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Beaded Crown (Adenla), unknown Yoruba artist

Arnold Lehman: Numbering in the millions, the Yoruba people of Nigeria and Benin are the largest ethnic group in all of sub-Saharan Africa. They are the ancestors of many African Americans today.

This intricately beaded crown was made for a Yoruba king, or *oba*. The face on the front is Oduduwa, the creator-god and ancestor of all Yoruba kings. Beneath him is a mesh-like veil through which the king would look out. Professor Rowland Abiodun explains the function of the crown:

Rowland Abiodun: The crown elevates the ruler to the height of a deity, *orisha*, while the veil protects the wearer from curses and all evil machinations that may be directed against him.

Arnold Lehman: At the top of the crown is *okin*, the royal bird. Next to him are four female figures.

Rowland Abiodun: They allude to the power of our mothers, without whose support the ruler's reign may be disastrous. The representation of two horsemen and attendant figures is symbolic of the ruler's wealth and success as a warrior.

Arnold Lehman: Centuries ago, a Yoruba crown would have been made with coral, which was extremely heavy. Beginning in the eighteenth century, glass beads were imported to western Africa and became objects of great prestige. The tiny glass "seed" beads on this crown were made in either Venice or the region of Bohemia in the modern-day Czech Republic. They are the exact same type of beads that Europeans traded with Native American peoples in the nineteenth century.

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