

Afikpo oral tradition claims that there exists a dump of bronze/brass/copper objects in the Ogwugwu valley. The spot is very sacred to the people and my attempts at locating the exact place did not get the necessary support from the local population. The bronze objects purport to have been abandoned by the *Ego* (the putative ancestors of present-day Ugwuagu and Amizu communities in Afikpo). In addition, the burial of a one-time chief, Okorie Chukwu, of Uzuakoli in Imo State is claimed by the elders to contain numerous burial goods including some bronze/brass objects. This site was brought to our notice by the incessant letters of one Mr. Akwani who asserted that there exist some royal tombs in Uzuakoli which might yield valuable archaeological information. After the usual survey and consultations, we were ready to test-excavate one of the chambers. But to our surprise, an explosive politicking ensued immediately and we were forced to abandon the investigation. There are, however, many garbage dumps and mounds which hold plenty of promise for archaeological investigation in Uzuakoli. The feuds are now over and we hope to start investigating these mounds as soon as we get enough funds.

This discussion, however, centres around a few bronze objects to which our attention was drawn in Ihiala about 40 km south of Onitsha. The informant (Mr. Ifebi – an Estate Management Consultant) indicated that somewhere in Okohia village in Ihiala, there were a few objects which might interest an archaeologist. We set off immediately, and after about a 15-minute drive, we arrived at a mud-walled, thatched house situated approximately 3 km west of the Onitsha-Owerri road. Luckily enough, the owner of the house was at home. Mr. Ifebi introduced me briefly and then asked him to show me “those objects.” After some bargaining, he brought out five heavy metal objects. Fascinating as the objects were, I did not fully appreciate their significance, until he told the story of how he came upon the artifacts about 20 years ago.

According to Mr. Ifebi, he and his helpers were digging laterite for the purpose of building the walls of the very house in which we were. At a depth of nearly 2 m (by his own estimation), they started digging up ash-like material and soon, numerous objects like these came to view. Immediately, his neighbours and others who came by helped themselves to save as many of the objects as they could. They thought that these objects were protective charms, and some were sent to relations living far away.

At this point, we went to the area of the ditch, which is now filled in. From Mr. Ifebi's answers to our questions, it became clear that the ash-like material continued south, east, and north of the ditch, but once they removed those obstacles in their way, they continued with their work. He does not remember whether there were other objects, e.g., bone, cloth, wood, beads, etc. in association with the bronzes. It is very likely that we may find *in situ* some more objects in the undisturbed area. Judging from the rate at which new buildings are presently constructed in the area, it becomes very necessary to expedite the excavation of the site before it is entirely covered by permanent structures.

This object (Fig. 1) is aesthetically the most exquisite of the five. It is an effigy of a double-headed python. The body decoration is suggestive of production by the *cire-perdue*

### The Artifacts

Fig. 1: A double-headed python



(1.5 kg; total length: 42.5 cm)

Figs. 2 and 3: Spiral coils



(2.7 kg; total length: 2.16 m)

method of casting. It has composite motifs, combining zig-zag, serpentine and straight lines, as well as geometric patterns.

Both spirals have expanded terminals at both ends. In Fig. 2 seven coils are shown sandwiched between the terminals, and in Fig. 3 five coils are shown. The approaches to the terminals are conical, with the thickest sides of the cones ending in the expanded terminals. Each is decorated with an intricacy that suggests the *cire-perdue* method of production. A combination of fine diagonal lines and chevron-like patterns is present. At the proximal end of the decorations a diamond shaped motif stands out with fine diagonal lines executed on it. In Fig. 2 the broad surface of the terminal is further decorated with a cruciform pattern also intricately decorated with diagonal lines.