



Leg Band Currency (Ambi)

Date	late 19th and early 20th Century
Primary Maker	Mbole
Medium	Copper

Description

This is a currency anklet made by the Mbole. Known as the “perfect form,” these anklets were used for commercial transactions and displays of wealth. This currency took the form of an anklet; a flattened, spherical ring with an opening on one side. The anklets were forged by master smiths out of a single copper ingot in the same fashion that helmets of medieval armors were made. The smiths made them into a perfect sphere and left them almost completely closed. The currency came in several sizes, each with their own monetary value and name. Both men and women wore these anklets to display their status. Possessing several of the anklets regulated access to different ranks of the man society Nkum’ okunda. Payments to become part of secret society would also be made using these pieces. The anklets were furthermore the third element of a six element monetary series used in commercial transactions by the Jonga and Hamba tribes. Women wore the anklets to display their rank amongst fellow wives in their households. In addition, these currency anklets were used in marriage transactions. This form of currency, though not practical, became important in its one fundamental function; a tool to buy women. Women have fundamental exchange value as a source of life. Though different titles are distinct (slave, daughter, wife) women help preserve a man of high value. Copper, being the medium for this currency, is also relevant to its symbolic value. Copper was the most precious of all African metals and associated with water and fertility.

Dimensions

Overall: 8 in. (20.3 cm)