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Unveiling Igbo Ukwu's Ancient Currency: *The Manilla's Significance in Pre-Colonial Igboland*

By Chuka Odike

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FEATURE
IMAGE

“A manilla, a form of currency, from around the 9th century, found at Igbo Ukwu”. On display at the British Museum

Article image · caption retained from the published Ozikoro article



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The manilla was a form of currency widely used in West Africa, including Igboland, particularly during the pre-colonial and early colonial periods.

The discovery of a 9th-century manilla at Igbo Ukwu sheds light on the sophisticated economic systems of ancient Igboland. Manillas, copper or bronze bracelet-shaped currency, facilitated trade and wealth accumulation in West Africa, particularly among the Igbo people. These “money bracelets” played a vital role in Igbo commerce, social exchanges, and cultural practices.

Manillas originated from European brass imports, adapted by Igbo craftsmen to create a standardized currency. This innovation enabled efficient trade, solidifying Igboland's position in regional commerce. The use of manillas persisted during the colonial era, demonstrating the resilience of Igbo economic traditions.

Manillas are bracelet-shaped pieces of copper or bronze, often described as “money bracelets,” and they were an important medium of exchange in the region.

Manillas symbolized wealth, status, and social standing within Igbo society. Their exchange facilitated:

1. Bridewealth payments
2. Trade agreements
3. Ritual offerings
4. Symbolic gestures of respect

Manillas played a significant role in the economic and social life of the Igbo people. Their use as currency and in cultural exchanges reflected the dynamic nature of trade and wealth accumulation in Igboland before the full integration of Western monetary systems.

1. Confirms Igboland's ancient economic complexity 2. Highlights regional trade networks 3. Provides insight into pre-colonial Igbo culture

Isichei, E. (1976). The Igbo people. London: Heinemann.

Ugwu, A. (2009). Igbo history and culture. Onitsha: Africana Publishers.

Nnoli, O. (1978). Igbo nationalism and the Nigerian crisis. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chuka Odike

I'm a dedicated civil engineer with a passion for infrastructure development and community empowerment. With a strong background in engineering, my work focuses on creating sustainable solutions for urban and rural development projects. Outside of my professional career, I'm deeply interested in Igbo history and culture. I actively explore ways to impact society by using historical lessons to inspire and educate others about the rich cultural heritage of the Igbo people, aiming to bridge tradition and modern development.



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