

The Fredric Wertham Collection

BUSCH-REISINGER MUSEUM, HARVARD UNIVERSITY

African Art

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Akan Brass Weights

Beginning in the fifteenth century, brass weights of figurative and geometric forms cast by the *cire perdue* or lost wax technique, and floral and faunal specimens cast in the direct cast method, were used by Akan traders of coastal West Africa (Ghana and Ivory Coast) for the exchange of gold dust. Along with other gold-weighting equipment (scales, gold dust boxes, measuring spoons, sieves, and blow-pans), weights were stored in a bundle of cloth and skin wrappings known as the *dja*. A trader would be familiar with the entire corpus of weights in his *dja*, with the mass each represented, and with the adages to which they referred. Periodic sacrifices were made to the *dja*, for the soul of the owner was thought to dwell within it, and its contents were passed from one generation to the next.

Much of the human imagery in gold weights captures ordinary people in action—climbing palm trees, carrying tools, bearing loads, etc. The geometric weights form a language system of ideograms which communicate spiritual, political, and mathematical messages. The figural weights were inspired by proverbs that refer to chiefs (their strength, wisdom, or abuse of power), family affairs and marriage, disputes over property, and the sagacity of judgments. Each weight was associated with a number of proverbs. The meaning of a weight was determined by its form (combination or reduction of iconic elements) and by its context (the selection of a proverb which was situationally defined). According to Hesketh, Dr. Wertham grew interested in the weights for their representation of proverbs.

Most of the weights in this collection are examples of production revival which began in the 1920s and 1930s. Some weights, including the geometric forms and the "snake devouring a lizard" (checklist no. 166), are older and exhibit signs of indigenous use (rounded edges and a heavily patinated surface). In modern Ghana and Ivory Coast, brass weights are still produced for sale to tourists. To satisfy Western demand for older weights, African traders distress new weights by tumbling them in sand and water, aging them in a corrosive bath of salt and vinegar, and applying a stain of potassium permanganate.

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BIRDS

- 137 Three small birds with outstretched necks, seated on a rectangular base.
2.2 x 3 x 2.8 cm
1987.122.9 / PM 6.88.20
- 138 Large, heavy rooster with comb and wattle; feathering indicated by incised lines. Considered the leader of all time-signalling birds, the rooster is the earliest riser. Proverbs about the rooster are told to one who breaks the established rules of social etiquette.
5.5 x 2.9 x 5.9 cm
1987.122.12 / PM 6.88.23
- 139 Large standing bird and two seated offspring.
4.9 x 5.3 x 5 cm
1987.122.15 / PM 6.88.26
- 140 Bird with head pointed toward back feathers. This image refers to the search for knowledge, to the importance of the past, or to one who procrastinates. A person desiring to give more thought to a particular matter might invoke the bird in an appropriate proverb.
2.7 x 2.6 x 3.9 cm
1987.122.16 / PM 6.88.27
- 141 Bird with comb holding fish in beak, surmounting a column holding four immature birds set in a tiered rectangular base. This column represents a hut pole documenting clan and family histories, and was used as a gable support for a funerary hut erected for a prominent individual.
6 x 2.6 x 3.5 cm
1987.122.32 / PM 6.88.43
- 142 Three small birds perched on the edge of a nest-shaped pedestal; the column terminates in a hexagonal base.
8.5 x 4.6 x 4.5 cm
1987.122.45 / PM 6.88.56
- 143 Small, single bird on base; incised designs on wings represent feathering.
1.8 x 3 x 2.7 cm
1987.122.50 / PM 6.88.61
- 144 Two courting birds on a raised lozenge-shaped base.
1.8 x 5 x 2.1 cm
1987.122.52 / PM 6.88.63



