

Basic Detail Report



Leg Band Currency (Konga)

Date

19th Century

Primary Maker

Mongo

Medium

Bronze

Description

Before standardized coinage in sub-Saharan Africa, regions used metals shaped into varying objects as their currency and repositories of wealth. These objects could take the shape of useful items such as hoes, blades or knives. The currency also took dramatic shapes to exhibit the mastery forging of the African blacksmiths. Still, much of the currency was shaped into wearable pieces to exhibit the wealth and social standing of an individual. The Konga (or Bakonga), made in Zaire, or modern day Democratic Republic of the Congo, is an example of wearable currency that came in the form of a leg band. The Mongo people, a subgroup of the Ekonda who lived in a central part of the Democratic Republic of Congo, were great experts in metallurgy and are known for making the heavy currency through pouring the metal into a puddle mold on the ground. The blacksmiths worked as the material cooled, curving the flat piece into a circular shape by flexing it around a wooden trunk, or occasionally having fitting directly onto a person's leg. The Konga was then decorated with ridges and incised lines. This particular Konga is more heavily decorated than others, containing ridges throughout the front exterior. The sides, however, are less decorated as the ridges pinch in at the front creating an hourglass effect. Lastly, the leg band was polished. When viewed from above, the Konga takes the form of a hook shape. Married women of high status wore these anklets to display their wealth and nobility. The anklets were worn mostly during celebrations, which would last a few months. The Konga could reach 10kg of weight so in order to support the heavy adornment; women protected their ankles by wrapping them with bulges of fabric and leaves called Litele. When removing the Konga from their bodies, women needed to readjust the way they walked as the Konga changes the center of body gravity. The use of the Konga was otherwise limited to matrimonial or ritual transactions. The Konga was an important form of dowry among the Bakutu and Ekota populations from the Boende territory.

Dimensions

5 × 4 × 5 3/8 in. (12.7 × 10.2 × 13.7 cm)