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Benin Art in Canterbury Museum

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ABSTRACT
Canterbury Museum cares for 16 items of nineteenth century and one early twentieth century example of Benin art. This paper offers the first published description of this collection, presenting a straightforward illustrated catalogue with a brief description of the individual pieces as well as their acquisition history and provenance.[1] A short historical and political overview together with a narrative placing Benin art within an indigenous context are also included to ensure the ethnographic perspective of the objects complements their descriptions. This addition to the body of literature related to Benin art will alert international scholars to the existence of the Canterbury Museum collection, allowing it to become a more academically active and accessible part of the large, but finite, worldwide corpus of Benin art.

KEY WORDS
Benin; collection.

INTRODUCTION
Canterbury Museum cares for the largest collection of nineteenth century Benin art in any public collection in Australia or New Zealand.[2] The provenance of most items can be securely traced through the English ethnographic collector William Downing Webster back to the conquest of Benin in early 1897 by the British Punitive Expedition. The Expedition, which resulted in the destruction of the city and the exile of its King, looted great works of art from the city which were later auctioned to defray costs; an activity then seen to be a legitimate prerogative of a punitive expedition. Thousands of Benin art and ethnographic objects, through government and private sales, soon found their way into museum and personal collections throughout the United Kingdom, Europe and America. A lesser number of items of Benin art were also solicited by museums throughout the British Empire, no doubt prompted in part by feelings of patriotic emotion and a tendency of colonial museums to mimic collecting patterns of large international institutions such as the British Museum. While the majority of items in Canterbury Museum's collection were obtained around the turn of the twentieth century, an additional acquisition in 2005 of a bronze commemorative head further developed the museum collections artistic and historical context of this genre.

The British Punitive Expedition, while led by the British military, attracted attention throughout the world. Newspapers in New Zealand kept readers

informed of activities in Benin with sensational headlines such as 'A Horrible Place' and 'The Niger Expedition – Capture of Benin – Human Sacrifices'.[3] The expedition stayed in the news for months with more detailed, but no less gruesome, eye witness accounts of the campaign. These accounts justified the destruction of Benin in a variety of ways. 'The Benin Expedition – The Story of one of the Party' drew, for example, on the practice of human sacrifice to validate the Expedition:

> Then we came to an open glade, and there was a most revolting sight – a human sacrifice of a young girl disemboweled, her arms tied behind her, and a stick driven through her cheeks as a gag. It turned me sick… That sight put an end to any nervousness I felt, and I simply thirsted for blood and vengeance.[4]

Over a year after the conclusion of the Expedition, Canterbury's daily newspaper *The Press* still claimed it was fresh in the minds of its readers and congratulated Canterbury Museum on obtaining, for its collection, valuable examples of the booty taken from Benin.[5]

Over the twentieth century, worldwide collections of Benin art became the focus of an ever growing corpus of research, exhibition and scholarly publication. Yet, few scholars are aware of the existence of the small but important collection of Benin art held by Canterbury Museum. As a result, this paper contextualises these items within the history of Benin and an understanding of its art before examining how these items made their way to Canterbury Museum. It concludes with an illustrated catalogue of the Benin Art held by this institution.

HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL OVERVIEW OF THE KINGDOM OF BENIN

Today, Benin City is the capital of the Edo state of Nigeria, located on a rolling coastal plain on the west coast of Africa, with the River Niger running along its southern border. The Kingdom of Benin (known as Edo to its inhabitants) represents the oldest extant monarchy in Africa and appears to have reached its territorial apogee before the arrival of Europeans. A highly centralised kingdom was established sometime in the fourteenth century with political authority based in the capital city Benin, which was also the seat of elaborate court institutions. At the political and religious apex of the kingdom was a semi-divine king, the *oba,* supported by three groups of chiefs: *otu* (appointees to the palace), *eghaebho n'ore* (appointed town officials) and *uzama* (senior hereditary chiefs). The bureaucracy, organised on the basis of both hereditary authority (*oba* and *uzuma*) and achievement through promotion by the *oba,* was a sophisticated political system with constitutional checks and balances. The *uzama* were excluded from political office but delegated the authority as 'king-makers' on the death of an *oba* and the *iyase* (the senior town chief) entrusted with responsibility to act as a check on excesses by the monarch.[6] Queen mothers (*Iye Oba*) have played a conspicuous role in Benin court life for at least four hundred years and are traditionally the only women who have had a voice in administration and politics. *Iye Oba* live in a separate court on the outskirts of Benin city. They are customarily consulted by the *oba* on all state affairs. However direct contact with their son is 'officially' forbidden and all communication is conducted through messengers. Within their own court *Iya Oba* have ascribed rights, responsibilities and privileges and effectively perform a role comparable to that of a high ranking chief. After his mother's death, her son erects an altar in her memory in his palace. These altars are usually decorated with rattle staffs, commemorative heads, and rectangular cast brass/bronze altarpieces depicting figures representing the *Iye Oba* and her court attendants. The *oba* customarily holds an annual commemorative service at his mother's altar and offers sacrifices in her memory.[7] Many elements of the sophisticated political system, the hierarchical structure of society and complex belief systems of Benin are clearly reflected in the art associated with the court and bureaucracy.

