

Benin and
Ethiopia:
Art, Power,
Resilience

23

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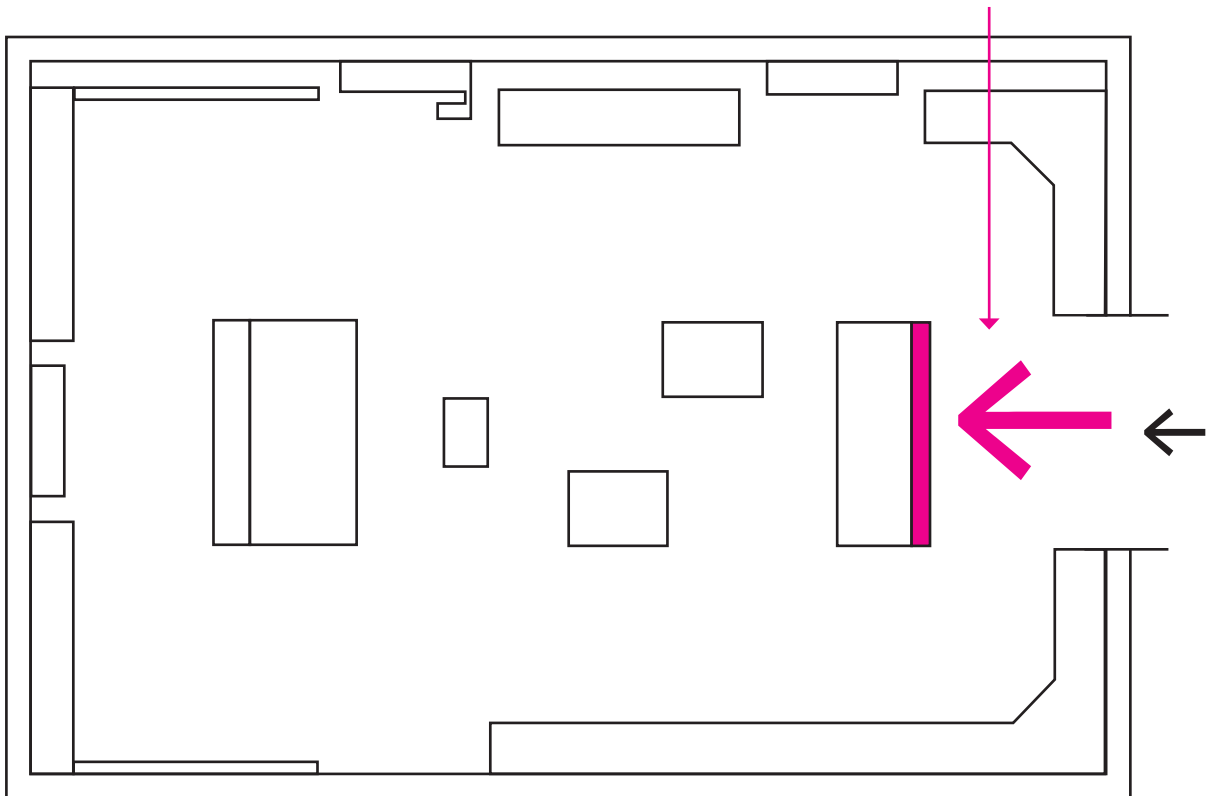


We hope you enjoy your visit to the Weltmuseum Wien!

Vienna, December 2024

Room 23

Start



Benin and Ethiopia: Art, Power, Resilience

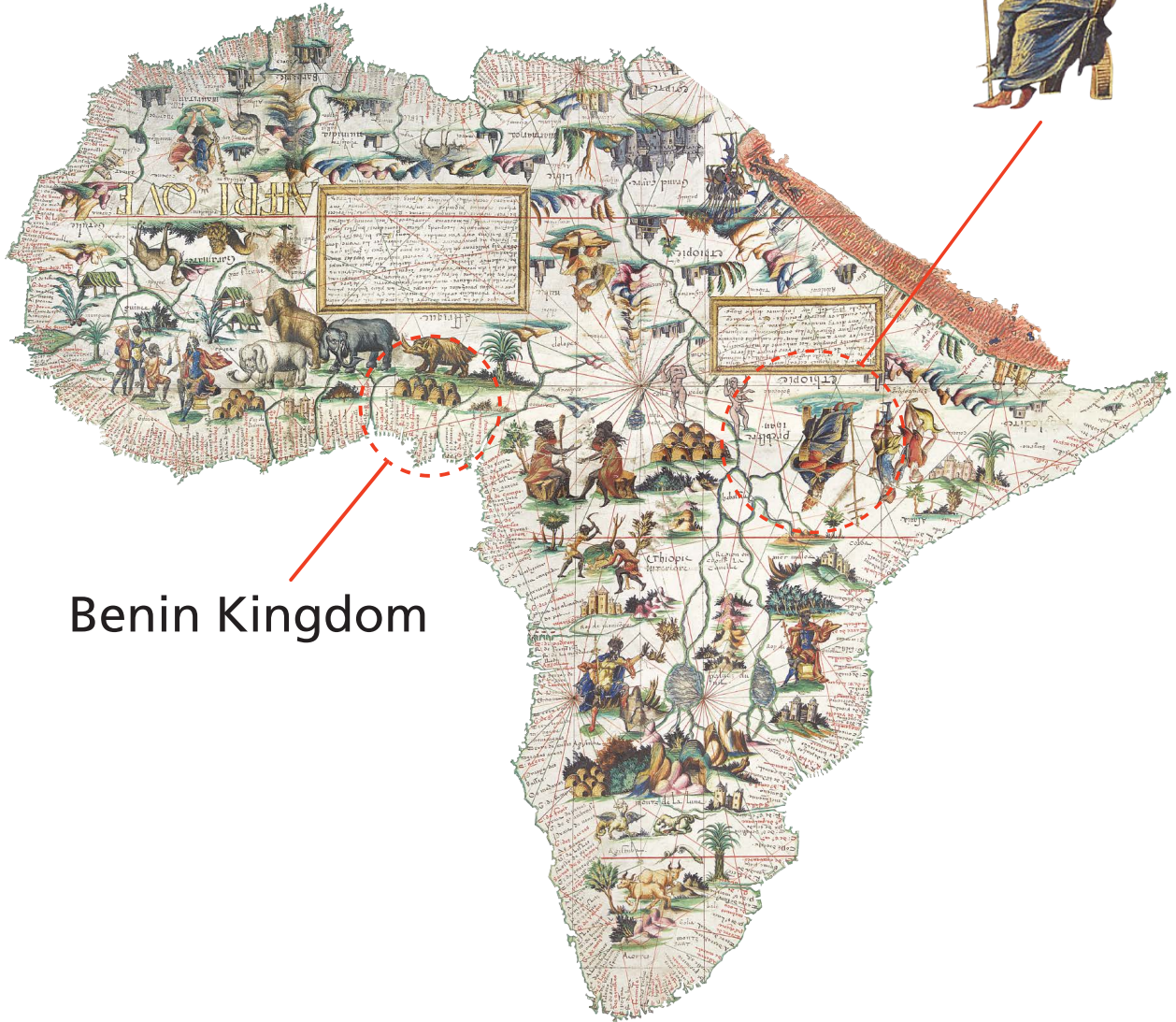
Art treasures from the Benin Kingdom and imperial gifts of the Ethiopian emperor Menelik II to the Austro-Hungarian emperor Kaiser Franz Joseph I today figure as the most precious African holdings of the Weltmuseum Wien. Both collections came to Europe in consequence of the opposition to colonial threats in the late 19th century: Oba Ovonramwen, King of Benin, opposed British interests and lost his kingdom and the royal treasures. Emperor Menelik II on the other hand tried to secure the independence of his country with international diplomacy by creating alliances and signing treaties with several European powers like Austria-Hungary, and by further expansion of his empire. The collections in Vienna both directly relate to these historical events and therefore the precious objects do not only tell us about the history, wealth and splendour of these empires and their courtly cultures but at the same time they are sites of memory for their fight for freedom. The gallery will therefore try

to account for both of these lines of interpretation and will also reflect the postcolonial changes in both cultural contexts and the contemporary relational connections to Austria and to the museum.

Knowledge about Africa in the 16th century

The map reflects the knowledge of the world in the mid-16th century. It shows the kingdom of Benin in West Africa and indicates the legendary Prester John in the east, while capturing the historic moment when Portuguese explorers maintained intense contact with both empires. The Christian priest-king had been inspiring the fantasy of Europeans since the 12th century, and in the so-called Age of Discovery, they believed to have found his descendants both in Benin and Ethiopia. The rulers of the two empires met with their Portuguese counterpart as equals and respected partners, exploiting this relationship with great skill to their advantage.

The legendary Prester John



Benin Kingdom

Africa, section of the world map (planisphere)
by Pierre Desceliers 1550

The map is designed so it can be read from two
opposite angles when lying on the table.

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Benin

1000–1200

First dynasty of the Ogiso or Era of the Sky Kings; presumably shaped by the coalescence of autonomous village chiefdoms with their respective chiefs.

13.–15. c.

Consolidation of the kingdom of Benin; Oba Eweka I becomes the first king of the second dynasty; his successor Oba Oguola built a protective wall around the capital city of Benin.

ca. 1472

Portuguese Ruy de Sequiera lands in the Bight of Benin.

15.–17. c.

Expansion and Golden Age of Benin under the kings Ozolua and Esigie, with the latter winning the war against Benin's neighbouring state Idah in 1515/16. Oba Orhogbua founds the city of Lagos, then named Eko, around 1550.

1485–86

João Afonso de Aveiro is the first European to visit Benin City.

1514

A royal delegation from Benin visits King Manuel in Portugal. The first missionaries arrive in Benin around 1515; Portuguese mercenaries support the Obas in their campaigns.

1553

First contacts with British traders; Thomas Wyndham visits Benin City.

17. c.

Century of crisis and civil war caused by conflicts for succession and the Iyase, the town chief and military leader, gaining power. Around 1700, the Dutch traveller D.V. Nyendaël visits Benin and describes the magnificent royal palace.

18. c.

New rise of the empire and time of prosperity under Oba Akenzua I and Oba Eresoyen. French traders play a greater role; Captain J.F. Landolphe visits Benin several times around 1780.

19. c.

Internal conflicts for power between the king and the higher ranks of nobility. Increasing threat of the British presence at the coast and their colonial interests. The empire loses influence under Oba Adolo and Ovonramwen.

1862

Sir Richard Burton visits Benin and describes the practice of human sacrifices in his book; this portrayal shapes the image of Benin City as the City of Blood and later on helps to legitimise its integration into the British colonial empire.

1892

Protection treaty signed between Oba Ovonramwen and Queen Victoria.

1897

In January a British delegation is ambushed by Benin soldiers because of a misunderstanding. In February, the Benin Kingdom is conquered by British troops. Oba Ovonramwen is forced into exile to Calabar.

1914

Oba Eweka II is crowned under the conditions of British “indirect rule”. In the same year, the British protectorates of Southern Nigeria and Northern Nigeria are joined to form the single colony of Nigeria.

1933

Oba Akenzua II is crowned king. His reign is marked by internal conflicts between the royal court’s structure and the local economic and intellectual elite. Queen Elizabeth visits Benin in 1956.

1960

Independence of Nigeria with Tafewa Balewa as its first prime minister. In 1963, the Edo-speaking region and the Delta region form Bendel State with Benin City as its capital.

1979

Oba Erediauwa (1923–2015) is crowned the first king of Benin in independent Nigeria. In 1991, Bendel State is divided up and Edo State becomes one of the 19 states of Nigeria with a population of more than 3.5 million today.

2016

Crown Prince Eheneden Erediauwa is crowned
Oba Ewuare II.

Ethiopia

100–1000 AD

Ancient kingdom of Aksum in northern Ethiopia extending to Yemen around 600 AD. In the 4th century, Aksum adopts Christianity under Emperor Ezana (ca. 330–ca. 365).

1000–1270

Zagwe dynasty; King Lalibela (ca. 1185–1225) commissions the monolithic churches. Increasing conflicts with the expansion of Islam. In 1177, Pope Alexander II writes a letter to Prester John.

1270

Beginning of the Solomonic dynasty, which claims to descend from the biblical figures of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. The origins of the House of Solomon are recorded in the Kebra Nagast (book on “The Glory of Kings”).

14.–15. c.

Emperor Zara Yaqob (1434–1468) establishes diplomatic relations with the Mamluk rulers of Egypt; first contacts with Europe; Italian Pietro Rombulo visits Ethiopia in 1450.

1527–1559

30 years of war against Ahmad Gragn of Harar who threatens the Christian empire and causes great devastation. In 1541, Portuguese troops under the command of Cristóvão da Gama provide help in achieving decisive victories.

as of 1554

Arrival of Jesuit missionaries; period of lengthy conflicts between the faiths of the Ethiopian Church.

17. c.

Emperor Susenyos converts to Catholicism; forced to abdicate after the civil war. Emperor Fasiladas (reign 1632–1667) moves the capital to Gondar and banishes the Jesuits from his lands.

1769–1855

Age of Regents (Rase); provincial feudal lords weaken the centralised power of the emperor and wage war against each other; rapid succession of 19 emperors.

1855–1868

Tewodros II restores imperial power, and both stabilises and expands the empire. In 1868, he captures and imprisons British subjects and missionaries in Ethiopia due to a diplomatic conflict. British troops under the command of Sir Robert Napier occupy Magdala; the emperor commits suicide.

1871–1889

The Ras of Tigray, Yohannes IV, is the last emperor to be crowned in Aksum. He successfully holds his ground against Egyptian and Italian attempts of expansion, wards off European missionaries, and has Muslims Christianised.

1889

Emperor Yohannes dies in battle against the Mahdists of the North. Menelik II, King of Shewa, is crowned as emperor. Eritrea becomes an Italian colony in 1890.

1896

Historic victory of Ethiopia against Italy in the Battle of Adwa. Menelik II secures the sovereignty of Ethiopia, expands his empire to the south, and initiates various processes of modernisation.

1913

Emperor Menelik II dies and is succeeded by his grandson, Lij Iyasu (reign 1913–1916) whose mother Zawditu takes over the regency.

1916

Lij Iyasu is removed from power because of his Muslim sympathies and imprisoned in 1921. Zawditu (Judith, reign 1916–1930) is crowned Empress of Ethiopia, Ras Tafari is appointed regent. Admission of Ethiopia to the League of Nations in 1923.

1930

After the death of Empress Zawditou, Ras Tafari is crowned Emperor Haile Selassie. In 1935, the emperor orders to have Lij Iyasu killed to make sure he cannot be reinstated by Italy.

1936–1941

Ethiopia is annexed by Fascist Italy. Haile Selassie leaves the country to go into exile in England and pleads to the League of Nations for aid in resisting the Italians but without avail. In 1941, Ethiopia is liberated and the emperor returns.

1974

General Mengistu and the Derg depose Emperor Haile Selassie who is placed under house arrest and killed in 1975.

1991

The Marxist regime of Haile Mengistu is overthrown; Ethiopia establishes the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in 1995.

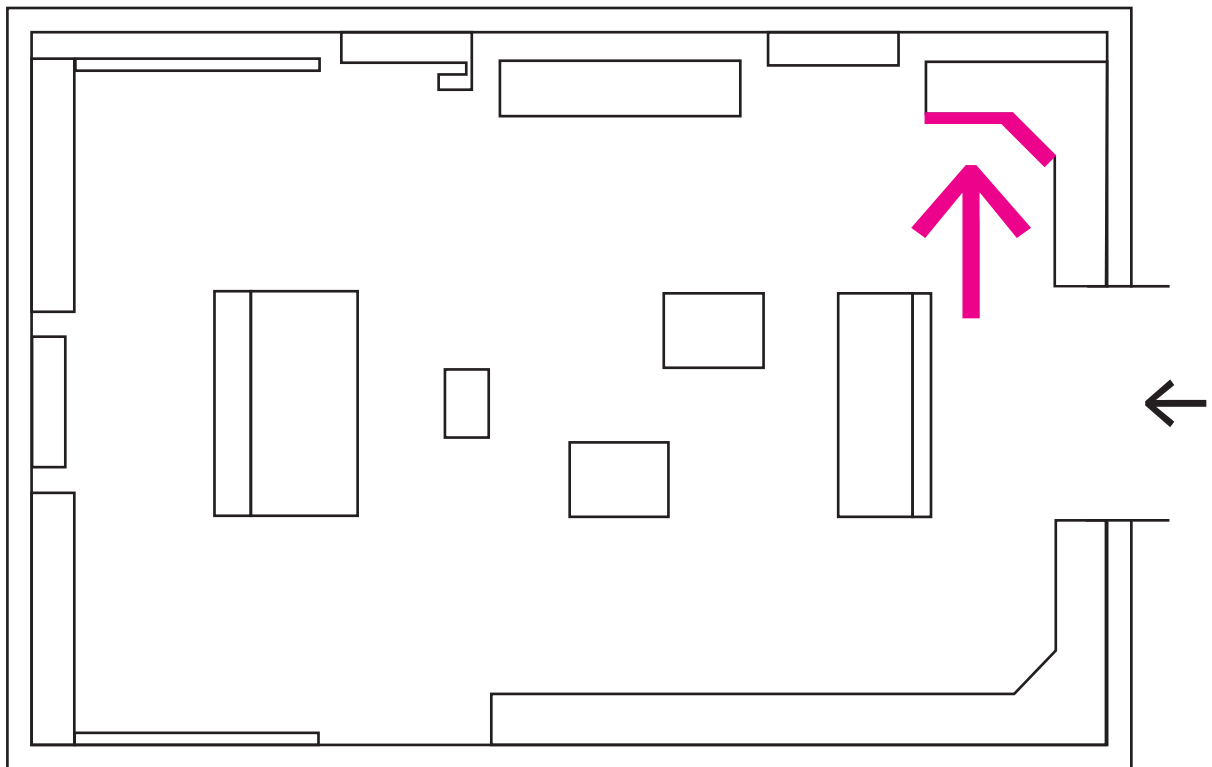
“When you talk about artefacts, you are talking about your heritage. [...] It is like closing doors behind you when you pass through them without knowing where you came from. But when people, because they were stronger, took all of this from you, you will not be able to trace where you are coming from.”

Lambert H. B. Asemota, Legal Adviser, February 2016

“I also think that it is important for our bronze artefacts to be exhibited in this museum and bear witness to my culture and traditions. In my opinion, that is a positive thing.”

