

Spoon, Attributed to a workshop of the northern Guro area

- Côte d'Ivoire
- Guro
- 19th century
- Wood
- H.: 18.5 cm
- Formerly Josef Mueller collection (before 1939).
- INV. 1007-90

According to our sources, spoons were used by elderly Guro, both men and women, for eating rice with sauce. They seemed to have been rather common, especially in the north, but little is known about their specific meaning or connotation. As decorated spoons are hardly used anymore today, one

can only guess about the function of these tools. Most probably they were not destined for everyday use. Hans Himmelheber [\[1\]](#) tells of the chief of the village of Buafila, who 'had elevated his festive spoons in a basket to the rooftop and tied the string to the roof, so that his treasure be absolutely safe.'

At any rate, one has to attest to the extremely imaginative production of some spoon sculptures. Masterpieces were created in a vast spectrum of shapes. In 1917, a French colonial officer named Tauxier was the first to report the artistic value of beautiful spoons. Many spoons have buffalo horns carved at the end of straight handles, which are very often decorated with knobs and rims. Others have carved animal heads, present in Guro mythology as powerful and mighty beings. Apart from the strongly stylized buffalo head representations one can find elephants, monkeys and leopards sculpted at the end of the stem. The shovels are usually slightly oval or even round, sometimes showing the European prototype underlying their form. Interestingly, spoons with very long handles (as from some Dan workshops) exist as well. Nothing is known about their function.

[\[1\]](#) Himmelheber 1943.

Lorenz Homberger, *Arts of Africa and Oceania. Highlights from the Musée Barbier-Mueller, musée Barbier-Mueller & Hazan (eds.), 2007: p. 136.*