When Portuguese explorers first reached Benin in about 1490 they found a flourishing kingdom. Trade and treaties, entered into on an equal-sovereign-nation basis, saw generally successful relations develop. The Portuguese were to be the first of a succession of European explorers and traders woven through the history of Benin. Dutch migrants visited Benin from the first half of the seventeenth century, followed by the French in the eighteenth century and the British in the nineteenth century.[8] By the mid-nineteenth century the political and economic fortunes of Benin were in slow

decline. The British, who had established the adjacent British Protectorate of Nigeria viewed Benin as an obstacle to their expansion into the agricultural interior. When a substantial, but largely unarmed, diplomatic envoy in transit to Benin city, determined to undertake negotiations with the *oba,* was ambushed and killed in 1896 (recorded as a massacre by the British media), the response was a military punitive expedition against the kingdom.[9] The British Punitive Expedition of 1897 set fire to the residences of the Queen mother and important chiefs which rapidly spread, destroying most of the city. The royal palace, sacred sites and homes of the chiefs were looted. The capture of the city and subsequent exile of Oba Ovoranmwen marked the end of Benin as an independent kingdom and the beginning of an era of enormous social, political and, of course, artistic change.[10] The British conquest of Benin not only resulted in the dispersal of much of the nation's artistic heritage, but the once independent warrior kingdom was incorporated into the wider political framework of the British Protectorate of Nigeria and later the modern Nigerian state. The royal and bureaucratic patronage of bronze working and other artistic works all but ceased leaving those skilled artisans who wished to continue little choice other than to operate on an itinerant basis.

THE ART OF BENIN IN CONTEXT

While the western world appreciated Benin art for its aesthetic appeal, it is important to recognise that items of Benin art were considered to be ritual objects or historical artefacts by those that created them. Primarily, such art was created for the *oba* who lived in a palace compound covering several hectares. The complex included meeting chambers for various groups of chiefs, storehouses, shrines, work areas for ritual specialists and royal craftsmen as well as residences for the *oba's* wives. Each of the craft guilds was located in a specific ward and had a specific service to perform for the *oba.* Among these guilds were the craftsmen who produced brass, bronze, ivory and wood sculpture, embroidered cloth and leather fans for the *oba,* and, with an indulgence from the *oba,* for the chiefs and priests throughout the kingdom. In reality these artisans were dependent on royal patronage and they cast, carved, forged and wove prestigious regalia for the *oba* and officials associated with the royal court. Almost all the art produced by guild artists remained within the palace compound and was exhibited in association with palace buildings, shrines and rituals.[11]

The royal palace was considered the centre of the Benin world and a focal point of social aspirations. It is evident from travelers' accounts how impressive and highly decorated it was. Accounts of members of the British Punitive Expedition reveal that doors, lintels and rafters of the council chamber and *oba's* residence were lined with sheets of repousse decorated brass covered with royal geometric designs and figures of men and leopards. Doors were fitted with ivory locks and surrounded with carved ivory figurines.[12] The large number of bronze/brass plaques fitted to the pillars in the *Oba's* audience hall added to this visual narrative with scenes designed to evoke recognition of both ritual and historical subjects and calculated as an impressive public display for foreigners, palace officials and commoners alike. Impressive commemorative bronze/brass heads, most of which supported elephant tusks intricately carved with ritual and historical narratives (often related to the individual being depicted), were placed on adjacent shrines and ancestral altars. The palace was also the centre of ritual activities aimed at ensuring the well-being and prosperity of the nation. An annual cycle of both private and public rituals were held within the confines of the palace and adjacent shrines. Guild artists including carvers, casters, weavers and leatherworkers were required to provide regalia and ritual objects to be used in the ceremonies.