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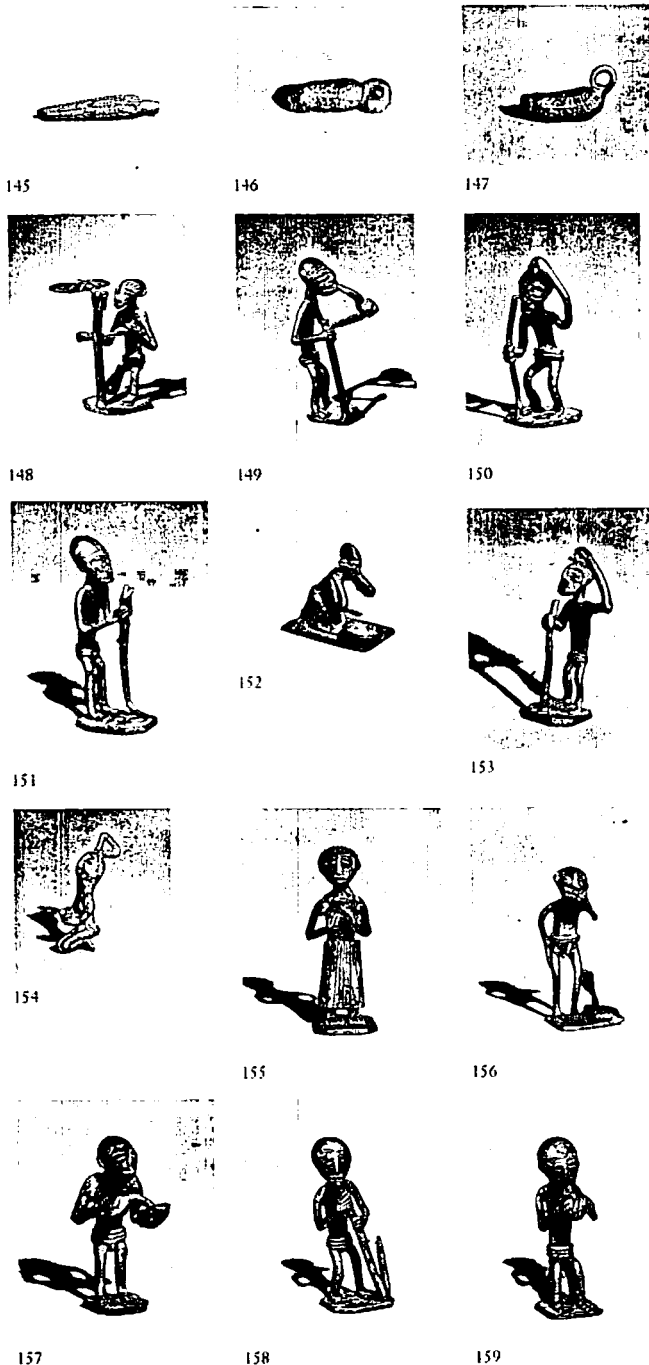


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FLORA (direct cast method)



- 145 Small ear of corn. "Marriage is not like corn." Before buying corn at the market, one pulls back the leaves in order to reveal a blemish. In marriage, however, a partner's imperfections are not always revealed until after the wedding ceremony. The proverb is spoken by a husband or wife to deplore the incompatibility in their household.
1.4 x 6.7 x 1.5 cm
1987.122.13 / PM 6.88.24
- 146 Peanut pendant. "Marriage is like a peanut; you must crack it to see what is inside," or, you cannot tell what marriage is like until you've been wed.
1.4 x 3.8 x 1.3 cm
1987.122.26 / PM 6.88.37
- 147 Peanut pendant.
2 x 1.9 x 3.7 cm
1987.122.39 / PM 6.88.50

HUMAN FIGURES

- 148 Man tapping a palm oil tree, balancing a shallow dish of gourd or coconut shell on his foot.
5.1 x 2.3 x 4.5 cm
1987.122.1 / PM 6.88.12
- 149 Elder male dressed in a banded loincloth, smoking a pipe, with one hand placed on a walking stick.
6.4 x 2.2 x 3.2 cm
1987.122.3 / PM 6.88.14
- 150 Bearded elder male wearing a loincloth, supporting a nut on his head, and carrying a walking stick in his other hand.
6 x 2.8 x 2.4 cm
1987.122.8 / PM 6.88.19
- 151 Elder male, dressed in a loincloth, strangling a serpent. "The snake is only so much rope once its head is grasped." The proverb alludes to dangerous powers that can be controlled once a vital area is seized.
6.3 x 2.1 x 2.6 cm
1987.122.23 / PM 6.88.34
- 152 Skirted woman kneeling forward with hands on back (probably washing), with a large basin or bowl in front of her.
4 x 2.3 x 4.5 cm
1987.122.24 / PM 6.88.35
- 153 Man wearing a banded loincloth, with one hand on his head supporting three small sticks, the other carrying a cane.
5.8 x 1.9 x 1.8 cm
1987.122.27 / PM 6.88.38
- 154 Pendant of small kneeling figure with hands raised in prayer.
4.5 x 1.1 x 2.3 cm
1987.122.33 / PM 6.88.44
- 155 Woman wearing a pendant, hands on her breasts; her skirt is decorated with incised designs which represent patterning.
6.2 x 2.3 x 2.1 cm
1987.122.42 / PM 6.88.53
- 156 Elder male with hand cupped over half of mouth (registering fear); a snake (probably a viper) is about to spring before him.
5.6 x 2.6 x 1.8 cm
1987.122.43 / PM 6.88.54
- 157 Figure of a man dispensing liquid from a calabash container into a shallow bowl.
5.7 x 1.8 x 2.3 cm
1987.122.44 / PM 6.88.55
- 158 Man about to play a large flute.
6 x 2.7 x 2.2 cm
1987.122.46 / PM 6.88.57
- 159 Man seated on a stool drinking from a fruit or vegetable.
5.8 x 1.9 x 2.3 cm
1987.122.47 / PM 6.88.58

