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Digital Benin brings together photographs and rich documentation material from collections worldwide to provide a long-requested overview of the royal artefacts from the Kingdom of Benin looted in the 19th century. The historic Benin objects are an expression of Benin arts, culture and history, and were traditionally used to depict historical events, to communicate, and to worship and perform rituals. The digital platform introduces new scholarship which connects digital documentation about the translocated objects to oral histories, object research, historical context, a foundational Edo catalogue, provenance names, a map of the Benin Kingdom and the institutions worldwide. Digital Benin connects data from over 5000 objects across 131 institutions in 20 countries.

Digital Benin's scope focuses on objects looted by British forces from the Kingdom of Benin (now Edo State, Nigeria) in February 1897. Together, these events and processes led to the worldwide translocation of the objects shown on this platform. A small set of contextual objects are included in the catalogue to represent the broader context in which the artistic production of Benin guilds is situated: Benin-Portuguese Ivories, produced and circulated outside West Africa before 1897, objects produced in the areas surrounding the Kingdom, and objects produced by named artists after 1930.

With the support of the Ernst von Siemens Kunststiftung, the Museum am Rothenbaum (MARKK) in Hamburg opened an international project office to digitally connect the globally dispersed objects from the Kingdom of Benin from 2020-2022.

The drawings reference object groups that can be accessed on the website's Eyo Otọ, a foundational learning space about the historic Benin objects and their Edo designations. Scan the QR code below to listen, view and read about the objects' use, production and function.

ERNST VON SIEMENS KUNSTSTIFTUNG

MARKK
MUSEUM AM ROTHENBAUM
Kulturen und Künste der Welt

DIGITAL BENIN



Sensitive Content

The QR codes in the colouring book and on the language cards lead to DigitalBenin.org, a digital platform that collates digital material about historical Benin objects from institutions worldwide and research about historical events. Some of the material on the platform is colonial and references violence and trauma or contains words, terms and phrases that are inaccurate, derogatory and harmful towards African and African diasporic communities. Catalogue transcriptions, book titles, exhibition titles and museum titles may contain harmful terms. We recognise the potential for the material to cause physical and mental distress as well as evoke strong emotions.

The material within the catalogue does not represent Digital Benin's views. Digital Benin maintains a strong anti-colonial, anti-racist position and affirms its support for centring the humanity of historically marginalised and disenfranchised communities.

Please familiarise yourself with the material on the platform before giving children access to the colouring book and language cards.

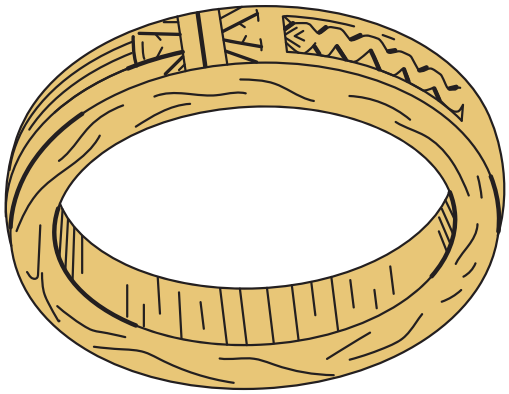
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AMA
Carved Wooden Panel/Relief Plaque



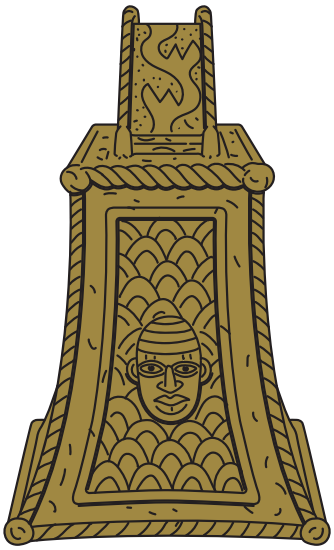
Ama is a pictorial combination of figures that has a historical explanation or is a visual representation of a historical event. Over nine hundred plaques were known which provided a testimony to court life at the time of Ọba Esigie and were considered ‘a sort of pictorial record of events in Benin history, an aid to memorizing oral traditions’.

ẸGBA
Bracelet



Ẹgba (Bracelets) are worn as part of ceremonial costumes and could be made of brass, bronze, iron, ivory and wood. The material of the Ẹgba would determine the status of the individual who would be wearing it. The bracelets are worn around the upper arm and could potentially be fortified by putting charms or medicine in them.

ẸRORO
Bell



Ẹroro are an important part of the spiritual worship of Benin people. They are lined along the front of the ancestral altar and are used to summon the ancestors to join their descendants and partake in the ceremony.

UHUNMWU-ELAO
Commemorative Head/Udo-Style Head



The commemorative head, Uhunmwu Elao, of an Ọba placed at the king’s ancestral shrine could be made from bronze, wood or terra-cotta. The altar consists of a commemorative head that supported the carved ivory tusk. It could have a circular base or a rectangular-shaped base.

IKORO
Armcuff



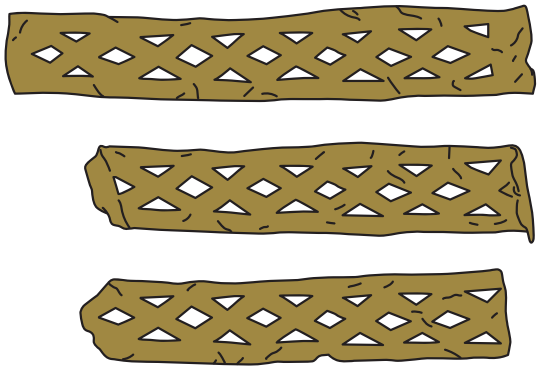
Ikoro are big wrist bands made from different materials like brass, ivory and wood. They are worn by the Ọba and chiefs during ceremonies when dressed in their full regalia. They could be made by different guilds depending on the material used – the Igun Ẹronmwon would make them out of brass and bronze while the Igbesam-wan would produce ivory and wood Ikoro.

UHUNMWU-ẸKUẸ
Pendant Mask



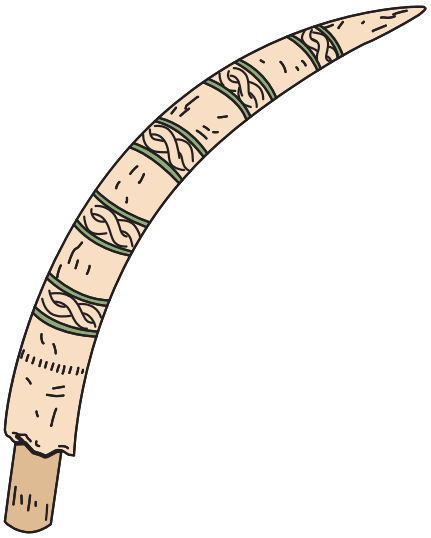
Uhunmwu-Ẹkuẹ (pendant masks) is a general term, however each mask has a different name depending on the subject depicted. Uhunmwu-Ẹkuẹ are one of the best-known categories of Benin artworks. A range of human and animal heads are depicted, hence the term ‘mask’, although they were not used to cover the face.

EMWIEGBE
Charm/Ornament



Emwiegbe describes ornaments worn on the body or attached to ceremonial regalia.

AKEN'NI ELAO
Altar Tusk



Aken’ni Elao (altar tusks) are ivory tusks carved with scenes of ceremonies or spiritual activities. These were placed at the ancestral shrines of the Ọba and were primarily made as a historical record for documenting events. For the Edo people, the white colour of ivory represents the purity of spirituality.

OKPIA
Male Figure



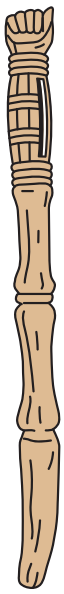
Okpia is the Edo word for ‘male’ and figures which can be identified as male have regalia and dresses that vary. The figures could be made from ivory or cast in brass.

ẸKPẸTIN
Box



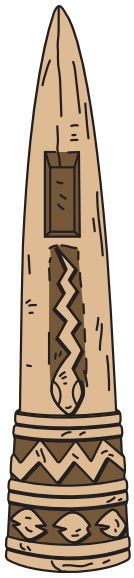
Ẹkpẹtin describes boxes of different shapes and sizes used as storage for different articles. They were usually carved from wood by members of the Igbesamwan and designed with different relief patterns of animal and human figures. Some may also have been used as stools.

UKHURHẸ
Ancestral Staff



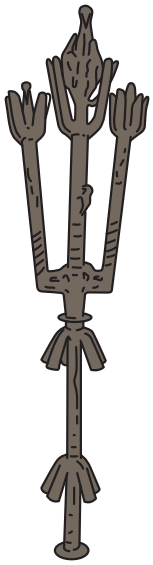
Ukhurhẹ are placed at the ancestral shrine of each family. A carved wooden staff is placed in honour of the first son, and his achievements in life are carved on it. Ukhurhẹ reflect the activities of generations of elder sons.

AKOHẸN/OKO
Horn or Flute



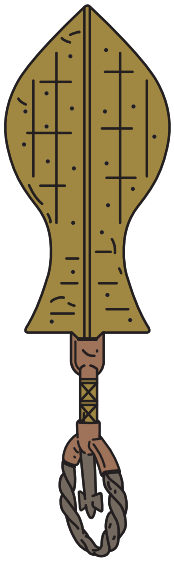
Oko are side-blown horns and Akohẹn are flutes, however since the instruments look very similar they are grouped together here. Oko are frequently used by priests to evoke spirits and by traditional doctors to drive away witches when attending to a patient that may have been afflicted by a witch.

