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Unidentified artist
Nigeria, Yoruba culture
Ogboni/Osugbo Rattle, late 19th century
copper alloy
Charles and Isabel Eaton Fund, 2020.24.2

About the Art

- This double-sided, hand-held rattle would have been used in the rituals of the Ogboni Society of male and female elders, dedicated to Onile, the Yoruba god of the earth and sea. Traditionally, these elders play important roles in matters of government.
- On top of the staff is an image of the serene, wise face of an elder. His headgear includes not only the canonical snail shell-like cap symbolic of transformation and renewal, but also what appears to be a European style crown and framed by serpentine forms.
- The base of the staff includes a composite figure that brings together a human head, a large bird (signifying metaphysical power to create) and a fishtail (alluding to Onile's dominion over the sea.)