevin Carroll decided on a great experiment. In the village of Oye-Ekiti he established a school to preserve the best in the Yoruba style of carving. At the same time he substituted Christian for pagan culture – and ideals – as the source of inspiration among the pupils. After 12 years this art of the Yorubas is coming into its own again.*

I would like to introduce Lamidi Fakeye to you. He is a Moslem and a traditional woodcarver. He has been working for Father Sean O'Mahoney and myself for over twelve years. Our photographs show a large door that Lamidi carved for the Cathedral at Ibadan. It

represents the Seven Sorrows of Our Lady. One of her sorrows, "the Death of Jesus", is not included in the door but is in an alcove over the door and is not seen in the photograph. The Crucifix and the statue of St. Bernadette are by his former master, Bandele,



who is a Catholic. St. Bernadette is kneeling in front of the Lourdes grotto of the St. Louis Sisters' Convent in Ado Ekiti. The cross in the photograph is made by a beadworker.

Bandele and Fakeye have done a lot of work for other edifices besides Churches. They have made furniture and decorations for the Houses of Assembly of the Western Region of Nigeria. Some of the carvings are very big and are up to twelve feet high. They are usually carved in a hard wood called *iroko*.

I now let Lamidi Fakeye talk for himself.

"I am a native of Illa. My great grandfather was a famous wood-carver. His name was Gbogunjoko. He was living in Omido, north of Illa, on the way to Esie. When war came he went to Illa. The King asked all the carvers to carve something for the Oro festival, when all the worshippers bring out their images. When the King, who was called Orangun Illa, and whose personal name was Aniyeloye, saw Gbogunjoko's work he gave his daughter to be his wife.

My grandfather, son of Gbogunjoko, did not like carving because it was too poor at that time. His son was Fakeye, that is my own father. My grandfather did not want him to carve but to be a farmer like himself, because there was no money in carving. But my father, Fakeye, began to learn the work by himself, and at the age of 25 he went to carve at Oke-ode, which is a quarter of Illa. He worked under a carver called Taiyewo. My father, Fakeye, was under him as an apprentice for more than three years.

All Fakeye's sons began to learn carving at the age of nine or ten. The first born was Adewuyi, who died in 1957. There is also David



Adeosun who is still a carver. I went to school and did Standard VI. I did not like to be a carver because I thought it was a useless work. However I was carving petty things like trays, "ibeji" twin figures, spoons and so on, from 1942 to 1947. Then I went to Oro near Ijero in Ekiti, and was carving such things as motors, trains and bowls in the form of a cock called "Olumeye" which the women like in that district. At that time I thought I was the best carver, until I went to the King's palace at Oro, and saw some carved pillars. One of the pillars was a woman nursing a child, according as Yoruba women are nursing their children, and another was a horserider with many small figures round him. I heard that a carver called Areogun from Osillorin did them. These two pillars are now in the museum at Lagos.

I heard that the Rev. Mr. Jones of Ifaki Training school wanted a carver. He asked me to teach the

students how to carve. I worked there for some months.

Father K. Carroll came to Oro one day with Bandle the son of Areogun, and I introduced myself as a carver. He asked me to come to Oye Ekiti to do some work for testing. When I got there and I saw the work of Bandle I was a bit ashamed. Father Carroll asked me to become an apprentice under Bandle. I worked as an apprentice for Bandle for three years and suffered much.

In the evening time I was working on my own work and began to become a good carver. The first big work Father Carroll gave me to do was to carve big pillars and doors for the Idena gate house of the Oni, king of Ife. I brought Fayo, another carver, to help me in the work. These works can now be seen in the Idena gate house of the Oni's palace at Ile-Ife. The work was done in 1953. In 1954 the Father brought me to Lagos. There I carved the panels for the door

**This triptych of the Madonna in the University Chapel at Ibadan is the work of Father Carroll.**



**Statue of St. Bernadette in Ado Ekiti.**

of the Catholic chapel of the University with Christian subjects.

In 1955 I carved panels for the seats and tables of the House of Assembly and House of Chiefs at Ibadan. One big one is the throne for the President of the house of Chiefs, who is the Oni. Since 1954 I have been working with Father O' Mahoney at Ondo. He understands the work very well. Last year I made carvings for the office of the Premier of the Western Region.

The Fathers have been advising me to get my own apprentices so that I can increase my work. I have now my young brothers and cousins. What makes me glad is that my two cousins who have finished Modern Secondary school at Illa have now come to work for me. They prefer this work to any other work like teaching or clerking. Altogether I now have seven apprentices. Akin and Awolode are very good carvers. They can finish the work perfectly when I have done the rough work."

