



Trumpet, the point as a maternity group

Not on display

Title/Description: Trumpet, the point as a maternity group

Born: 1850 - 1950

Object Type: Musical instrument

Materials: Elephant ivory

Measurements: h. 416 x w. 45 x d. 55 mm

Accession Number: 251

Historic Period: 19th Century - Late, 20th Century - Early

Production Place: Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo

Cultural Group: Yombe

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

Maternity sculptures in the Yombe area are not connected with the sixteenth century introduction of Christianity, but are now known to refer to the principle of fecundity and its importance in maintaining the chief's power. Since the chief was head of the group, his own fecundity affected that of his people, their prosperity and stability. A chief's obligations included carrying out rituals at the start of any important initiative such as first crop-sowing or an armed raid. These rites, aimed at ensuring a successful outcome, could be invalidated by sorcery or the chief's personal lack of strength. Thus, the chief's own potency, manifest in the birth of many children, was of considerable importance.

Rites to maintain and increase this power provide the context for this horn, with the prescribed maternity group on the tip. The mother sits upright in a hieratic pose, her feet on a stool; she supports and nourishes her child as the chief is expected to support his people.

Margret 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) pp. 180-181.

Provenance

Purchased by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury from K. J. Hewett in 1967.

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