



Ring with figure on horseback

Not on display

Title/Description: Ring with figure on horseback

Born: 1500 - 1900

Object Type: Jewellery

Materials: Brass

Measurements: h. 65 x w. 24 x d. 52 mm

Accession Number: 202

Historic Period: 16th century, 19th century

Production Place: Africa, Mali

Cultural Group: Dogon

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

Although representations of horsemen are fairly common in Dogon art, the country is unsuited to horses; indeed, the Dogon fled the Mossi cavalry to the refuge of the Bandiagara cliffs.

Perhaps we have in this ring an allusion to the myth of the Primordial Blacksmith, the ritual thief who brought fire to mankind on earth by stealing a piece of the sun and hastening down a spiral path on the rainbow. The *nommo* remaining in the sky attacked the Blacksmith by hurling firebrands at him, which he warded off with the skin of his bellows, which was transformed into a shield embodying a piece of the solar essence, so that it became fireproof. The rider's shield could well refer to this, since a whirling copper spiral propels the female sun (Griaule, 1965: 20, 71) and 'the sun is . . . surrounded by a spiral of copper with eight turns' (quoted in Griaule, 1965: 16). The 'spear' could be the thief's crooked stick.

Such rings, all cast by the *cire perdue* (lost wax) process, probably belonged to Dogon elders (see Fisher, 1984: 116, fig. 1; 117, fig. 6).

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) p. 109.

Provenance

Purchased by Lisa Sainsbury from H. Reisser as a gift for Robert Sainsbury in 1967.

Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.
