

Benin Artefacts Information Guide

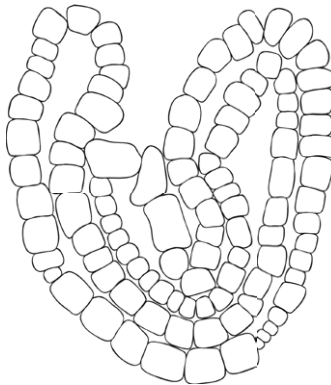


Mask of Queen Idia

Masks have always been an important part of African culture. They were made for use in ritual ceremonies and represented a link to the spiritual world. This mask of Queen Idia, who was the mother of Oba Esigie, dates back to the 16th century. It is made of ivory and features intricate carvings showing skilled craftsmanship. Women were highly valued in the Benin Kingdom and the role of the mother of the Oba was very important. Queen Idia fought bravely for her son in many battles.

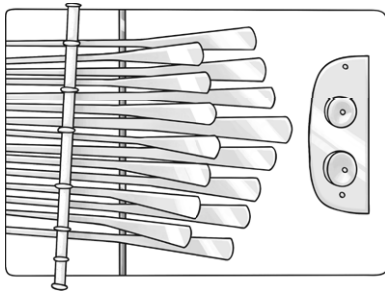
Coral Beads

Coral beads have a special significance in traditional Edo customs. The beads are made from coral stones from the seas, which are polished and shaped into small beads. These beads were highly valued in the Edo culture; they were used as decoration at weddings and funerals and they also represented how important a person was. Edo chiefs would wear necklaces of coral beads and the Oba would wear necklaces, collars and crowns made from them. People in Nigeria still wear coral beads at weddings today.



Mbira

This unusual instrument, which can be described as a 'thumb piano', is played by strumming the keys with the thumb. The mbira has been used in Africa for over 3000 years. Music played an important part in Edo culture in celebrations and religious ceremonies and rituals. Originally mbiras were made of bamboo and later metal and wood.

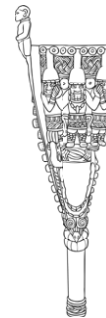


Horn

This horn is blown from the side and it is believed that the Edo people used it to summon witches. A feast would be laid out for the witches and the horn would then be blown to call them to eat. The people thought this would help them keep on the good side of the witches and protect them from harm. The horn is thought to be from around the 18th century. It is made from ivory, which has been carved with patterns and figures. This horn was also placed on top of a stand and used as a shrine.

Brass Head

This brass head figure was used in the worship of the goddess Osun. The snakes and birds on the figure represent the goddess's link with the earth and the stone axes are associated with lightning, which is featured to represent the powerful force of nature. Brass heads such as these were used in the 18th century Benin Kingdom for worship and ritual purposes. Osun is a Yoruba goddess and the River Osun in Nigeria is named after her. Many people visit the river each year to this day to worship Osun.



Double Bell

This double bell or Egogo, was used by the Oba to scare away evil spirits during religious ceremonies and acts of worship. It is believed to be from the 16th century and it features intricate carvings showing the Oba and his followers. The bell is made of ivory. Bells in the Benin Kingdom were also used to summon the ancestors to hear the prayers of the people on earth.