

Basic Detail Report



Sword Currency

Date

19th Century

Primary Maker

Kundu

Medium

Wood and metal

Description

This is a short sword that was used as currency and made by the Kundu peoples of the Democratic Republic of the Congo sometime in the 19th Century. The Kundu are a sub group of the Mongo, tribes of central Congo who live in the equatorial region surrounded by rivers Kasai, Sankuru and Lomami. These knives were used in tribal ceremonies, as a symbol of rank and as a form of currency. The Konda artisans were celebrated for their

extravagant weapons that were completely useless as anything other than currency. As in any culture, currency evolves from needed goods traded between two people, to ornate pieces that symbolize wealth. The high quality of the metal blades and imported brass tacks are signs of high status objects. Currency hoes, blades and bells may have been useful tools once but became designed as regalia rather than to be offered as something for everyday use. The Konda swords are an excellent example of this evolution. Though swords were not considered the chief weapon of war in western Africa, as opposed by daggers and throwing knives, they were secondary weapons that could cut an enemy. These swords, however, represented prestige and stored wealth. Rather than being taken to the battlefield, they were displayed in parades and spiritual rituals. Bride wealth payments in the form of metal currency were also widespread over large parts of Central Africa. This currency sword, though designed with intricate decoration on the center of the blade, pales in comparison to the flamboyant artistry of other Konda swords. Calligraphic blades were created as the master blacksmiths hammered the blades into thin sheets and shaped them with varying hooks, angles and embellishments.

Dimensions

3 3/4 x 2 3/4 x 19 in. (9.5 x 7 x 48.3 cm)