

**1050**

*Plaque, unknown Edo artist*

**Arnold Lehman:** This metal plaque once decorated the walls of the royal palace of Benin. The long hair and beard, along with the pleated skirt, buttoned shirt, helmet, and sword, identify the man on the plaque as a Portuguese warrior. But why would a Portuguese soldier be represented in the royal court of Benin?

**William Siegmann:** The answer to that has to do with the fact that the Portuguese were the most important trading partners of the Kingdom of Benin. At this particular period in time, the Portuguese were regarded as a positive asset to the Kingdom of Benin.

**Arnold Lehman:** Beginning in the late 1400s, Portuguese traders imported vast quantities of copper to Benin. Because copper was not available locally, brass—made from copper and zinc—was considered more precious than gold. Although brass castings had been made for centuries with copper imported from North Africa, the craft exploded with the arrival of Portuguese copper. The background of the plaque shows delicate floral designs. These probably represent silk textiles from China and Japan, another valuable Portuguese import.