OSOGAN
Osun Staff



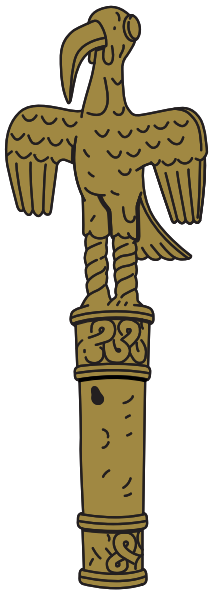
Osogan (Osun staffs) are kept by the Osun priests, and they were usually fortified with medicine. Osun is the deity of medicine and ensures the effective use of all forms of medicines, curative or otherwise. Osun is worshipped by the professional traditional doctors called Ewaise, and their guild performs an annual festival called Ehosun in honour of the Osun deity.

EBẸN
Ceremonial Sword



Ebẹn are often described as swords, however they are used more like sceptres. During ceremonies titled chiefs would hold them or throw them during dances, and in doing so they pay homage to the Ọba at these public events. It is forbidden for Ebẹn to touch the ground.

AHIANMWẸ́-ỌRỌ
Bird of Prophecy Staff and Bird of Prophecy Figure



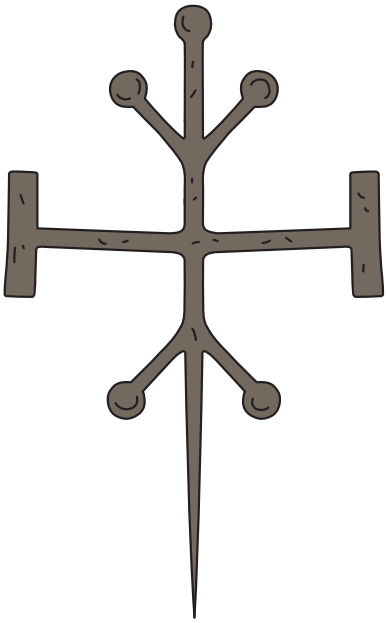
The Ahianmwẹ́-Ọrọ, meaning Bird of Prophecy in English, is a bird with a long beak, the cry of which is said to be prophetic. If it cries “OyaO” ("disgrace") it portends danger or disaster ahead. If it cries “Oliguegue” ("be grateful"), it portends good favour, fortune or good luck ahead. The bird is believed to be a messenger of the spirit world.

URHOTỌ
Altar Tableau



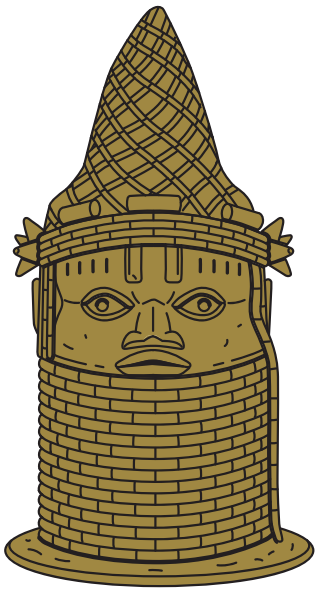
Urhotọ (altar tableau) are displayed on an ancestral altar dedicated to the Iy’ọba, who was usually entitled to an Urhotọ in her ancestral shrine. Just like the Ọba, after her death, an altar was erected in her memory within Uselu Palace and Ọba Palace. These altars would be decorated with a collection of objects related to achievements in life.

AZUWA
Hair Ornament



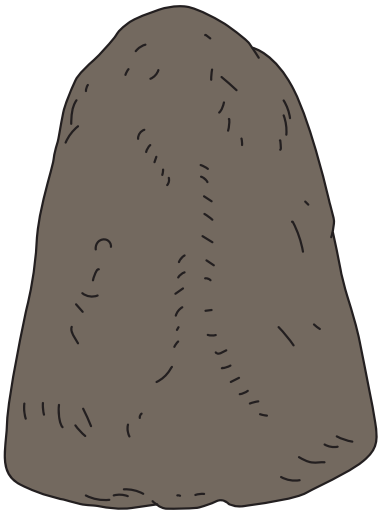
Azuwa (hair ornaments) are used for decoration by the Ọba's wives (Oloi) in their Okuku (wig). They may also be used to scratch the scalp.

UHUNMWU ELAO ỌGHE IY'ỌBA
Commemorative Queen Mother Head



Uhunmwu elao ọghe Iy'ọba (commemorative queen mother heads) were placed at the ancestral shrine of the Iy'ọba. Similar to the Ọba's altar, the Iy'ọba also had an altar erected on her behalf which consists of a commemorative head. The Uhunmwu elao ọghe Iy'ọba are particularly distinguished by the Upkẹ okhokho (chicken beak) hairstyle.

UGHAVAN
Celt (Thunderbolt/Thunderaxe)



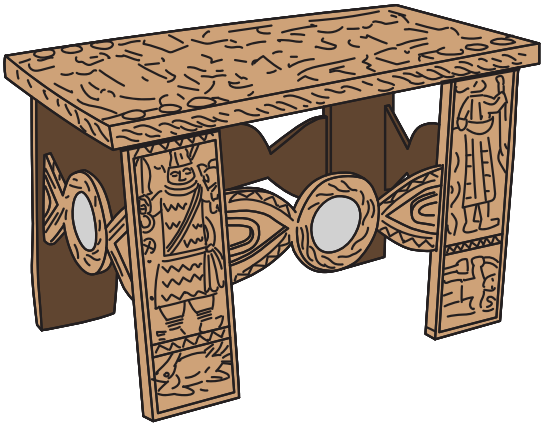
Ughavan (celts) are thunderbolts or stone axes usually found on Osun altars. They are obtained by pouring four tins of oil into the hole in which the Ughavan landed when falling from the sky as thunderbolts. Uloko (Iroko) is said to be the only tree that can withstand Ughavan while other trees shatter. According to oral tradition, Ughavan is believed to be thrown by Ogiuwu, king of death, also known as god of thunder.

ỌKPORHU
Rooster Figure



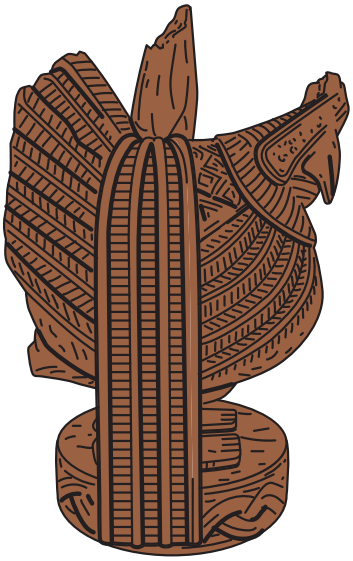
Bronze cock which did not come into existence until after the introduction of the Iy'ọba title by Ọba Esigie. The first Iy'ọba was Idia, and the Iy'ọba title is considered to be the greatest achievement of a Benin woman. It has spiritual significance and is placed at the altar of the Iy'ọba after her death.

AGBA
Stool



The Agba is regarded as the stool of judgement, and according to oral tradition, it originated during the Ogiso dynasty. Agba may be used by the Ọba, chiefs and some priests, and it is believed they were carved by members of the Emada.

IYEỌKHỌKHỌ
Hen Figure



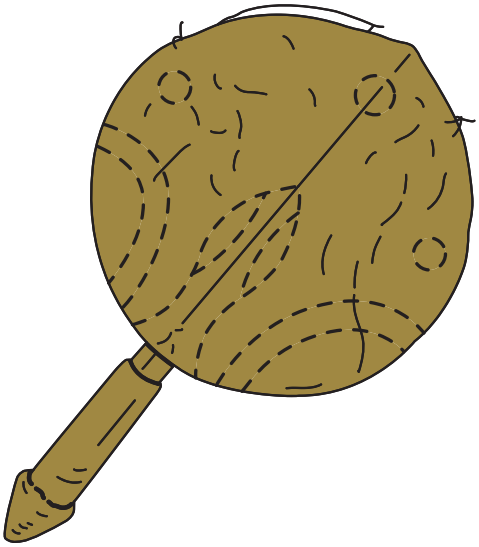
The Iyeọkhọkhọ (hen figures) are used by chiefs and commoners on female altars. These differ from cast brass or bronze Ọkporhu, which are only to be used on royal ancestral altars for the Iy'ọba. Hens symbolise maternal care and love, in particular they protect the chicks by spreading their wings over them.

IGHẸGHAN
Crotal Bell



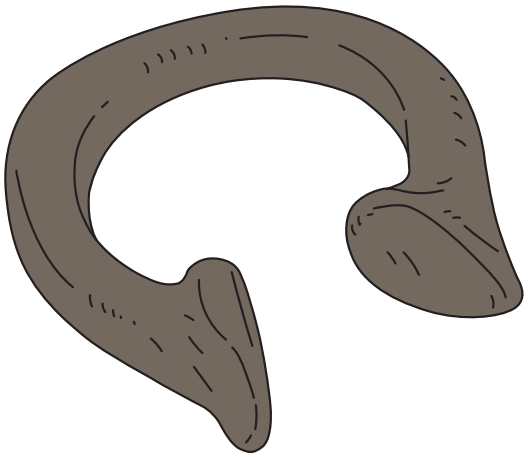
Ighẹghan (crotal bells) are small bells mostly attached to objects such as arm cuffs and bracelets, and sometimes pendant masks or pendant plaques. Ighẹghan were produced by the Igun-Eronmwon. They are cast in brass or bronze with a slit opening and a small pellet inside.

ẸZUZU
Fan



Ẹzuzu (fans) were particularly important when it came to the comfort of the Ọba and other high-ranking individuals, such as the Iy'ọba.While smaller fans could be considered everyday domestic items, larger fans would have been a symbol of high status and may have had ritual importance too.

IGHO
Manilla



Igho (manillas) translates directly from Edo to mean ‘money’, and as manillas were a form of exchange in the past, they were and are called Igho. Igho were the principal currency used within southern Nigeria during the Ọba dynasty. In contemporary Nigeria, images of Igho can be seen on the 100 naira banknote, illustrating their continued importance as a symbol of money and wealth.

