



Spatula Currency (Parapare)

Date

19th Century to early 20th Century

Medium

Copper

Description

The vernacular names of this object depend on the local dialects of Nigerian tribes. Copper was one of the most important economic materials to the western and central African societies of the 19th and 20th centuries. Currency was made from the mineral constantly, displaying various shapes and forms. Copper, the red gold, was scarce and became an element associated with leadership and wealth. The richness of the element became essential in social structure. Though 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. In this piece, copper takes a spatula like form with two flat ends with a bent center. Though the piece is not extravagant, the material of the item made it valuable and with this value came attached commercial use.

Dimensions

Overall: 3 x 1 3/4 x 8 3/8 in. (7.6 x 4.4 x 21.3 cm)