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Okpogho and Okpoho: *Igbo Heritage through Traditional Brass and Copper Adornments*

By Chuka Odike

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FEATURE
IMAGE

Coiled copper or “snake manilla” currency from the Igbo area, used in old times throughout what became Eastern Nigeria before the enforcement of the use of the British West African pound by the

British colonial administration.

Early 20th century, Minneapolis

Smithsonian Institution

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The general name for brass and copper rods in Igbo is okpogho or ikpeghe. These coiled 'snake manilla' rods could form part of a bridewealth payment and could be, as modelled in this photo, used as jewellery. Photo: @Beyonce by Tony Duran for Flaunt Magazine, July 2013.

Okpoho refers to traditional brass or bronze bracelets commonly worn by the Igbo and other ethnic groups in Nigeria. These bracelets are symbols of wealth, status, and heritage.

The Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria have long used brass and copper rods, called okpogho or ikpeghe, as symbols of wealth, heritage, and social status. Traditionally, coiled brass bracelets, often

referred to as okpoho or “snake manilla,” held significant cultural value as jewelry and currency. These rods were not merely decorative; they played essential roles in social rituals, including bridewealth payments, where a groom’s family would offer brass rods to the bride’s family as part of the marriage exchange, underscoring the object’s value as both an adornment and currency.

The okpoho bracelets, crafted from brass or bronze, symbolize ancestral heritage and prosperity among the Igbo, with similar usage seen in neighboring ethnic groups. The rods were widely traded throughout what is now Eastern Nigeria and held a prominent place in local economies before the British colonial administration replaced indigenous currency systems with the British West African pound in the early 20th century. These traditional forms of wealth symbolized continuity with Igbo ancestors and local identity even amidst colonial economic transformation

She was indeed been spotted wearing this, it reflects her ongoing interest in African culture and fashion. Beyoncé has often highlighted African elements in her work, particularly in albums like *The Lion King: The Gift* and through her fashion choices, which embrace African artistry and traditions.

Modern-day fashion has seen a revival of these African adornments, with figures like Beyoncé incorporating African-inspired elements into her work. Her choice to wear an okpoho-inspired bracelet in a photoshoot by Tony Duran for *Flaunt Magazine* in July 2013 reflects an homage to African artistry. Beyoncé’s engagement with African aesthetics, particularly in projects like *The Lion King: The Gift*, underscores the broader cultural significance of these traditional items, connecting global audiences to African heritage through fashion and music.

The historical and cultural importance of these brass and copper ornaments continues to resonate today, with collections like those at the Minneapolis Institute of Art preserving these artifacts as a testament to Igbo craftsmanship and traditional African currencies.

Duran, T. (2013, July). Beyoncé for Flaunt Magazine. Flaunt Magazine.

Minneapolis Institute of Art. (n.d.). Coiled copper or “snake manilla” currency from the Igbo area.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chuka Odiike

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 explores 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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