Although villages were mainly agricultural some did specialise in crafts such as pottery, carpentry, iron working and mask making; this work was undertaken for their local community rather than the *oba.* Men had access to a greater range of artistic activities than women in Benin. Because religious strictures prevented women artisans handling metal or metal tools their participation was restricted to the weaver's guild. The reverse was not the case however and men could also be weavers. Regardless of the medium in which they worked guild artists saw themselves as possessing a body of forms and patterns that belonged to them and defined them as artists. Each guild shared a belief that the supernatural world was the ultimate source of their designs and while they worked artists constantly invoked divine beings for favour, guidance and protection. Many of the designs also include iconographic motifs identified as associated only with the royal court.

Not all the questions relating to the origin of brass/bronze casting in Benin have yet been resolved. There is general agreement, however, that the practice of casting precedes European contact and that both the artistic expression and technical excellence of Benin castings are substantially the result of indigenous development. The only external fillip to the process appears to have been the result of access to brass/bronze from European sources. Although many of the earliest dated pieces are made of bronze (an alloy mainly of copper and tin), most Benin sculpture tested so far has proven to be brass (an alloy of copper and zinc). Tin is found locally in Nigeria but copper is not, so to make the early bronzes Benin must have had an existing external trading network before European contact. The logical explanation for the apparent move to brass as the principle alloy used seems to involve the availability of brass trade *manillas* and also *neptunes* (brass pans) and other brass objects which were manufactured in Europe and traded to West Africa from as early as the sixteenth century. Since 1897 there have been many attempts by colonial officials, historians, and anthropologists to resolve the issue of whether the origin of copper alloy casting techniques have indigenous African or foreign origins. Most indigenous oral traditions seem to favour local African technological development. Irrespective of this discussion the copper alloy castings of ancient Benin are regarded as amongst the finest examples of the *lost wax* casting technique in the world and have been greatly admired as aesthetic masterpieces since their arrival in the west in 1897.[13]

Canterbury Museum's collection of Benin art comprises an interesting cross-section of both secular and ritual objects ranging from small personal items to spectacular altar objects rendered in a variety of materials. The artistic quality of each of the seventeen pieces, their potential cultural and historical significance and the story which took them some 16,000 kilometers from their home, is such that they are worthy of documentation as a contribution to the corpus of literature relating to Benin art.

ACQUISITION, PROVENANCE AND DISPLAY

All but one of the pieces of Benin art were acquired during the directorship of Canterbury Museum by Captain Frederick Wollaston Hutton around the turn of the twentieth century. Hutton is remembered primarily as a scientist of considerable ability and versatility, but his role in the acquisition of the Benin collection also reveals he possessed an astute awareness of wider curatorial interests and knowledge.[14] It appears likely that Hutton was influenced by both a legacy of personal involvement through his service in British military campaigns in Crimea and India and by a strong sense of professional duty to expand the *encyclopedic* collections being accumulated by Canterbury Museum.

Hutton's report to the Board of Governors of the Canterbury College for 1899 indicates that *"the most important addition"* for the year preceding was *"a collection of objects from Benin City"*.[15] While his report signifies that objects were obtained by purchase, there is no indication of the source. In the same report, and that of the previous year, Hutton recorded that exchanges had been concluded with various museums and individuals including Mr W D Webster of Oxford.[16] Webster, who became an ethnographic collector and dealer soon after 1890, travelled throughout Britain buying from auction houses and by purchase or exchange from private collectors, especially members of the armed forces recently returned from abroad. Webster bought and sold extensively, supplying large numbers of objects to many of the major collections both in Britain and around the world. It is clear from Hutton's reports that Webster was also willing to engage in exchange transactions, presumably acting as a *middle man* in order to obtain objects to mutually satisfy client's requests.[17] Although no original correspondence between Hutton and Webster has survived it is clear from Hutton's annual reports that the two were concluding transactions, by both purchase and exchange, from at least as early as 1897.[18] Given the enormous demand in Britain, Europe and America for the newly available supply of Benin art returned to England from the British Punitive Expedition, it is highly likely that Webster would be in a position to demand 'purchase only' transactions for these items. Records show that Webster marked the objects he acquired using white ink in a distinctive hand. These marks survive on most of the Benin art objects acquired by Canterbury Museum and it therefore seems reasonable to assume these items were, at least for a time, in Webster's possession.[19]

Twelve items of Benin art can be confirmed as having been purchased by Hutton at an auction in

London in 1898.[20] Although each item would have had a specific historical and ritual significance within the environs of the royal court, the abrupt manner in which they were removed resulted in the loss of such unique and intimate records. The Canterbury Museum Foreign Ethnology Register records that these objects were purchased from Webster at an auction in London on 30 August 1898. However, the situation of their purchase was slightly more complicated than this. As a result of poor business turnover Webster had been, by necessity, forced to sell much of his stock to Stevens - the major London auctioneer in ethnographic and natural history specimens. The material, noted as being sourced from Webster, was in fact sold by Stevens over five days in November 1898. Lots 661-690, sold on 30 November (not 30 August as recorded in Canterbury Museum's Ethnology Register Book 1) consisted of Benin material.[21]

