

Basic Detail Report



Cup for Palm Wine

Date

20th Century

Primary Maker

Lele

Medium

Wood

Description

Lele; Zaire, Palm wine drinking cup. Patinated dark sculpted wood in the shape of a head. Top rim smaller in diameter than head shape below. Close-knit cross hatch coiffure with raised border as outline. Handle protrudes back of head. Eyes squinting, nose semi-flattened, no nostrils; mouth narrow horizontal slit protruding slightly; beard directly below mouth and no wider, decorated with a series of incised lines. Neck acts as base of cup. Face extends from neck. Circumference at widest point. Kuba men used decorated cups such as these when they drank

palm wine. They were status symbols that proclaimed the owner's wealth and good taste among his drinking companions. These cups always portrayed males, and were usually restricted to males, to whom palm wine was more readily available than it was to women. There are reports-not confirmed-that these cups might have been used in the poison ordeal. A person suspected of using witchcraft was required to drink poison from such a cup. If he vomited up the drink, he was declared innocent. On the other hand, his death proclaimed his guilt and constituted his punishment. While some cups are in the form of a human head, others are carved with intricate geometric patterns. Each of these motifs has its own name and specific meaning, based upon certain objects or symbolic ideas (moon, sun, animal forms, horns, cowrie shells, etc.). Similar goblets are made by the Lele, Kongo, Pende, and Luba peoples, among others. African Masterpieces from the Musee de l'Homme, 1985:p.156 Segy, L., African Sculpture Speaks, 1975:p.232,236

Dimensions

Overall: 5 3/4 x 3 1/2 x 4 1/4 in.