

Basic Detail Report



Currency (Boloko)

Date
19th Century

Primary Maker
Song Meno

Medium
Copper

Description

Copper, the red gold, was scarce and became an element associated with leadership and wealth. Copper pieces became a sign of prestige among the Song Meno and the richness of the element became essential in social structure. Though other forms of currency were attached to symbolic meaning with ceremonial roles and religious significance, copper made currency took on a fundamental role with its ability to purchase vital necessities. For example, with copper currency people had the ability to buy women, a necessity to sustain life. A woman preserved a person with a high level of value in her different roles. A wife could bear heirs, a sister could help sustain the land, and a slave could do daily chores. Still, copper also could be regarded in its ornamental, commercial, religious and martial value. Copper currency was fashioned into many shapes. The Boloko was a copper currency piece used for rare but important commercial transactions in central Africa. The U-shaped rods had splayed ends and were the favorite currency in the Congo from 1900-1950. The Nkutshu blacksmiths who made them traded them with their neighbors, the Basongo Meno, a group of Mongo origins, in exchange for copper mineral. The Basongo Meno used them in the purchase of slaves, big animals, and in dowry payments. To the Nkutshu, they were known as the Konga or Kunga. To the Basongo Meno, they were known as the Boloko or Okano. One Boloko would equal the value of one male goat or more. Two Boloko would buy a male slave, three would buy a female slave. Ten Boloko would buy a wife.

Dimensions

Overall: 14 1/2 x 8 3/4 in. (36.8 x 22.2 cm)