160 Pendant figure of an elder male seated on an Asante stool, with both hands clutching his long conical beard.

7 x 1.7 x 2.4 cm
1987.122.48 / PM 6.88.59

161 Older aristocratic woman supports a pot with one hand, while holding a walking stick in the other; she wears a sleeveless dress with articulated straps; textile patterning is indicated by incised designs.

5.9 x 2.8 x 2.2 cm
1987.122.49 / PM 6.88.60

162 Male figure dressed in a loincloth, supporting a bowl and its contents on his head with one hand, while holding a branch of sugar cane with the other.

6.5 x 2 x 2.2 cm
1987.122.55 / PM 6.88.66



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REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS

163 Crocodile or serpent mounted on a four-tiered square base. "When a crocodile seizes something there is no force capable of making him give it back." The crocodile symbolizes the tenacity of a powerful chief, especially in the lake or lagoon regions.

1.9 x 8.7 x 3.6 cm
1987.122.11 / PM 6.88.22

165 Coiled snake (probably a boa). "When an elephant is killed it should be transported with a coiled cushion." Akan women and men carry head loads using a portage pad made of coiled rags or leaves. The coiled snake is like a giant portage pad which could be used to carry an elephant.

1.1 x 3 x 2.2 cm
1987.122.25 / PM 6.88.36

164 Freshwater turtle, its carapace divided with pronounced midrib and incised lines. The turtle is associated with femininity.

1.3 x 2.6 x 7 cm
1987.122.18 / PM 6.88.29

166 Snake devouring a lizard or frog, with incised lines replicating snake skin. "The cobra has caught the monitor lizard! The world is coming to an end." This is interpreted broadly to mean "Will wonders never cease!"

2 x 8 x 3.4 cm
1987.122.53 / PM 6.88.64 (color plate, p. 54)



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INSECTS

167 Scorpion with incised designs. The scorpion symbolizes friendship turned to enmity. Proverbs referring to the scorpion are invoked when one does not get the help expected from a friend.

2.5 x 2 x 4.3 cm
1987.122.10 / PM 6.88.21

MAMMALS

168 Antelope with twisted antlers and articulated ribs. Horns coming from the head symbolize thought.

4.2 x 2.1 x 5.3 cm
1987.122.2 / PM 6.88.13

169 Porcupine with exaggerated quills. "Even if one does not have a sponge with which to bathe, one's rear should never be rubbed with a porcupine."

2.5 x 7 x 1.9 cm
1987.122.4 / PM 6.88.15

170 Leopard consuming its prey (probably a reptile). "The panther's victim doesn't choose the path along which it is taken." The image evokes the total control of a chief over the subjects in his kingdom.

2.5 x 3.6 x 6.8 cm
1987.122.17 / PM 6.88.28

171 Leopard pendant with raised and incised designs on back. The leopard is a symbol of power, especially in the savannah region.

3.2 x 1.6 x 6.8 cm
1987.122.51 / PM 6.88.62



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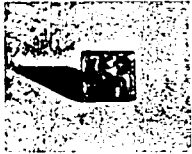
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GEOMETRIC FORMS

- 172 Small geometric weight bearing three horizontal bars.
1.1 x 1.7 x 1.5 cm
1987.122.5 / PM 6.88.16
- 173 Triangular weight decorated with subtractive design elements.
.8 x 4.2 x 3.9 cm
1987.122.14 / PM 6.88.25
- 174 Polygonal weight depicts a very worm gam-madion cross and two bars.
1.6 x 3 x 3.3 cm
1987.122.30 / PM 6.88.41
- 175 Geometric weight with gam-madion design. The cross turning to the left represents a seated female with her feet in front and her arms raised. The one turning to the right
- 176 Geometric weight with subtractive design pattern.
1 x 2.6 x 2.2 cm
1987.122.37 / PM 6.88.48
- 177 Geometric form with subtractive design elements, lead inserted in cavity to adjust weight.
1.7 x 2.7 x 1.5 cm
1987.122.38 / PM 6.88.49

FISH

- 178 Sawfish.
1 x 3.2 x 6 cm
1987.122.7 / PM 6.88.18
- 179 Oversized sawfish.
1.1 x 8.3 x 9.1 cm
1987.122.56 / PM 6.88.67