IVIN
Carved Coconut Vessel



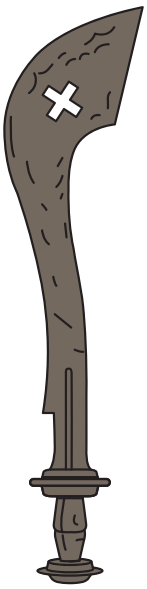
Ivin (carved coconut vessels) served as a medium for carvers who were part of the Emada and practised inside the palace. Ivin may have been used for storage or other functions. Some are cut in half, forming a bowl and a lid while others have small openings and lugs carved into the sides to allow them to be suspended, possibly to be used as a kind of flask.

UZOKPO
Lidded Bowl



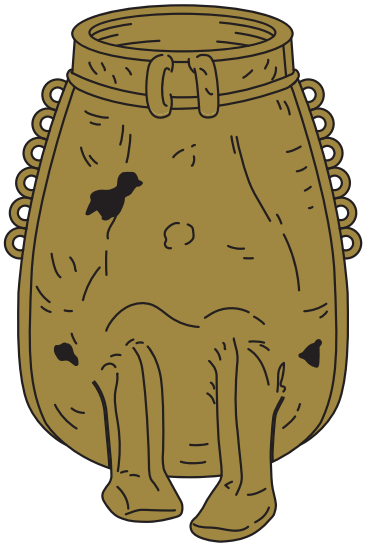
Uzokpo (lidded bowls) can be carved from wood, sometimes with brass sheeting applied to the exterior or cast in brass. The highly decorated aspect of the Uzokpo suggests they would have been used by the royal court, chiefs and dukes.

ADA
Ceremonial Sword



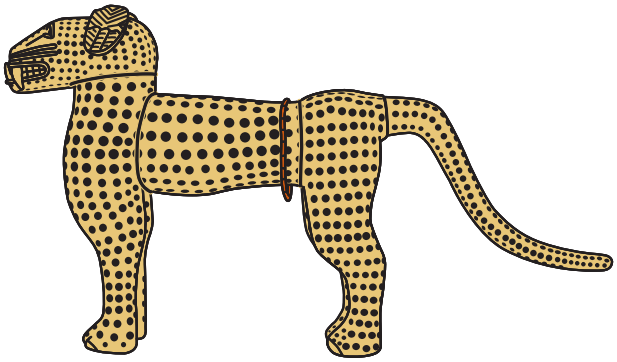
The Ada is a symbol of authority usually borne in the presence of the Ọba. It is one of the two most common types of ceremonial swords found in the Kingdom of Benin.

UKPU
Cup



Ukpu (cups) included are made from brass, bronze, wood or ivory. Some are decorated with human figures and others have pedestals or feet, similar to a chalice. Those in brass and ivory would have been mostly used in the royal court, as the possession of objects made from these materials was restricted to the Ọba and some chiefs who obtained certain ranks in palace societies.

ẸKPẸN
Leopard Figure



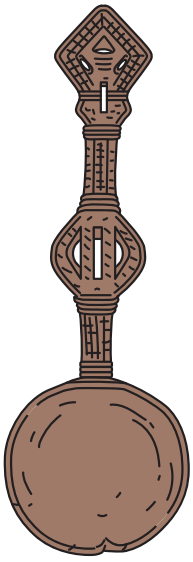
Ẹkpẹn (leopard figures) are widely featured in Benin arts. In Benin, leopards are considered the king of the forest and as such seen as a symbol of authority. The leopard is a royal symbol of kingship because it embodies the qualities of courage, strength, ferocity and wisdom.

URHUKPA-ẸVBI
Lamp



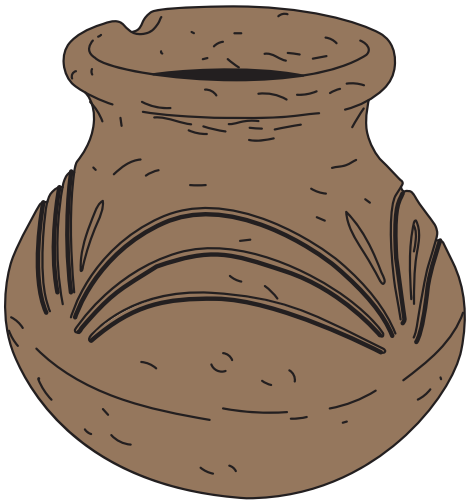
Urhukpa-Ẹvbi (oil-lamps) are used to illuminate the house after dusk. Most lamps were made to have a curved plate-like bottom in which the oil would be poured and lit, and they are hung from chains attached on three or four sides.

UHẸNHẸN/EKUYẸ
Spoon



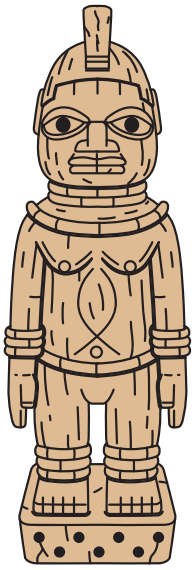
Uhẹnhẹn is the older term meaning ‘spoon’. However, Ekuyẹ, which is a corruption of the Portuguese word colher, meaning ‘spoon’, is more commonly used today in Edo. Some spoons are called Benin-Portuguese ivories, which would have acted as objects commemorating travels as well as signifiers of wealth among the Europeans who owned them.

AKHẸ
Pot



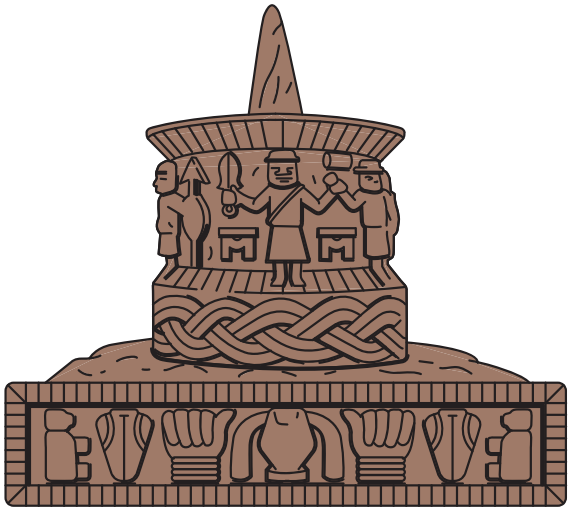
Akhẹ is the general term for all earthenware pots. Pottery is one of the oldest traditional crafts practised in Benin, and Akhẹ continue to be made and used today in Benin City. Potters were, and continue to be, known as Imakhe, and they are often women.

OKHUO
Female Figure



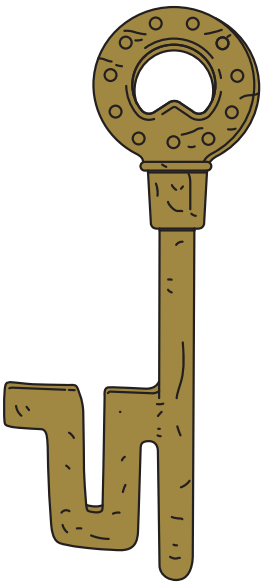
Many of these Okhuo represent young unmarried women, which we know as they are naked except for a girdle of Ekan or Ivie around their waist or hips.

IKẸGOBỌ
Altar of the Hand



Obọ, the hand or arm, is recognised to be the seat of power of accomplishing things. Its worship is specific to warriors as well as wealthy and high-ranking people. It is worshipped to ensure success for special undertakings and give thanks. The Ọba and some people of high rank still have special altars of the hand, called Ikẹgobọ, which take the form of sculptured cylindrical objects in wood, or occasionally bronze.

ISANRẸN
Key



Isanrẹn can be used to lock up rooms such as the aza emwin arhe. This is a vault or a storage room for valuables, for example money, ivory, artifacts, coral beads and clothes. Isanrẹn were cast in brass, which indicates that they were used within palaces.

URU

Aquamanile/Ewer/Jug



Uru are used for pouring and storing palm wine (okhere) and other liquid substances like water. In the Edo language, Uru is used to describe objects which could be considered jugs, ewers and aquamaniles.

EWUA

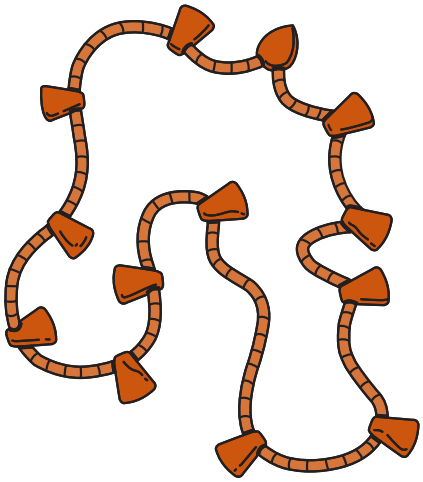
Ewua Messenger Figure



Ewua is the title of a priest belonging to the Holy Aruosa Church, also referred to as the church of the Ọba of Benin. The church was first established by Portuguese missionaries in the fifteenth century. Each morning, noon and evening, the Ewua priest goes to the Ọba to lead prayers or devotion.

EMWIURHU

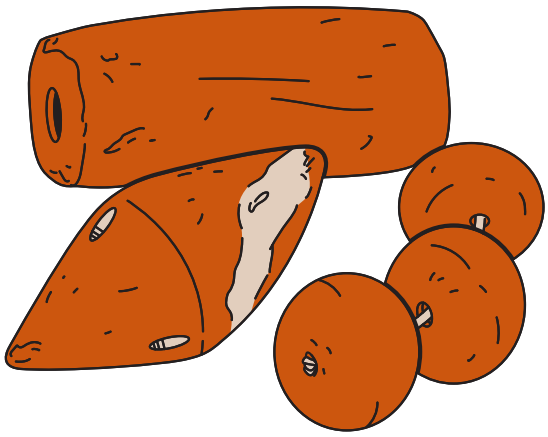
Neck Ornament



Emwiurhu (neck ornament) is anything which is worn around the neck. These ornaments can be made from various materials like coral beads, bronze and brass. They would be used as decoration, or they may serve a ritual protective function.