The twelve items acquired by Canterbury Museum at this auction include Fig 1: brass bell (EA 1976.772); Fig 2: bronze wall plaque (EA 1977.470); Fig 3: amulet in the form of an adze (EA 1977.204); Fig 4: amulet with surface decoration in the form of an adze (EA 1977.211); Fig 5: ivory figure from a sacrificial altar (EA 1977.203); Fig 6: small ivory carved head (EA 1977.191); Fig 7: small bronze figure of a warrior (EA 1977.192); Fig 8: heavy brass bracelet (EA 1977.165); Fig 9: bone armlet (EA 1977.166); Fig 10: brass bracelet (EA 1977.167); Fig 11: bird of prophecy sculpture from apex of Chief's staff (EA 1976 .775); and Fig 12: ivory war horn (EA 1976.779). In his report to the Board of Governors in 1900 Hutton referred collectively to this acquisition *"as the most important addition"* to the Ethnological Room, but apparently only regarded one object *"a large bronze placque"* (sic), as worthy of individual description.[22] Hutton's expression of preferential focus simply reflected a universal bias amongst collectors and museums. The most desirable items of Benin art were bronze wall plaques and bronze commemorative heads; Hutton was clearly keen to acquire representative examples of each, despite obvious financial constraints, to continue the *encyclopedic* collecting ambitions of Canterbury Museum initiated by the first director Sir Julius von Haast. In that same report to the Governors of Canterbury College in 1900 Hutton records a further purchase of *"a very fine 'mask', being the support for an elephant's tusk, from the city of Benin"*.[23] This commemorative head Fig 13: (EA 1977.468) also appears to have been purchased from Webster in 1899 and certainly indicates the level of Hutton's commitment and determination to acquire what might be considered as a representative collection of Benin art.[24]

Acquisitions of Benin art by Hutton over the next five years confirm this aspiration. Two items, Fig 14: bronze knife handle (EA 1976.771) and Fig 15: carved ivory 'clapper' (EA 1976.778) are recorded in the Foreign Ethnology Register as having been acquired at an auction in London on 2 March 1901.[25] The entry for each object also records a reference to the relevant Webster catalogue in which they appear; catalogue 21:23 and (Volume 2) catalogue 24:27 respectively. Surprisingly neither of these items was recorded by Hutton in his annual reports to the Board of Governors of the Canterbury College and it is therefore not possible to know if they were acquired by purchase or exchange. The final acquisition of Benin art by Hutton, Fig 16: commemorative head (EA 1977.469), has a somewhat more interesting story. In his report to the Board of Governors of Canterbury College in 1905 Hutton records two seemingly unrelated pieces of information. Amongst *'exchanges received'* he acknowledges Mr O E Yanson (sic: Oliver Erichson Janson) of London and under *"Ethnological Collections"* he notes, *"A bronze mask from Benin City"*.[26] It appears probable that Webster, whose distinctive marking is visible on the work, was also once the owner of this commemorative head. In 1904 Stevens' conducted a further sale of items sourced from the Webster collection and it appears that Janson acquired the commemorative head from this auction.[27] An examination of the Canterbury Museum Exchange Book, 1899 to 1912, failed to reveal the connection between Janson and the Benin *mask*. However an entry in the Canterbury Museum Accession Book, 1891 to 1933 records the entry on 6 July 1902 of a *'Bronze Mask from Benin City, Exchange, from O E Yanson for moa skeleton'*.[28] Although this particular entry should have been recorded in the exchange book, rather than the accession book, it seems to have been a simple administrative error rather than an attempt to conceal any more sinister motive. Transactions between O E Janson and Hutton continued until Hutton's untimely death in 1905.[29]

The most recently acquired item in the Canterbury Museum collection, Fig 17: a second commemorative head, (2005.12.1), is thought to have been made in the period 1900 to 1910 but, with the absence of comparative examples, it has not yet been possible to confirm this. A private vendor acquired the item in or about 1980 from a dealer in Lagos, Nigeria and subsequently brought the item with him to New Zealand when he emigrated from England. It was purchased by Canterbury Museum in 2005. This commemorative head is of particular historical significance because it appears to belong to the period immediately following the disbandment of royal patronage of Benin art.

