



Ceremonial axe with janiform figure

Kambire, Sikire

Not on display

Title/Description: Ceremonial axe with janiform figure

Artist/Maker: Kambire, Sikire

Born: 1900 - 1950

Object Type: Implement

Materials: Iron, Wood

Measurements: h. 665 x w. 235 x d. 60 mm

Accession Number: 199

Historic Period: Early 20th century

Production Place: Africa, Burkina Faso

Cultural Group: Lobi

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

Ceremonial axes, batons and messenger staffs often serve to identify a chief's envoy or spokesman as well as being regalia or potential diplomatic gifts. Such objects may have the form of an everyday artefact but are distinguished by more or less elaborate decoration with engraved or chased blades, often of a non-functional nature. This one appears to have a female figure issuing from the socketed blade, while that attached to the shaft is male (see Leiris and Delange, 1968: fig. 316, for a very similar axe with missing blade; also Meyer, 1981: 127, 140).

This is recognisably a work by the acknowledged master of all Lobi carvers of this century, Sikire Kambire of Gaoua (just within the Burkina Faso border), who lived from 1895 till 1963. In the late 1920s Professor Henri Labouret, who was much impressed with his carving in the Lobi tradition, took him some Baule masks as an experiment, asking him to carve copies of them. Sikire liked the Baule style so much that he immediately used elements from it, notably the strict, almost architectonic arcading of the eyebrows, which are of even width, not pointed as in the Lobi way. He had many followers, though none who equalled his bold and sure hand.

His hand - though perhaps not his name - was known far and wide throughout all northern Ghana, where the chiefs were accustomed to keep fine carvings from which they made diplomatic gifts to other chiefs and to the more important colonial administrators on tour. After 1930 he probably produced more works for trade than for tribal use, yet this sculpture seems to have been made for

use by an African chief.

Margaret Carey, 1997

Entry taken from *Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection, Vol. 2: Pacific, African and Native North American Art*, edited by Steven Hooper (Yale University Press, 1997) pp. 112-113.

Provenance

Purchased by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury from S. Rasmussen in 1970.

Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.