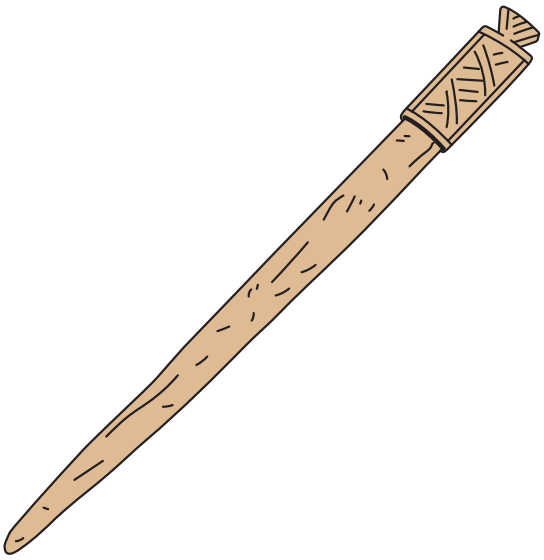
ẸKAN

Bead



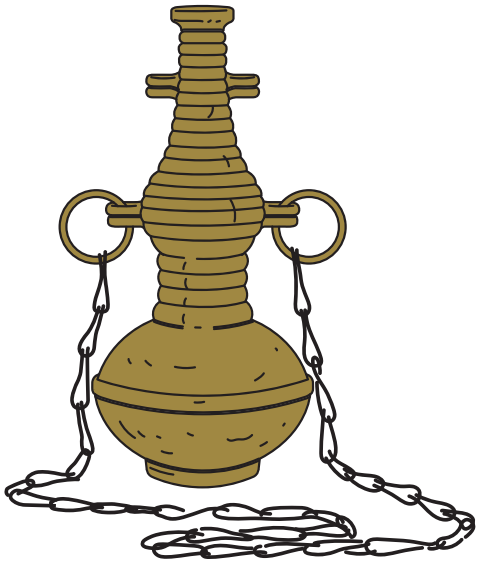
Ẹkan are beads made from the semi-precious agate stone. They look similar to the beads known as Ivie, which are used to make jewellery. However, Ẹkan are more greyish in colour and are of less value than Ivie. The Ọba in the past would control both Ivie and Ẹkan and one could only wear them if the Ọba gave the right to do so.

IDO
Weaving Accessory



Ido (weaving accessories) were used by the Owina guild. Benin cloth can be finely woven from thin threads of cotton, or it may be woven with raffia and principally white or dyed red and indigo blue. When the Owina was founded by Ọba Ohen, there were seven palace women who were weavers. Meanwhile, it was men who did the spinning.

UKO
Flask



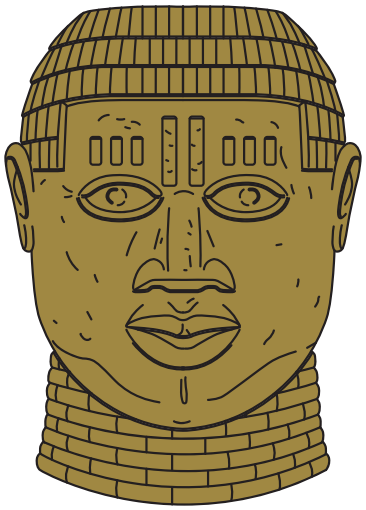
In Edo language, the word Uko means a kind of container or flask used for different articles. There is no consensus on the function of flasks, and indeed different flasks likely had different uses. Flasks are also depicted on other objects, such as altars to the hand and altar tableaux, illustrating their importance.

IDẸNRHẸN
Knife



Idẹnrhẹn (knife) could be called a number of names in Edo, depending on the part of Benin City one is from – for example, Ehọ or Abẹ. The Idẹnrhẹn shown here could have been used for domestic functions, and some are similar to those used by the Igbesamwan carvers today.

IVBIOTỌ
Trophy Head



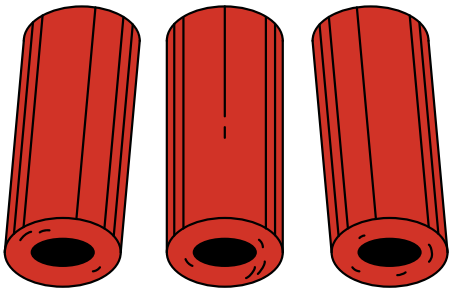
Ivbiotọ (trophy heads) are thought to represent heads of former Benin vassals who rebelled against the Ọba. The three Udari, or suborbital markings, show that the image is that of a non-Benin male.

ASORO
Spear



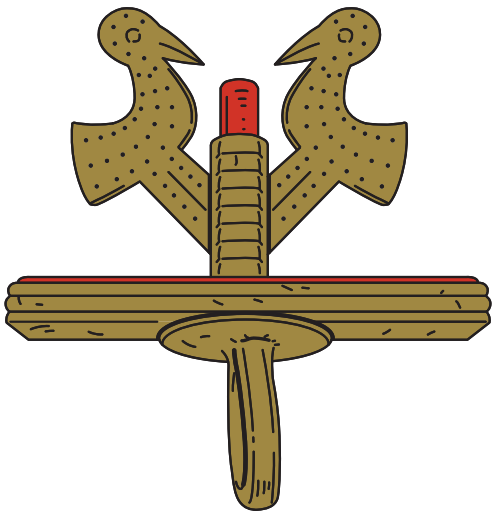
Asoro (spears) were used as weapons. The tip of the long wooden shaft would either be carved from wood or made of iron and hafted to the shaft. Iron tips would have been made by the Igun Eyeanugie, who are part of the Igun-Ematon and have the responsibility of making weapons.

IVIE
Bead



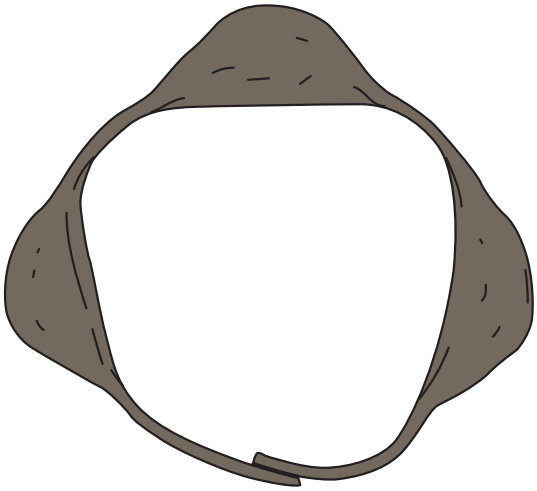
Ivie are coral beads which today anyone can wear as a decorative body ornament. However, in the past only the Ọba could wear them, along with those he bestowed them upon, such as chiefs and members of the royal court. The Ọba has the exclusive right of granting any deserving citizen the honour of his beads.

OROKA
Finger Ring



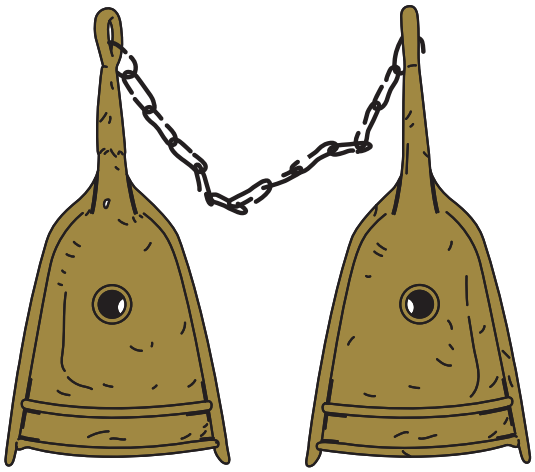
Oroka (finger rings) were often worn as amulets of protection. Priests or diviners affiliated with different deities may bless Oroka for different purposes, such as protection of the wearer. There are a number of simpler forms, without coral, that may have been worn by women of the royal court.

ELUBASẸ/ISEVBERE
Anklet



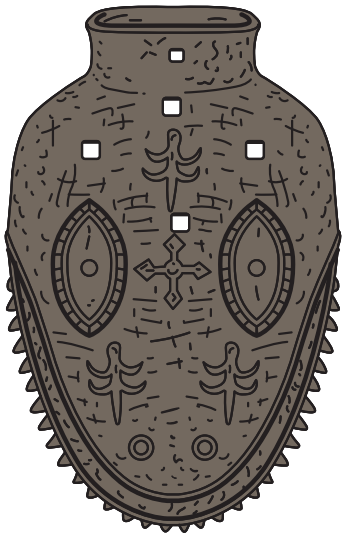
Elubasẹ are a type of Eguen, an anklet which has integral rattles. The rattle pellet is made from fibre originating from the Urua palm. According to oral tradition, Eguen anklets were introduced into Benin by Ogiso Ere in the tenth century. Elubasẹ are worn by children as a way to hear their movements.

ẸGOGO
Gong



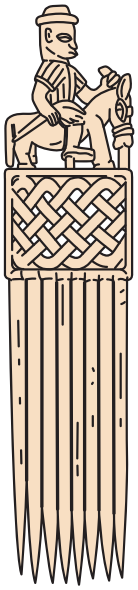
Ẹgogo (gongs) are used to summon attendees to a meeting or draw attention to important public announcements. They are often used by Avbiogbẹ (information officers). Ẹgogo were made, and continue to be made, from iron, brass and ivory.