The examples of Benin art acquired by Canterbury Museum were rapidly incorporated into prominent display locations within the exhibition galleries. The second edition of *The Guide to the Collections in the Canterbury Museum* published in June 1900, records the presence of the newly acquired Benin collection in the African section of the Ethnological Room.[30] The entry discussing the Benin art wonderfully encapsulates and conveys the prevailing Victorian social attitudes towards indigenous African peoples:

Case 36….Bronze *'mask',* used as a support for an Elephant's tusk. When the City of Benin was captured by the British in 1897, a number of bronzes were found in the King's house, quite different to any other known bronzes, many of them showing a high state of art. Native tradition says that they were made by a white man called Ahammangiwa, when Esige was King. He taught several natives who made inferior imitations. Twelve Kings have reigned since Esige, which would give his date at about the middle of the sixteenth century, and this coincides with the evidence of the bronzes themselves. No doubt these bronzes bear distinct traces of European influences. The difficulty is that no works of equal merit have been found in Portugal. At all events they show a high degree of skill not merely in design, but also in the process of casting, for they have been first modeled in wax (see also the next case).[31]

Case 37 clearly contained the remaining items from Benin and states briefly, "Specimens from Benin City".[32] The arrival of a second bronze 'mask' in 1904 clearly initiated a rearrangement of the display because the wording of the entry for Case 36 in the third edition of *The Guide to the Collections in the Canterbury Museum* was changed to read… *'A 'mask', used as a support for an Elephant's tusk, is placed each side of the door leading to the New Zealand Room'*.[33] The remaining text of the entry remains otherwise unchanged from the 1900 edition.

The items of Benin art remained on continuous display in this configuration until all galleries were systematically upgraded under the directorship of Dr Roger Duff in the 1940s. Subsequently the Benin art collection has featured in the Canterbury Museum exhibition programme at intermittent intervals. Two items (a commemorative head (EA 1977.469) and a plaque (EA 1977.470)) were loaned for an exhibition titled Eye of the Sun at the Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt, between December 1985 and September 1986 and the two commemorative heads (EA 1977.468 and EA 1977.469) featured in an article titled 'Ancient Craftsmen of West Africa' in a popular series known as *Museum Pieces* in the local newspaper *The Press.* No complete list of the collection has as yet featured in any scholarly publication with wider distribution and readership.[34] While this emphasis on presenting the Benin art collection to a local audience is one of the primary functions of Canterbury Museum, sadly the collection has been essentially invisible to international scholars and therefore a wider audience.

CONCLUSION

While Canterbury Museum's collection is numerically small by international standards, the secure provenance of the items highlights the potential contribution they offer to the growing artistic and historical understanding of the worldwide corpus of Benin art. The proactive acquisition of the Benin collection by Curator Captain Frederick Wollaston Hutton also suggests a number of related areas of potentially enlightening research relating to late nineteenth century colonial behaviour and museological practice. One factor that seems to have influenced acquisition decisions appears to have been a colonial sense of belonging within the British Empire. New Zealand newspapers certainly kept readers up to date on the salient developments in what became commonly known as *'the scramble for Africa'* as European nations competed for colonial territories across the

continent. If this was so, the acquisition of objects from Benin would appeal not only on intrinsic grounds, but also as tangible evidence of one of the last chapters of British Empire building. The authors hope that this paper will increase awareness of, access to and interest in the Canterbury Museum collection of Benin art and act as a gateway for inclusion of the collection into future research and exhibition programmes involving this genre. The authors also hope that in some small way this paper offers a fitting tribute to the *obas,* chiefs, artists and ritual specialists of Benin without whom such magnificent art could never have been created and that this publication will help preserve information relating to their art and culture both for their descendants and also for a wide general audience.

END NOTES

[1] The authors would like to thank Dr Lissant Bolton, Keeper Oceanic, Africa and the Americas, British Museum and Hannah Thomas, Anthropology Library and Research Centre, British Museum for their prompt and helpful assistance with information relating to the W D Webster catalogues, Dr David Dorward for his initial assessment of the collection in 1995 and Nicolas Boigelot of Canterbury Museum for his excellent photography.

[2] D Dorward, 'The Royal Art of Benin in the Antipodes', Unpublished exhibition proposal, Related Documents: Ethnology, Canterbury Museum, 1995, p 2-4.

[3] *North Otago Times,* 19 April 1897, p 4; *Otago Witness,* 4 March 1897, p 13.

[4] *Evening Post,* 21 May 1897, p 2.

[5] *The Press,* 30 August 1898, pp 4, 6.

[6] P Girshick Ben-Amos, *The Art of Benin,* (London, The British Museum Press, 1995), pp 12-14.

