



Herbalist's Staff

Date

mid 20th century

Primary Maker

Nigeria, Yoruba people

Medium

iron

Description

This object reflects the ritual importance of iron in connection with transformation to, or communication with, the spiritual realm. Iron is made and worked by blacksmiths, some of whom, especially those in West Africa, are also ritual specialists. By means of fire they transform a material of the earth into tools and weapons associated with the letting of blood in hunting, warfare, and circumcision. Their knowledge is considered secret

and mysterious, and their products are essential to many activities of life, from farming to rites of passage. As is typical of iron altar devices, this example is made in the form of a staff so that they may be thrust into earthen altars. The Yoruba Herbalist's Staff is topped by a bird, the spirit mediator who aids in healing.

Dimensions

Overall: 49 3/4 x 9 x 2 3/4 in. (126.4 x 22.9 x 7 cm)