

AFRICAN PASSPORT MASKS



Before there were paper passports, Africans used colorful masks to identify their tribes or countries of origin when traveling across the continent.

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All the tribes or countries identified themselves with their own special colors and symbols, much like our sports teams do today.

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Masks for men and women were slightly different in shape and size, expression and detail. Men looked generally more bold and strong, women more graceful and beautiful.

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In addition to colors, countries incorporated local animals into their masks, similar to the way we have state and national birds and animals. This one has a trunk like an elephant.

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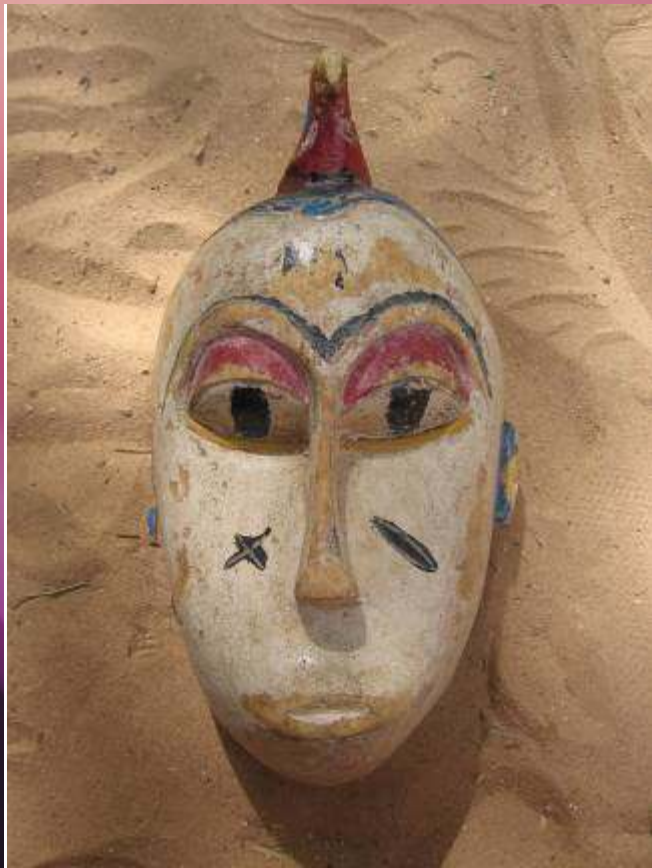
This mask has a small figure at the top in between two goat horns. This was a messenger mask. The triangle at the bottom is a messenger symbol.

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This mask shows gracefulness and symmetry in the curved goat horns at the top and double swan shapes at the bottom. Long ago it would have been used by a woman traveler.

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The cheek marks on this mask are scarification. Some tribes still beautify themselves by permanently scarring their skin, much like tattoos, but slightly raised.

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This mask has a small blue bird on top of the head and symmetrical scars on the cheeks. It would have been used by a man traveling long ago.

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The eyes of African masks are very expressive. Some eyes are open wide, some are narrowed, and others are heavy lidded or only partially open.

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Here is another mask with an elephant on it, this time with the head on top, ears on the sides and tusks at the bottom. Not all the wood on this mask is painted. Some is left natural.

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With what you have just learned about passport masks, what intelligent guesses can you make about the traveler that used this one once upon a time?