[7] P Ben-Amos and A Rubin (eds), *The Art of Power, the Power of Art: Studies in Benin Iconography,* (California, Museum of Cultural History, 1983), pp 79-83.

[8] For a comprehensive narrative of European contact see A Ryder, *Benin and the Europeans, 1485-1897,* (London, Longman Green & Co 1969). See also H Ling Roth, *Great Benin: It's Customs, Art and Horrors,* (London, Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1903 Edition Reassure 1968), pp 1-17.

[9] This point has been disputed in other accounts, see, for example, Robert Home, *City of Blood Revisited: A New Look at the Benin Expedition of 1897,* (London, R Collings, 1982).

[10] Ben-Amos (1995), p 58.

[11] Ben-Amos (1995), pp 1-19; Ben-Amos (1983) pp 13-16; Barbara Plankensteiner (ed), *Benin Kings and Rituals: Court Acts from Nigeria,* (Vienna: Kunsthistorisches Museum and Snoek Publishers, 2007).

[12] Ling Roth, pp 157-192.

[13] For a wider discussion, see Peter Junge 'Age Determination of Commemorative Heads: The Example of the Benin Collection' in Plankensteiner, pp 185-197; Timothy Garrard 'Benin Metal-Casting Technology' in Ben-Amos and Rubin, pp 17-20.

[14] Born in England, Hutton served three years in the Indian Mercantile Marine before studying applied science at King's College, London. He went on to serve, as an ensign, in the Royal Welsh Fusiliers during the Crimean War and the Indian War of 1857-58. Following his return to England, in about 1860, he rose to the rank of captain, a title by which he was later known in New Zealand. In 1866 Hutton resigned his commission and travelled to New Zealand. He soon joined the colonial government Geological Survey team and later undertook a variety of work at the University of Otago, Otago Museum and Canterbury College. On the death of Canterbury Museum's first Director, Sir Julius von Haast, in 1887 Hutton acted as interim Curator of Canterbury Museum until the appointment of Henry Forbes in late 1888. In turn Hutton succeeded Forbes as Curator of Canterbury Museum in 1892. In 1905 Hutton took leave to visit England but died on the return voyage in October of the same year. For a comprehensive biography of Hutton see Elliot W Dawson, *F W Hutton (1836-1905) Pioneer New Zealand Naturalist: A Bibliography and Taxonomic Analysis,* Occasional Papers of the Hutton Foundation, (New Zealand, Hutton Foundation, 1994).

[15] The Canterbury College Annual Report, 1899, Canterbury Museum, p 13.

[16] Ibid; The Canterbury College Annual Report, 1898.

[17] For a comprehensive biography of Webster see H Waterfield and J C H King, *Provenance: Twelve Collectors of Ethnographic Art in England, 1760-1990,* (London, Paul Holberton Publishing, 2009), pp 55-64.

[18] Hutton neglected to record those transactions made by exchange in the relevant Canterbury Museum exchange books, which now makes it impossible to know what was sent to Webster in exchange for the items received.

[19] In 1895 Webster began to produce and sell illustrated ethnographic catalogues. It is quite obvious that not all items acquired by Webster were listed in his catalogues prior to sale and therefore, in this way, the 'stock' number on an individual object does not appear as a number in

the published catalogues. A set of copies of the original Webster catalogues for the years in question (1897-1898) are held by the Horniman Museum in London and a check of the numbers believed to have been applied by Webster to the items in the Canterbury Museum confirms that they do not correspond to numbered items in the Webster catalogues, at least for the relevant years. See Webster Volume 2, Catalogues 11-17, 1897-1898; Volume 3, catalogues 18-23, 1898-1899 Volume 4, catalogues 24-27, 1900, Volume 5, catalogues 28-31, 1901.

[20] Canterbury Museum Foreign Ethnology Register (Book 1), Canterbury Museum, pp 252, 256.

[21] Waterfield and King, pp 57-58.

[22] The Canterbury College Annual Report, 1900, Canterbury Museum, p 13.

[23] Ibid, p 15.

[24] Canterbury Museum Foreign Ethnology Register (Book 2), Canterbury Museum, p 8.

[25] Canterbury Museum Foreign Ethnology Register (Book 1), Canterbury Museum, pp 251, 255.

[26] Edward Wesley Janson, an entomologist and a dealer, was also the curator of collections of the Entomological Society of London between 1850 and 1863 and then became librarian until 1874. He started his natural history business with his son Oliver Erichson Janson in 1850 (O E Janson & Son), selling books and specimens. The Canterbury College Annual Report, 1905, Canterbury Museum, p 13.

[27] Waterfield and King, p 58.

[28] Canterbury Museum Accession Book, 1891 to 1933, Canterbury Museum, p 65.

