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| Artist | Unknown |
| Title | **Soldiers and Attendants of Oba at the Palace Doors** |
| Date | The plaques date to the 1500s and 1600s. That period is known as the time of the warrior-kings and is considered to be the golden age of the Benin Kingdom. |
| Medium | Brass |
| Scale | 50 x 40 x 10 cm APPROX. |
| Scope | Ethnic identity pre 1850 |
| Style | Edo, Benin |
| Patron | Oba Esigie (about 1504-1550) |
| Location | The plaque originally hung alongside many others on posts throughout the palace of the Oba. |
| Function | Decoration of the Oba’s palace |

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| Formal features | |
| Composition | The composition uses a hierarchic scale as the figures range in size, due to their level of importance within the court and to the Oba. The composition also depicts community and the more important and larger figures appear to train the smaller ones in protecting the Oba. |
| Colour or texture | Brass is a combination of brass and copper, resulting in a rich brown colour today, but originally the material would have been extremely shiny, reflecting the divinity of the Oba |
| Light & tone | Used to create realistic figures that stand out against the background of the plaque. |
| Space & depth or relief | This is a relief cast as the figures stand out from the background of the plaque. Details of the tiles and the figures are most prominent, while the flowers motifs were carved into the medium before casting. |
| Details | Symbols of the python on the tiled roof and small leopards on the pillars illustrate the connection between the Oba and nature. Symbolic of Benin religious and ethnic identity. |

Influence from technological factors:

The kingdom of Benin dominated trade with Europeans on the Nigerian coast from the late 1400s to the end of the 1900s. When Portuguese traders arrived in Benin in the 1400s they brought brass bracelets, known as manillas, to exchange for pepper, ivory and slaves. The artists of Benin transformed this European brass into plaques to decorate the Oba's palace. When these plaques were first seen in Europe in the late 1890s they astounded art critics who couldn't believe that such technically accomplished sculptures were created by African artists.

Critical text quote:

Wole Soyinka, Nigerian poet and playwright – When I see a Benin bronze, I immediately think of the mastery of technology and art – the welding of the two. I think immediately of a cohesive ancient civilisation.

Some more details…

The rosette shapes that adorn the background of the plaque were possibly derived from Christian crosses brought by these European traders.

Distinctive coral beaded regalia reflects the guards rank as close to the Oba

Use or development of materials, techniques & processes:

Lost wax process; first, a more malleable wax version of the final brass work is made. It is then covered in clay and fired to harden the clay, removing the wax, which melts away in the process. Molten liquid brass is then poured into the clay mould. As the brass cools, it hardens, and the clay is removed, revealing the finished plaque.

Influence from cultural/social factors:

The first contacts between Benin and the Portuguese in the late 1400s, leading to trade relations until the mid-1500s and brought wealth to the kingdom. After the Portuguese, Benin traded with the Dutch and the British. European visitors to Benin were impressed by the city, the king and his court; describing the size, scale and magnificence of the city.

Image: 

Influence from political factors:

The empire was ruled by a regent called the Oba. Today, the Oba of Benin is still respected in Nigeria; he is the most revered traditional ruler in Nigeria though his powers are largely ceremonial and religious. The capital of the Benin Empire was Edo, now known as Benin City in what is now south-western Nigeria.