

Nom : Saltcellar

Description : Saltcellar, Benin kingdom, Bini-Portuguese style, Edo peoples, Nigeria, 16th century, Ivory

Carved for export to Europe, saltcellars originally consisted of two vertically linked spherical containers and served more as an indicator of status than a functional container. This piece is missing its lid and lower section. The figures on the bowl depict Portuguese men, identifiable by their costumes, beaklike noses and straight hair. The most unusual features—two nude, adult male winged figures—are not typical of European angels or of any African figure, suggesting that the European model was not completely assimilated. The use of surface ornament and size to indicate relative importance are in keeping with Benin court art tradition, although the result here is notably different in style from traditional Benin figures.

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Source : Musée national d'art africain