

## **GCUC 5. African display – African Metalwork captions**

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1. 66/1938/20/1

Staff (edan ogboni)

Acquired 1894 – 1900

Yoruba, Southwest Nigeria

This is an emblem of membership to the Ogboni (or Osugbo) society. The Ogboni is a council of male and female elders who have demonstrated wisdom and sound judgement. In precolonial times, this council fulfilled a number of political, judicial and spiritual functions.

2. 136/1993/77

Ceremonial récade (makpo)

Made before 1958

Fon, Republic of Benin

The makpo, or 'staff of fury', was associated with the vodun religion and royal authority. This emblem also authenticated the bearer who acted as a royal messenger.

3. 57/1938/27

Spear

Made before 1938

Central Africa

The addition of copper enhances the item's appearance. It therefore had status and value, and was likely to have served as currency. Copper in Central Africa was largely mined in Zambia.

4. 158/2000/3

Ceremonial knife

Unknown provenance

Mangbetu, Democratic Republic of Congo

This stylised prestigious harvesting knife is associated with Mangbetu chiefship being present on formal occasions, and presented to favoured families. Such knives of copper were solely for the king's use.

5. 2/1938/7/1

Harvesting knife

Collected in the 1930s

East Africa

These knives were employed by women for harvesting fruit. This knife was made special by the addition of brass and steel band decoration. It was likely used ceremonially.

6. 91/1932/48

Ceremonial axe

Made before 1932

Songye, Democratic Republic of Congo

The axe's wooden handle is attached to a blade of decorated iron which is sheathed in patterned copper. The axe symbolised the potency of a ruler's power and emphasised their authority in long distance trade.

7. 60/1948/82/1

Barbed arrow

Acquired from 1884

Northeast Democratic Republic of Congo

This arrow carries an iron barbed tip and is associated with hunting small animals. It may have been used in ritual engagement with bush spirits prior to hunting.

8. 1/1993/15

Cult figures (edan ogboni)

Acquired in Lagos 1895-1911

Yoruba, Southwest Nigeria

Cast brass figures on an iron core connected by a chain – these would have been worn over a shoulder as a sign of office. They relate to the council members of the Ogboni (or Osugbo) society who served to settle economic, political and spiritual disputes.

9. 574/2007/25/1

Length of iron chain

20th century

Kamba, Kenya

Metals in eastern Africa predate beads in terms of body adornment, and iron chains were made exclusively for this purpose. Specialist smiths can produce up to 150cms of chain or 300cms of triangular cross-sectioned chain per day.

10. 90/1951/9

Tongs

Donated in 1951

Asante, Ghana

Made of wrought iron, this toiletry item served to remove facial hairs.

11. 23/2011/15

Snuff container (kiangi)

Acquired early 1970s

Kamba, Kitui region, Kenya

In East Africa, men and women carry snuff containers which are often accompanied by personal items for grooming. The Portuguese were the first to import tobacco into Africa from Brazilian plantations in the 17th century.

12. 10/2010/38

Razor (ruenji)

Made before 1973

Kikuyu, Kenya

Flat ovoid razor commonly used by Bantu-speaking peoples to shave the head. Men never shave beards with razors, instead they pluck out these hairs using tweezers.

13. 10/2010/15/1

Armlet (jingiri)

Purchased for 5/- in the 1970s

Kikuyu near the Kamba border, Kenya

Donor Sheila Unwin acquired this dance armlet. It consists of aluminium crescent-shaped bells (tulamba) suspended from a copper chain (munyo). The Kamba learnt the art of metal working from the Giriama, who live close to the coast.

14. 59/1953/1-2

Arrowheads

Collected 1912 – 1914

Nigeria

Here are two, out of a group of 28 arrowheads, which were probably made from locally smelted iron.

15. 65/1925/7

Spearhead

Collected before 1925

Possibly Azande, Democratic Republic of Congo

This barbed socketed spearhead was a warrior's principal weapon. Acquired during the period of colonialism in Africa, its shape would have supported false notions of 'primitive peoples' and acts of savagery, instead of an appreciation of age-old metalworking technology.

16. 432/2006

Prestige knife (sai)

19th century

Ingessana, Blue Nile state, Sudan

This prestige blade, or sai, was not intended as a weapon and was never thrown as it is large and too heavy. The blade is decorated with highly stylised spider and snake motifs, which connects men to nature. This item is used by men as a fashion accessory.

17. 84/2005/9

Wrist knife

Collected 1972-4

Pokot, Kenya

This is a pastoralist's weapon and ornament. The blade is cut from a rectangular iron sheet and the outer and inner edges are sheathed in animal hide. It is a fighting weapon used by men, women and children.

18. 10/2010/42

Woman's waist belt

Acquired early 1970s

Northwest Kenya

The pastoralist peoples of Northwest Kenya use aluminium solely for body ornamentation as it is very malleable and ductile. This white metal is cheaper than copper to obtain, and is as shiny as silver but doesn't tarnish. This belt is fashioned from iron wire lengths that are covered in aluminium wire thread.