Samson Ogiamien, Sculptor, February 2016

Room 23



Ethnography and Trade

In the early 20th century, Austria-Hungary became increasingly interested in trade opportunities with Ethiopia. The country was regarded as stable and innovative under the rule of Menelik II. The import and export of goods was facilitated by Ethiopia building a railway from the port of Djibouti to the capital city of Addis Ababa that had been founded in 1913. As the Danube Monarchy was not a feared colonial power, it hoped for a favourable trading position. Ethiopia was primarily interested in weapons and imported a plethora of everyday and luxury goods. Although several Austrians visited the country to explore new opportunities, they also brought back objects for the collection of the Anthropological-Ethnographical Department at the Natural History Museum Vienna and the Vienna Trade Museum.

The Ethiopian Feudal System and Titles of Nobility around 1900

Political and military titles

Negus Negasti

King of Kings: Emperor of Ethiopia

Lij

later Lul: Successor to the throne, son of a noble

Negus

King: originally independent rulers, then rulers of provinces and supreme military leaders

Ras

Archduke: Head of a provincial dynasty, later king, military leader

Dejazmach

Count: Commander of an army division

Fitawrari

Baron: Commander of the vanguard

Quannazmach

Commander of the right wing

Gerazmach

Commander of the left wing

Balambaras

Lieutenant colonel: Commander of the citadel

Selected court titles

Bitwoded

Supreme advisor

Blattengeta

Head administrator of the palace

Raq Masare / West Azazh

Steward, master of ceremonies

Tsahafi Te'ezaz

King's scribe, keeper of the seal

Zhandaraba Azazh

Head of the eunuchs

Bejirond

Guardian of the royal property, treasurer

Liqā Makuas

Double of the emperor, keeper of the royal mule

Selected civil titles

Afa Negus

Speaker of the emperor, chief justice

Azazh

Royal judges

Nagadras

Customs collectors and trade minister



Empress Taitu Betul (ca. 1850–1918), wife of Menelik II, 1901 (?)

Photograph: Alfred Ilg

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1 Silk cloak (kabba)

Precious cloaks made from imported silk were worn by the wives of high-ranking dignitaries at festive occasions. Silver applications against a dark-blue backdrop are reminiscent of a sun- and starlit sky. The superb quality of the hooded cloak also becomes clear at the filigree clasp.

Ethiopia, 19th century; silk cloth, gilded silver fittings and pendants, silk yarn
Austrian Trade Museum Coll.

2 Magnificent shoes

This eastern type of shoe made of noble metal was reserved for the imperial family or highest ecclesial dignitaries. They could have been either manufactured by Indian craftsmen working at the imperial workshops or imported as a highly valuable good.

Ethiopia, 19th century (?); gilded silver, leather, velvet
Dorotheum Coll., Vienna

3 Gilded silver armcuff (bitäwa)

Covered in filigree work, the armcuff is presumed to have originally been the property of a high-ranking dignitary, accomplished warrior, or a Ras (duke) to signify his title. The cuff is closed by means of a hinge.

Amhara, Ethiopia, 19th century

Dorotheum Coll., Vienna

4 Arm ornament of a dignitary

Oromo, Shewa, Ethiopia, 19th century; brass, partially gilded

Philipp Viktor Paulitschke Coll.

5 Ivory armcuff

Ethiopia, 19th century

Gift by successor to the throne Lij Iyasu

6 Crown of a deacon or priest

Most Ethiopian churches hold crowns for the ministry to wear at important religious holidays. Bride and groom may also wear them at Coptic weddings. Its shape can be traced back to the Coptic tiara of the eastern Mediterranean region.

Ethiopia, 19th century; brass

Dorotheum Coll., Vienna

7 Processional cross

Processional crosses are the property of the church. The cross is affixed to a wooden staff to be carried and held above the heads of believers during processions, or to bless believers during Coptic liturgical services. A cloth is pulled through the two loops to guarantee the needed balance.

Ethiopia, 18th/19th century; brass

Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

8 Umbrella (jan tela)

Umbrellas were originally reserved for emperors; the Amharic term means “the emperor’s shadow”. Menelik II extended this privilege to nobility and high ecclesial dignitaries. The domed centre of the silver application is made to resemble an honorary shield.

Ethiopia, 19th century; velvet, silk, silver, wood

Austrian Trade Museum Coll.

9 Censer (sena)

Burning incense is an essential element of Christian-Coptic liturgy and intended to ward off evil spirits. If the censer with bells attached to the vessel is swung, smoke from the burning incense flows through the holes. In addition, the incense is said to have cleansing properties.

Ethiopia, 18th/19th century; brass
Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

10 Prayer book with leather case

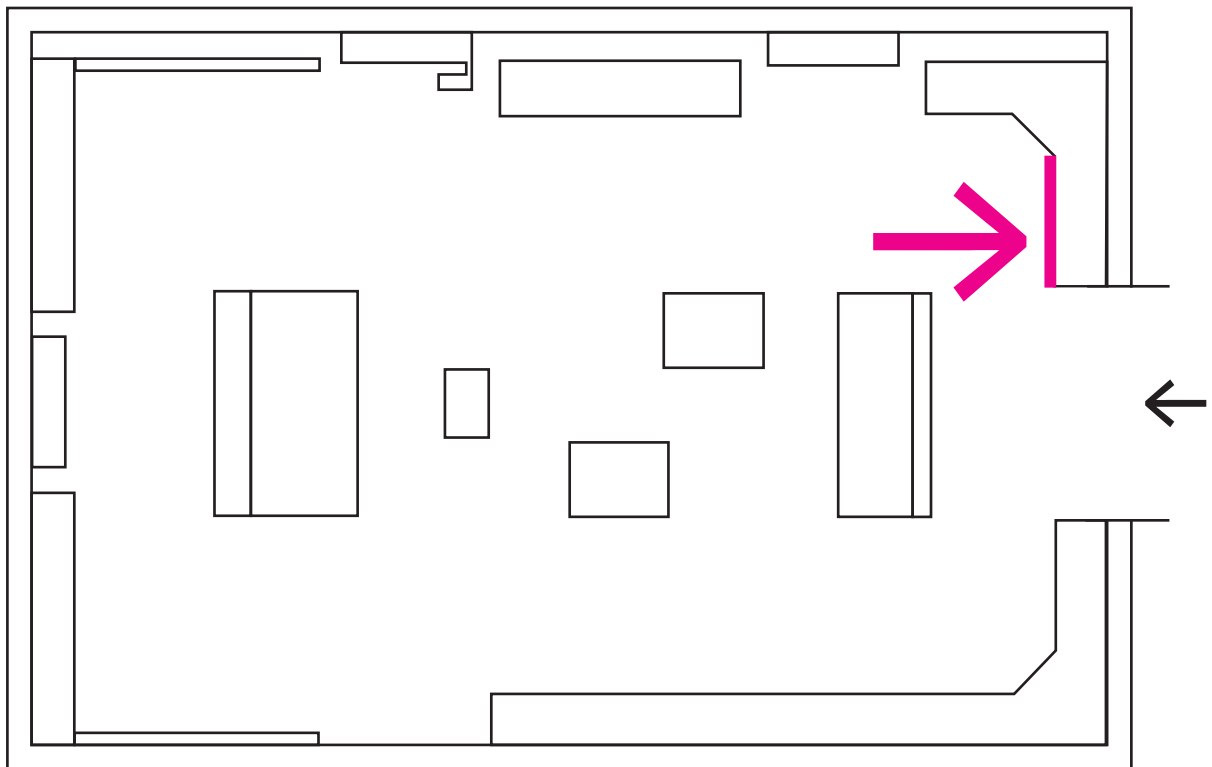
The prayer book is written in Ge'ez, the ancient Ethiopian language, and includes prayers to the Blessed Virgin Mary. The leather case protects the book during transport.

Ethiopia, 19th century (?); wood cover, parchment, binding with plant fibre cord
Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

11 Prayer book

Ethiopia, 19th century (?); wood, parchment, fibre cord
Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

Room 23



Menelik II.

In 1889, Menelik II (reign 1889–1913) concluded an amity and trade treaty with Italy. In contrast to the Amharic version of the treaty, the Italian text granted Italy protectorate status over Ethiopia, a difference that ultimately led to war. After inflicting a crushing defeat on Italy in 1896, Menelik II established diplomatic relations and signed trade agreements with various world powers. He also expanded his empire to the south and thus gained access to new natural resources. The emperor employed European advisors to assist him in modernising the country. After Menelik's death, his grandson and preferred successor, Lij Iyasu, assumed the throne assisted by a regency. In 1916, Iyasu was removed from power because of his sympathies for Islam and forced to make way for Menelik's daughter Zawditu.

1 Battle of Adwa

The victory of Ethiopia against Italy in the Battle of Adwa 1896 secured the country's independence. In the national culture of remembrance, this historic moment still plays a vital role and is the reason for a national holiday. In contrast to the Ethiopians, the Italian enemies are depicted in profile.

Unknown artist, Ethiopia, 1900;

oil paint on canvas

Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

2 Menelik II, King of Kings

This painting portrays Menelik II with his imperial crown and the characteristic headscarf as the "Lion of Judah". The lion had been the symbol of the Ethiopian nation and monarchy since the first millennium. The emperors also kept lions at the palace.

Unknown artist, Ethiopia, ca. 1900;

oil paint on canvas

Paul Alexander Szanto Coll.



Emperor Menelik II
with his entourage,
1907 (?)
Photograph unknown

3 Fly whisk with ivory handle

The precious fly whisk with horse tail was a sign of dignity for aristocrats and high priests.
Ethiopia, 19th century
Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

4, 5

Ivory combs

The fine hairpins with several prongs were used for combing or simply worn as decoration. They were probably used by both men and women alike.
Ethiopia, 19th century
Paul Alexander Szanto Coll.

6-8

Butter vessels

These vessels served as storage containers for butter mixed with fragrances. According to Szanto, the butter was used as a hair care product by women or a skin care product both by men and women. The fat was also believed to provide protection against the sun as well as illness.

Ethiopia, 19th century; wood

Paul Alexander Szanto Coll.

9 Menelik thaler

Menelik II had coins modelled on the Maria Theresa thaler and produced at a mint in Paris as of 1893. They show a profile of the emperor on one side and the Lion of Judah, the emblem of the House of Solomon, on the other. In 1903, Ethiopia acquired a minting machine from Vienna.

Ethiopia, after 1893; silver

Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

10 Maria Theresa thaler

The Maria Theresa thaler was first documented in Ethiopia around 1800 and turned out to become the most popular trade coin of eastern Africa in the 19th century.

Many thalers are dated 1780, although they were produced at a later date. Circulating aside from the Menelik Thaler, it was the legal currency of Ethiopia until 1945.

Ethiopia, 1780 (?); silver

Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

11 Drinking cup with leather case (yāwança mahdär)

Cups for drinking mead were made from buffalo horn, carried in delicate leather cases with straps, which were brought along on journeys.

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 19th century

Paul Alexander Szanto Coll.

12 Buffalo drinking horn

In 1906, Szanto described its function as follows: "It is used to carry 'Tej', Abyssinian mead, whenever a chief or Ras makes a journey."

Ethiopia, 19th century

Paul Alexander Szanto Coll.

13 Wooden bottle

Ethiopia, 19th century; wood, leather

Friedrich von Kulmer Coll.

14, 15

Multi-part cotton cloth (derreb gano)

The delicately woven cloth with red end bars was worn by high-ranking public officials and priests under Menelik II. The lengths of folded fabric were wrapped around the body according to precise specifications, as the style of wearing the cloth could indicate a certain title, correspond to a certain occasion, or express a certain mood.

Ethiopia, 19th century

Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

**16 Cotton trousers with silk embroidery
(lebbalba)**

Delicately embroidered jodhpur-style trousers were worn by noble men and women; the latter used them especially when riding a horse because there were no side saddles. These trousers were combined with a long cotton shirt with matching embroidery.

Ethiopia, 19th century

Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

**17 Honorary shield of Nagadras Gabra Heywat
Baykadagn (Gabriel)**

Menelik's minister of transportation presented this shield of honour as a sign of gratitude to his friend and mentor, Wilhelm Müller, who had brought him to Austria as a child. After studying at the Imperial Export Academy in Vienna, he returned to Ethiopia. He was also the translator when the Ethiopian delegation arrived in Austria in 1907.

Ethiopia, 19th century; leather, velvet, gold, gilded brass

Antiques Trade Coll., Graz



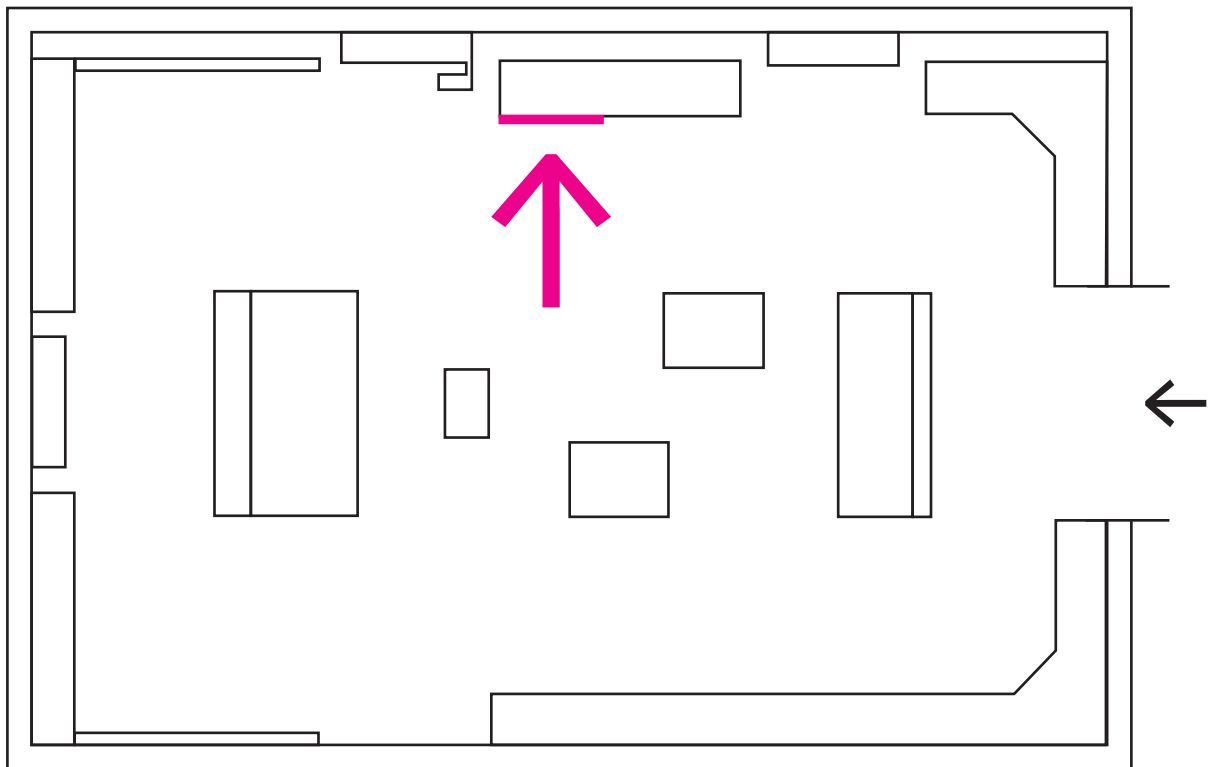
Ethiopian Minister of
Transportation, Nagadras Gabra
Heywat Baykadagn (Gabriel), 1917
Photo: Atelier Sophie Graz



Visit of the Ethiopian delegation (court advisor and former provincial governor Dejazmach Masasa Warka, director of customs in Harar and Dire Dawa Nagadras Yeggazu Bahabte, Jacob Hall, and at the centre of the second row Gabriel Heywat Baykadagn) at the Böhler steel works, Kapfenberg in Styria on 27 September 1907.

© Bezirksmuseum Hietzing

Room 23



Social Structure and Heroism

The king (Tato) of Kaffa was the supreme political and religious authority. He was a member of the Minjo dynasty that had been ruling the country for more than 19 generations. A council of seven dignitaries stood by his side and served as a controlling body at the same time. Aside from such court officials, the complex hierarchical system was headed by provincial governors and clan chiefs. Honour and status were of major concern. Successful warriors were highly honoured and rewarded with positions and privileges. Big-game hunters demonstrated their virility in the same way and were celebrated as heroes. Various attributes indicated the merits and achievements to the outside world. After the old structures had fallen victim to the Ethiopian occupation, Bieber collected last pieces of evidence of that period.

**1 Warrior coat (literally: black leopard-skin)
(mājé nándō)**

Worn over the left shoulder without covering the right shoulder, the coat was reserved for aristocrats and accomplished warriors. It is modelled on the paws of a predator and has nine elongated elements, two more than the velvet coats of the Amhara with up to seven such elements.

Kaffa, Ethiopia, 19th century; wool fabric
Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

**2 Leather strings with mouse tooth rings
(uké gášo)**

The king presented his followers as well as aristocrats and their children with rings as a gift and “keepsake”; these rings were made from mouse incisor teeth that had grown together to form rings. If worn on a string around the neck, they also served as protective amulets.

Kaffa, Ethiopia, 19th century
Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

3, 4

Skin bracelets from elephant sole (kéco)

These bracelets were worn, usually on the left arm but occasionally also on both arms, by men who had brought down an elephant.

Kaffa, Ethiopia, 19th century

Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

5 Dagger with pendants

The dagger is presented with a lighter, a shearing blade, a thorn puller, an ointment jar, and pincer pliers attached to it; utensils a man needed every day.

Kaffa, Ethiopia, 19th century; leather, iron, brass, wood

Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

6 Phallic headdress of gilded brass (qāllácō)

The king of the Kaffa Kingdom awarded renowned warriors who had killed an enemy, lion or elephant, with this phallic ornament worn on the forehead for festive occasions. The three phallic representations symbolise their male strength, thus ensuring the continued existence of the kingdom.

Kaffa, Ethiopia, 19th century

Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

7 Phallic headdress (qāllácō)

According to Bieber, this mark of distinction was reserved for accomplished warriors; the gilded version could only be worn by the chief justice and ambassador.

Kaffa, Ethiopia, 19th century; nickel silver

Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

8 Warrior headband (kójo)

Headbands were another status sign for brave warriors. Pulled over the forehead and positioned below the hairline, they also stabilised the phallic headdress.

