



Throwing Knife Currency

Date

19th Century

Primary Maker

Matakam (Mafa)

Medium

Iron and fiber

Description

This is a throwing knife made by the Matakam (Mafa) people from Cameroon in the 19th Century. Due to the lack of ethnographic research on African throwing knives, little is known of their function, manufacturing and distribution. As a result, the evolution of the currency's value is difficult to track. As weapons, throwing knives were used to sever the legs of enemies or their horses.

Some researchers suggest that the throwing knives were

never made to be thrown as metal was extremely valuable. If throwing knives had been meant as weapons, their evolving designs inhibited their use as weapons and restricted their role to only currency. By the 19th century throwing knives became symbols of power and stores of wealth. The Matakam throwing knives is one such example of a weapon or everyday tool becoming a form of currency. The Matakam throwing knives were made in various areas including; Cameroon Equatorial Guinea, Cabinda, Sao Tome, Uganda, Gabon, Republic of Congo, parts of Zaire, Rwanda, Sudan, Chad, Niger and Tanzania. As throwing knives became symbols of wealth, chiefs kept the knives in their treasury and the currency even had its own role in rituals. Elaborate throwing knives show handles made of wood or ivory. Many throwing knives were traded as currency for settling debts and as wedding payment. They were also given as rewards in combat, kept as heirlooms and placed on graves of honored peoples.

Dimensions

Overall: 9 x 23 in. (22.9 x 58.4 cm)