IKPIN
Snake Figure



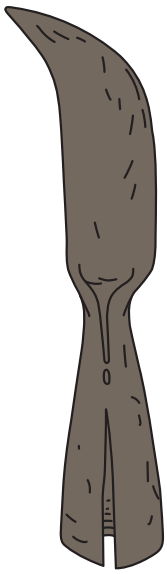
Ikpin (snake figures) featured on the roof of Ọba Palace. In the Kingdom of Benin, the crocodile and the boa constrictor are considered the guardians of Olokun, the god of the great waters or the ocean, of wealth, prosperity and fertility. When the palace was burnt down during the 1897 British expedition, the Ikpin were stolen, and they do not feature on the roof of the current palace.

OYIYA
Comb



Oyiya (combs) were highly decorated by carvers to make the objects more attractive, to document events and people at the time and possibly for use by members of the royal court. Oyiya in Benin were historically carved from wood or, in the case of more elaborate examples, ivory.

AZA
Bell



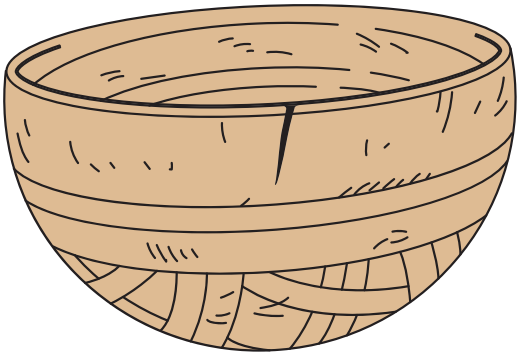
This knife with a bell-like handle would be used at oranmila shrine to summon spirits and ancestors. The Aza are not frequently mentioned in works on Edo culture, which is likely because they are used on fewer occasions compared to the other clapper bells.

AKHẸ AMẸ
Pot



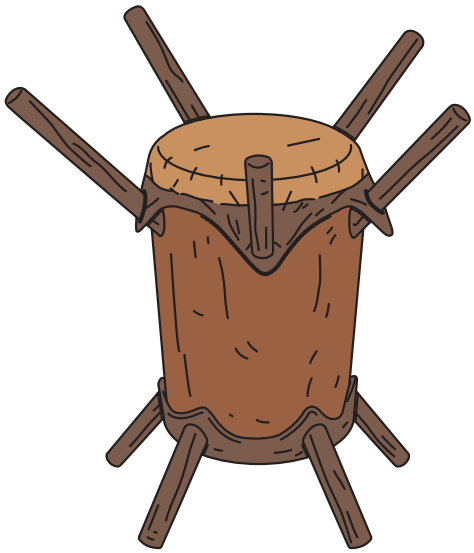
Akhẹ-Amẹ (water pots) are a type of Akhẹ. These pots stored water in the past, although they are not so popular today.

ỌKPAN
Bowl/Plate



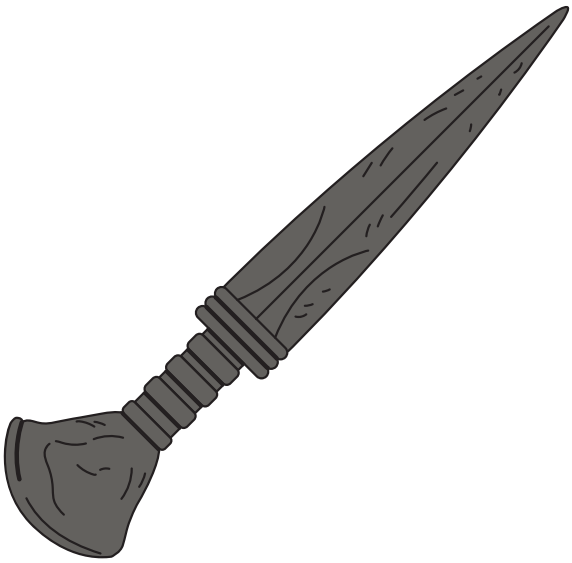
Ọkpan (bowls and plates) were often used as household items, for eating or as kitchenware. There are some cast brass and gilt objects which would have been used for ritual or ceremonial purposes, possibly even by members of the royal court.

EMA
Drum



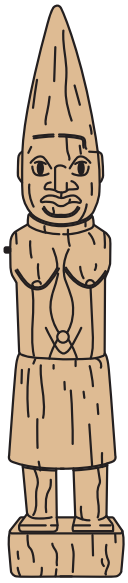
Ema (drums) have different forms and shapes. The Kettledrums (Obiza) consist of a clay pot whose opening is covered with the skin of a viper. Obiza is played especially by Ivbiosakon hunters to accompany their dances. The cylindrical drums (Emedo) consist of the hollowed trunk of an Oma tree with a stretched skin across the top that is pegged and braced.

AGBADA
Dagger



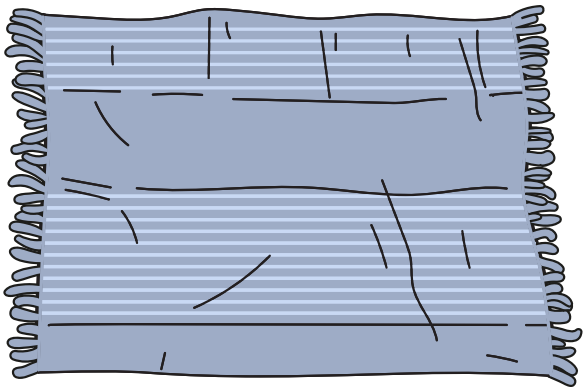
The Agbada is a short sword used during close range combat. Agbada were made by the Igun Eyeanuguie, members of the Igun-Ematon, who focused on the manufacture of weapons.

IY'ỌBA
Queen Mother Figure



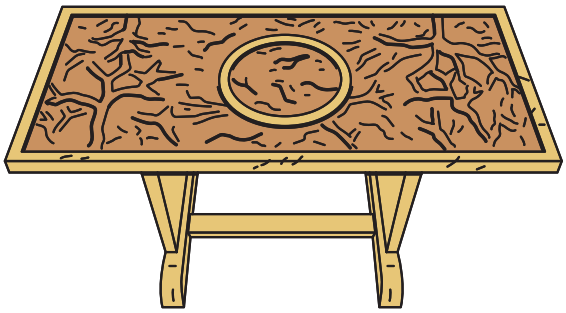
The title of Iy'ọba is conferred on a woman by her son, the newly coronated Ọba, when he ascends the throne of his father. These figures can be identified by the Ukpo-Khokho, or 'chicken beak' hairstyle, that was worn by Iy'ọba in the past.

UKPỌN
Clothing



Ukpọn (clothing) can be made from many kinds of textiles, from woollen aprons to cotton cloth. In the past, only a few colours were used in the production and dying of textiles, which may explain why only red, blue and white are seen in the clothing grouped together here. Blue would have been made from indigo, whereas red would have been from ume or camwood.

UKHUERHE
Table



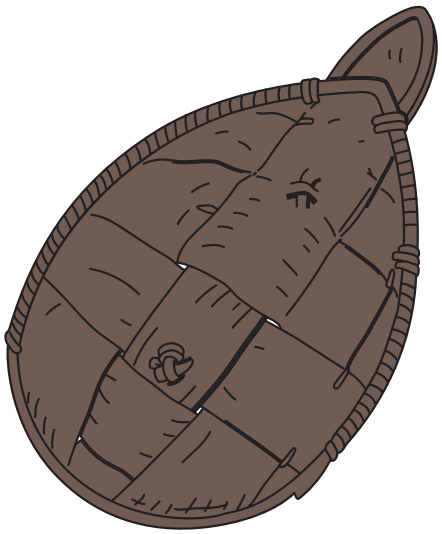
The Ukhuerhe (tables) shown here bear a similarity with other carved objects because they are highly decorated and record events that took place in the Kingdom of Benin. The Ukhuerhe shown here are produced by the Igbesamwan.

AKHIỌN/UKOKO
Smoking Pipe



Akhiọn (smoking pipe), also referred to as Ukoko, were used by both men and women in Benin Kingdom to smoke tobacco. The bowl into which tobacco is filled can be made of either terracotta, wood or metal, and had a long wooden stem. Tobacco was introduced into Benin by the Portuguese.

ASA
Shield



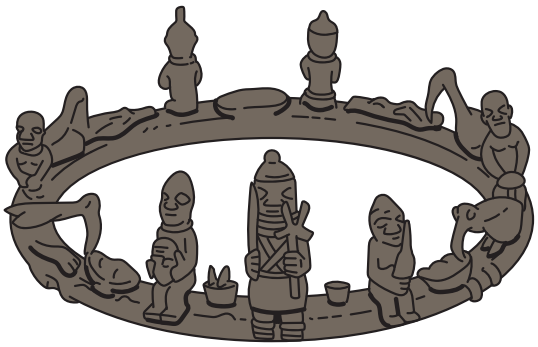
Asa (shields) were usually made from elephant or crocodile skin and were used by warriors as protection during battle. These objects were made by the Isekpokin guild and were an important part of the weaponry used by the Benin armies in hand-to-hand combat.

AKHẸ OSUN
Pot



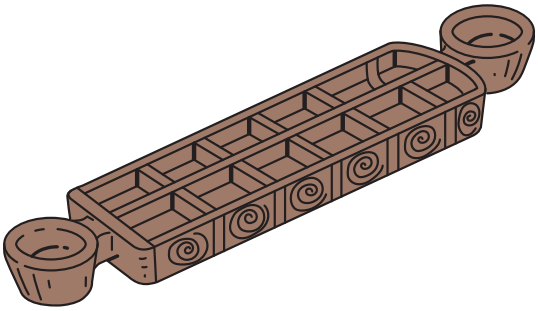
Akhẹ-Osun (Osun pot) is a specific term for the pot used for storing medicinal plants at the Osun Shrine. Akhẹ-Osun can be distinguished by the high-relief decorative motifs around the rim of these pots, which are often figurative. The motifs depend on the deity at whose shrine the Akhẹ-Osun was used for medicine.