Kaffa, Ethiopia, 19th century; woven wool

Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

9 Headdress for women (wogéro)

The wives of those warriors who had been awarded a phallic headdress by the emperor could emphasise their special status by wearing a particular headdress on festive occasions.

Kaffa, Ethiopia, 19th century; silver, cotton cord, glass and silver beads, silver plates and wire

Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

10, 11

Heroes' feathers (bálo)

Ostrich feathers epitomised heroism and were worn on the back of the head. The king awarded such hero feathers to accomplished warriors at the festivities celebrating victory in battle. The royal crown itself was also decorated with feather tufts as well.

Kaffa, Ethiopia, 19th century; ostrich feather, wool flannel, brass

Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

12 Necklace of the Chief Justice and Royal Herald

The range of insignia of the chief justice and speaker of the king included a special necklace that was probably passed on from father to son. As the king never addressed the people himself, the royal herald enjoyed an exceptional position at the royal court.

Kaffa, Ethiopia, 19th century; silver
Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

13 Necklace for the daughters of phallus bearers

Kaffa, Ethiopia, 19th century; glass and sheet metal beads, cotton cord
Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

14 Men's necklace

The numerous marks of distinction that were awarded by the emperor for certain accomplishments demonstrate the great importance that was placed on bravery in hunting as well as war. The pendants are reminiscent of lion paws and visually reinforce that notion of bravery.

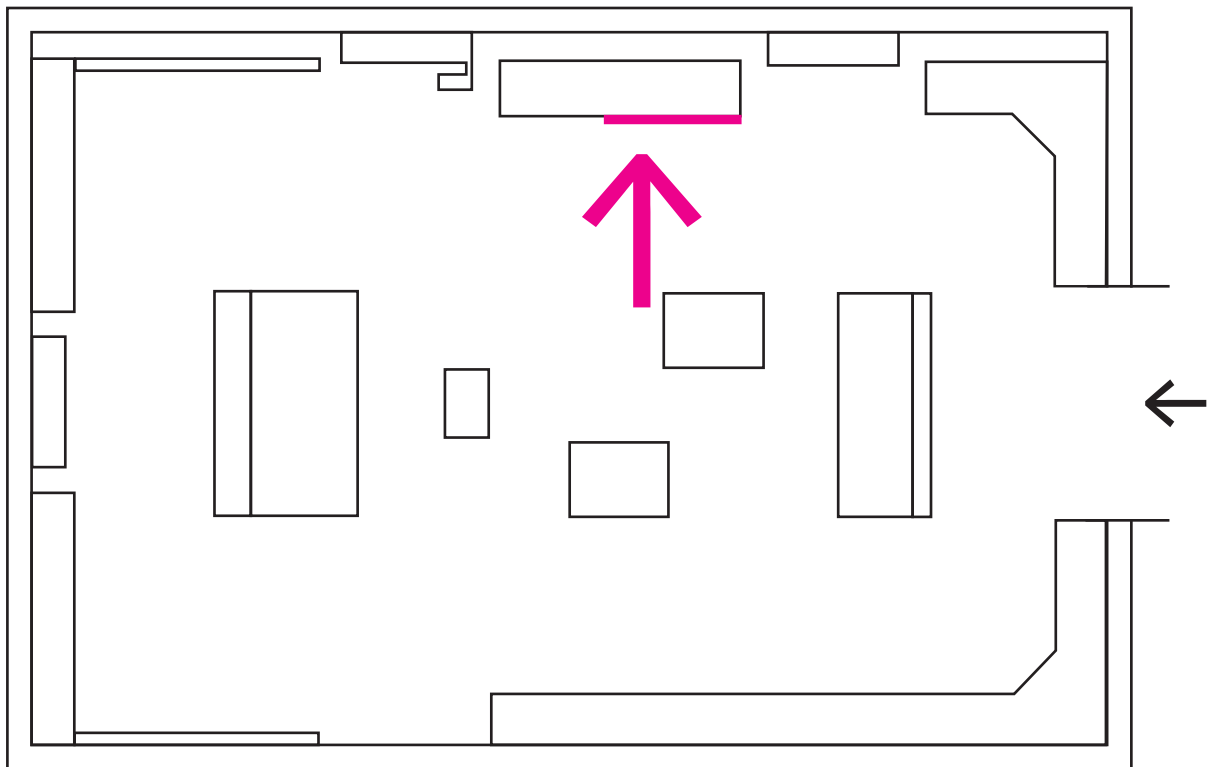
Kaffa, Ethiopia, 19th century;
millefiori glass beads, silver
Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

15 Men's neck ring (mógo)

These simple neck rings were another form of imperial reward for brave warriors and signified this distinction both in battle and on festive occasions.

Kaffa, Ethiopia, 19th century;
bronze with silver wire
Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

Room 23



Kaffa and Friedrich Julius Bieber

The origins of the Kaffa kingdom date back to the late 14th century. The Kafficho people were able to protect their borders against raiding Oromo or Amhara troops for centuries. In 1897, the kingdom fell victim to Menelik's expansion to the south. After eight months of fighting, the last king of Kaffa, Gaki Sherocho (reign 1890–1897) was removed from power, sent into exile to Addis Ababa, and died under house arrest in 1919.

Son to a family of coffeehouse owners, Friedrich Julius Bieber had the wish to travel to the original home of coffee early on. As the representative of the Ministry of Trade, he joined the Austrian mission to Ethiopia in 1905, and then visited Kaffa, a recently annexed region of Ethiopia.

1 Breeches (šanafilo)

Common in the southern mountain regions of Ethiopia, these breeches were worn by noble men and women in Kaffa. A belt around the waist held the breeches in place. Kaffa, Ethiopia, 19th century; cotton
Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

2-4

Headrests

Headrests protected the elaborate hairstyles of noble women while sleeping. According to Bieber, they were hardly used in Kaffa. The exhibited examples might come from adjacent Oromo regions. Kaffa, Ethiopia, 19th century; wood, glass beads
Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

5, 6

Wooden ewer for beverages

Milk container

There are no records for the original function of many objects from the Kaffa Kingdom; comparable objects are not used anymore either. Some of what we know is exclusively based on Bieber's records.

Kaffa, Ethiopia, 19th century

Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

7 Wooden mug

Kaffa, Ethiopia, 19th century

Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

8, 9

Horn mug

As Bieber describes, horn and wooden mugs were used for drinking mead or coffee:

"Small horns or cups made by cutting off the tips of cow horns and affixing a wooden bottom. They are primarily used for drinking coffee."

Kaffa, Ethiopia, 19th century

Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

10 Coffee cup container with cap

The container is covered in glass beads and decorated in the characteristic patterns and colour combinations of Kaffa. The beads arrived by overseas trade and originated in Bohemian Jablonec and Venice amongst other sources.

Kaffa, Ethiopia, 19th century;
wood, glass beads, fibre cord
Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

11 Coffee cup container with cap

Small coffee cups were stored and brought along in this ornate container. Their exceptional design demonstrates how much coffee was appreciated. Interestingly, Bieber does not mention such containers anywhere in his records.

Kaffa, Ethiopia, 19th century; plant fibre weaving, glass beads, seeds, leather
Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

12 Coffee cups

Coffee was preferred unfiltered and unsweetened but seasoned with cloves and other ingredients in Kaffa.

Kaffa, Ethiopia, 19th century; ceramic
Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

13 Leather sheet (qébo)

Bieber returned to Austria with two decorated leather sheets. Title holders placed them on their portable frame beds above interlaced leather straps or used them as travel cloaks. During the day, they sat on their beds when receiving visitors.

Kaffa, Ethiopia, 19th century
Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

14 Bamboo cup

Drinking cups made from bamboo cane were popular vessels for drinking beer or other beverages. Such bamboo cups were primarily used by the Manjo. In the social class system of the free people in Kaffa, the Manjo were of the lowest status. Although the Kaffcho held them in low esteem, the Manjo still worked for them, for example as guards amongst other positions.

Manjo, Kaffa, Ethiopia, 19th century
Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

15 Pointed hat (báyo)

According to Bieber, these hats were made from dried Ensete leaves and worn by both Kaffa men and women. Nevertheless, they were also characteristic of the Manjo, a group of lower status in the Kaffa Kingdom. The Manjo were hunters and had their own king appointed by the king of Kaffa.

Manjo, Kaffa, Ethiopia, 19th century;
ensete leaves, leather, cotton cloth
Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

16 Women's necklace

This captivatingly simple necklace was, according to Bieber, "for common people". Kaffa, Ethiopia, 19th century; ensete bast
Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

17 Handwoven cotton cloth

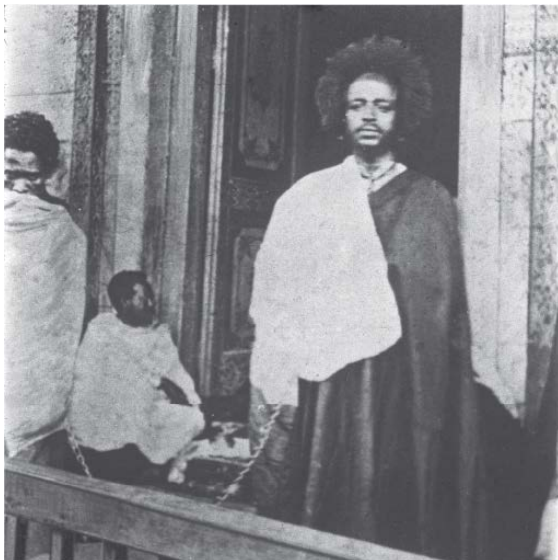
This cloth in Ethiopia's state colours green, red and yellow was woven in Kaffa and given as a gift to Friedrich Bieber by Ras Wolde Giyorgis, the military commander conquering Kaffa and its first Ethiopian governor. Bieber held him in veneration as a great statesman. Kaffa, Ethiopia, 19th century
Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

18 Ensete bast loin skirt (yóko)

The wives of farmers wore simple skirts made from Ensete bast. Similar to a wrap skirt, they were tied around the waist and rolled up when not in use. The fibres of the Ensete, a banana plant bearing inedible fruit, were processed into everyday objects in many different ways.

Kaffa, Ethiopia, 19th century

Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.



Tato Gaki Sheroko as prisoner of Menelik II in Addis Ababa, tied to his guard Aarau with a silver chain. In the background to the left: the later Ethiopian governor Wolde Giyorgis, 1897.

Photograph unknown

19 Salt as currency (yámmo)

Salt bars were a common alternative to money all over Ethiopia. The salt came from the Danakil Desert near the Red Sea. Shaped like bricks, the salt bars weighed about 420g. In 1905, one Maria Theresa thaler was worth about four to five salt bars. Parts of such bars were used as "small change".

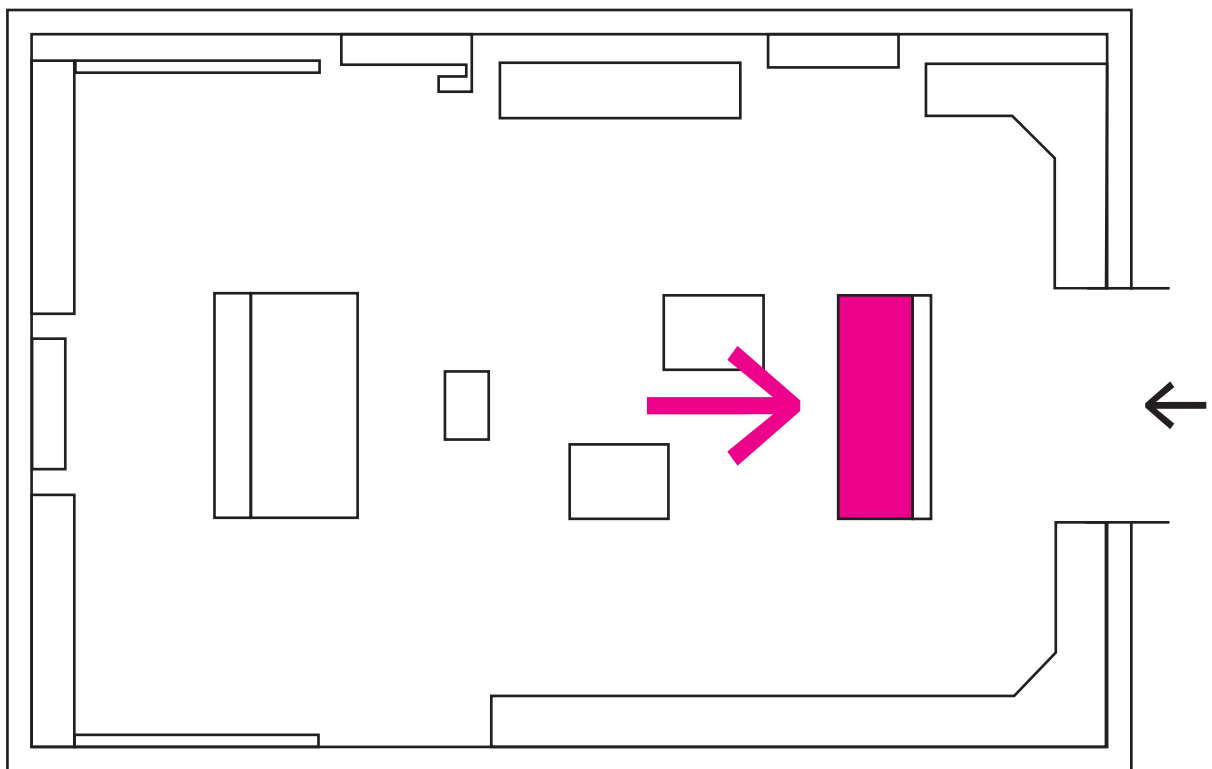
Kaffa, Ethiopia, 19th century
Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

20 Beads as currency (jélla)

According to Bieber, bundles of six strings, each with 14 glass beads in red, blue and white, were similar to small change in Kaffa. The beads were made in Bohemian Jablonec and arrived in the Kaffa Kingdom via trade routes from the coast through the Amhara highlands.

Kaffa, Ethiopia, 19th century
Friedrich J. Bieber Coll.

Room 23



Diplomatic Gifts of Ethiopian Emperors

In the course of his diplomatic endeavours, Menelik II also established contact with Austria. In 1905, Emperor Franz Joseph sent a delegation to Addis Ababa to sign a trade agreement. In return, an Ethiopian mission travelled to Vienna two years later. The aspirant to the Ethiopian throne, Lij Iyasu, sent another delegation to strengthen the ties between the two countries in 1914. This process went hand in hand with the diplomatic exchanging of gifts, which can tell us a lot about the interests of these trade partners. The gifts of Lij Iyasu were much more magnificent and demonstrate his efforts to reinforce his domestic position through external alliances. In 1905, Austria-Hungary sent a portable mountain cannon, Mannlicher rifles, various medals, silk fabrics, Tokaj wine, and products of the Wiener Werkstätte.

1 Ivory tusk in leather case

When the Ethiopian delegation visited Austria in 1907, the Austrian press reported that they had arrived bearing two elephant tusks of exceptional size and beauty as gifts. Gift by Negus Negasti Menelik II, 1907

2 Ornamented coat (lämd)

Popular among military commanders, the coat with elongated elements is modelled on the skin of a lion.

Ethiopia, prior to 1905; velvet, silk yarn, gilded silver

Gift by Negus Negasti Menelik II

3 Ornamented horse gear including saddle, saddle pad, saddle blanket, harness, headgear and decorative chain elements

Magnificent horse gear was the pride and joy of all noble Amhara. The emperor rewarded aristocrats with gold and silver horse adornments for their bravery. Such gifts were passed on in families from generation to generation.

Ethiopia, prior to 1905; leather-covered wood, velvet, silk embroidery, dyed leather, gilded copper alloy, chrome-plated iron, silver, silk yarn

Gift by Negus Negasti Menelik II

4 Ornamented shield (tafa gašša)

This shield was part of an initial set of gifts by the successor to the throne, Lij Iyasu, to Emperor Franz Joseph I in 1912. The precious bossed shields served as marks of distinction to aristocrats and outstanding war leaders.

Ethiopia, ca. 1900; dyed leather, velvet, gilded silver fittings

Gift by successor to the throne Lij Iyasu

5 Ornamented shield (tafa gašša)

Shields had outlived their purpose as defensive weapons after the arrival of rifles. Nonetheless, ornamented versions still maintained great significance as imperial rewards.

Ethiopia, prior to 1905; velvet, gilded silver fittings, dyed leather

Gift by Negus Negasti Menelik II.

6 Ornamented sabre with sheath (gweradee)

The sabre blade is decorated with damascened gold inlays and the inscription "Menelik". Ornamented sabres were an exceptional distinction awarded by the emperor to high dignitaries.

Ethiopia, prior to 1905; steel, rhinoceros horn, wood, gilded copper alloy, velvet, dyed leather

Gift by Negus Negasti Menelik II.

7 Lance with sheath

Ethiopian warriors were traditionally equipped with sabre, dagger, lance and shield. As early as under Menelik's rule, these objects became less important and turned into status symbols with the increasing influx of firearms.

