

Would the Legends of African Kings Live On?



Photographs by Mike Peel (www.mikepeel.net).



The Benin Bronzes are a collection of more than a thousand investment castings from the Benin Empire in what is now southern Nigeria created between the 13th and 18th centuries. The relief plaques often celebrated a particular “oba” (king) in court or warriors following victory in battle.

The finely produced artworks didn’t receive international acclaim until 1897, when Britain, the imperial occupiers at the time, removed hundreds of pieces. The Benin Bronzes—something of a misnomer because many of the pieces are brass or other alloys—changed European views toward African culture and art. Naively imperialistic perceptions led many to believe Africans were incapable of such achievements, an assumption that proved false when research showed indigenous technological advancements led to the intricate castings. **MC**