

The British
Museum



Casting Civilisations

The Art of Bronze Making in
China and Nigeria



British Museum, Room 3

FREE

*Sino-British Fellowship Trust
Aall Foundation*

Igbo-Ukwu



Bronze twisted manilla ornament
(AF1956,15.4)



Bronze pendant in the shape of a human head
(AF1956,15.1)



Bronze rams head pendant
(AF1956,15.2)

Igbo-Ukwu is an African Iron Age archaeological site from the 9th century AD located near the modern town of Onitsha in South-Eastern Nigeria. They are the ancestors of the present day Igbo people. Igbo-Ukwu was a 'freetown' where previously enslaved people were allowed to live. In 1938 a group of bronze objects were discovered by construction workers, the site was later professionally excavated by Thurston Shaw in 1959–60. Further discoveries were made during the excavation by Shaw, including the remains of an adult male seated on a wooden stool accompanied by the bodies of his five attendants. He was adorned with fine clothing as well as other objects of value (see images to left).

The inhabitants of Igbo-Ukwu had a flourishing metal working culture which has been carbon dated to the 9th century AD. They were the earliest coppersmiths in West Africa and employed the use of lost wax casting techniques to create the desired shapes.

Objects such as these were often used by royalty in their daily lives. This is underscored by the fact they were discovered in graves to be used in the afterlife.



Bronze Ding

Found in China

Zhou Dynasty (1100BC-1001BC)

Height: 21.9 cm

Purchased by the British Museum in 1973

1973,0726.2

Bronze bowl

Igbo Ukwu, Nigeria, AD 800s-900s

Discovered in the village of Igbo Ukwu, this bowl shows the unique design and alloy composition of bronze objects from this area of West Africa. Differing from Ife and Benin designs practices, the surface of the bowl is adorned with rich surface decorations of shapes and dots overlaid with thread, pellets and spirals.

Bronze bowl found in 1938 in Igbo Ukwu, south eastern Nigeria, donated by F W Carpenter