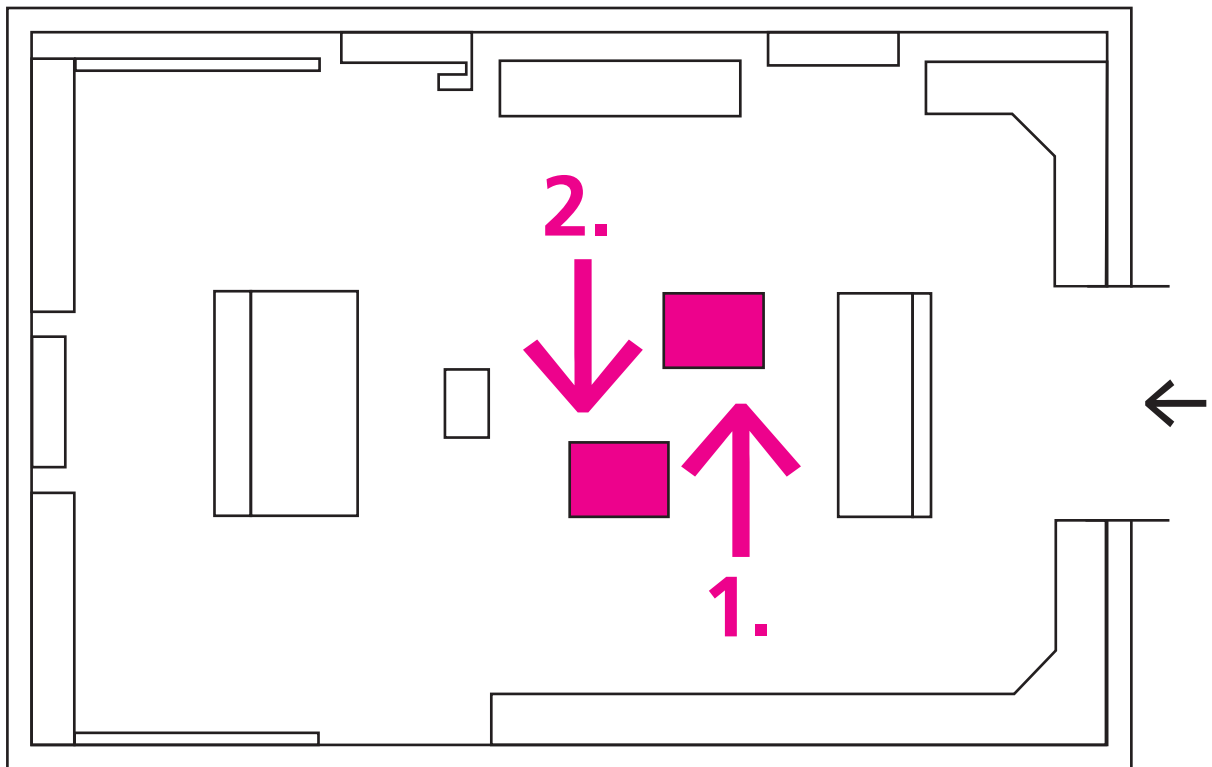
Ethiopia, prior to 1905; wood, iron,
dyed leather

Gift by Negus Negasti Menelik II

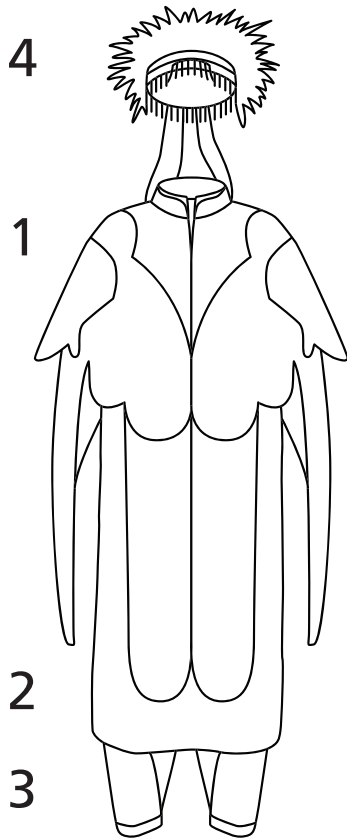
8 Ivory tusk in leather case

Gift by Negus Negasti Menelik II, 1907

Room 23



1.



Imperial dress ensemble

composed of a velvet cloak with gold embroidery kabba lanqa (1), a long silk shirt qamis (2), velvet breeches sänafil (3) and the lion crown anfarro (4)

Along with an honorary shield, ornamental riding gear and a sabre, Lij Iyasu's delegation presented this ensemble to Emperor Franz Joseph in 1914; it is believed to have been part of the estate of Emperor Menelik II. Moreover, the successor to the throne had sent three lions, two mountain zebras and a giraffe for the imperial menagerie in advance; one giraffe did

not survive the journey.

The delicate velvet cloak with stand-up collar corresponds to the type exclusively reserved for provincial governors or highest clerical dignitaries. Only the emperor was entitled to wear the displayed example made of red velvet with embroidered crown motifs on the epaulettes.

Ethiopia, ca. 1900; velvet, gold threads, silk, lion's mane, leather, silver

Gift by successor to the throne Lij Iyasu

2.



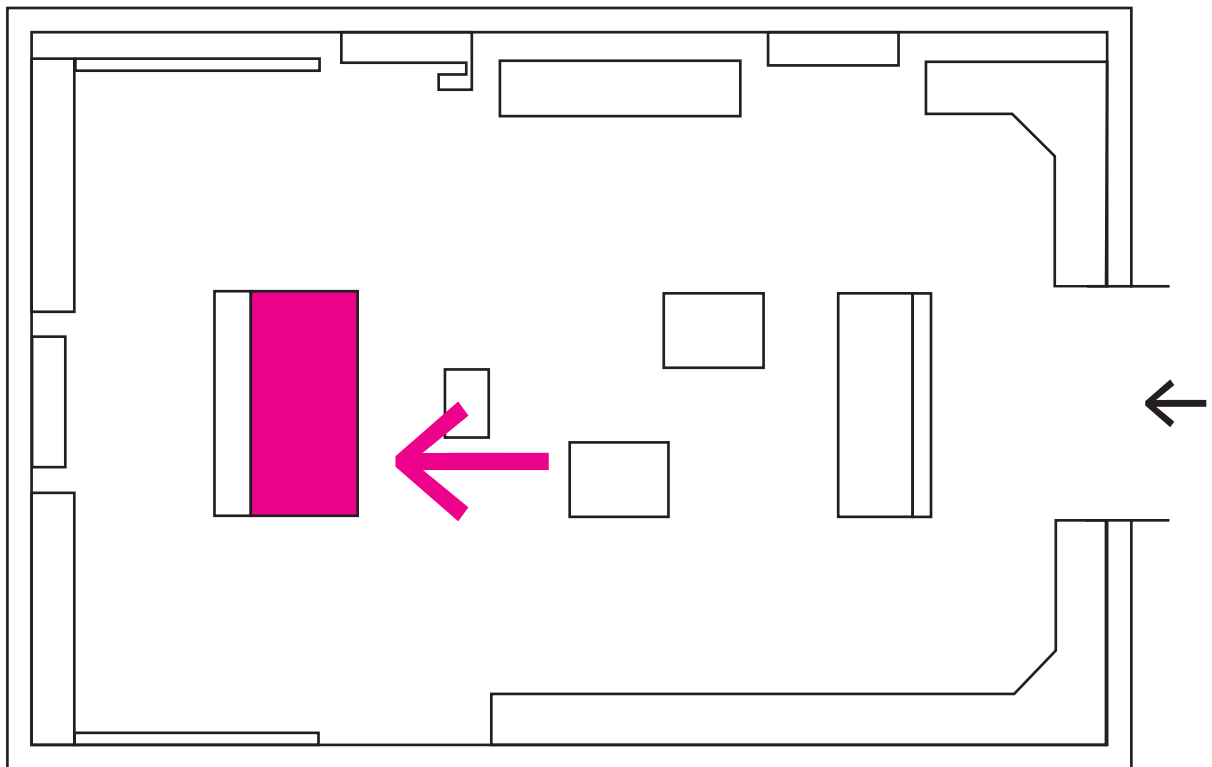
Two court dwarfs (akaeronmwon)

These worldwide unparalleled figures are among the earliest artworks from Benin and were originally placed on royal ancestral altars. They probably depict two historic individuals; a fact that is referred to in oral history.

Court dwarfs are said to have existed in Benin since the 15th century. They served as the voice of the king and were responsible for breaking delicate news. With a fan, their attribute, they initiated palace ceremonies upon the Oba's welcome. Moreover, the jesters' duties extended to the care of certain shrines and market oversight.

Benin Kingdom, 14th/15th century; brass
Captain Albert Maschmann Coll.

Room 23





Ivory tusk with relief carving

Elephant tusks richly carved with figures adorn the ancestral altars of the king from the 17th century on. Illustrating decisive moments in the life and accomplishments of an Oba, they allude to the deeds of the deceased and establish the connection to the royal ancestors along with the remaining altar ensemble. In the 18th century, European visitors told of more than 60 carved ivories found at royal ancestral altars. The splendid relief carvings draw their inspiration from many motifs of Benin's earlier relief plaques, and are full of references to the kingdom's glorious past.

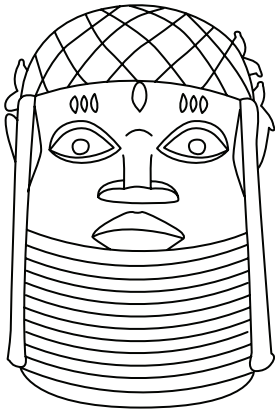
Benin Kingdom, mid-18th/mid-19th century
William D. Webster Coll.



Commemorative head of a king (uhunmwun elao)

Bronze heads were exclusively reserved for the ancestral altars of the Oba and the Queen Mother. High-ranking dignitaries used wooden heads which were sometimes adorned with brass sheet. The massive and more strongly formalised heads with winged elements on the beaded crown are dated to the 19th century. Legend has it that this type of crown was introduced by Oba Osemwende who ascended the throne in 1816. Even today's Oba wears such a crown made of coral beads as part of his coronation regalia. Commemorative heads served as pedestals for heavy, carved elephant tusks.

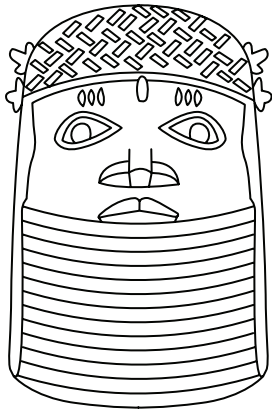
Benin Kingdom, 19th century; brass
Funds for acquisition: Georg Haas



Commemorative head of a king (uhunmwun elao)

A newly crowned Oba of Benin was obliged to immediately install an ancestral altar in his deceased father's honour. For this purpose, he commissioned a commemorative head that was placed on the altar along with other objects. Ancestral altars were located in a special section of the royal palace and also served to legitimise the living ruler. The identity of the Oba to which an altar is dedicated is revealed in the composition of the altar ensemble.

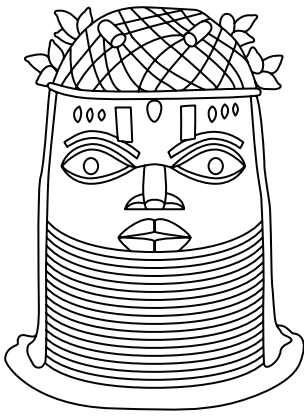
Benin Kingdom, 16th/17th century; brass
William D. Webster Coll.



Commemorative head of a king (uhunmwun elao)

Based on the preserved royal altar heads, researchers were able to develop a stylistic chronology of Benin art. The thin-walled, more naturalistic design is assumed to be the earliest, while the heavy, stylised heads are more recent. This example is part of a rare group of seven similar heads from the 16th century, which could have been made by the same artist. In contrast to other early altar heads, each example of this group features two rosettes on each side of the beaded crown.

Benin Kingdom, 16th century; brass
Captain Albert Maschmann Coll.



Commemorative head of a king (uhunmwun elao)

Altar heads of the 17th and 18th century are characterised by a higher beaded collar on top of a so-called plinth at the base on which figurative depictions in high and flat relief can be seen. The head is believed to be the receptacle of supernatural energy guiding wise behaviour, and is in a certain manner the seat of life's destiny. A man's head not only ensures his own survival and prosperity, but also that of his followers and family. Therefore, the royal commemorative heads are of fundamental significance to the entire nation.

Benin Kingdom, 17th/18th century; brass
Hans Meyer Coll.



Ivory tusk with relief carving

This early elephant tusk could stem from the ancestral altar of an Ezomo. Literature is divided on this issue, though, and it could have also been part of a royal altar ensemble. In the 18th century, the military commander gained an extraordinary position of power with many privileges once exclusively reserved for the Oba. The tusk's main motif is a warrior with a sword and severed heads in his hand, perhaps epitomising the accomplished military leader. The Ezomo achieved a special status when Oba Akenzua made the Ezomo title hereditary in the 18th century.

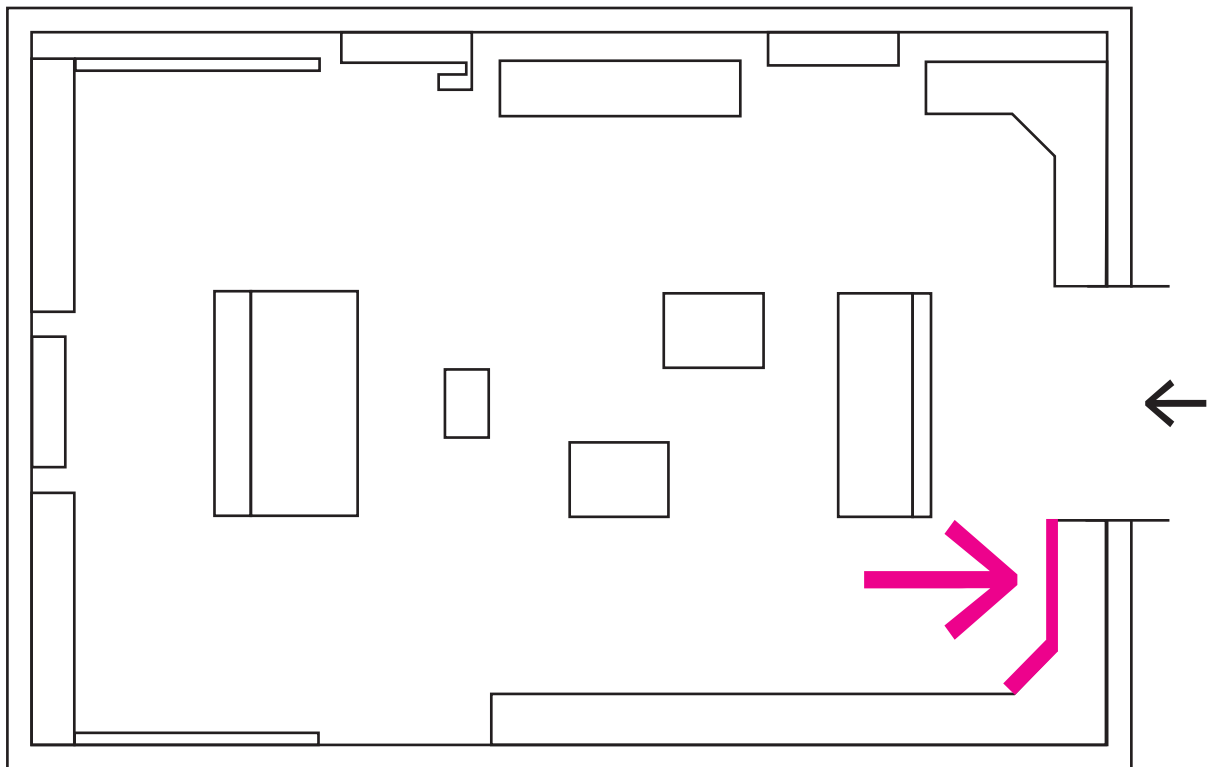
Benin Kingdom, 18th century
Gustav Spiess Coll.



Commemorative head of a king (uhunmwun elao)

According to oral tradition the appropriation of bronze heads was established under Oba Oguola in the 13th century. The head's flanged basis shows various symbols in flat relief that are associated with the spiritual power of the king. The royal ancestral altars have special significance for the continued existence of the kingdom. At the annual Igwe festival for strengthening the mystical power of the Oba, the king himself performs sacrificial offerings. This act demonstrates the extent to which the Oba is responsible for the welfare of his people, and underscores his position's ritual function. Benin Kingdom, 19th century; brass
Captain Albert Maschmann Coll.

Room 23



Art as an Archive of Imperial History

The durable properties of bronze made it the ideal material of kings. In Edo, remembering literally means “to cast a motif in bronze”.

Designed to glorify the Oba and demonstrate the power of the kingdom, the relief plaques decorating the courtyard pillars of the royal palace are considered to be an archive of the kingdom’s glorious past and ceremonial equipment.

In the 16th century, Oba Ozolua and Oba Esigie promoted expansion as supreme military leaders. In the next century, conflicts for succession decentralised the system and increased the power of rich dignitaries and warlords. The Obas began focusing on their religious influence. The 18th century was a period of prosperity but when the British intensified their presence along the coast in the 19th century, they increasingly destabilised the local balance of power.



Atlas Minor

The map of West Africa is based on a version from 1562 and highlights the importance of the Benin Kingdom. It is located in the tropical rainforest belt in the south of today's Nigeria. As one of the most influential kingdoms in pre-colonial West Africa, Benin had become rich and powerful through trading and belligerent expansion.

Gerhard Mercator, Amsterdam 1609

Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum,

Library, 14.852

1 Relief plaque: lower body of a Portuguese

The two-part plaque depicts a Portuguese holding a linstock, which indicates that he is a cannoneer. The crocodile heads are associated with Benin's period of expansion, when its troops were accompanied by European soldiers repeatedly and imported firearms provided military advantages.

Master of the Circled Cross

Benin Kingdom, 16th/17th century; brass

William D. Webster Coll.

2 Relief plaque: Portuguese with linstock and five manillas

The four-leaf backdrop is associated with river leaves which are then connected to the sea god Olokun. As the Portuguese had crossed the sea, they became a symbol of the god of fertility and wealth in Benin art.

Benin Kingdom, 16th/17th century; brass

Captain Albert Maschmann Coll.

3 Staff with bird of prophecy

Oba Esigie had idiophones made which depicted the bird of prophecy; they are sounded during a specific ceremony every year to commemorate his victory over the Igala of the kingdom of Idah.

Benin Kingdom, 18th/19th century; brass
Hans Meyer Coll.

4 Relief plaque: bird of prophecy

In 1515/16, Benin won a decisive war against the northwestern kingdom of Idah. A bird predicted that Benin would be defeated, but the Oba had it shot. His army overpowered the Attah, after which he became a vassal of Benin.

Benin Kingdom, 16th/17th century; brass
Wilson Coll.

5 Manilla

Horseshoe-shaped brass manillas were the most important means of exchange for European merchants trading with Benin from the late 15th to the early 18th century. The slave trade was a major source of huge quantities of these money rings reaching Benin.

Benin Kingdom, 17th century (?); brass
Captain Albert Maschmann Coll.

6 Relief plaque: Oba Ozolua with four attendants

Oba Ozolua the Conqueror (ca. 1481– 1504) is considered to be the greatest yet also most cruel warrior-king in the history of Benin. He wears his characteristic headdress and a feather or scale dress, presumably festive clothing.

Benin Kingdom, 16th/17th century; brass
William D. Webster Coll.