19. 196/2007/34

Bracelet

Made early 1970s

Acquired in Kenya

A smith has incorporated twisted copper wire and twisted and hammered aluminium rods for this piece of jewellery. Bracelets with a similar decoration, of coiled brass and steel wire, were produced in South Africa in the late 19th century.

20. 10/2010/36/1-2

Ear ornaments (awalia)

Made before 1973

Turkana, Kenya

These aluminium leaf-shaped ornaments are still worn by Turkana women on the upper part of the ear. Cut from old cooking pots, the metal is beaten into shape and then punch-decorated.

21. 10/2010/35/1-2

Lip plugs (Pokot: apunoy)

Acquired 17 October 1972

Turkana or Pokot, Kenya

Lip plugs are worn by both men and women after their initiation. They are cold forged on stone then hammered or they're cut from old cooking pots, melted down and hammered into shape.

22. 564/2005/1

Pendant

Acquired in 1960s

Togo

This pendant of gold and copper alloy was given to the donor by a Togolese minister. Culturally copper has as much significance as gold in Africa. On the reverse it is stamped with a 1987 Birmingham import mark, and its maker K&SH.

23. 93/2004

Copper alloy key

Collected 1930 - 1942

Ethiopia

A hand cross of this size would have belonged to a member of the Ethiopian clergy who would have carried it with him wherever he went as a sign of his profession.

24. 10/2010/20

Collar

Acquired early 1970s

Northwest Kenya

This neck collar is fashioned from short iron wire lengths that are covered in aluminium wire thread. Wirework is made by a specialist called kilingi. Knowledge of wirework came to the smiths in Kenya from the coast after trade routes had been established between Lake Victoria and the east African coast in the early 19th century.

25. 76/1960/9

Neck ornament

Made before 1960

Maasai, Killimanjaro region, Kenya

This is based on a traditional Maasai beaded necklace of the same form, possible a bridal piece, but instead of glass beads is made from iron and copper alloy. Iron is commonly believed to have protective properties, especially when worn on the body. This would have been a valuable item.

26. E1936

Bracelet

Made before 1878

Xhosa, Eastern Cape, South Africa

Bracelet likely made of locally smelted copper in the 1850s or 1860s. This decorative piece would have been worn by someone of high status, such as a chief.

27. E594

Anklet

Made before 1868

Yoruba, Abeokuta, Southwest Nigeria

One of a pair of anklets cast from white metal alloy. White metal alloys were often associated with devotees of Ọbatala. Ọbatala is a Yoruba orisha (lesser deity) who created the first man and woman, and is involved with the development of the foetus in the womb.

28. 42/2000/16

Bracelet

Purchased 1956

Nasarawa state, Nigeria

This white alloy bracelet was crafted in the Mada Hills and then traded in Keffi Market. It was manufactured using the lost-wax casting technique with reused scrap metal, probably a recycled car-bumper. Its design is said to be Nupe.

29. 94/1993/46a

Teether

Made before 1922

Yoruba, Efon Alaye, Southwest Nigeria

A copper alloy teether made for an infant to be worn about their arm. This was cut and hammered into the form of a Muslim prayer-board. Its use would have been restricted to children of a high-ranking family.

30. 113/2003/1

Sword

Purchased in 1975

Ghadames, Northwest Libya

Made for display, this iron-bladed sword was made by blacksmiths for the Tuareg tourist market in the Berber town of Ghadames. Items made in Northern Nigeria were also on sale there. For several hundred years this town, under Muslim control, has played a significant role in trans-Saharan trade.

31. 42/2016/1

Reliquary figure

Date unknown

Kota (Mahongwe), Gabon

Until the mid-20th century, extended families venerated important ancestors through relics. This figure would have sat atop a basket containing relics e.g. the crania of the deceased. It appears to be genuine but shows signs of repair and has arms, which are not typical. This is believed to be an example of tourist art.

32. 81/2002/2

Figure of horse and rider



Purchased 1962-68

Owo, Southwest Nigeria

Lost wax casting in brass of an Oba or King of Benin on horseback. This was made by a Yoruba craftsman in the Benin court style for sale to a British expatriate.

33. 82/2002/1

Bell

Collected 1962 - 68

Chad or Niger

The handle of this bell represents a caricature of Charles de Gaulle, the President of France at the time, with his distinctive peaked cap (kepi), pointed nose and arms raised in victory. A new French constitution in 1946 eventually led to independence for both nations in 1960.

34. 284/1998/56

Cast aluminium spoon

Collected by Nancy Stanfield 1970s

Yoruba, Southwest Nigeria

Used in the indigo dyeing process for measuring specific amounts of caustic soda (sodium hydroxide). The technology to make this dye has changed. The process utilises caustic soda as the alkali medium for the fermentation process instead of ash. This helps to shorten the dye's production time.

35. E1946

Hoe currency

Made before 1868

Xhosa, Alice, Victoria East, Eastern Cape, South Africa

This hand-made forged iron hoe was unearthed in the donor's garden. It resembles prestige or hoe currency. Such forms were used as bride wealth. The shape isn't meant to serve as a functional item but rather a symbolic one. Hoes can be used as lobola, a payment for brides, in place of cows.