



20th century

Wood and pigment

Height: 17 1/4 inches (44.5 cm)

CÔTE D'IVOIRE (IVORY  
COAST), TOUMODI  
REGION, BAULE CULTURE

## LOOKING QUESTIONS

What is this? What do you think it is for?

Where do you think it was made?

What do you think it was made of?  
How was it made?

This stool has two parts.  
What do you see on the top?  
The bottom?

What is the leopard holding in his mouth? Does the leopard look strong or weak? Why?

What could the leopard holding the smaller animal symbolize?

What kind of designs do you see on the top section?

Do you think this object was made to be used as a stool or to be displayed? Why?

What would it feel like to sit on it?

## LEOPARD STOOL

The Baule (baw-lay) people who live in the Côte d'Ivoire (coat dee-voir) (Ivory Coast), a country in West Africa, carved and painted this stool. It is unusual because it has two parts: on top, a golden stool whose legs are covered with designs similar to those found in kente (ken-tay) cloth weavings; below, a powerful, spotted leopard who stands squarely on all four paws, carefully holding a small animal in its mouth. The smooth, large forms of the leopard's back and tail make a sturdy, **horizontal** support for the smaller, elegant stool with its gracefully curving seat and intricate designs. The leopard is the "king of the forest," and this leopard communicates a king's power to kill as well as his ability to be gentle and compassionate—he is not eating or harming the animal held between his teeth!

Before the twentieth century, West African kings and important members of their courts commissioned stools for ceremonial use. According to some of these cultures' beliefs, their souls were transferred to their stools when they died and the stools were kept in special shrines. In similar fashion, kente cloth made in Ghana (gahn-nah), a West African country, was made solely for kings. Because each kente pattern expresses a unique proverb or idea, the king wore patterns that communicated specific messages he wanted his people to know. Over time, the production of both stools and kente has become commercial and more widespread. Today, nonroyal Africans as well as African Americans often collect and display stools like this one to honor their African heritage and identity and for the sense of social status they confer.

Philadelphia Museum of Art: 125th Anniversary Acquisition. Gift of William C. Bertolet, 2000-159-1