

Finch & C^o



COLLECTION OF THREE WEST AFRICAN YORUBA OWO FINELY CARVED IVORY IFA DIVINATION TAPPERS 'IROKE IFA'

A COLLECTION OF THREE WEST AFRICAN YORUBA OWO FINELY CARVED IVORY IFA DIVINATION TAPPERS 'IROKE IFA'

A & B WITH OLD SMOOTH HONEY COLOURED PATINAS AND INLAID EYES - (B - SOLD)

C WITH TRACES OF INCRUSTATION ON A WORN SMOOTH DARK REDDISH PATINA - SOLD

19TH CENTURY

SIZES: A: 27.5CM HIGH – 10¾ INS HIGH / 31.5CM HIGH – 12½ INS HIGH (WITH STAND)

B: 31CM HIGH – 12¼ INS HIGH / 37.5CM HIGH – 14¾ INS HIGH (WITH STAND) - SOLD

C: 34.5CM HIGH – 13½ INS HIGH / 37CM HIGH – 14½ INS HIGH (WITH STAND) - SOLD

LITERATURE

AMONG THE YORUBA THE USE OF IVORY, AS WELL AS THE USE OF BEADS AND BRONZE, WAS THE PRIVILEGE OF PERSONS OF HIGH RANK, ESPECIALLY THOSE WITH SPIRITUAL POWERS AND MEDIATORY ROLES, WHICH AFFECTED THE LIVES AND DESTINIES OF OTHER PEOPLE. IVORY WAS THE PRIVILEGE OF KINGS, OF THE ELDERS OF THE SECRET OGBONI SOCIETY AND OF IFA PRIESTS.

OWO IS A LARGE KINGDOM ON THE FAR EASTERN BORDER OF THE YORUBA REGION. THERE HAS BEEN CONSIDERABLE INFLUENCE FROM THE NEIGHBOURING CITY OF BENIN AND IT IS NOW THOUGHT POSSIBLE THAT THE BEST BENIN IVORY AND WOOD CARVERS WERE PROBABLY RECRUITED FROM OWO.

THE TAPPER OR 'IROKE' IS DIVIDED INTO THREE DISTINCT SECTIONS. THE SLENDER POINTED END BALANCED ON THE HEAD OF THE KNEELING FIGURE IS THE PART THE PRIEST USES TO TAP ON THE DIVINATION TRAY IN ORDER TO ATTRACT THE ATTENTION OF THE DEITY OF THE IFA ORACLE 'ORUNMILA'. THIS AREA REPRESENTS THE 'INNER HEAD' THAT IS GIVEN TO EVERY HUMAN BEFORE HE IS BORN AND WHICH DETERMINES HIS FUTURE DESTINY. THE NAKED KNEELING FIGURE IMAGES ALL WORSHIPPERS WHO COME TO THE PRIEST, 'BABALAWO' MEANING 'THE FATHER OF THE SECRET', TO CLARIFY THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR DESTINIES. IN YORUBA THE WORD FOR 'HEAD' AND 'PERSONAL DESTINY' IS THE SAME: 'ORI'.

NUDITY AMONGST ADULT YORUBA IS NOT CONSIDERED NORMAL EXCEPT ON VERY RARE OCCASIONS WHEN COMMUNICATING WITH THE CREATOR 'ELEDU' OR TAKING AN OATH ON AN IMPORTANT ISSUE. THE SAME HOLDS TRUE FOR A WOMAN HOLDING HER BREASTS, THE YORUBA BELIEVE THAT WHEN WE ENTER LIFE IN THIS WORLD WE 'CHOOSE AND RECEIVE OUR DESTINIES WHILE KNEELING DOWN' (ROWLAND ABIODUN). IN THE RITUAL OF DIVINATION THE SUPPLIANT KNEELS ONCE AGAIN TO LEARN WHAT WAS, AND IS, THE HOPE AND THE LIMIT OF HIS OR HER LIFE.