



Katanga Cross Currency (Handa)

Date	19th Century to early 20th Century
Primary Maker	Kasai
Medium	Copper

Description

Katanga was a province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo that was rich in copper mining. No other regions rivaled the copper deposits of Katanga and as a result, copper ingots, called Katanga crosses, were shaped into the form of an X and were very important to the currency of the Upper Congo in the 19th and 20th centuries. These crosses became so engrained into the economy and identity of the region that they became an emblem on coins and flags of the independent state of Katanga before the region was forcefully reunited back into the Congo in 1963. In 8th century central Africa, H-shaped copper ingots were cast with perfect angles. As the use of this currency evolved, sizes varied. However, by 15th century two shapes had become the predominant form for the money. In the southeastern Congo the currency was shaped into a cross, being called St. Andrew’s cross. In eastern Katanga, H-shaped ingots remained until the 18th century. Later came larger X-shaped crosses and these items became the norm. These larger Katanga crosses also characteristically had ribs across the center. These crosses were the principal currency of Katanga from 1850s to the 1920s. Katanga crosses were traditionally molded by chiefs. The molten copper would be poured into sand molds, shaped using the artisan’s hands. Later, tin was added to the mold as well, forming a shinier variety of bronze that was more accepted than pure copper. The value of Katanga crosses varied according to the locals. These crosses were never refused as payment as they could be a store of wealth. As currency, they were typically used for bride price and could be used for tributes.

Dimensions

9 5/8 x 9 5/8 x 2 in. (24.4 x 24.4 x 5.1 cm)