



Cup supported on male figure

Not on display

Title/Description: Cup supported on male figure

Born: 1850 - 1899

Object Type: Vessel

Materials: Bronze, Metal

Measurements: h. 103 x w. 40 x d. 37 mm

Accession Number: 235

Historic Period: 19th century - Mid/Late

Production Place: Africa, Benin City, Nigeria

Cultural Group: Edo

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

A small number of these imitations of European wine glasses came to light in early collections, but without indication of whether they came from the palace or elsewhere in the kingdom, or whether they were in fact for drinking or for libation or some other use.

The casting style suggests an origin in the middle or late nineteenth century, although the absence of hatching about the eye borders would, in a more ambitious piece, probably mean a date such as 1775. In shape the bowl somewhat resembles ale or wine glasses in use in the second half of the eighteenth century. Remains of a pontil on the underside of the base indicate that the cup was cast in an inverted position.

Margaret Carey, 1997

Entry taken from *Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection, Vol. 2: Pacific, African and Native North American Art*, edited by Steven Hooper (Yale University Press, 1997) p. 159.

Provenance

Benin City was the principal settlement of the Edo Kingdom of Benin, situated in the south of Nigeria. In February 1897 the city was attacked by British military, ending the ruling indigenous administration, and the Oba (King) Ovonramwen Nogbaisi (reigned 1888-1897) was exiled. The city was destroyed along with its Royal Palaces. The royal regalia and important religious and memorial sculptures that survived the raid, were looted by the combined forces of British Royal marines and other colonial forces. The Oba's son, Aiguobasinwin Ovonramwen, Eweka II (reigned 1914-1933) returned to Benin City in 1914, restored the city and Palace complex and the Oba dynasty continues today as a regional and cultural administration in Edo state, Nigeria.

The number of artefacts taken in 1897 is believed to be around 2,500, which were shipped to the UK by the British Admiralty. About 40% of the objects were accessioned to the British Museum (700 works) and other works were given to individual military personnel. The remainder were sold at auction by the Admiralty to pay for the expedition, for example, at Stevens Auction Rooms, 38 King Street, London, May 25, 1897, followed by several sales at William Downing Webster, Bicester, between 1898 and 1900. The artefacts are now dispersed across museum collections, notably in Europe and the USA.

Provenance between 1897 and 1965 incomplete. Noted as belonging to K.A. Webster.

Purchased by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury from John Hewett in 1965.

Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.
