

# Royal Atiye Gong



- Côte d'Ivoire
- Atiye (or Akye)
- 18<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> century
- Brass
- H.: 31,5 cm
- INV. 1007-181

Does music induce sculptural forms? No, the forms of instruments obey other constraints. And yet African drums and idiophones seem to suggest the opposite. It is as if chords, modulations and inflexions have transmuted into statues, as if musical sonorities and notes have metamorphosed into works of art.

And this is what this gong from an area 90km northeast of Abidjan, on the border of the lands of the Agni and Atiye, two groups of the Akan people, so marvellously demonstrates. It is as if the work itself was a

suspended note, fixed in brass, and whose very form expresses the sound it produces.

There is nothing superfluous about the horn player decorating it. This is an aesthetic expression of the correspondence between the object's use as a percussion instrument, and the image surmounting it, a musician playing a wind instrument. Perched on the handle of the gong, which is held by the officiant, he is blowing the horn through a lateral and not apical mouthpiece, as is frequently the case in West Africa, notably for the ivory trumpets of the Sapi people in Sierra Leone (fifteenth and sixteenth centuries), some of which, curiously, are identical [1].

This instrument once played an important role in the ceremonies of the Atiye in southeast Côte d'Ivoire. Several people have confirmed me that gongs and trumpets like this were used during celebrations attended by the chief and his retinue, but I have personally never seen such an instrument [2], which confirms its age (eighteenth or nineteenth century).

Alain-Michel Boyer, in *Arts of Africa and Oceania. Highlights from the Musée Barbier-Mueller, Musée Barbier-Mueller & Hazan (éd.)*, 2007, p. 148.

[1] see Boyer, « Les ivoires des Sapi », dans Boyer 2007a, p. 51.

[2] Nor have any of my Atiye doctoral students.