7 Relief plaque: horseman

The plaque is the only one of its kind. It might portray the Attah of Idah, ruler of the adjacent Igala, who was defeated by Oba Esigie after protracted battles in the 16th century. In consequence, Benin gained control of the River Niger.

Benin Kingdom, 16th/17th century; brass
Captain Albert Maschmann Coll.

8 Relief plaque: naked youth

The young crown prince and later Oba Ohuan, only son of the great warrior and herbalist Oba Ehengbuda, had to walk naked through Benin City to dispel rumours that he was a woman. When the Oba died childless, Benin entered a period of internal instability in the 17th century.

Benin Kingdom, 16th/17th century; brass
William D. Webster Coll.



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View of Benin City according to European imagination with the king and his entourage, the royal palace in the background, 1668

Aus: Olfert Dapper, *Naukeurige Beschrijvinge der Afrikaensche Gewesten*, Amsterdam.

© British Library Board, 457.e.4, Plates 308-309

9 Relief plaque: Portuguese with two manillas

The great number of imported manillas provided Benin's bronze casters with raw material and enabled a golden age of court bronze casting. The Portuguese's heavily pleated surcoat was commonly worn in the early 16th century, which makes it possible to date the plaque.

Benin Kingdom, 16th/17th century; brass
Wilson Coll.

10 Ivory door bolt

Door bolts served as drop bolts to prevent trespassers from gaining access to the palace. This precious example depicts a Portuguese with strings of beads or fabrics for trading and a Queen Mother. The Portuguese became an important motif in Benin art because of their presence as merchants, mercenaries and missionaries. Benin Kingdom, 18th/19th century
Captain Albert Maschmann Coll.

11 Ivory comb

The Portuguese were a common motif in the court art of Benin and demonstrate the profound impression they made as foreigners. The motif was used until the early 20th century, as this comb picked up in Calabar at the coast of Benin attests. Benin Kingdom, ca. 1900
R. Rohde Coll.

12 Bini-Portuguese spoons

Commissioned by Portuguese merchants, such ivory spoons served as precious showpieces on the tables of Renaissance sovereigns in Europe. They might have been manufactured by ivory carvers of the adjacent Owo Kingdom working at the court of Benin. Owo or Benin Kingdom, 16th century Ambras Castle and B. Kurtz Coll.

13 Imperial orb

A symbol of late antiquity representing the cosmos became a symbol of sovereignty in the Middle Ages that was used by all Christian kings in western Europe. The Obas and their high dignitaries also used foreign symbols of sovereignty, such as this object as the only preserved example, to underscore their prominent position.

Benin Kingdom, 16th/17th century (?); brass William D. Webster Coll.

Global Relations

The first visit of Afonso de Aveiro in 1486 established friendly relations with Portugal and even led the Oba to send a delegation there. Benin did not have to wait long for the Dutch, French and British either. The most important export goods were pepper and ivory; in the 19th century, it was rubber and palm oil. From these early beginnings until the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade in the early 19th century, slaves were profitable goods in this trade. The Europeans exchanged these goods mostly for copper and brass, cowry shells from the Maldives, European and Indian luxury textiles, hats, Mediterranean coral, firearms and munitions, spirits or tobacco. This intense cultural contact left its marks on material culture. The Oba himself regulated the trade and determined the terms and partners until 1897.

14 Ivory cup

Many prestigious metal vessels and ivory objects found at the royal court of Benin were modelled on foreign, European or Oriental forms and shapes that had found their way into Benin as gifts or imported goods.

Benin Kingdom, 18th/19th century

William D. Webster Coll.

15 Powder keg

Local artists picked up foreign forms and reinterpreted them in their own way: one such example is this powder keg of unknown local function.

Benin Kingdom, 19th century; wood,
embossed brass sheet

William D. Webster Coll.

16 Container for gold dust

Apparently modelled on the form of a calabash, this receptacle has a European screw top welded on.

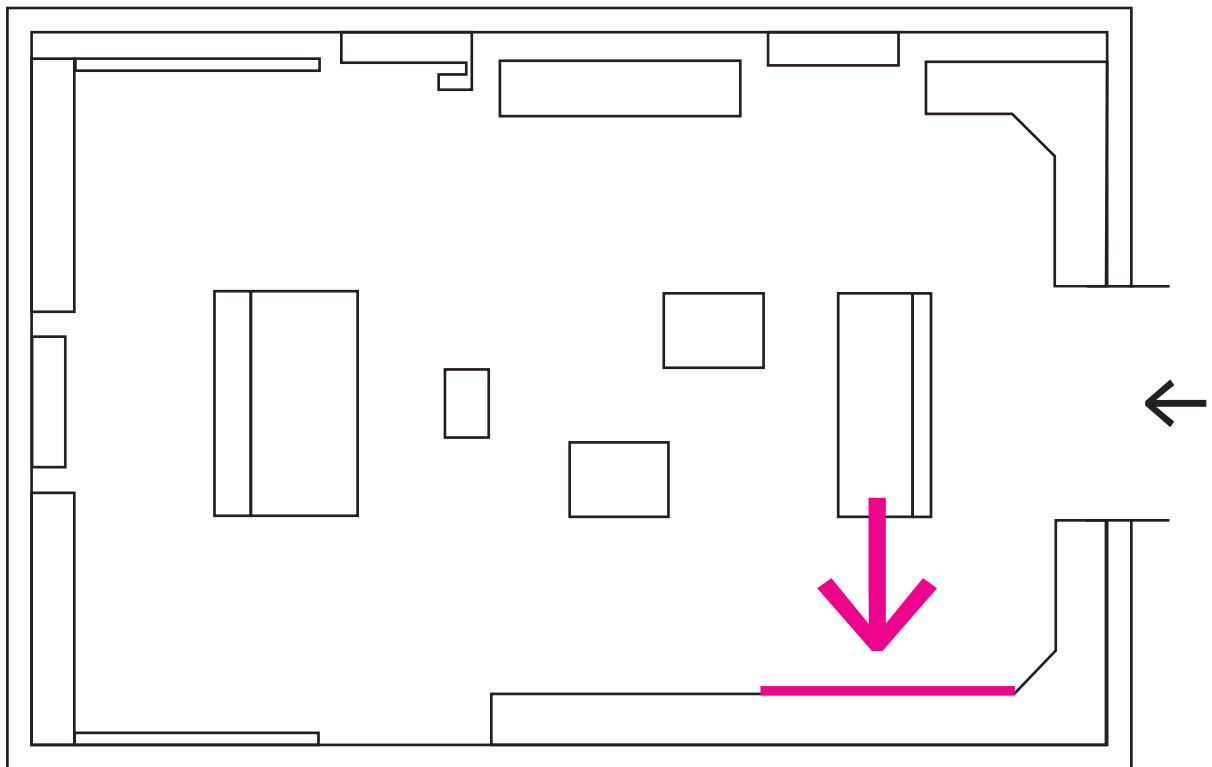
Benin Kingdom, 19th century (?); brass
William D. Webster Coll.

17 Ivory tusk with king's mark

Ivory was one of the most important commodities aside from slaves. Until the late 19th century, the king was entitled to one of the tusks of every elephant anywhere in the kingdom. The "king's marks" declare them to be the property of the royal house.

Benin Kingdom, 18th/19th century
Captain Albert Maschmann Coll.

Room 23



Palace Structure and Ceremonies

A complex system of hereditary and non-hereditary titles shaped the hierarchical system of pre-colonial Benin. At the top was the king (Oba) as the highest political and religious authority. One of the main sources of the Oba's power lay in his ability to appoint title holders. The queen mother (Iyoba) was the only woman to occupy one of the highest offices in the kingdom. Moreover, a key hereditary rank was attributed to the seven kingmakers (Uzama). Representatives of the people served as non-hereditary title holders with four powerful town chiefs as their superiors. Three palace societies were subject to the Oba's direct control. Headed by palace chiefs, these societies were composed of hundreds of dignitaries, responsible for specific duties and affiliated with specialised guilds.



Street scene with notables in Benin, portrayed according to European imagination, 1604.

Johann Theodor de Bry (Hg.): India orientalis, pars VI, Taf. 23

© Universitätsbibliothek Salzburg,
Sondersammlungen. Signatur R 15391 II

1 Relief plaque: leopard

As the signifier of kingship and totem of the king, the leopard is the most represented animal in Benin art. The Edo language uses two lexical terms for leopard: the “leopard of the home” refers to the king, while the “leopard of the bush” is the name of the big cat.

Benin Kingdom, 16th/17th century; brass
William D. Webster Coll.

2 Relief plaque: leopard-skin bag

This could be a courier bag for transporting royal messages. We know that in the 16th century, Oba Esigie and his son Oba Orhogbua could read, write and speak Portuguese; the same was also taught to courtiers.

Benin Kingdom, 16th/17th century; brass
William D. Webster Coll.

3 Girdle

Small pieces of leopard-skin have the ability to transfer the strength of the leopard to the wearer of the skin. The rings of iron hanging at the girdle are associated with Ogun, the god of war. The girdle could have served as protection for the Oba or a warlord. Benin Kingdom, 19th century (?); leather, leopard-skin, iron
Captain Albert Maschmann Coll.

4 Leopard head

The head was one of several segments of a large leopard sculpture that was probably created in the early 18th century for one of the Obas who wished to impress visitors with their lavish use of ivory. Benin Kingdom, late 17th or 18th century; ivory, brass plates, iron nails
Captain Albert Maschmann Coll.

5 Ivory pendant mask with leopard head

Pendant masks of a leopard's head were worn by everybody involved in Benin's military affairs, including the drummers and hornblowers accompanying troops into battle.

Benin Kingdom, 17th/18th century

William D. Webster Coll.

6 Agate pendant of kingship

Triad representations depict the Oba at the centre usually wearing the pendant of kingship signifying his legitimate rule.

Benin Kingdom, 19th century (?)

Captain Albert Maschmann Coll.

7 Pendant with royal triad

The most salient royal image in Benin art is the triad, which depicts the Oba flanked by two attendants. In this composition with a supporter on either side, the Oba and high dignitaries appear in public; a motif that points to the necessary support from the population.

Benin Kingdom, 18th century; brass

Hans Meyer Coll.

8 Pendant with royal triad

The pendant clearly deviates from the court style of Benin, although it was found at that very place. It is probably a product of the “Lower Niger Bronze Industry”, the historical significance and context of which has not been fully understood yet.

Benin Kingdom, Lower Niger Bronze Industry, 15th/16th century; bronze
William D. Webster Coll.

9 Altar group for an *lyoba* (*aseberia*)

The altarpiece in honour of the Queen Mother portrayed her accompanied by her entourage with two leopards and two elephants. The *lyoba* figure at the centre is broken out. The Queen Mother appointed her own priests as well as her warrior bodyguards.

Benin Kingdom, 17th/18th century; brass
Hans Meyer Coll.

10 Sculpture of a Queen Mother

The sculpture is clearly recognisable as an *lyoba* by her conical headdress with a lattice net of beads and the beaded strands crossing her torso. She was probably once part of an altar group.

Benin Kingdom, 18th/19th century; brass
William D. Webster Coll.

11 Ivory sculpture of an *lyoba*

The slightly curved, conical headdress of the weathered sculpture identifies her as Queen Mother from Benin. It might be assumed that such ivory sculptures were placed on ancestral altars. They were composed of several segments of a tusk, which is also why this example's arms are missing.

Benin Kingdom, 17th/18th century
William D. Webster Coll.

12 Ivory staff with lyoba

The Queen Mother carved atop this sceptre-like staff is portrayed sounding a clave. Unfortunately these attributes have broken off.

Benin Kingdom, 18th century

William D. Webster Coll.

13 Wooden door

This door is one of the few preserved architectural elements in wood. It is believed to be either from the women's quarters of the Oba's palace or from the lyoba's palace. It presumably served as a mirror frame at the same time.

Benin Kingdom, 19th century

Granville, William D. Webster Coll.

14 Commemorative head of a Queen Mother (uhunmwun elao)

Bronze heads were only permitted on the ancestral altars of Obas and Queen Mothers. The Iyoba had a palace of her own located just outside Benin City. She was the only woman to be classed with the highest ranking town chiefs.

Benin Kingdom, 19th century; brass
Hans Meyer Coll.

15 Rooster

In Benin, the most senior wife of the Oba, Eson, is referred to as "the cock who crows the loudest". This appellation comparing her to a cockerel describes her role as a leader. Cockerel sculptures are said to have been placed on the ancestral altars of the Iyoba. Benin Kingdom, 17th/18th century; brass
William D. Webster Coll.



Illustration of the political hierarchy of Benin in the 16th century as perceived by European visitors. The structure was subject to constant change; each and every king could introduce new titles and functions.

Johann Theodor de Bry (Hg.): India orientalis, pars VI, Taf. 26 © Universitätsbibliothek Salzburg, Sondersammlungen. Signatur R 15391 II

Political Structure of Benin

OBA (King)

OREDO (Capital Benin-City)

UZAMA (Kingmakers)

1. Oliha
2. Edohen
3. Ezomo
4. Ero
5. Eholo
6. Oloton
7. Edaiken

EGHAEVBO N'ORE (Town Chiefs)

1. Iyase
 2. Esogban
 3. Eson
 4. Osuma
 5. Iyoba
 6. Esama
 7. Ologbose
 8. Osula
 9. Ima
- und weitere

EGHAEVBO N'OGBE (Palace Chiefs)

IWEBO (Chamberlains, keepers of royal wardrobes and regalia)

1. Uwangue
 2. Eribo
 3. Osague
- und weitere

IWEGUAE (Keepers of the royal household and personal services to the Oba)

1. Esere
 2. Obazelu
 3. Aighobahi
- und weitere

IBIWE (Keepers of the royal harem)

1. Ine
 2. Osodin
 3. Obazuaye
- und weitere

IKINKIN AGBON-EDO (Districts)

ENIGIE (Princes)

ODIONWERE (Village heads)

Affiliated Guilds to the Palace Societies

IWEBO

Dancers and drummers, royal shield bearers, bronze casters, blacksmiths, ivory and wood carvers, town criers or heralds, weavers, ceremonial executioners, priests (Osa and Osuan), leatherworkers, archers and manufacturers of arrow poison, astrologers and cannoneers (Iwoki), leopard hunters, leopard butchers and dividers, beadmakers and royal storekeepers, royal flute players, ivory hornblowers, ritual path clearers

IWEGUAE

Guard of the Oba, embalmers of deceased kings, royal physicians and diviners, priests and keepers of royal ancestral shrines, court chroniclers, performers of rituals forging peace and tranquillity of the royal harem, ritual land purifiers, guardians of specific shrines and dancers, witch exposers, collectors of river taxes, acrobats and fish eagle hunters (Amufi)

IBIWE

Performers of rituals for the health and fertility of the Oba's wives, Ogun priests, servants of the wives, performers of specific prayers, custodians of the Oba's cattle

16 Relief plaque: dignitary with eben sword

This plaque depicts a title holder of the Iwebo palace society who holds the eben, a ceremonial sword, aloft by the side of the Oba or as a welcome during public festivities at the royal palace.

Benin Kingdom, 16th/17th century; brass
Foreign Office,
William D. Webster Coll.

17 Relief plaque: dignitary with eben sword

Dignitaries wear their ceremonial robes for the annual ceremonies at the royal palace. The details of these robes indicate their rank in palace hierarchy.

Benin Kingdom, 16th/17th century; brass
Foreign Office,
William D. Webster Coll.

18 Relief plaque: two dignitaries

This relief might depict two dignitaries or, according to a different theory, Oba Esigie with two distinct headdresses. A beaded pendant hanging from the figure's right hip is associated with Oba Esigie. As there is no historical evidence, many interpretations remain speculative.

Benin Kingdom, 16th/17th century; brass
William D. Webster Coll.

19 Relief plaque: dignitary with four crocodile heads

Title holders are obliged to attend the annual festivities to prove their loyalty to the Oba. In Benin art, they are usually depicted in their ceremonial robes. The crocodile heads refer to the god Olokun who bestows wealth.

Benin Kingdom, 16th/17th century; brass
Foreign Office,
William D. Webster Coll.

20 Relief plaque: two case bearers

These two courtiers carry cases that are cylindrical in shape and characteristic of Benin. Such cases were used to present gifts to the king during ceremonial appearances or pass on messages in the form of symbolic objects.

Benin Kingdom, 16th/17th century; brass
Captain Albert Maschmann Coll.

21 Relief plaque: two dignitaries with staff

The two high-ranking courtiers carry staffs of office indicating their rank and task at official occasions.

Benin Kingdom, 16th/17th century; brass
Foreign Office Coll.

22, 23

Staffs of office

These staffs may have been carried by representatives of the *Iyase*, an influential war commander and the highest-ranking title holder of the town chiefs, which made him the people's representative and leader of the political opposition at the Oba's court. One of the staffs depicts the *Iyase* himself,

the other his helmet.

Benin Kingdom, 18th/19th century (?); brass
Captain Albert Maschmann and
William D. Webster Coll.

24 Waist pendant (egbele)

Brocaded waist pendants are worn suspended on the left hip over a large wrapper at palace ceremonies. Title holders can only obtain such pendants from the royal guild of weavers and with exclusive permission from the Oba. This pendant is the only historical example of its kind.

Benin Kingdom, 18th/19th century;
cotton, wool
Captain Albert Maschmann Coll.

25 Pendant hip mask with Oba head

The ceremonial robes of kings and high-ranking dignitaries also include small pendant masks hanging from their left hip. Only title holders of the highest senior level in their category are entitled to wear these bronze pendant masks with Oba head.

Benin Kingdom, 19th century; brass
William D. Webster Coll.

26 Ivory armcuff

Benin Kingdom, 18th/19th century
Captain Albert Maschmann Coll.

27 Ivory armcuff

Ijebu style, Benin Kingdom,
18th/19th century
William D. Webster Coll.

28 Armcuff

Pairs of luxurious ivory armlets or cuffs were worn by the Oba or selected dignitaries on their forearms during palace ceremonies. This privilege had to be extended by the Oba. The king himself preferred wearing brass armcuffs.

Benin Kingdom, 18th century; brass
Hans Meyer Coll.

29 Coral and agate necklace

Coral and agate were some of the most valuable materials in coastal regions where they were used to create the regalia of kings and high-ranking dignitaries. Polished agate came from the north; the highly-valued Mediterranean coral reached Benin via the coastal trade with Europeans from the early 16th century on.