ASẸBẸRHIA
Altar Ring



Asẹbẹrhia (altar rings) are displayed on ancestral altars dedicated to the Iy'ọba, as she was usually entitled to one. Just like the Ọba, after her death an altar in her memory was erected within the palace and decorated with a collection of objects related to her achievements in life. The Asẹbẹrhia usually consists of figures around a principal figure with a circular base. They are made by the Igun Eronmwon.

ISẸ
Game



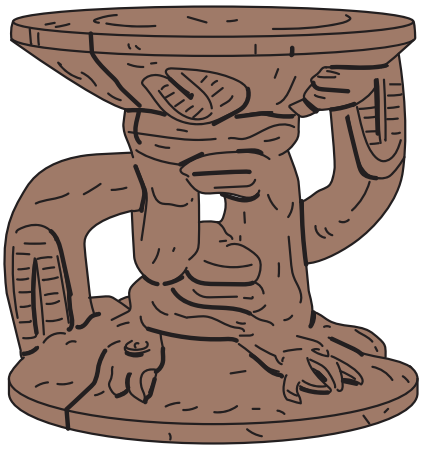
Isẹ (game) describes any kind of game being played for entertainment, from a board game with pieces to a puzzle or card game. A common game played in Benin is called Ogirhise and two people would play this game with small stones or smoothed seeds.

OSISI/ETU
Firearm



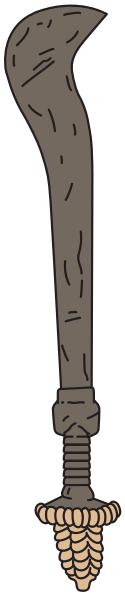
Osisi (gun) and Etu (canon) are both types of firearms. Most of these firearms were produced in Europe until the eighteenth century, when under the command of the Ọba, guns started to be produced locally by the Igun-Ematon.

ẸRHẸ
Stool



Ẹrhẹ are round stools with two intertwined serpents as the supporting column. Aside the two serpents, which point in two different directions (up and down), other creatures such as frogs, leopards, roosters and human figures are seen on these stools. The Obah n'uhi pattern of design (which has no beginning or end) shows the supremacy of the Ọba (king/emperor). These are ceremonial stools used by the Benin chiefs when performing rituals in ancestral shrines.

UMOZO/ỌHỌ
Executioners or Warfare Sword



Ọhọ is the executioner's sword, and it is one of three items given to a prince being sent out to establish a dukedom. This gives the prince the power of life and death. The blade and part of the handle is iron, and the top of the handle is brass. Both the Igun-Ematon and the Eronmwon would have made this object.

IKPOTOKI
Portuguese Figure



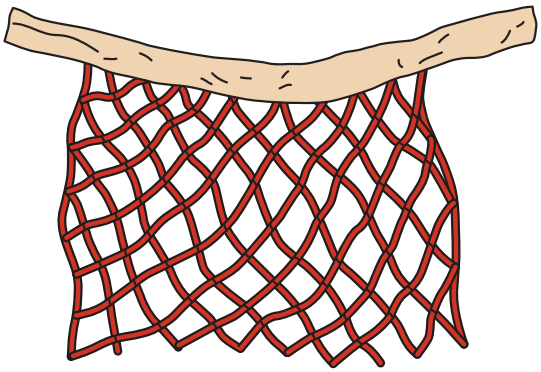
Ikpotoki means 'Portuguese' in Edo. Benin oral traditions claim that a man called Ogbeide, nicknamed Okhuaihe and deified in Benin during the reign of Ọba Ewuare, used divination to attract Europeans to visit the kingdom. The first recorded Europeans reached Benin between 1472 and 1485 and after their arrival, casters and carvers of the guilds began to represent the Portuguese in the artworks they created.

ANWA/AKPOKA
Tong



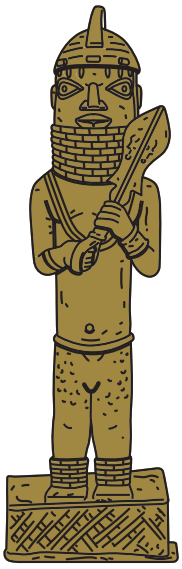
Anwa and Akpoka (tongs) were used by members of the Igun-Ematon and Igun-Eronmwon guilds. Today they are still used by members of the Igun-Ematon to handle hot objects, such as crucibles, during the casting process.

UGBẸKUN
Girdle



Ugbẹkun (girdle) is the literal translation for ‘objects which are tied around the waist’. Ugue-egen is another word which can be used to describe a girdle-like object. These may be worn by the Ọba or chiefs either underneath or on top of clothing. When underneath, medicine or potent charms may be added for protection.

IBIERUGHA
Attendant Figure



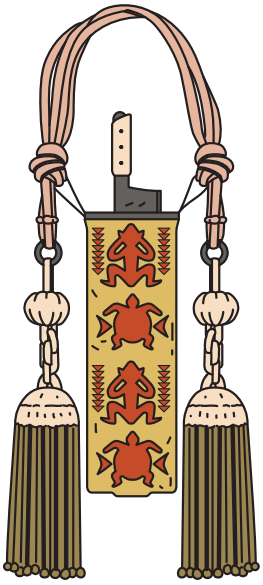
Ibierugha (attendant figures) are in the first stage of being initiated into chieftaincy. They are wearing the Odigba, which is the bead collar worn by the Ọba and chiefs, and have a distinctive hairstyle or headdress which would have been the fashion for chiefs. Ibierugha are either carved in ivory or cast in brass/bronze.

ẸKPO
Bag



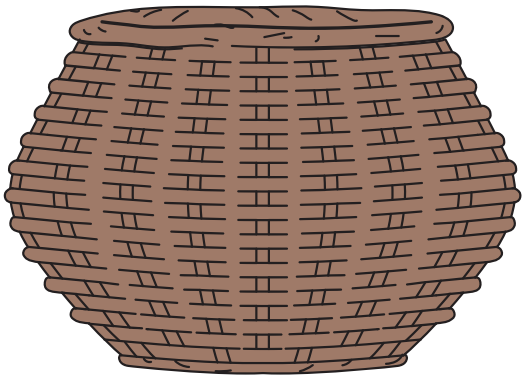
Ẹkpo (bags) were typically made from skins or woven from raffia. The leather bags were made by the Isekpokin, whereas bags made from raffia were made by the Owina. Typically, Ẹkpo are rectangular with a strap, and some have a flap over the front.

AKO-ỌPIA
Sheath



Ako-Ọpia (sheaths) are covers made from leather or other materials. They would be used to house or protect any kind of bladed weapon, such as Idẹnrhẹn, Umozo or Ọhọ. A number of these are heavily ornamented and cast in brass, and would probably have had a ceremonial rather than practical function. A smaller number are made from coral beads.

OKHUA'Ẹ
Basket



Okhua'ẹ (baskets) are traditionally made from natural materials such as reeds, raffia or grass which is either woven or coiled together with twine. Okhua'ẹ were used for storage or to carry objects from one place to another, and may have been used in domestic and commercial contexts.

ASIGBE
Bolt



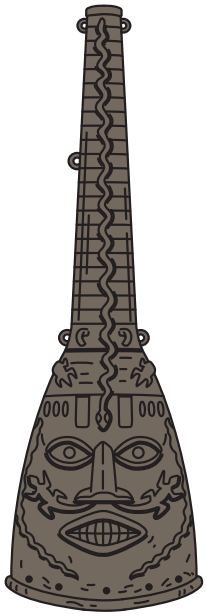
Asigbe (bolts) are used to secure doors. Some bolts are intricately carved in ivory by members of the Igbesanmwan, while others are simpler in appearance.

ỌBA
King Figure



Figures of the Ọba, which is the title of the ruler of the Kingdom of Benin, would be used on ancestral altars within the royal palace. These are only cast in brass and carved in ivory, which illustrates their importance, as these two materials are considered highly valuable in the kingdom.

ARO ODODUA
Ododua Mask



Aro Ododua are ritual masks that have two forms: male – Uwẹn – and female – Ọra. The male is identified by the four suborbital marks that identify a Benin man. Uwen guarantees that the Ọba survives at war, no matter how terrible the war is. Ọra guarantees the productivity of the Ọba, as he must always have children. They are also known as the two royal deities – Ẹbọ n'ẹdo.

ẸKPOKI
Box



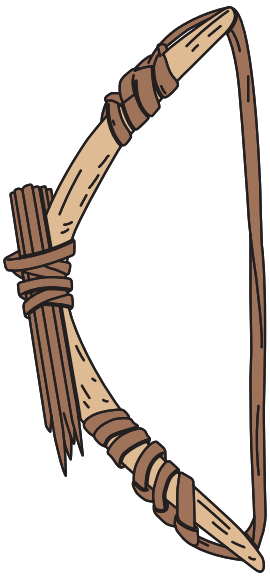
Ẹkpoki (box) were often made by the Isekpokin from leather, however the Igun Ẹronmwon made some from bronze. They would have been used to carry precious and important objects to the Ọba. They are frequently seen depicted on relief plaques and altar tableaus being held by members of the royal court.

IKPAKOHEN
Hornblower or Fluteplayer Figure



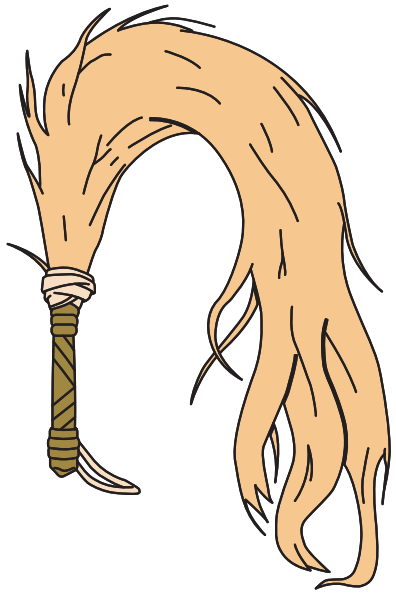
Ikpakohẹn (horn-blower or flute-player figures) provide entertainment at private or public functions, festivals or events. Ikpakohẹn are cast in brass and the figures usually wear a woven cap and a leopard-tooth neck ornament and are shown blowing into a horn or flute. At the waist, a wrapper is tied with a stylised knot of cloth projecting upwards, and a leopard pendant mask is attached to this tie.

