A000-AFR-Nigeria-Yoruba-Edan Ogboni-Two Chained Male, Female Staffs-Brass-1850 CE

**Case no.: 6**

**Accession Number:**

**Formal Label:**

AFR-Nigeria-Yoruba-Edan Ogboni-Two Chained Male, Female Staffs-Brass-1850 CE

**Display Description:**

Thetriad is the symbolic numerological and dialectical symbol of the Yoruba. It is exemplified in these two staffs which are linked with a chain. The two staffs have two edan figures (male and female aspects of Onile, the owner of the earth) that are cast in brass and are surmounted by mounted male guardians of the law. They are3 the sources of the link between the male and female aspects of Onile since loops on the tops of their heads connect the two staffs with *circular*, *welded* chains that not only signify connection but also permanence.. These *circular, welded* chains suggest a dating of these staffs to the early 19th c since later examples of Edan Ogboni staffs have chains with open (*nor welded*) *oblong* loops. The unusual structure of these staffs and their large size (1 m tall) suggest that these Edan Ogboni were commissioned by a high-ranking Ogboni elder. Ogboni is a fraternal institution of the Yoruba language-speaking polities of Nigeria, Republic of Bénin and Togo. The society performs a range of political and religious functions, including exercising a profound influence on regents and serving as high courts of jurisprudence in capital offenses.

These Edan Ogboni figures have Yoruba physiognomic features: almond-shaped eyes, pronounced eye-lids, flared nostrils and fine lips. The male figure below the mounted horseman has a beard with seven twisted spikes. His hands extend down to three, linear, converging keloids on his abdomen to his protruding penis emphasizing his sexuality. The female figure wears a necklace with ten loops and two earrings with bulbous pendants. These same erring-like fixtures are attached to loops below these figures as well as one attached to their connecting chain. The female figure’s hands extend down to three, linear, converging keloids on her abdomen to her visible genitalia emphasizing her sexuality thatis also signified by her pushing down on her protruding breasts. Both of these ritual postures are aspects of Onile’s care for humanity. This latter gesture corresponds to the formal salutation between the Ogboni members where they prostrate upon the ground, clench their fists together with the left on top of the right with thumbs hidden, and the elder kisses the ground three times and each time declares, ‘The mother’s breasts are sweet’.

Ogboni or Oshugbo. Ogboni is one of the most prominent Yoruba religious cult societies, which worships the owner of the earth, Onile. Its prime function is to harmonize all spirits and forces of nature. It is led by the eldest and wisest man and woman from the community. Edan were worn around initiates’ necks, as symbols of rank, at society meetings and ceremonies. The casting over an iron rod signifies the union of the magical forces associated with brass and iron.

Since brass does not rust, it symbolizes immortality – the desire for longevity and well-being. The union of the male and female figures by a chain represents the duality of Onile. Ogboni venerates Onile to ensure human survival, peace, happiness, and social stability in the community.

Edan perform five main functions: judicial, oracular, healing, protective, and communication/surveillance (Roache, 1971). For the judicial role, it is believed that an edan placed upright by its spike on the ground will fall should a man not confess his guilt. For its oracular role, it is required to be present with its owner in ifa divination for predicting the owner’s future. The Ogboni society has its own odu, a set of sacred verses of the spiritual and ethical tradition of ifa, predictions; that relate to both mundane and spiritual prescriptions. For the healing role, the edanare sometimes shaped like a spoon for medicine preparation. For the protective role, the edan are worn or carried to keep the bearer from harm and witchcraft. For the communication and surveillance role, the edan are believed to have the power to travel in the form of a bird to disseminate messages as well as to watch over people.

Ogboni believe that a union of two Ogboni becomes three Williams (1960). The third entity is the mystery of the chain that links the union of male and female, harbinging the issuance and birth of new life. from kneeling before the High God or Father Olodumare, receiving a personal destiny ori, entering the world of sexual, social, political and religious differentiation and opposition (Fagg & Pemberton 1982). The edan often was placed in places of conflict to demonstrate unity, reconciliation and adjudication of differences among mankind, and ultimately with the earth. The Ogboni society acted as a town council, a civic court, and even controlled over regents in local monarchies. Membership implied power and prestige, and this status generally was reinforced through the commissioning of religious and courtly paraphernalia. Williams (1964) argues that Ogboni art was absolute, static and linear as opposed to the formal theme of Yoruba carving: abstract, dynamic and architectonic. The membership is limited to the few people who achieve distinction through their profession and who prove to be of high integrity. Ogboni societies still exist among more

**LC Classification:**

**Date or Time Horizon:** 1850 CE

**Geographical Area:** Nigeria

**Map:**

**GPS coordinates:**

**Cultural Affiliation:**

**Medium; brass**

**Dimensions:**

**Weight:**

**Condition:** The set has a superb dark patina and contours softened by age and ritual use.

**Provenance:**

**Discussion:**

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An Ogboni wearing two edan, male and female, around his neck. After https://www.pinterest.com/pin/508203139172516544/ Appendix:

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