UTILITARIAN OBJECTS

- 180 Knife in sheath decorated with cross design and serrated edge.
.6 x 1.3 x 5 cm
1987.122.6 / PM 6.88.17
- 181 Oliphant or calling horn. Kings and chiefs possessed hunting and calling horns carved of ivory as well as bovine and antelope horns. The most important horns were decorated with human jawbones.
1.4 x 5 x 5.2 cm
1987.122.19 / PM 6.88.30
- 182 Oliphant or calling horn with articulated mouthpiece and mid-section; designs represent human jawbones.
1.5 x 2.3 x 5.7 cm
1987.122.20 / PM 6.88.31
- 183 Axe.
.4 x 2.3 x 4.8 cm
1987.122.21 / PM 6.88.32
- 184 Wrapped bundle of wooden sticks with insignia, representing a charm. Protective charms were placed in sleeping quarters, inside the thatching of a roof, on a tree in the domestic compound, at the crossing of two roads, or on one's person in a pocket or in hand.
1.2 x 1.1 x 3.5 cm
1987.122.22 / PM 6.88.33
- 185 Elephant tail flywhisk which symbolizes the king, the king's messenger, or the power of royalty.
1.6 x 6.1 x 3.7 cm
1987.122.28 / PM 6.88.39
- 186 Weight representing a knot. Elaborate knots were tied around the *dja*—the container for all the weights and gold weighing instruments. "A person who can untie this knot knows the secret of the *dja* (the sum total of human knowledge)." The knot refers to wisdom and informed speech.
.4 x 1.2 x 4.5 cm
1987.122.29 / PM 6.88.40
- 187 Undecorated saber with large protrusion on handle.
1.1 x 7.4 x 1.5 cm
1987.122.34 / PM 6.88.45
- 188 Axe.
.5 x 4 x 5.5 cm
1987.122.35 / PM 6.88.46

189 Rectangular shield. Used for combat with swords, shields were made of hide stretched over a rattan or wooden frame. Since the introduction of firearms, shields have lost their practical use and have served as ceremonial emblems in dance. "A damaged shield still has its wooden frame." This proverb refers to a deposed leader who still retains his good manners and social standing.
1.6 x 7 x 3.9 cm
1987.122.36 / PM 6.88.47

royalty. Most are stored in hide sheaths bearing the owner's distinctive emblem.
1 x 1.6 x 6.9 cm
1987.122.41 / PM 6.88.52

191 Ring with two *yimis*—a miniature version of the blacksmith's anvil/hammer used as an amulet.
1.2 x 3.5 x 4 cm
1987.122.54 / PM 6.88.65

192 Weight in the shape of an amulet. It represents a powerful object created to ward off misfortune, or to curry the favor of a chief.
1.2 x 3.5 x 4 cm
1987.122.57 / PM 6.88.68



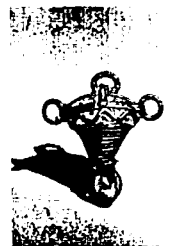
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Miscellaneous Pieces

193 Very heavy, large, anthropomorphic seated brass figurine holding knee with right hand and stick with other, with tongue hanging out and pronounced genitals.
6.1 x 3.6 cm
1987.122.40 / PM 6.88.51

194 Ivory carving in the Luba (Zaire) style. The ivory carving of a human figure was given to the Werthams by J.B. Neumann, the German art dealer who ran the well-known gallery in New York from 1924 onward.
8.5 x 2.7 x 4.2 cm
1987.124 / PM 6.88.69

Latin American Art

Prepared by Rosemary A. Joyce, assistant professor of anthropology, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology

195 Carved stone pendant
Mesoamerica
Monte Alban V period beginning ca. AD 950
Light green micaceous stone (greenstone, cultural jade)
Ovate plan, triangular section
One surface carved with crude human face, including lines above eyes representing a headdress
Pierced once on upper edge
3 x 2.3 x 1.2 cm
1987.126 / PM 6.88.70

The carved stone pendant is a Mixtec object from Postclassic Oaxaca. Both faces and full body depictions of greenish stone with crude carved details are generally identified as *penates*. They are characteristic of the Mixtec sites in the state of Oaxaca, Mexico during the time period called Monte Alban V. The *penates* have been suggested to represent deceased ancestors and, according to ethnohistoric documents, were tied into the hair of the deceased prior to burial. According to Hesketh, the pendant was given to Dr. Wertham around 1923 by the Harvard graduate Dr. Sylvanus Griswold Morley, the Maya expert of the period, who was active in the field from the 1910s through the 1930s.

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