UHANBỌ
Bow



Uhanbọ (bows) are usually used in conjunction with Ifẹnmwẹ and mainly served as weapons of war and hunting. They were made by the Igbesanmwan. Uhanbọ are simpler in form than Ẹkpede, made only from a single curved piece of wood, often cane, with string stretched between the two ends.

UGBUDIAN
Flywhisk



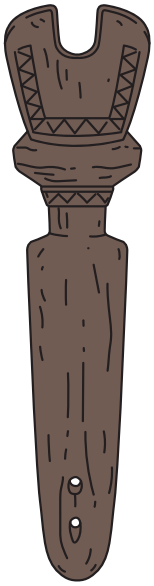
The Ugbudian (flywhisk) is one of the four items (Ada, Eben, Oro and the Ugbudian) that must be given to a prince when he is sent to establish a new dukedom. Made from leather, Ugbudian is harsher than the other type of flywhisks made from horsetail hair. It is used to chase the tsetse fly.

ONWỌ
Wax Model



Onwọ directly translates to 'beeswax' in English and can be used to describe the wax model made by brass-casters. It is an essential material used in the lost-wax technique, because when heated the Onwọ melts and creates a vacuum for the molten bronze or brass.

UFERE
Whistle



Ufere (whistle) is an instrument blown from one end which produces musical sound used for entertainment. The one who plays Ufere is called Olufere. They are carved from wood and cast in brass or bronze.

EMWIOKỌ
Plant Specimen



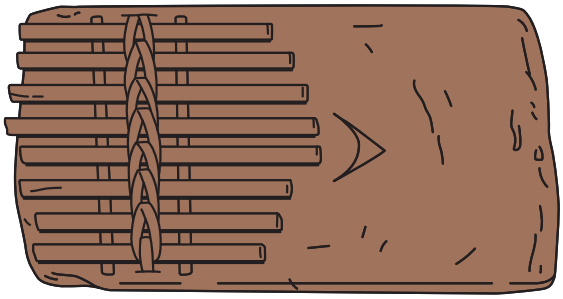
Emwiokọ is the term generally used in Edo to describe plants and young crops and is therefore used to designate objects described in English as plant specimens.

IFẸNMWẸ
Arrow



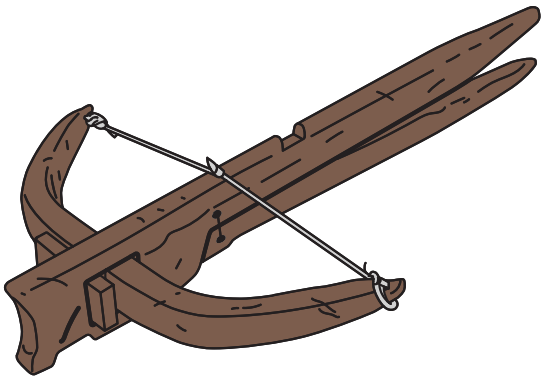
Ifẹnmwẹ (arrows) were usually used alongside Uhambọ and Ẹkpede. Ifẹnmwẹ were part of the weaponry used for hunting animals and during warfare. The shaft was a product of the Igbesamwan guild, and the tips were made by the Igun-Ematon. Ifẹnmwẹ tips could be dipped in poison made by the Ilobi, who still continue to make toxic substances.

ASOLOGUN
Lamellophone



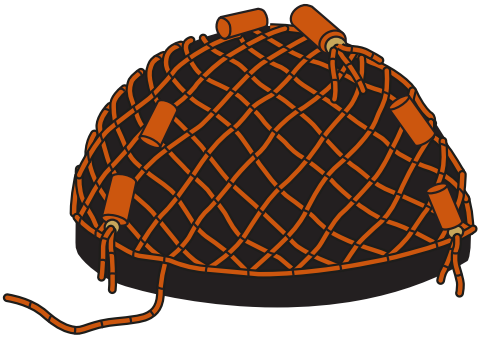
Asologun (lamellophones) were used mainly for entertainment and either played solo or with other lamellophones to accompany storytelling or dances. They are also known as thumb pianos or sansas, and are a kind of musical instrument made and used by people across the African continent, and specific to Benin, it is a small wooden box with metal lengths fastened to the top by horizontally placed bars.

ẸKPẸDE
Crossbow



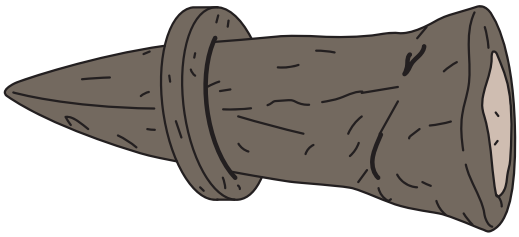
Ẹkpede (crossbows) were introduced by the Portuguese, although the Edo people already had and used Uhambọ and Ifẹnmwẹ. These would have been made in iron by members of the Igun-Ematon and placed on altars to Ake, the deity of archery, or Ogun, the deity of war.

ẸRHU
Headwear



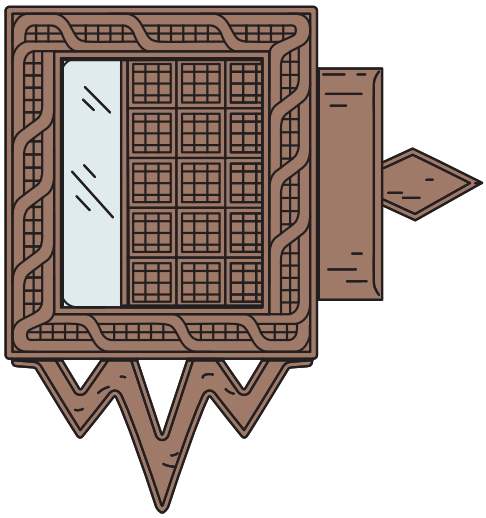
Ẹrhu describes different items of headwear which may be worn by chiefs, priests or the Ọba himself. The coral crown, or Ẹde, is for the Ọba only.

OVAZẸ
Anvil



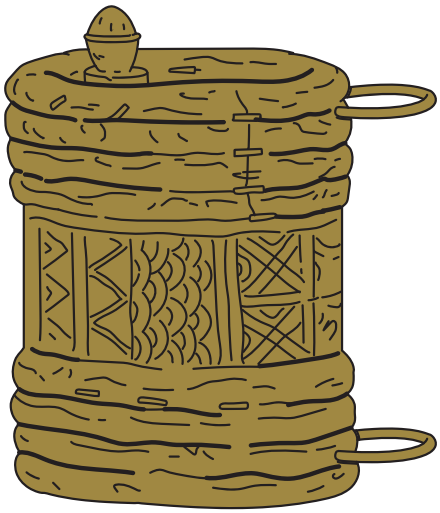
Ovazẹ (anvils) are used today as chisels by members of the Igun-Ẹronmwon and Igbesan-mwan to carve wood or split smaller pieces of wood. Despite the similarities in the ways they are used, Ovazẹ were identified separately from Afian (chisels) by members of the Igun-Ẹronwmon.

UGHEGBE
Mirror



Ughegbe (mirrors) are encased in carved wooden frames with a sliding wooden panel that would cover the glass when not in use. The wooden frame was carved by members of the Igbesanmwan, while the glass for the mirror would have been one of the goods traded to Benin by European merchants. Ughegbe were used mainly by priests and are viewed as portals to see beyond the physical world.

UKO ẸKHAẸ
Powder Keg



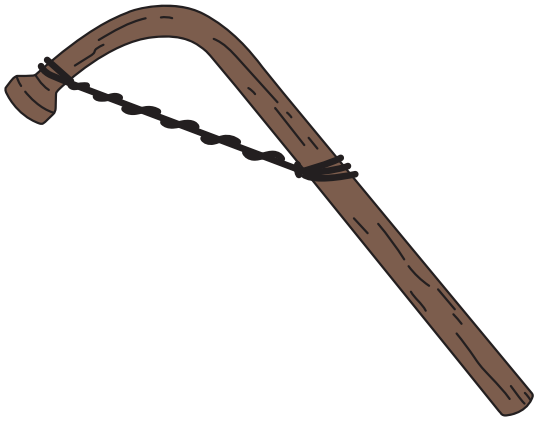
Uko Ẹkhaẹ (powder keg) directly translates to ‘powder container’ in the Edo language. These are usually small casks that were used to store and transport powder.

AGA
Chair



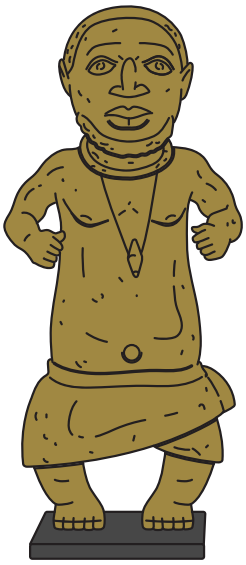
A small number of Aga, European-style chairs with backs and armrests exist and they are made from wood.

UKEKE
Striker



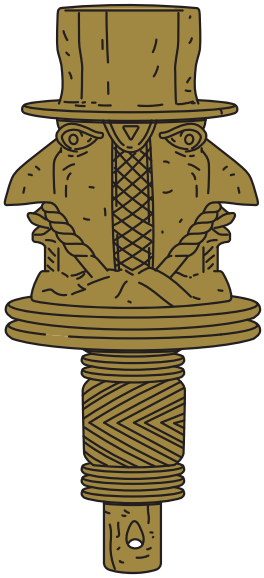
Ukeke (strikers) are used with other instruments, in particular gongs but also some drums. They are carved from tree branches and are most likely produced by the Igbesamwan.