Benin Kingdom, 18th/19th century (?)

Captain Albert Maschmann Coll.

30 Necklace with European glass beads and coral

This unique necklace combines polished Bohemian glass beads with beads of blown glass from 18th century Venice. As the precious beads were imported, this piece of jewellery might have been royal property. Glass beads were found on European trading lists from the early 16th century on.

Benin Kingdom, 18th century

Captain Albert Maschmann Coll.

31 Amulet chain

The amulet chain features 36 different pendants. Its various parcels and leather-covered miniature calabashes encase medical or magical substances. The valuable imported materials imply royal property.

Benin Kingdom, 18th/19th century (?);
brass, woollen cloth, leather, agate, coral,
cowries, glass, iron, animal teeth
Captain Albert Maschmann Coll.

32 Ivory horn

The mouthpiece of side-blown horns from Benin is placed on the outside curve of the instrument. This horn depicts a design of highly symbolic motifs carved by members of the ivory carving guild. Blasts of this royal side-blown horn may have accompanied sacrificial ceremonies at the royal palace.

Benin Kingdom, 17th/18th century
William D. Webster Coll.

33 Relief plaque: hornblower

Hornblowers announced the Oba whenever he appeared in public but also accompanied advancing military campaigns. In terms of palace hierarchy, hornblowers were organised in guilds and affiliated with the Iwebo palace society.

Benin Kingdom, 16th/17th century; brass
Friedrich Wolff-Knize Coll.

34 Ivory horn

Heavily darkened by intense use and oiling, this side-blown horn depicts a hand holding a mudfish at its top. This motif refers to a proverb on the short-lived character of power: He who is holding the fish may also lose it again.

Benin Kingdom, 18th/19th century
Captain Albert Maschmann Coll.

35 Wooden box with brass fitting

Benin Kingdom, 19th century;
wood, brass sheet
Captain Albert Maschmann Coll.

36 Wooden box with relief carvings

Boxes of this kind in various sizes and made from diverse materials were mostly used for the storage or presentation of kola nuts. The richly carved wooden boxes were probably made by the Emada, the pages of the royal court, who practiced this craft in their free time and developed their own style.

Benin Kingdom, 19th century

Captain Albert Maschmann Coll.

37 Figure of an Ewua priest

Benin Kingdom, 18th/19th century; ivory

Captain Albert Maschmann Coll.

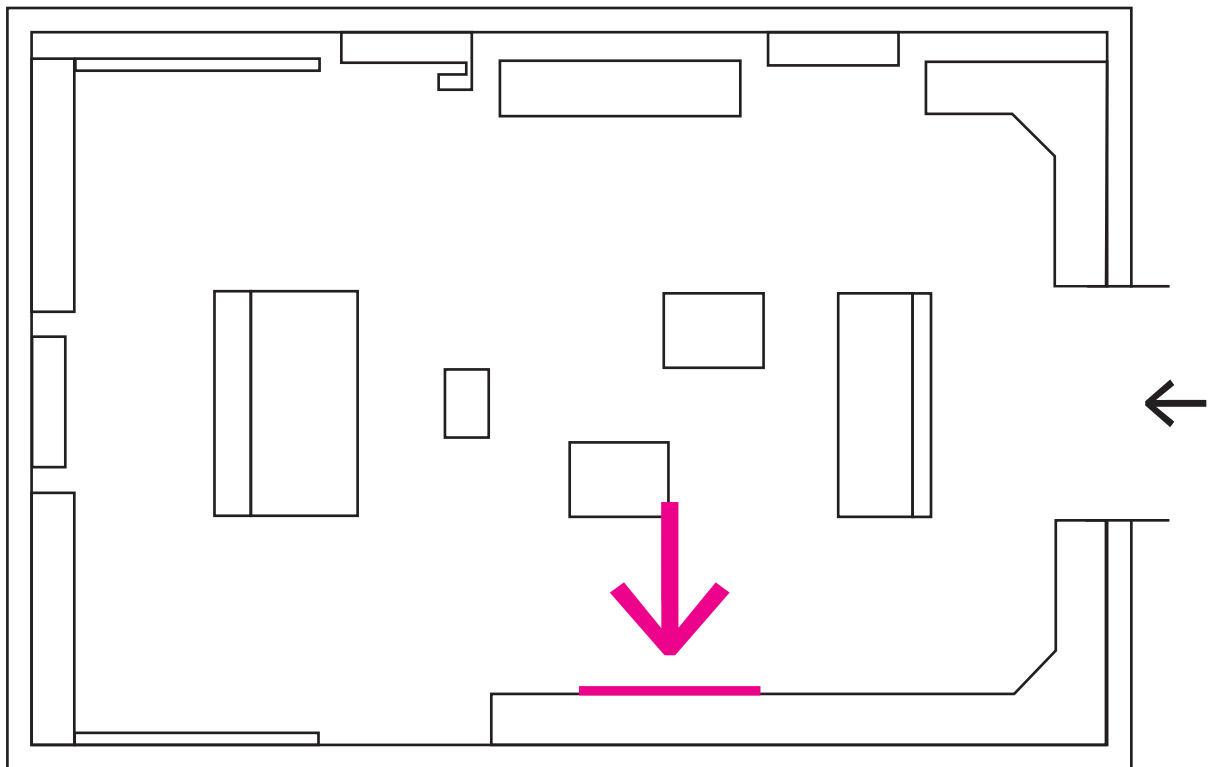
38 Sculpture of an Ewua priest

The figures may portray Ewua officials, a palace guild founded by Oba Esigie. Ewua were responsible for awakening the Oba and performing the daily morning ceremonies honouring his dynasty's spiritual legacies.

Benin Kingdom, 16th/17th century; brass

Captain Albert Maschmann Coll.

Room 23



Gods and Shrines

In addition to ancestral altars, shrines for various gods play a fundamental role.

Particularly important for supporting the Oba's sovereignty is the worship of the sea god Olokun who bestows fertility and wealth. Shrines dedicated to Olokun are primarily white in colour, which stands for purity and good fortune. As the ruler of the underwater world, Olokun is considered to be the king's counterpart.

Ogun, the protective god of war, iron and metal working, enables human beings to produce tools, arts, weapons, and today also machines, out of metal. The "hot" colour red associated with Ogun characterises shrines erected to him, which often consist of an accumulation of metal parts. Osun is the spiritual power inherent in medicinal plants, insects and reptiles.



Olokun shrine with clay figures around 1890.
The deity as the ruler of the sea with regalia
and entourage similar to that of an Oba.
© The Trustees of the British Museum

1 Osun pot

Imitating the shape of a terracotta pot, this container was probably made for palace shrines. The reliefs show snakeswallowing frogs, a motif suggesting supernatural attacks and associated with Osun. His shrines are mighty trees surrounded by vessels filled with water and leaves.

Benin Kingdom, 18th century; Brass
Captain Albert Maschmann Coll.

2 Osun staff (osun ematon)

Osun is the god of medicine, and these staffs are linked to herbal specialists. Moreover, they are also associated with hunters and warriors who regard Osun as their patron. The nocturnal birds bring bad luck; the chameleon signifies danger because of its ability to change, just as warriors during tactical manoeuvres.

Benin Kingdom, 18th century; iron, brass
Wilson Coll.

3 Relief plaque: crocodile

Benin Kingdom, 16th/17th century; brass
Captain Albert Maschmann Coll.

4 Relief plaque: crocodile head

Crocodiles are considered to be dangerous and warriors of Olokun, deity of the sea. Sometimes they were sacrificed for Olokun initiates but most often they were used as offerings to altars of the hand, i.e. in gratitude for their accomplishments. The depicted head refers to sacrifices, since the heads were left on altars as request reminders.

Benin Kingdom, 16th/17th century; brass
Foreign Office,
William D. Webster Coll.

5 Relief plaque: snake

Poisonous snakes were linked to Osun, god of medicine, while the python was connected to Olokun, god of the sea and wealth, because of its predilection for water. The python is said to be the playmate and messenger of Olokun as well as the king of snakes.

Benin Kingdom, 16th/17th century; brass
Foreign Office Coll.

6 Snake head

Oversized bronze snakes decorated the roofs of some buildings in the royal palace. They might have symbolised the extraordinary spiritual power of the Oba. This example's moveable tongue, which is said to have made a sound when vibrating in the wind, is still preserved.

Benin Kingdom, 17th century; brass
Wilson Coll.

7 Altar bell

The altar's owners ring the bells for ceremonial purposes, summoning spirits, or proclaiming their presence. At the same time, they alert the spirits to the praise and petitions of those initiating the ritual.

Benin Kingdom, 18th/19th century (?); brass
Captain Albert Maschmann Coll.

8 Ivory bell with figurative clapper

Bells are essential to the functioning of any ancestral altar. Ivory bells are extremely rare and were exclusively for use by the Oba. The clapper of this example is carved to represent a dignitary.

Benin Kingdom, 18th century

Captain Albert Maschmann Coll.

9 Imitation of a tortoise

This replica could have served as a permanent reminder of a sacrificed tortoise, which provides protection against false friends and treacherous lies or intrigues.

Benin Kingdom, 18th/19th century (?); brass
William D. Webster Coll.

10 Altar of the hand (ikegobo)

An altar of the hand is dedicated to the individual success of its owner and glorifies his or her achievements. An image representing the owner is perpetuated in central position. Wooden ikegobo could be used by dignitaries, warriors, wealthy traders, whether male or female, hunters and craftsmen.

Benin Kingdom, 19th century; wood
Captain Albert Maschmann Coll.

11 Altar of the hand of an Iyoba (ikegobo)

Altars of the hand were the prerogative of high-ranking officials and people of great achievement: the king, Queen Mother, dignitaries, and other prominent personalities. Those made of brass were reserved for the king and Queen Mother. Benin Kingdom, 18th/19th century; brass
William D. Webster Coll.

12 Figure group

The contextual significance of this figure group for an altar is unknown. It might refer to the responsibility of a dignitary for his people and the protection he grants.

Benin Kingdom, 19th century; brass
Hans Meyer Coll.

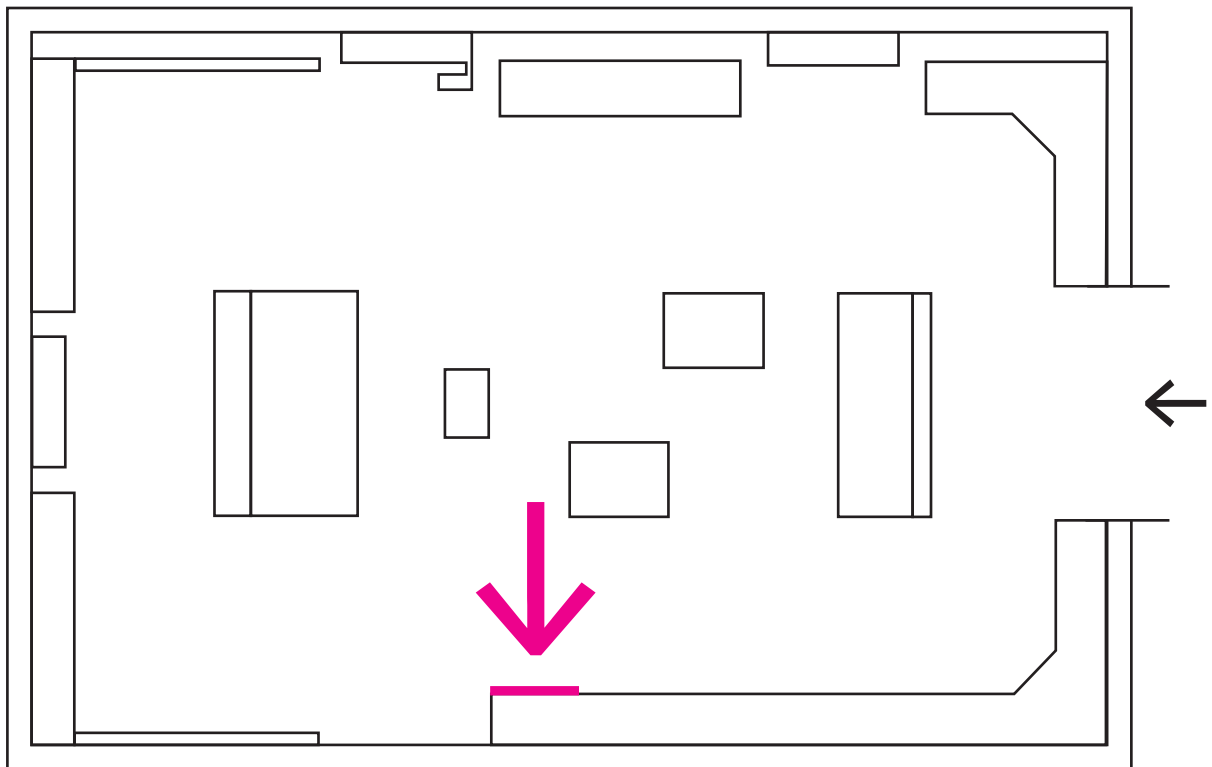
13, 14

Rattle staffs (ukhurhe)

Rattle staffs serve as basic furnishing of any ancestral altar in Benin. They symbolise the community of the ancestors. It is the duty of the eldest son to have a rattle staff like these carved when his father dies, and to place it among the other staffs leaning against the back wall of the ancestral altar.

Benin Kingdom, 19th century; wood
Captain Albert Maschmann Coll.

Room 23



History of the Benin Collection in Vienna

The discovery of Benin art was followed by a fierce competition for the valuable objects. A pivotal role is attributed to Berlin-based Felix von Luschan who compared it to the bronze art of the Italian Renaissance artist Benvenuto Cellini. The Viennese curator Franz Heger tried to raise the needed funds quickly as well. The British market offered numerous objects traded by soldiers of the Benin expedition and the Foreign Office. William D. Webster became the most important trader and also sold objects to Heger. The most significant share of Vienna's Benin collection was acquired through Captain Albert Maschmann, a middleman in Hamburg. Many objects already changed hands in Benin or were sold by locals after the downfall of the kingdom before entering Europe through the Port of Hamburg.

1 Ivory tusk

This tusk was the very first Benin acquisition for the collection in Vienna. Vienna's curator Franz Heger bought it from his Austrian colleague Felix von Luschan from the Ethnological Museum when he was staying in Berlin in 1897.

Benin Kingdom, 18th/19th century

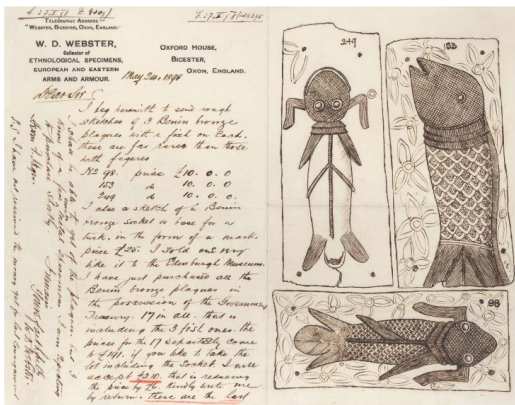
National Museums of Berlin, Ethnological Museum Coll.

2 Ivory horn

This unique ivory horn is one of the few Benin objects that arrived in Europe before the 18th century. African elephants have never been domesticated. The motif of the Oba riding the elephant depicts the king as the symbolic ruler over the strongest animal in the forest, a motif indicating a powerful person of high rank.

Benin Kingdom, 17th/18th century

Imperial and Royal Cabinet of Coins and Antiquities Coll., Ambras Castle as of 1847



Letter of ethnographica trader William D. Webster to the curator F. Heger, 24 May 1898

3-5

Relief plaques: mudfish

Webster offered these plaques to the curator Heger by sending him drawings and urged him to decide quickly due to the great demand. They still show the number of the British Museum in the drawing. In Benin art, fish call attention to the links between Olokun and his earthly counterpart.

Benin Kingdom, 16th/17th century; brass
Foreign Office,
William D. Webster Coll.

6 Relief plaque: dignitary with eben sword (ukueben)

In 1897, the British Museum exhibited 300 plaques. By order of the British Foreign Office, it had to resell most of the objects afterwards to cover the costs of the Benin expedition. Vienna acquired the plaque from Webster in 1899; originally it had the BM No 227.

Benin Kingdom, 16th/17th century; brass
Foreign Office,
William D. Webster Coll.

7 Relief plaque: two dignitaries with rattles

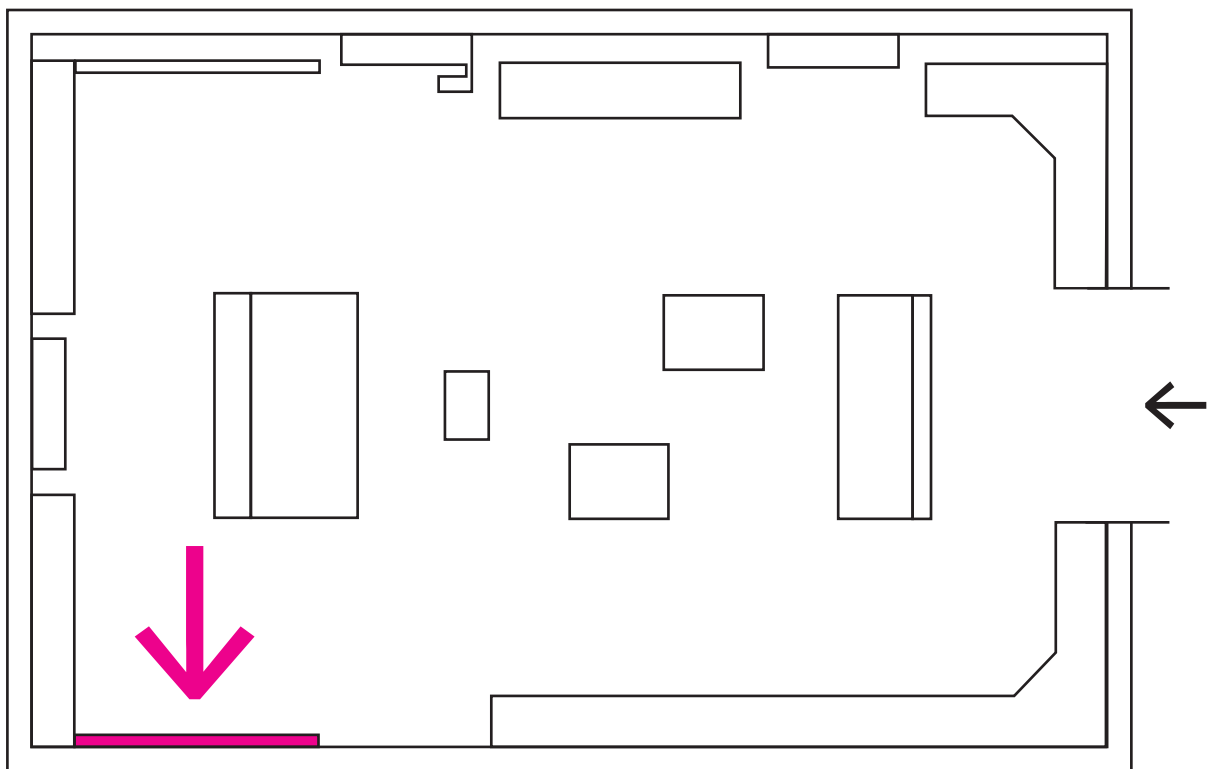
This plaque depicting two court musicians was offered by Curt Schembera from Wroclaw, of whom unfortunately no further details are known. His offer included an artistically arranged photograph of his private collection. The museum only acquired the plaque in 1899.

