



Smithsonian
National Museum of African Art

Benin Altar photograph, EEPA 1993-014

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives, National Museum of African Art
Title:	Ancestral Shrine, Royal Palace, Benin City, Nigeria
Identifier:	EEPA.1993-014
Date:	1891 May
Extent:	1 albumen print (cabinet card; black and white; 12.7 x 17.8 cm. (5 x 7 inches) (without mount))
Language:	English
Summary:	One cabinet card with an albumen photographic print by Cyril Punch of a Benin altar with two bronze heads supporting ivory tusks and framing a group of brass statues and bells, an inscription on the frame reading, "Juju altar, Benin City, May 1891.
Container:	Box 1

Administrative Information

Provenance

Purchased, 1992.

Processing Information

The mount and the albumen print have been separated for conservation reasons.

Restrictions

Use of original records requires an appointment. Contact Archives staff for more details.

Conditions Governing Use

Permission to reproduce images from the Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives must be obtained in advance. The collection is subject to all copyright laws.

Biographical / Historical

Cyril Punch was a British merchant who lived in the late 1800s and who often traded between Lagos and Benin.

Scope and Contents

A handwritten title on this albumen photograph reads: "Juju altar. Kings compound Benin City May 1891." This cabinet card is considered the earliest known photograph of a Benin altar and the only one known to exist prior to the British invasion of Benin in 1897. It shows the configuration of carved ivory tusks, commemorative heads, bells, a king figure with an eben (sword), and smaller bronze figures. The photograph was taken by Cyril Punch in 1891.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Types of Materials:

- Albumen prints
- Cabinet photographs

Geographic Names:

- Africa
- Benin (Nigeria)
- Nigeria

Container Listing

Box 1 EEPA 1993-0014: Ancestral Shrine, Royal Palace, Benin City, Nigeria, 1891 May
1 albumen print (cabinet print; 12.7 x 17.8 cm. (5 x 7 inches) (without mount))

[Image\(s\)](#)

Topic: Altars
 Nigeria

Genre/Form: Albumen prints
 Cabinet prints

Culture: Africa