

Ife in the history of West African sculpture.

Thames & Hudson - African art history

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Kingdom of Ife: Sculptures from West Africa, British Museum, London

These bronze heads are evidence of additional trade since Ife-made glass beads have been found widely in West Africa. These included small family groups of hunter-gatherers, such as the San people of southern Africa; larger, more structured groups, such as the family clan groupings of the Bantu-speaking people of central and

southern Africa; heavily structured clan groups in the Horn of Africa; the large Sahelian kingdoms; autonomous city-states and kingdoms such as those of the Akan; Edo , Yoruba , and Igbo peoples in West Africa; and the Swahili coastal trading towns of East Africa.

Bronze Head from Ife

As the birthplace of the human species, Africa is the home of some of the oldest existing art forms. A pair of monumental carved doors by Olowe of Ise on display in the galleries previously featured within the 1924 Nigerian Pavilion at the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley, London. The Ashanti Empire also held out a long while against the British in a series of Anglo-Ashanti wars, persevering even after the colonizers had exiled their king and seized their capital.

The National Archives

This bickering made the Hausa states vulnerable to other African powers: at various times in their history, they were forced to pay tribute to several other powers, including Kanem-Bornu and the Songhai Empire. In the 1700's and onwards, ivory tusks known as 'olifants' were carved in intricate detail and became highly prized trophies of conquest, seized during wars and raids.

Nok Art: Early Sculptural Pottery in West Africa



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They belonged to rulers and chiefs and were elaborately carved with relief scenes of animal hunts and battles. The origins of African art history lie long before recorded history, preserved in the obscurity of time.

About West Africa

There are so many Africas, and so many arts of Africa. Among the historic artists represented within the galleries whose identity we do know is the celebrated Yoruba carver, Olowe of Ise. Mansa Musa also encouraged the pursuit of knowledge, particularly as regarding Islam, by building and funding universities and mosques.

The History of West Africa at a Glance

It was probably made in the thirteenth-fourteenth century AD, before any European contact had taken place with the local population.

African sculpture

Ife terracotta sculptures date from between the 12th to 15th Century.

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