Benin Kingdom, 16th/17th century; brass
Curt Schembera Coll.



The Benin collection of Curt Schembera
from Wroclaw offered for sale

Room 23



1897–Fall of the Benin Kingdom

Founded in 1891, the British Oil Rivers Protectorate was interested in extending its influence and put pressure on Oba Ovonramwen. In 1892 the king signed a treaty of protection but did not understand its impact. According to local belief, it was inconceivable to limit the power of the Oba, and he continued his policies as before the treaty. In 1897, a British mission was sent to Benin City to convince the king to comply with the treaty. The mission was raided and most of its members killed by loyal followers of the Oba. Great Britain sent troops in retaliation and enforced British rule over the kingdom. The Oba was sent into exile and the chiefs in charge sentenced to death. As these traumatic incidents marked the fall of the independent kingdom of Benin, they play a central role in the remembrance culture of the Edo.

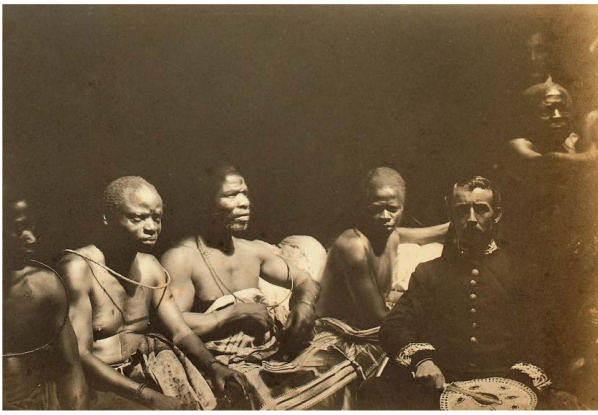
Protection Treaty with Queen Victoria

On behalf of the British crown, vice-consul Henry Gallwey managed to conclude a treaty of protection with Oba Ovonramwen in 1892, which granted Great Britain free trade and representation of Benin. The king signed with fingerprint. From today's perspective, it can be assumed that the contents of the contract were not accurately translated to the Oba. When Gallwey was visiting the king, a few of the very rare pictures of Benin Kingdom before 1897 were taken.



A Benin chief with entourage in front of his residence with ridges indicating his high status, 1890–1900

© The Trustees of the British Museum



Henry L. Gallwey with dignitaries during his visit to Benin City, 1892

Photo: J. H. Swainson

© Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, EEPA 1996-0019-0135



Originally entitled "Ju Ju Compound, Benin", this illustration by Captain George LeClerc Egerton, a member of the British expedition, gives an impression of the compounds in the extensive royal palace, 1897

© Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, Dumas Egerton Trust Collection, 1991.13.30

British Invasion

The British troops were able to take Benin City despite strong resistance. The king and his high dignitaries had fled, and the city was almost deserted. The British installed their headquarters in the royal palace. On the third day, a fire broke out which destroyed parts of the palace and the city. The cause of the fire remains undetermined. While the British label it a mishap, the Benin side detects a deliberate act, as the burning of entire villages was common practice during the British colonial expansion.



Gate to the royal palace
after the fire, 1897

© Courtesy of the Council
of the National Army
Museum, London



Destroyed building in
Benin, said to have
belonged to a priest,
ca. 1897–1900

Photo: R. K. Granville
© Pitt Rivers Museum,
University of Oxford,
1998.208.15.5

Loss of the Royal Art Treasures

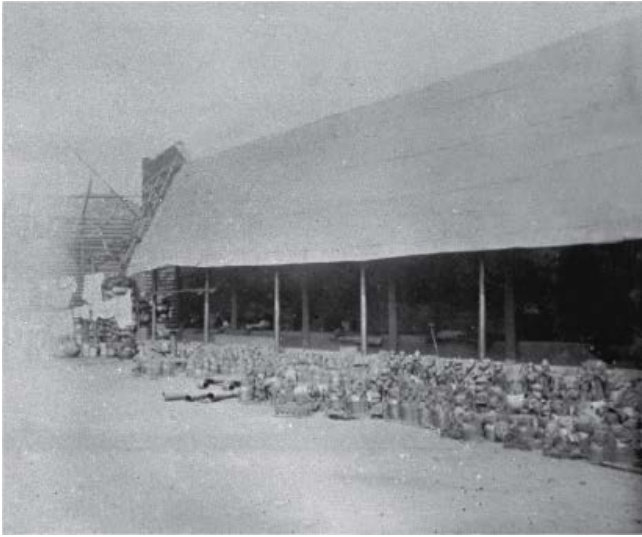
During the occupation of the city and the royal palace, the art treasures were discovered unexpectedly and a major part brought to Great Britain. There, they were dispersed around the world to fund the expedition in arrears. In the following turmoil of the destroyed kingdom and lack of leadership, Benin lost many more art treasures. Up to this day, the royal family as well as Nigeria's commission for museums have been demanding either the return of at least some art treasures or reparations.



Transport of artworks out of Benin by British soldiers. Original title: "Benin Expedition 1897. The donkey belonged to Sepping Wright, correspondent of Illustrated London News." Photo: Rear Admiral H.S. Measham
© The Trustees of the British Museum



Members of the British expedition in a courtyard at the royal palace with bronzes and ivories. On the roof, a monumental snake sculpture can be seen, 1897.
© The Trustees of the British Museum



Original title: "Bronzes in the palaver house of the king", 1897

Photo: R.K. Granville (?)

© Courtesy of the Council of the National Army Museum, London



Original title: "Tusks collected in the royal quarters", 1897

Photo: R.K. Granville

© Courtesy of the Council of the National Army Museum, London



Interior of the burnt down royal palace grounds,
with discovered bronze relief plaques lying on
the ground, 1897

Unbekannter Photograph

© Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford,
1998.208.15.11

“The practice of human sacrifices, of which much hitherto had not been heard, was after the destruction of the Phillips Expedition vigorously denounced. The ‘gross barbarism’ of Benin, of which the European merchants must have been all the time aware, did not prevent them from amassing considerable wealth at the expense of the simple natives.”

Moses da Rocha, Lagos-born Student of Medicine
Edinburgh University, 1897

The Exiled Oba

Oba Ovonramwen faced British colonial troops after six months in hiding. He was put on trial in Benin City and exiled to Calabar, seat of the colonial administration at the coast, where he lived with his family and died as a prisoner in 1914. The British distributed photographs of the deposed king to provide evidence of their supremacy. In collective memory, these pictures became the visual expression of an irretrievable, glorious past.

If you saw the King they captured
He is like the python of the water.
But if you saw the white man who captured
Ovonramwen
He is skinny like a twig.

Praise song to Oba Ovonramwen,
early 20th century



Oba Ovonramwen on the British yacht Ivy on his way to exile, standing on his right is Captain Herbert A. Child, 1897

Repro eines Abzugs in Besitz von Chief Oliha, Benin City, durch Barbara Plankensteiner



Oba Ovonramwen with his wives Queen Egbe and Queen Aighobahi in exile in Calabar, ca. 1898 (?)

© Reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library, RCS Y30430/18



Oba Ovonramwen in shackles on the way to Calabar, 1897. Original caption on photograph by Captain Maschmann (?):
 "The king of Benin just captured, on board H. M. Yacht Ivy. His expression is very solemn, expecting to be condemned to death."

Photo: Jonathan A. Green



The last king of Benin, Oba Ovonramwen on the British yacht H.M. Ivy, 1897. Original caption on photograph by Captain Maschmann (?): "The king of Benin on board H.M. Yacht Ivy, after the sentence, his life being spared, made a promise that he would become a Christian. He received penal servitude for life, but was allowed to have his family and wife with him. He is at present imprisoned at Old Calabar."

Photo: Jonathan A. Green



Oba Akenzua II with the coral regalia of his grandfather Oba Ovonramwen, returned to him from British private ownership. On his left Sir John Macpherson, British Governor General of Nigeria, on his right the Earl of Plymouth, 1938. Photo: Solomon O. Alonge

© Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, EEPA 2009-007-0038



Prince Omoregbe Erediauwa, Benin City 2013

Prince Omoregbe ist der jüngste Sohn von Oba Erediauwa und Geschäftsmann in Benin City. Er spricht über die Bedeutung der Benin-Kunstschätze für die königliche Familie und deren Pläne zur Eröffnung eines Palastmuseums.

Prince Omoregbe is the youngest son of Oba Erediauwa and businessman in Benin City. He talks of the importance of Benin art treasures to the royal family and their plans of establishing a palace museum.

1

Aussparung Grafik
für Monitor
B 292 x H 216 mm

Ironclad 1887, Lancelotti Odawa Ironclad

Der Hollywood-Film wurde 2016 in Toronto und in London gedreht. Der Regisseur dokumentiert die historischen Ereignisse, die zum Verlust der Ober- und Unterteile der Eisenklammer führten, aus der sich die Briten retteten. Er will das Bewusstsein dafür schaffen, dass sich der Großteil der Kunst in Museen und Privatsammlungen außerhalb Nigerias befindet, und stellt die Verantwortlichkeit dieser Tatsache fest.

Kurzversion für die Wikimedia Commons

The Hollywood film premiered in Toronto and London in 2016. The main picture was made at the historical events leading to the loss of more than 1,000 pieces of Benin art from the perspective of Prince Odawa. It aims to both raise awareness and question the legitimacy of the issue that most of the lost artworks still remain in museums and private collections outside of Nigeria.

Short version for the Wikimedia Commons

3

Aussparung Grafik
für Monitor
B 292 x H 216 mm

Prince Edun A. Akenzua, Enogie of Obazuwa-Iko, Benin City 2013

Prince Edun ist ein Bruder von Oba Erediauwa und tritt international als Musiker hervor und setzt sich für eine Rückgabe der über die Jahre verstreuten Benin-Kunstwerke ein.

Prince Edun is a brother of Oba Erediauwa and appears internationally as his representative to advocate for the return of Benin artwork spread all over the world.

2

Aussparung Grafik
für Monitor
B 292 x H 216 mm

4

1897 von Monday Midelele, 2009 (?)

Monday Midelele ist ein bekannter Musiker aus Benin. Er ist Mitglied der Gruppe Monday Midelele. Er hat eine große Rolle in der Benin-Kunstszene gespielt. Er hat eine große Rolle in der Benin-Kunstszene gespielt. Er hat eine große Rolle in der Benin-Kunstszene gespielt.

Belgian-based singer, composer and artist Monday Midelele (also for Monday Midelele) has been active in Benin since 2009. "1897" is not just another song or a further ideological song. It is a song that refers to one of the most tragic events in the history of my people. It is a song that I would like to use to effectively state my message for the return of the traditional and historical artifacts."

Aussparung Grafik
für Monitor
B 292 x H 216 mm

1 Prince Omoregbe Erediauwa, Benin City 2013

Prince Omoregbe is the youngest son of Oba Erediauwa and businessman in Benin City.

He talks of the importance of Benin's art treasures to the royal family and their plans of establishing a palace museum.

2 Prince Edun A. Akenzua, Enogie of Obazuwa-Iko, Benin City 2013

Prince Edun is a brother of Oba Erediauwa and appears internationally as his representative to advocate for the return of Benin artwork spread all over the world.

3 Invasion 1897, Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen

The Nollywood film premiered in Toronto and London in 2014. The motion picture reconstructs the historical events leading to the loss of more than 3,000 pieces of Benin art from the perspective of those affected. It seeks to both raise awareness and question the legitimacy of the issue that most of the lost artworks still remain in museums and private collections outside of Nigeria.

4 1897 von Monday Midnite, 2009 (?)

Belgium-based singer, composer and artist Monday Midnite (alias for Monday Osaigbovo Agbonze) describes his concern as follows in 2012: "1897 is not just another rap song or a further ideological song. It is a song that refers to one of the most tragic events in the history of my people. It is a song that I would like to use to officially start my campaign for the return of the traditional and historical artefacts."

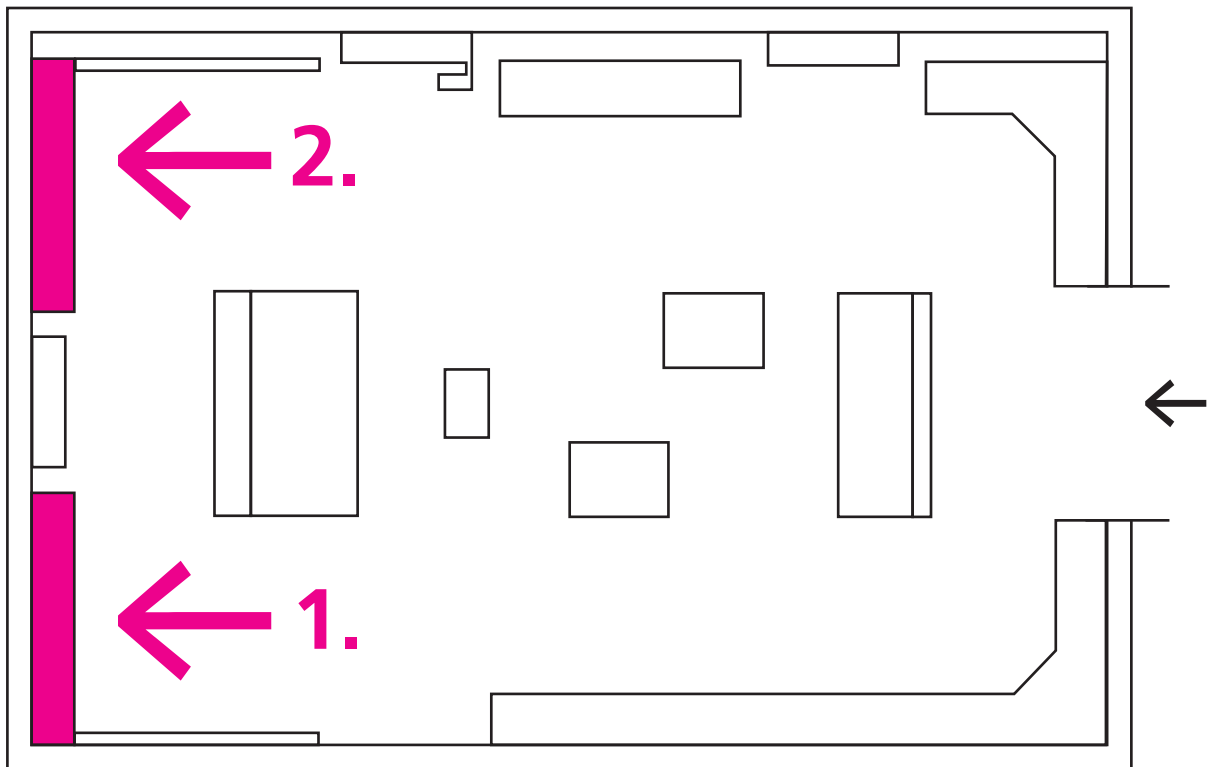
"The Benin kingdom was around for thousands of years. The royalty has been the same from generation to generation, nothing has been adulterated. think the fact that you can actually sit down and as far back as you can remember you can retrace your family tree is enough to appreciate what we have."

Prince Omoregbe Erediauwa, 2013

"Some objects were made to record history. Others were made to adorn altars. [...] What the British took away really, were not just artefacts, they took away chapters of our own history."

Prince Edun Akenzua, 2013

Room 23



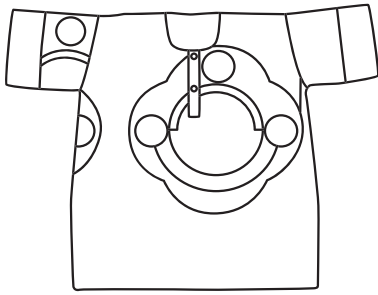
1.



Boat composition

Such figure groups became highly popular artistic expressions during the 1997 Benin centenary commemoration of Oba Ovonramwen's exile. The representation does not correspond to historical facts; the Oba is seen in his ceremonial attire. This interpretation pays appropriate tribute to his position and dignity, which in turn reflects the traumatic events of 1897 in a much more adequate manner for Benin's culture of remembrance.

Omodamwen workshop,
Benin City, Nigeria, 2006; brass
Barbara Plankensteiner Coll.



Men's shirt from 'Great Benin Centenary' commemorative cloth

The cloth was produced for the occasion of the centenary commemoration of the events in 1897. A portrait of Ovonramwen, the last Oba of the independent Benin Kingdom, forms the central motif of the fabric. The picture of the captured king was printed on postcards and distributed by the British in large numbers as proof of his subjugation.

Benin City, Nigeria, 1997; cotton cloth, industrially woven and printed

Barbara Plankensteiner, Gisela Völger Coll.

2.

Cross pendants

In the 15th century, Emperor Zara Yaqob commanded all Christians to wear a cross. Even though his decree did not last, Christians still continued to wear cross pendants either as signs of faith or as protective amulets. While the simplest examples were made of wood, aristocrats had golden crosses; copper and bronze versions were common as well. From the 19th century on, Maria Theresa thalers were melted down and made larger amounts of silver available. Crosses were made in countless regional varieties.

Ethiopia, 19th/early 20th century;
silver, nickel silver, copper alloy
Lore Trenkler Coll.