[29] The annual report for 1905 written by Acting Curator Charles Chilton reported that Hutton had *"ordered from Messers. Janson & Son, some insect cabinets and collections of foreign insects; these being prepared and will be sent out later on; by arrangement with Messers Janson & Son they have been paid for partly in cash and partly in duplicate specimens of natural history"*. The Canterbury College Annual Report, 1905, Canterbury Museum, p 12.

[30] Frederick W Hutton, *Guide to the Collections in the Canterbury Museum,* Second Edition, (Christchurch, Lyttelton Times, 1900).

[31] Ibid, p 181.

[32] Ibid, p 182.

[33] Edgar Waite, *Guide to the Collections in the Canterbury Museum,* Third Edition, (Christchurch, T E Fraser Printer, 1906), pp 161-162.

[34] Sally Burrage, 'Ancient Craftsmen of West Africa', *Press,* 28 January 1984, p 10.

[35] See Phillip J C Dark, *An Introduction to Benin Art and Technology,* (London, Clarendon Press, 1973), Plate 26, p 111; Augustus Pitt-Rivers, *Antique Works of Art from Benin* (London, Privately Printed, 1900), Plate 16, illustration 94 and 95, p 33.

[36] Dark, p7.

[37] Stylistically similar to a head illustrated by Pitt-Rivers, Plate 16, illustration 96 and 97, p 33.

[38] Dark, p 7.

[39] See illustrated in Ben-Amos (1995), plate 22, p 36.

[40] See Pitt-Rivers, plate 29, illustration 202 to 209, p 59; Ben-Amos (1995), plate 76, p 97.

[41] See Ben-Amos (1995), plate 70, p 89.

[42] Stylistically similar to an example illustrated by Pitt-Rivers, plate 46, illustration 356 and 357, p 93. See also Kate Ezra, *Royal Art of Benin: The Perls Collection in the Metropolitan Museum of Art,* (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992), pp 197-207; Ben-Amos (1995), illustration 82, p 103.

[43] Dorward, p 6.

[44] For a full review of bracelets see Ezra, pp 175-189.

[45] Ibid.

[46] See Ezra, pp 97-101; Pitt-Rivers, plate 25, illustration 73, 74, 75; plate 37, illustration 346, 347, p 37.

[47] See Ezra, pp 215-223.

[48] Ibid, pp 175-189.

[49] Ben-Amos (1995), p 98.

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DESCRIPTION OF OBJECTS IN THE COLLECTION

FIG 1: BRASS BELL
EA1976.772
Brass, 150 x 88 mm
Tapered rectangular brass body with suspension handle in a plain loop form, with an iron clapper suspended inside. Bells were worn by priests and at sacrificial and other ritual ceremonies.[46]

FIG 2: BRONZE WALL PLAQUE
EA 1977.470
Bronze/brass, 460 x 330 x 123 mm
Wall plaque with two almost identical full length court officials. The detailed rendering of the costume and regalia suggests the figures are directly associated with the royal court. The floral engravings on the main body of plaque are known as *olokun* designs and similar designs also appear on other objects and architecture associated with the royal court.

FIG 3: AMULET IN THE FORM OF AN ADZE
EA 1977.204
Bronze/brass, 35 x 17 x 4 mm
Small amulet or charm cast in the form of a miniature triangular adze. Suspension hole for possible wearing as a pendant or for attachment to court regalia.

FIG 4: AMULET WITH SURFACE DECORATION IN THE FORM OF AN ADZE
EA1977.211

Bronze/brass, 31 x 16 x 2 mm

Small amulet or charm shaped into the form of a miniature adze by cutting and filing from a piece of flat bronze, brass or *copper* recycled sheet rather than by casting. From the slightly erratic alignment of the two holes drilled through the body it is tempting to suggest that they were already part of the original 'scrap metal' from which the amulet was made. One face is decorated with a celestial star pattern of lines while the other has a carved geometric relief pattern. The holes could have been used for suspension as a pendant or for attachment to court regalia.

FIG 5: IVORY FIGURE FROM A SACRIFICIAL ALTAR
EA1977.203
Ivory, 40 x 53 mm
Carved ivory human figure possibly designed for use on a ritual altar or the apex of either a ceremonial hand-held 'clapper' or a chief's staff. Well defined facial features, seated with hands resting on knees, legs not depicted. The peg like base is clearly a functional feature.

