



## Chief's regalia (armlet)

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**Not on display**

**Title/Description:** Chief's regalia (armlet)

**Measurements:** w. 96 x h. 40 x d. 83 mm

**Accession Number:** 927j

**Historic Period:** 16th-19th century

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

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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.

A pair of armlets, (i) and (j) appear to be made of brass and are only distinguishable by the central

disc ornament on (i), and a slight different in size.

When a *hogon*, who is a priest of the 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.

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## **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.

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