Modern women's dresses (kamis) with scarf (natala) and necklace

In the mid-20th century, modern women's dresses came into fashion in Ethiopia's urban areas. Their style of ornamentation is modelled on clothing made by noble women in the 19th century. The cut of the waisted dresses draws inspiration from 1960s fashion.

Ethiopia, 1960s; cotton and synthetic yarn; silver
Lore Trenkler Coll.

Necklace with silver pendants

Found primarily in the northern provinces of Ethiopia, these necklaces feature pendants adorned with filigree work and modelled on small amulet receptacles. The pendants are empty and cannot be opened. Such necklaces are often a wedding gift and are supposed to bring good luck to the bride.

Ethiopia, early 20th century;
silver alloy, cotton thread
Lore Trenkler Coll.

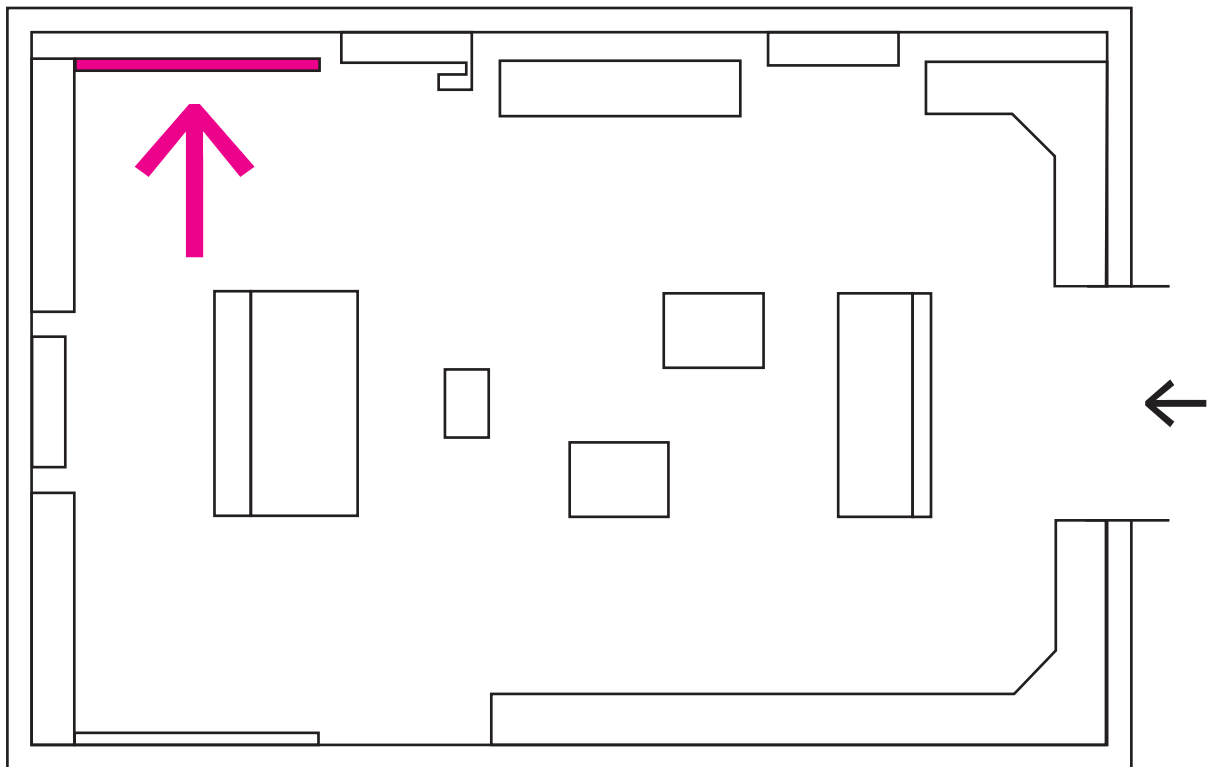
Menelik thaler as money or letter clip

Menelik or Maria Theresa thalers have always been processed into pieces of jewellery and other accessories up to this day.

Ethiopia, 1950s; silver

Lore Trenkler Coll.

Room 23



“At the time of Emperor Menelik II or the last emperor, Haile Selassie, Ethiopia was respected and famous in the world. It was independent, without any actual help from abroad, and autonomous.”

Bisrat Melaku-Wolde, Educator, February 2016

Apple Strudel for the Emperor

Austrian Lore Trenkler (1914–2002) became the dietician of diabetic Empress Menen of Ethiopia in 1960. After the Empress' death in 1962, she stayed at the imperial court as the personal chef of Haile Selassie. Lore Trenkler cared for his culinary needs until the imprisoned emperor was killed in August 1975. Shortly afterwards she left the country that was now ruled by General Haile Mengistu and the Derg, a military committee, after the revolution. She described her experiences at the court in a memoir which provides insight into Ethiopia's contemporary history from the perspective of the kitchen as well as an admirer who experienced the emperor as a benevolent ruler and blocked out the political developments outside the palace leading to the revolution.

Lore Trenkler's Memorabilia

Austrian chef and dietician Lore Trenkler spent 15 years at the court of Emperor Haile Selassie and was in charge of preparing European cuisine. She accompanied the emperor on his travels in Ethiopia and cooked for banquets with many international heads of state. In 2000, she donated a collection of 150 memorabilia from Ethiopia to the Museum. Her opinion of the authoritarian emperor: "I suppose he was rather strict with the Ethiopians but as a person he was very charming."



Lore Trenkler with an
Ethiopian dress in the style
of the 60s, 1960–75

© Peter Trenkler



Emperor Haile Selassie with
the chimpanzee Agonafer,
1960–75

Photo: Lore Trenkler

© Peter Trenkler



Lore Trenkler with the
chimpanzee Agonafer,
1960–75

© Peter Trenkler



The imperial kitchen,
1960–75

Photo: Lore Trenkler
© Peter Trenkler



Lore Trenkler with two
chefs in Addis Ababa,
1960–75

© Peter Trenkler

Haile Selassie's 25th Anniversary as Emperor

The son of Friedrich J. Bieber, Otto, had met Emperor Haile Selassie when he was visiting Vienna. In 1955, he was invited by the emperor to attend the 25th anniversary of the accession to the throne, which he captured on photographs. Haile Selassie took advantage of this moment and presented himself as a great reformer and innovator. Twenty years later, however, he ultimately failed to successfully combine this feudal structure with the requirements of a modern state and the interests of a wider educated middle class.

"I am rather nostalgic about the time of Emperor Haile Selassie, just like Austrians feel about [the] time of Emperor Franz Joseph. Although there was inequality. [...] When I met Lore Trenkler in Vienna, she told me how humane and benevolent Emperor Haile Selassie was, and completely changed my opinion."

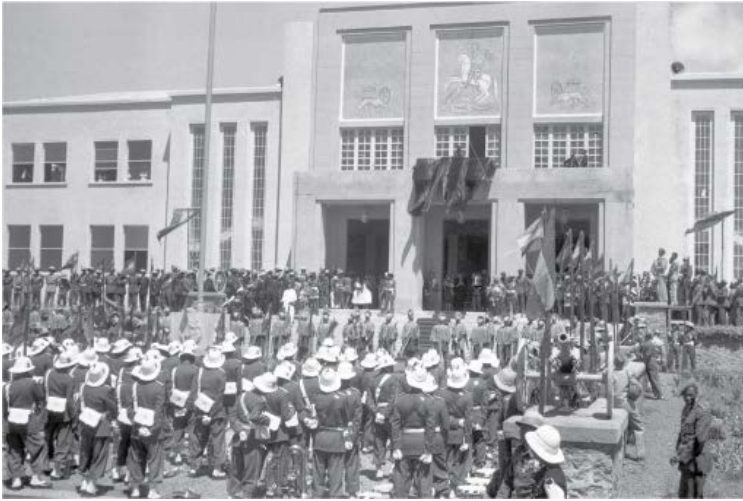
Sintayehu Tsehay, Freelance Journalist, February 2016



View across the festivities and the audience, 1955
Photo: Otto Bieber



At the 25th anniversary of his coronation,
the emperor signed a revision of the 1931
constitution and promised more political liberties
in parliament while continuing to keep all powers
to himself, 1955
Photo: Otto Bieber



The Ethiopian army in front of Jubilee Palace during the festivities for the 25th anniversary, 1955

Photo: Otto Bieber



A nobleman with regalia of an accomplished warrior in the tradition of the late 19th century on the occasion of the 25th anniversary, 1955

Photo: Otto Bieber



The imperial guard at the 25th anniversary, 1955

Photo: Otto Bieber

Emperor Haile Selassie in Vienna

Emperor Haile Selassie visited Vienna for a day on his tour across Europe in 1954. His journey to Great Britain, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Czechoslovakia, and Switzerland was intended to initiate diplomatic and trade relations as well as to assert internationally the sovereignty of Ethiopia. At Vienna's city hall, the emperor donated 25,000 Austrian shillings to the post-war population for welfare of the youth.



Emperor Haile Selassie takes a guided tour through the Vienna Museum of Ethnology. Africa curator Annemarie Schweeger-Hefel shows him the imperial gifts of his ancestors and the Kaffa collection, 29 November 1954

© Klaus Bieber



At Vienna's Westbahnhof, Emperor Haile Selassie is welcomed, amongst others, by Vice-Chancellor Adolf Schärf, Foreign Minister Leopold Figl and Undersecretary of State Bruno Kreisky, 29 November 1954

© ÖNB/Wien, E1/1718



Austrian President Theodor Körner with Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie and Empress Menen at a reception at Palais Auersperg in Vienna, 1954

The Italian Occupation of Ethiopia

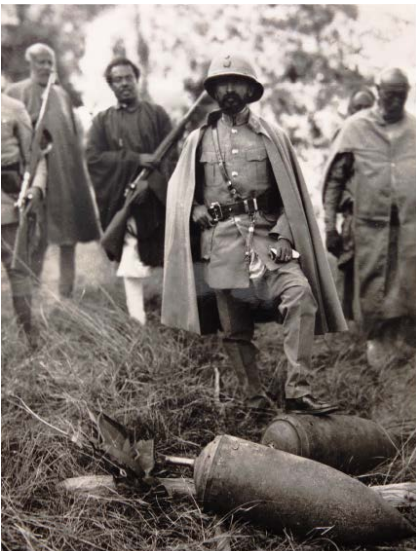
In October 1935, armed forces of Fascist Italy entered Ethiopia from Eritrea in the north and Somalia in the south. After heavy battles, the deployment of mustard gas in violation of international conventions, and an overall devastating war, the troops reached Addis Ababa in May 1936 and declared Ethiopia an Italian colony. The emperor had to escape and returned to his throne in 1941. The museum features photographs from the battleground in the provincial capital of Dessie, 400 km north of Addis Ababa.



Empress Menen on the front line
Photo: London, Associated Press



The devastating
destruction of the capital
of Wollo Province, Dessie,
in northern Ethiopia,
December 1935
Photo: London,
Associated Press



Emperor Haile Selassie with
Italian unexploded aerial
bombs, 1935
Photo: London,
Associated Press



Emperor Haile Selassie as
a military commander at
a church service after the
bombardment of Dessie,
December 1935
Photo: London,
Associated Press



Emperor Haile Selassie
petting a gazelle, 1935
Photo: London,
Associated Press



Emperor Haile Selassie at
a church service after the
bombardment of Dessie,
December 1935
Photo: London,
Associated Press

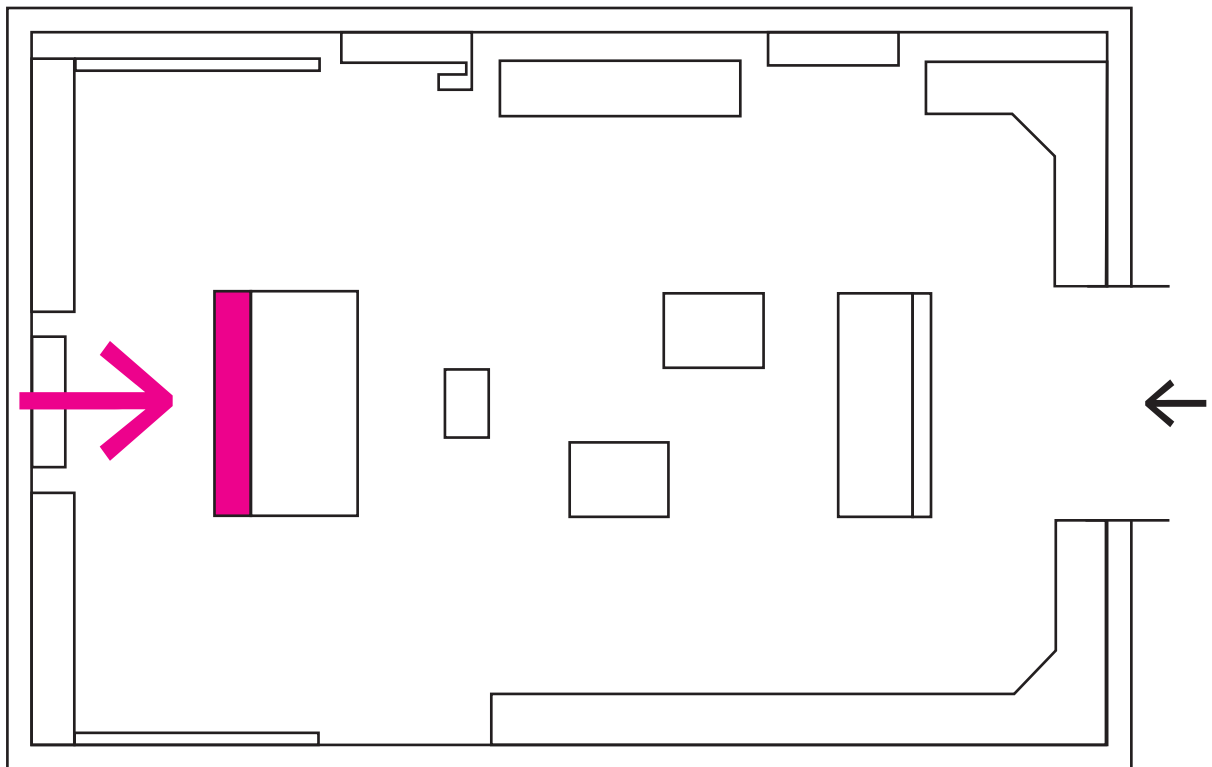
"We are still very much proud because we are not colonised. Colonisation is not good. They washed your brain, they took all your confidence, your personality and if you loose all these things, you are not yourself. You are different."

Ambachew Abate, Actor and Writer, April 2016

"In Austria, there is hardly any account of Ethiopian or even African culture. As an Ethiopian expatriate I would like to have lived in Europe at the time of Emperor Menelik. Ethiopia was respected and highly esteemed in Europe. Today it is just the opposite."

Bisrat Melaku-Wolde, Educator, February 2016

Room 23



Benin Kingdom Today

After Ovonramwen had died in exile in 1914, the British colonial regime enthroned his son as King Eweka II. Akenzua II was crowned in 1933 and succeeded by Oba Erediauwa (1923–2015) in 1979. After the independence of Nigeria in 1960, the Obas of Benin had no political role anymore and assumed a representative position. In addition, they have always remained the religious leaders of the Edo people. The Edo-speaking centre of the former kingdom constitutes the province Edo State in today's Nigeria. The practice of ancestor veneration and the belief in various gods coexists with membership in numerous Christian churches. Intended to commemorate key historic events and reinforce the ritual power of the Oba, the annual ceremonies in the royal palace confirm the continuing importance of the kingdom.

1 Calendar poster

The calendar poster depicts the highest chiefs and their current titles. The then-reigning Oba Erediauwa is positioned at the centre right above Crown Prince Ehenede who succeeded him as king. Such a continuously updated list of the highest-ranking dignitaries and their positions makes it easier for the population to keep track of who they can turn to with their concerns.

Benin City, Nigeria, 2005;

paper with colour print

Barbara Plankensteiner Coll.

Wax models

The bronze casting guild continues to work with the lost wax method. First, the casters create a core of clay, on which they apply a layer of wax which is covered first with a fine slip of clay and then a coarser clay layer. The wax is melted out and the liquid metal poured into the mould.

2 Two stages of a wax model for commemorative Queen Mother heads

Omodamwen workshop,

Benin City, Nigeria, 2006

Barbara Plankensteiner Coll.

3 Wax model for a relief plaque

Igbinosun workshop,

Benin City, Nigeria, 2003; beeswax, clay

Barbara Plankensteiner, Gisela Völger Coll.

4 Iwu men's dress with circular agate necklaces ikele

In the 1980s, the Iwu dress was adopted as the official ethnic dress of the Edo people. It is reminiscent of the Iwu tattoos, the former identification motif of all free Edo. The agate necklaces were originally reserved for chiefs but today are also worn by others for festivities outside the palace.

Benin City, Nigeria, 2002 and 2006;

cotton cloth; agate, wire, cotton thread

Barbara Plankensteiner Coll.

5 Ceremonial eben sword

The leaf-shaped sword is part of the insignia of all Benin chiefs. They carry it at palace ceremonies to hold it aloft in honour of the Oba and dance before the king tossing and twirling their eben. If the eben and the differently shaped ada sword are crossed, they form the symbol of the Oba and the kingdom.

Benin Kingdom, Nigeria,
early 20th century;
iron with zinc sheet repairs
Art trade Coll., Vienna

6 Commemorative cloth for the funeral of Oba Akenzua II

The cloth was designed for the funeral rites of Oba Akenzua II and made into clothing by the bereaved. It features portraits of the Oba at important moments of his reign: when the beaded regalia of his grandfather were returned in 1937, and in his coronation regalia in 1933.

Design by Elizabeth Olowu, 1978
Benin City, Nigeria;
cotton cloth, industrial print
Barbara Plankensteiner Coll.

7 Enogie mark

Edo dignitaries are still important customers of the bronze casting guild, which also produces artwork for the souvenir market today. Chiefs order objects for their ancestral altars or office insignia. This mark of a provincial ruler was intended to be affixed to his entrance door.

Benin City, Nigeria, 2006; brass
Barbara Plankensteiner Coll.

8 Oba and Queen

The busts are idealised representations of a king and one of his wives. There were no portraits of queens before 1897, whereas today this subject constitutes one of the most common themes in Benin art. This art category draws its inspiration from European sculptures and has become popular to commemorate the deceased.

Omodamwen workshop,
Benin City, Nigeria, 2005/06; brass
Barbara Plankensteiner Coll.