FIG 6: IVORY CARVED HEAD
EA 1977.191

Ivory or bone, 67 x 25 mm

Possibly a figure designed for use on a ritual altar, or the apex of either a ceremonial hand held *clapper* or a chief's staff. Appears to represent a chief wearing the headdress and collar of the traditional costume called *pangolin skin* imitating the scales of the pangolin, or scaly anteater, an animal which curls up when in danger and thus becomes invulnerable.[49] The flat base has once had a peg like functional feature, as on EA 1977.203, but this has been cut off at some stage in order to allow the figure to stand upright on a flat surface. On stylistic grounds there is a possibility that this piece is Yoruba.

FIG 7: BRONZE FIGURE OF A WARRIOR
EA 1977.192

Bronze/brass, 86 x 18 mm

Figure of a warrior holding a dagger in hand. Well defined physical features and dress. It is possible that this figure was once mounted at the apex of a ritual dancing wand.[40] It appears to be too small to have been used as a figure attached to an altar centre-piece.[41]

FIG 8: HEAVY BRASS BRACELET
EA1977.165
Brass, 19 x 11 mm; 75 mm external diameter/65 mm internal diameter
Robust, heavy bracelet, cast with parallel inclined grooves giving the visual effect of a continuous spiral decoration.[45]

FIG 9: BONE ARMLET
EA 1977.166
Bone or ivory, 13 x 6 mm; 100 mm external diameter/81 mm internal diameter
Bone or possibly ivory armlet with carved geometric design, well worn through use.[48]

FIG 10: BRASS BRACELET
EA1977.167
Brass, 12 x 5 mm; 77 mm external diameter/65mm internal diameter
Plain brass bracelet, or possibly child's armlet, with simple parallel grooves the only surface decoration. The current 'twisted' shape of the bracelet suggests that it may have been forcibly removed from the wearer.[44]

FIG 11: BIRD OF PROPHECY SCULPTURE FROM APEX OF CHIEF'S STAFF EA1976.775

Bronze/brass, 122 x 125 mm

This fragment from a staff represents the 'bird of prophecy' with a kola nut in its beak. Although recorded as an emblem from a chief's staff it was more likely to have once been part of a ritual item frequently referred to as a 'clapper'.[42] These staffs commemorate a legend relating to *Oba* Esigie who reigned in the early sixteenth century. A bird of prophecy is said to have warned against going to war, the *oba* killed the bird and went on to victory and is said to have admonished his troops with the words, *"Whoever wishes to succeed in life should not heed the bird that cries disaster"*.[43]

FIG 12: IVORY WAR HORN
EA 1976.779
Ivory, 310 x35 mm
Side-blown trumpet or horn blown on ceremonial and ritual occasions. *Osun* specialists use these horns to announce that a ceremony is about to begin. Decorated with four sets of rings that encircle the tusk and two snakes carved along the length of the body.[47]

FIG 13: COMMEMORATIVE HEAD
EA 1977.468

Bronze/brass, 400 x 270 x 255 mm

Ritual head representing an *oba* with vertical wings either side, for use on a royal altar.[37] The base depicts examples of royal iconography including, leopard, cola nut, a severed cow's head, mudfish and an elephant, represented by a trunk. It is likely to date from c1817-1933.[38]

FIG 14: BRONZE KNIFE HANDLE
EA 1976.771
Bronze/brass, 110 x 26 mm
Handle from a sacrificial knife decorated with almost identical opposed faces (sometimes described as a janus configuration) with curled drooping moustaches. The figure is wearing a helmet and possibly represents a Portuguese/ European soldier. Used during rituals involving animal sacrifice associated with the royal altars.

FIG 15: IVORY STAFF / CLAPPER
EA 1977.778
Ivory, iron, 260 x 35 x 16 mm
Small, hand held ceremonial staff for use in rituals. Plain tapered ivory body, with carved human facial mask. Arms are represented by two moveable iron attachments secured with a bolt through the body. It is also possible that this object was used as a 'clapper' or rattle in religious ceremonies.

FIG 16: COMMEMORATIVE HEAD
EA 1977.469

Bronze/brass, 370 x 270 x 2452 mm

Ritual head representing an *oba* for use on a royal altar. This is very similar to a head in the British Museum.[35] The base depicts examples of royal iconography including, leopard, cola nut, a severed cow's head, mudfish and an elephant, represented by a trunk. It is likely to date from c1735-1816.[36]

FIG 17: COMMEMORATIVE HEAD
2005.12.1
Bronze/brass, 348 x 155 x 128 mm
Commemorative head for the altar of Queen Mother Iyobu of the Royal Court of Benin. Although attributed to the period 1900 to 1910, the head has stylistic similarities to an earlier head.[39] However 2005.12.1 has been cast without a decorated base, which possibly reflects a functional shift following the loss of royal patronage.