



## Commemorative Bronze Head Kingdom Of Benin Edo Culture Nigeria Late 19th Century



2 800 EUR

Period : 19th century

Condition : Très bon état

Material : Bronze

Width : 17

Height : 54

Depth : 22

### Description

Male Commemorative Head - Edo Culture, Kingdom of Benin (Nigeria) - Copper alloy (bronze) cast using the lost-wax technique - Height: 54 cm; width: 17 cm; depth: 22 cm; weight: approximately 5 kg. Late 19th, early 20th century period. Traces of clay - Very good condition. International delivery available. This copper alloy sculpture represents a hieratic male head belonging to the artistic tradition of the Kingdom of Benin, a major center of metallurgical production in West Africa. The work is characterized by a strong verticality and a stylized treatment of volumes that accentuates the symbolic and ceremonial nature of the representation. The head, with slightly elongated proportions, rests on a particularly well-developed cylindrical neck, formed by a

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regular succession of thirty-eight thin rings. This ringed structure evokes the numerous coral necklaces worn by the sovereigns and dignitaries of the Benin court, an emblematic attribute of royal dignity in Edo culture. The sculpture as a whole presents a slender silhouette dominated by a tall, conical headdress, richly decorated with relief motifs. The face adopts a frontal and symmetrical composition, characteristic of commemorative statuary in Benin. The features are rendered in a naturalistic style:

almond-shaped eyes, slightly protruding, framed by pronounced upper eyelids; discreet brow ridges, giving the gaze a calm and restrained expression; a straight and broad nose with a clearly defined bridge; and a mouth with full lips, closed in an expression of dignity and reserve.

The face is marked by symmetrical facial scarifications, arranged vertically or obliquely on the cheeks. These markings reflect social and aesthetic identification practices widespread in several West African societies, while also contributing to the stylization of the face. The overall physiognomy conveys an attitude of calm and authority, a quality sought after in commemorative representations associated with political power and dynastic memory. The head is surmounted by a very tall, conical headdress, structured by vertical ribs and adorned with floral or rosette motifs in relief distributed across its surface. These decorative elements take the form of small crowns or stylized flowers, arranged in a regular pattern. The top of the headdress is extended by a twisted vertical element, evoking a finial or ceremonial appendage, accentuating the sculpture's slenderness. In the artistic tradition of Benin, headdresses and crowns are important markers of social rank. Their stylization in sculpture contributes to affirming the prestigious status of the figure depicted. The neck forms an elongated cylinder composed of thirty-eight narrow, regular rings. These rings symbolically represent the coral necklaces (ivie) worn by the kings and members of the Beninese aristocracy.

In Edo culture, these necklaces were insignia of power associated with the figure of the Oba (king). Their accumulation in the sculpture accentuates the ceremonial character and hierarchical importance of the figure. The multiplication of rings also contributes to the monumentality of the piece by visually elongating the structure of the bust. The sculpture appears to have been made using the lost-wax casting technique, a traditional process employed by the founders of the Igun Eronmwon guild, active in the historic city of Benin City. This process consists of: modeling the sculpture in wax; covering this model with a clay mold; melting the wax to create a cavity; and pouring the metal alloy into this mold. The resulting piece is hollow, which explains its relatively moderate weight (5 kg) despite its significant dimensions. The walls are thin, a characteristic of some late Edo castings. The surface displays a dark brown to coppery-brown patina, resulting from the natural oxidation of the copper alloy. Variations in texture and slight irregularities related to handwork and the casting process are also observed. In the tradition of the Kingdom of Benin, bronze heads were often used as commemorative heads for the ancestral altars of rulers. They could serve as supports for ivory-carved elephant tusks and played a central role in rituals honoring deceased kings. This sculpture is a remarkable example of the artistic tradition of the Kingdom of Benin. Its large size, its ringed neck composed of thirty-eight necklaces, and its headdress decorated with floral motifs testify to the symbolic richness and technical refinement of Edo metalwork. It belongs to the long tradition of commemorative heads associated with royal power, objects that were simultaneously artistic, ritual, and political, and which occupied a central place in the visual and religious culture of the Benin court.