



Chief's regalia (ring)

Not on display

Title/Description: Chief's regalia (ring)

Object Type: Ornament, Regalia

Materials: Bronze

Measurements: l. 90 x w. 24 x d. 24 mm

Accession Number: 927f

Historic Period: 16th-19th century

Production Place: Africa, Mali

Cultural Group: Dogon

Credit Line: Purchased with support from the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Art Trust, 1986

The exceptional group (927a-j) of cire perdue (lost wax) ornaments was purchased as being 'Dogon chief's regalia, Mali. Found in the lower falaise [cliff] of Bandiagara. Site - village of Irrele [?'Tireli]'. There is no certainty that the ten pieces form a group, since they are an unmonitored find; in the absence of comparative material from scientific excavations their age and context cannot be established with any certainty.

The ring (f) may perhaps be later than the other pieces; file marks on the sword scabbard suggest a date within the last century or so. Laude (1973: no. 77) illustrates a ring similar to (g), which he describes as 'in the form of a skullcap(?)'. It is larger in finger diameter than (f).

When a *hogon*, who is a priest of the cult of Lébé, and a priest-ruler of the Dogon, dies, copper rings are put on his fingers and arms. These belong to Lébé, who is particularly associated with copper, a sort of life essence, and are later taken off and given to the next *hogon* but one. 'Every Hogon had had the rings in his possession while his predecessor held office. He is impregnated with copper. He is like copper...' (quoted in Griaule, 1965 : 120). While copper is the metal specifically named, perhaps it is to be read as copper alloy, and therefore many, if not all, of the ornaments in this assemblage may have belonged to a *hogon*; in such a context the symbolism detectable in design and decoration is wholly appropriate.

Margaret Carey, 1997

Entry taken from *Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection, Vol. 2: Pacific, African and Native North American Art*, edited by Steven Hooper (Yale University Press, 1997) pp. 106-108.

Provenance

Purchased by the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia from Merton Simpson Gallery, New York on the advice of Robert Sainsbury in 1986 out of funds provided by the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Art Trust.
