

Beaded Coronet

1925-1975

Yoruba peoples, Nigeria

cloth, glass beads, metallic beads, and feathers

1997/1.345

This piece is a beaded coronet made especially for Yoruba *oba*, or “sacred kings.” Yoruba *oba* own many pieces of headwear due to the belief that an *oba’s ori inu* – inner head - is sacred and powerful, which demands it to be covered up at any given time.

The formal Yoruba headwear that *oba* wear is called the *ade* (a large crown with a beaded veil), but, *ade* are only worn within palace walls. When Europeans arrived and colonized West and Central Africa, the need for *oba* to travel and meet with other *oba* and colonial leaders grew, which called for a new type of headwear. The beaded coronet, called *orikogbofo* or *ojewe*, was created from this need. *Ojewe* translates to “head must not be bare,” tying in to the Yoruba belief surrounding *ori inu*.

There are nine birds on this coronet. The largest bird is *Okin*, the “king of birds” and the smaller bird figures reflect the Yoruba belief women were magical, mystical beings who had the power to be good “mothers” or evil “witches.”

Europeans brought seed-beads with them when they arrived in West Africa during the 19th century. Appreciating their beauty, Yoruba people chose to completely cover their coronets in contrasting, geometric patterns. The shape of the coronet reflects a direct European-influence as it is structurally similar to jeweled regalia worn by European royalty. This coronet only came about due to the direct interactions between Yorubaland and Europeans, which challenges the idea of an “isolated Africa.”

written by **Gabriella Cruciani**