

Nom : Figure

Description : Figure, Benin kingdom court style, Edo peoples, Nigeria, Early 19th century, Ivory

This figure of a young woman portrays a role rather than a specific person. The detailed coral bead jewelry and the crest hairstyle identify her as an attendant to the queen mother. Once King Esigie gave his mother Idia the title of iye oba (or queen mother) in the mid-16th century, a king (or oba) could honor his mother with the title and install her in her own palace with a separate court and attendants. Upon her death, the king would commission a palace altar in her memory. This figure, which was probably intended for such an altar, depicts a member of the court-one of the attendants of graded ranks and duties who kept important people from ever being alone. The C-shaped form in her hand may be a copper or brass manilla, a type of imported currency that was the source of much of the metal used by Benin casters.

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Source : Musée national d'art africain