

# Basic Detail Report

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## Chief's Crown

### Date

early to mid 20th Century

### Primary Maker

Yoruba

### Medium

Fabric, gold, shell, and glass beads

## Description

This is a Yoruba chief's crown. According to a legend of the Yoruba culture of western Africa, Oduduwa, the creator and first ruler sent his sixteen sons afar to establish sixteen separate kingdoms. He gave each son a beaded crown. For this reason, even to this day, Yoruba kings wear a beaded crown signifying the transference of legitimate power from their founding ancestors. Among the Yoruba and other cultures of West Africa, beadwork tended to be reserved for the adornment of the clothing and accessories used by the ruling class. This piece would have been worn by a Yoruba oba, or chief, and its motifs impress the legitimacy of their reign. The birds topping the chief's crown symbolize *aṣẹ*, a divine ability to effect change that is bestowed upon rulers by *Ọlọrun*, the Supreme Being in the Yoruba pantheon. Both beads and the practice of beading within Africa have ancient origins. The oldest dated beads globally were made about 72,000 years ago from shell, bones, and other natural materials. Jumping ahead about 71 millennia, beads made in the Middle East and Southern Asia first started appearing in South Africa by around the 7th century of the common era, brought by Arab and Swahili traders. As major bead-making centers were created in Europe, trade beads began to come to Africa by way of Portuguese and Dutch traders. Since the 16th century, there has been a steady trade of glass beads from Europe, with most today now being imported from countries like the Czech Republic.

## Dimensions

a: 11 1/2 × 7 × 7 in. (29.2 × 17.8 × 17.8 cm)