

# Early African Art

By Anthony Sacco  
(Late African Art by Caroline DelVecchio)

- Sub-Saharan = Africa with the exception of the Mediterranean Coast (Egypt, Morocco, etc.)
- Mihrab = A niche that points to Mecca
- Finial = A crowning ornament
- Tonson = A permanent wooden beam that supports scaffolding

## Vocabulary

- In ancient times, Africa's wealth attracted merchants and convoys
- Phoenicians and Greeks settled Northern Africa
- Later, Romans continued Sub-Saharan trade

**Background**

## THEN ISLAM...

- Swept across Northern Africa  
(visited Sudan and Sub-Saharan Africa)
- Chronicled Mali, Songhay, and Ghana  
(sups wealthy)
- Financed Muslim expansion

**Background Cont.**

## EAST AFRICA...

- Maritime trade across Indian Ocean  
(China, Indonesia, Persia, and India)
- First European encounter was the Benin empire with Portugal in 1525  
(much smaller & less wealthy)

**Background Cont. Cont.**

## Nok

- One of the first iron users (smelters)
- Western Sudan (Nigeria)
- Earliest Sub-Saharan sculpture
  - Terra cotta humans & animals, 500-200 BCE
  - Ornamented (braided hair, beads, armlets)

**Civilizations**

## Igbo-Ukwu

- Eastern Nigeria
- Earliest Sub-Saharan bronze casting
- Burial chamber found
  - King buried seated with beads and tusks
  - Shrine w/ceremonial objects

**Civilizations Cont.**

## Ife

- South Western Nigeria (Began 800 CE)
- King called "Oni"
- Began sculpting brass in 1050 CE
  - Naturalistic faces
  - Sensitive skin modeling (natural transitions)
  - Scarification (parallel vertical lines on skin)
  - Used a now lost wax method

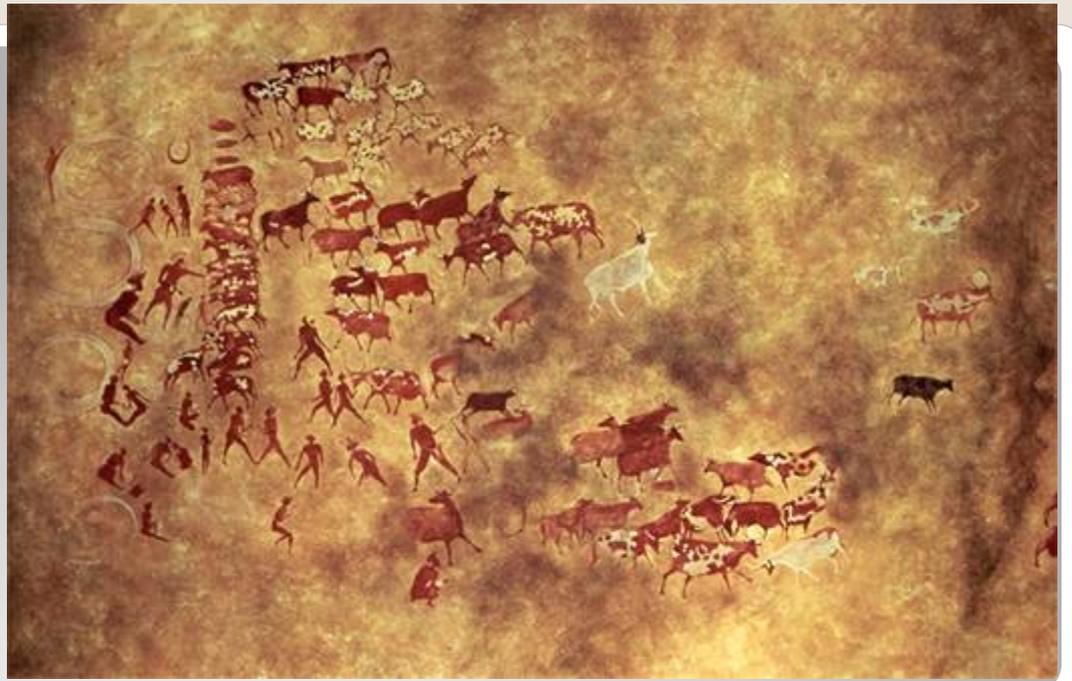
**Civilizations...**

**Ain't Dat Pretty?**



- Tassili-n-Ajjer, Algeria, 5000-2000 BCE
- From central Sahara (herding was the norm)
- Images of sheep, goats, and cattle
- People gathered in front of thatched houses
- Men herding animals
- Women preparing meal/caring for children

## **Cattle Being Tended**



- Horses can be seen in picture  
(from Egypt ~1500 BCE)
- Camels as well  
(from the East ~600 BCE)
- Cattle higher on wall create a sense of depth
- Likely sympathetic images
- Painted on across multiple millennia

**Cattle Being Tended Cont.**

- Benin culture, 16<sup>th</sup> century
- Brass casting
- First memorial casting of a ruler in Benin
- Casted by Iguegha, commissioned by the Oba
- Natural face, individualized elements (Braids, sad face ☹️, hair cap, collar)

