Baule Tribesman Mask with Pith Helmet



Baule mask of tribesman with pith helmet

The Baule are part of the Akan people who inhabit Ivory Coast and Ghana in West Africa. The Baule migrated westward from Ghana when the Asante, a neighboring group, rose to power. This tale of Baule breakaway is preserved in their oral traditions. During the Asante rise to power, the Baule queen, Aura Poku, was competing directly with the Asante king. When she lost, she led the Baule away from Ghana and to the Central Ivory Coast. Today, Aura Poku’s male descendant occupies the throne and palace she built, and is honored by the Baule as their nominal king.



The Baule are heralded for their mask making abilities

The Baule create art in several different media, including gold and brass casting, wooden sculptures, masks and figural carving. The mask is a primary art form in the Ivory Coast, and in turn, the Baule are heralded for their mask making abilities. Baule masks have many purposes, but they are used mostly for representative purposes, symbolizing deities, ancestors, and animal spirits. Masks are considered sacred, and as such only certain powerful individuals and families are permitted to own them, and only specially-trained individuals may wear them. It is believed each mask has a soul or life force and that when a person's face comes in contact with the inside of the mask, the person is transformed into the entity the mask represents. Masks are first and foremost disguises, and it can be surmised that this mask represents a Baule ancestor who was “urbanized” or worked in some official capacity because of the inclusion of the pith helmet, a decidedly European form of adornment.



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