ESEIKU
Eseiku Figure



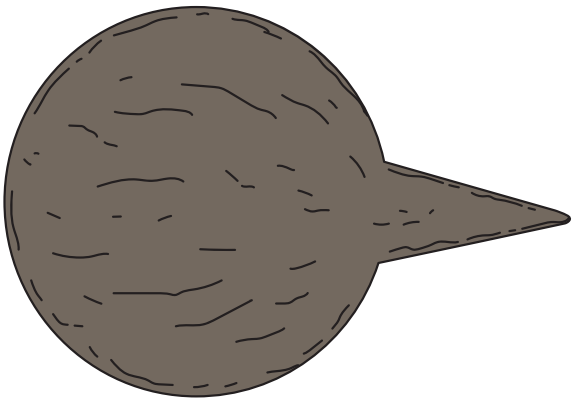
Eseiku (eseiku figures), according to oral tradition, have been identified as one group of the indigenous settlers of Benin, who were enclosed in a corner of the city, called Ivbioto today, while the new settlers, now referred to as the Benin people, took over the city. These figures depict individuals with the medical and genetic condition of dwarfism or chondrodysplasia.

OKHIẸ
Stopper



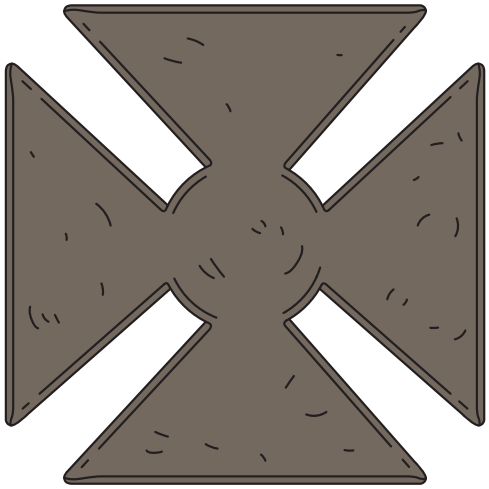
Okhiẹ (stoppers) are used to seal the contents of containers such as Uko and Uko Ẹkhaẹ. They are placed at the opening to protect the contents from spilling or being contaminated by outside matter.

EGUẸ
Hoe Blade



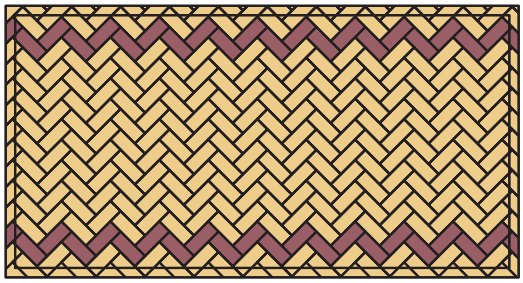
Eguẹ (hoe blades) are a kind of farming implement used for weeding and digging. These objects would also have been used by the bronze casters to dig for Ulakpa (red earth) used during the brass-casting process.

UMAN-AGUE/UGBUGBE
Cross



Uman-ague and Ugbugbe are two different kinds of crosses. Uman-ague refers to the equal-armed or Maltese cross, and Ugbugbe is used to describe the Christian cross, which has a longer vertical axis. Uman-ague is a symbol associated with the Holy Aro Osa Church.

AGHẸN
Mat



Aghẹn (mats) in this grouping are made from raffia, a fibre that comes from the raffia palm. These are usually spread over a raised mud platform and used as a bed for sleeping or by children to sit on during moonlight tales or may have had ceremonial functions.

ẸKHU
Door



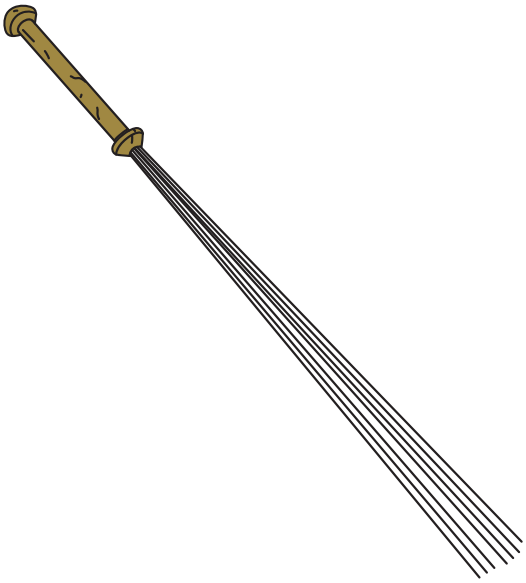
Ẹkhu (doors) would have been carved by members of the Igbesamwan with relief patterns of scenes that captured moments in the history of the Kingdom of Benin, such as ceremonies. Ẹkhu were, and still are, used to separate and secure rooms within the palaces and buildings of Benin City.

ẸGUẸN
Anklet



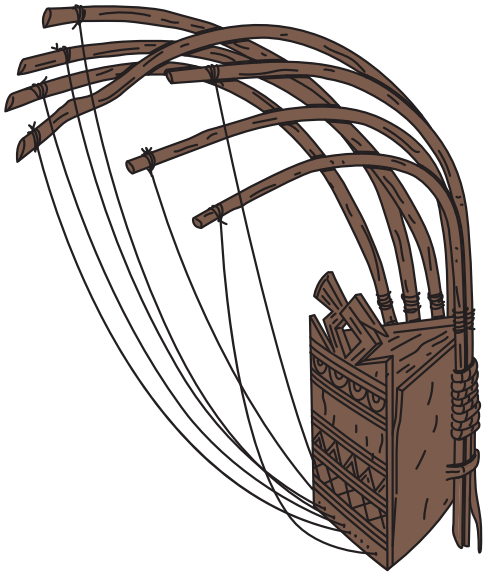
Ẹguẹn are worn by the Ọba and chiefs as part of their Ehaengbehia, the full regalia worn during special ceremonies. Ẹguẹn are worn around the ankles or calves and can be made from beads, ivory, brass or even iron.

UNWẸNRHIẸN/UNWẸNRHIẸNỌTAN
Whip



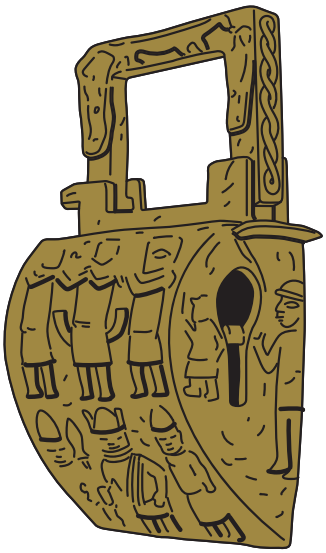
Unwẹnrhiẹn/Unwẹnrhiẹnọtan (whips) can be made from tiny twigs from trees or from strips of leather. They may have been used as means of discipline, however the exact context and manner in which Asan such as these were used in Benin Kingdom are unknown.

AKPATA
Bow-lute



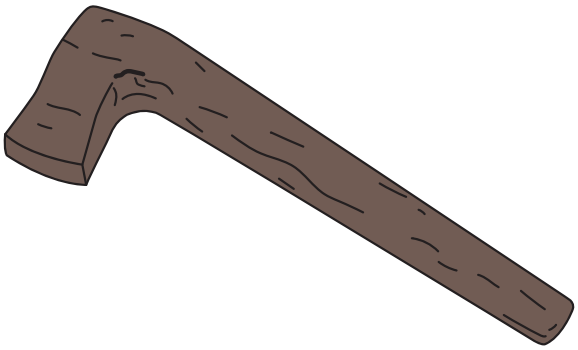
Akpata (bow lute) is a harp-like instrument made of wood and strings which makes a sound like a guitar. They continue to be used for entertainment during special festivals and ceremonies. Historically, the Akpata was one of the key musical instruments alongside the Asologun played by Edo musicians to accompany narrators during storytelling.

EKỌRỌKỌRỌ
Padlock



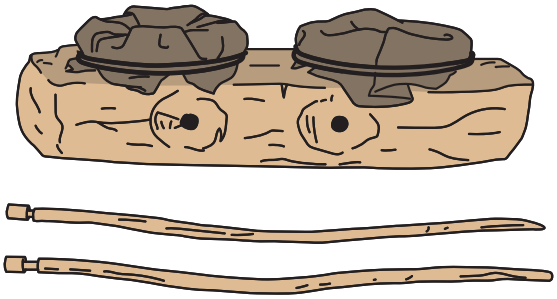
Ekọrọkọrọ (padlocks) were used in Benin Kingdom for securing valuables and continue to be used today. Some Ekọrọkọrọ were intricately decorated and cast in brass, indicating that they may have been used within the Ọba Palace or other royal palaces.

UMỌMỌ
Hammer



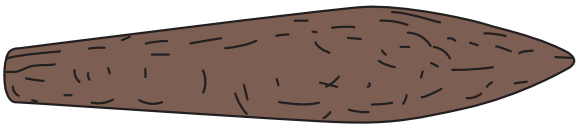
Umọmọ (hammers) have a distinctive L shape. They were used by members of the Igun-Ematon, Igun-Eronmwon and Igbesanmwan. Ewua messenger figures are also depicted holding this hammer in their left (proper) hands.

EKUẸ
Bellows



Ekuẹ (Bellows) are used to blow air into the fire or furnace, increasing the temperature enough to be used by brass casters in the Igun-Eronmwon and blacksmiths in the Igun-Ematon.

AFIAN
Chisel



Afian (chisels) are tools used by members of the Igun-Eronmwon for refining objects after casting and by members of the Igbesanmwan to carve objects.