

Digitizing the Sacred: A Case Study of the Library of Babaláwo Irete Obara

DÉLÉ FÁGBÈMI O.

Abstract:

This presentation introduces a community-led archival initiative focused on the sacred library of Babaláwo Irete Obara, a spiritual elder whose private collection holds more than fifty years of ritual texts, annotated Odu Ifá, and spiritual correspondence. These materials contain rare linguistic, historical, and ceremonial knowledge spanning multiple lineages and generations. Yet they remain largely undocumented and at risk of deterioration.

Unlike institutional archives, this library exists within an active spiritual lineage. Its preservation requires more than scanning equipment or metadata standards. It demands humility, consent, and community-rooted methods of care. This case study explores an emerging approach to digitization grounded in spiritual ethics, Afro-diasporic sovereignty, and intergenerational trust.

The Iroko Historical Society leads this effort through collaborative scanning practices, metadata that reflects sacred categories, and digital storage solutions shaped by those closest to the materials. This work challenges the limitations of Western archival frameworks that often misclassify or ignore Afro-Caribbean spiritual records.

Rather than treat these papers as folklore or ephemera, this project affirms their value as records of ceremony, migration, and ancestral presence. It also builds bridges between library and information science, anthropology, and religious studies.

The presentation offers early lessons for LIS practitioners, archivists, and community leaders who wish to protect sacred documents without erasing their context. It also outlines next steps for completing digital preservation, developing access protocols, and growing a sustainable model for sacred archives across traditions.

About the author:

Délé Fágběmí O. is an archival researcher, legal scholar, and community steward whose work connects sacred Afro-Caribbean knowledge systems with contemporary principles of ethical preservation. With formal training in law, anthropology, and financial management, he brings an interdisciplinary perspective to the care of sacred collections, especially those rooted in the Lucumí tradition, the Ifá corpus, and other diasporic spiritual practices.

He is the founder of the Iroko Historical Society, a community-based initiative dedicated to ethical digitization, multilingual metadata creation, and the spiritual stewardship of living archives. He currently leads the preservation effort of the private library of Babaláwo Irete Obara

in Havana, a sacred archive that holds ritual texts, Odu Ifá manuscripts, and five decades of spiritual correspondence.

His approach combines post-custodial archival practices with oral history, community consultation, and spiritual methodology. He has collaborated with educational organizations and independent religious communities throughout the Afro-descendant Americas.

His work advocates for preservation strategies that prioritize cultural consent, intergenerational trust, and epistemologies of the spirit. Through writing, teaching, and community work, he explores how archives can become living spaces of care, continuity, and resistance.