## Memorial Head of an Oba



- High cheek bones
- Large, detached eyes
- Sharp, intimidating features (symbols of power)
- Roller-Collar neck
- Part of rare set of early African sculptures

**Memorial Head of an Oba Cont.**

- Edo Culture, 1400-1897 CE
- Semicircular altar with Benin brass heads  
(Recreation)
- Surmounted by elephant tusks
- Heads decorated with coral necklaces
- Larger heads = stylized
- Smaller heads = individualized

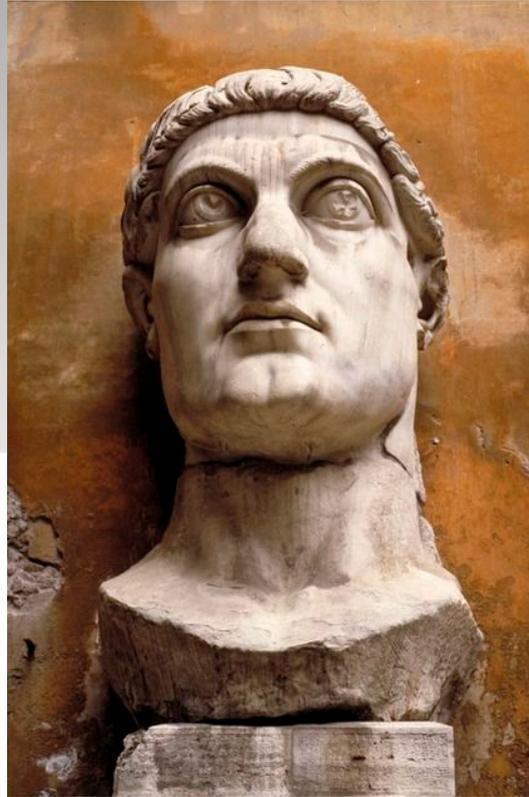
**Altar**



- Elephant tusks = power
- Smaller heads from earlier Benin period
  - Few beads, natural faces, thinly cast
- Larger heads from later Benin period
  - Stylized, tall beaded necks, thickly cast
  - Low relief carvings on bases
  - Growth in Oba's power and greater wisdom?

**Altar Cont.**

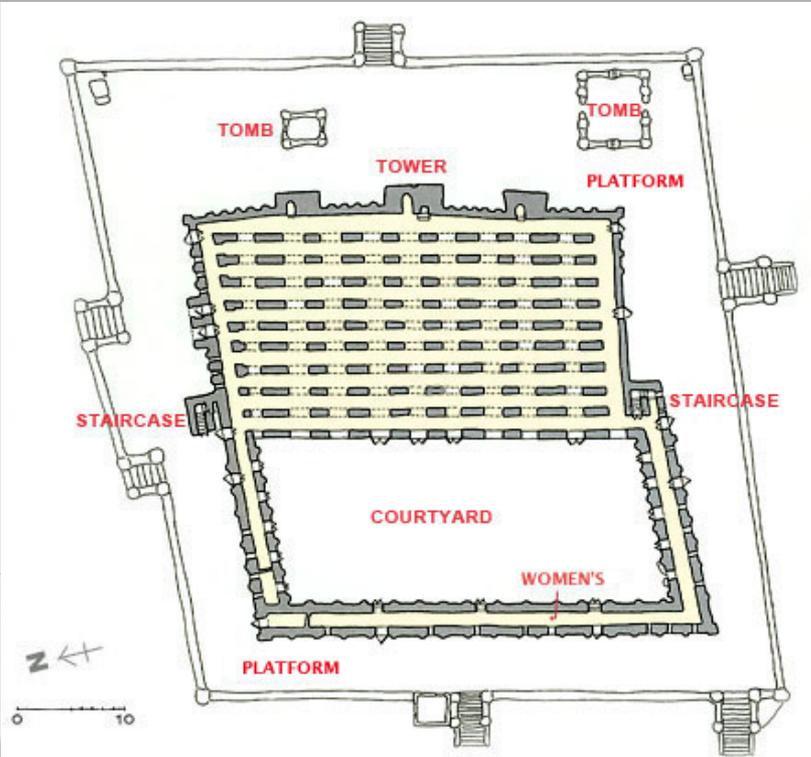
# Remember Constantine?



Stylized features, super huge, symbol of power...

- Mali, 13<sup>th</sup> century (1907 recreation)
- Constructed of adobe brick
- Eastern façade has three towers  
(central one contains Mihrab)
- The finials of each tower have ostrich eggs  
(fertility and purity)

## Great Friday Mosque



- Sides have tall, narrow, engaged columns  
(Buttresses anyone?)
- Tall walls + towers + engaged columns =  
VERTICAL EMPHASIS!!!
- Torons: wooden beams that project from  
the walls and provide support for  
scaffolding

**Great Friday Mosque Cont.**

# Check out dat **VERTICAL** **EMPHASIS!!**

But adobe  
looks like  
Play-Doh...



@torres

- [http://www.voyagesphotosmanu.com/Complet/images/peintures\\_rupestres\\_sahara.jpg](http://www.voyagesphotosmanu.com/Complet/images/peintures_rupestres_sahara.jpg)
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## Bibliography