



Throwing Knife Currency

Date

19th Century

Primary Maker

Lakka/Kapsiki/Falli

Medium

Iron, rubber and cloth

Description

This is a throwing knife made from iron, rubber and cloth from the 19th century Kapsiki culture. Throughout Africa numerous currencies were historically crafted from an array of mediums. One of these currency forms was the throwing knife. It has a widespread usage throughout Central Africa. The shape of African throwing knives varies widely from culture to culture. There are five different shapes of throwing knife, each roughly resembling letters

of the alphabet: F, Z, Y, E and I. It is believed that the earliest iteration of these throwing knives—shaped like the letter F—arrived in Central Africa from Libya by way of the Sahara, making its first stop among the peoples of Chad. With African iron smelting now estimated at being as old as 1000 BC, various forms of iron currency were created across the continent. Iron came in multiple qualities, with the finest and oldest throwing knives crafted from native smelted iron. Exchange rates fluctuated over time, but the value of throwing knives was immense. In some cases, a single throwing knife could be exchanged for a bride. These knives would commonly be owned by chiefs as signifiers of wealth and were preserved as heirlooms and passed down through generations. Lower quality iron scrap metal introduced to Africa in the early 20th Century was also eventually used for throwing knives. These could be extremely deadly, but the quality of metal did not carry the capacity to have quality ornamentation worked into it. The iron was still worth more as a money than a weapon. Shaped into standardized weights, with standardized forms informed by the region, these were optimal exchange items. Throwing knives could be purely utilitarian, ornate enough to only be used as weapons as a last resort, or as a standardized currency too light to be thrown. The most utilitarian shape for a throwing knife was the F-shaped knife, which when thrown like a baton could take off a leg at 20 meters.

Dimensions

Overall: 5 3/8 x 24 1/8 in. (13.7 x 61.3 cm)