

# Basic Detail Report

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## Leg Band Currency (Ambi)

### Date

early 20th Century

### Primary Maker

Mbole

### Medium

Brass

### Description

Mbole currency, often referred to as 'the perfect form,' was worn around the ankle as a display of status by both women and men of the Mbole tribe. Formed from copper, mboles were exchanged during marriage ceremonies. Copper was worked in Africa five-hundred years before the use of iron. This ancient material is typically associated with fertility and water. Traditionally, these heavy copper "anklet" forms were recognized and used as currency for rare but major transactions. They have become so popular as decorative objects, especially when displayed alongside contemporary art, that they are now being created especially for the art market. The Mbole, are a small group of about 150,000 people in Southeastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire), and made ankle currency bracelets of copper which were used for major transactions. Worn by both men and women these large rounded anklets were offered by the husband to his wife to be a part of the marriage contract. These anklets were forged and hammered from a single copper ingot. These particular Mbole forms were modeled after anklets that were actually worn generations ago, but are no longer worn. Their age is unknown, but similar pieces have been found to be centuries old. These dramatic copper forms have been popular for decades with designers and any collector who appreciates beautiful form and function. They are now nearly impossible to find. Certain specifications are given to the differing sizes of these anklets in the Jonga and Hamba languages. These names are Diako (small), Ambi (medium), Ehuke (large), Batakataka (extra-large and gigantic). Spherical copper rings, flattened and open on one side. Used as anklets and in commercial transactions between tribes of central Congo who live in the equatorial region surrounded by rivers Kasai, Sankuru and Lomami. They constituted the third element for tribes Jonga and Hamba of the monetary series used in marriage transactions. Possessing them allowed regulating access rights to various rank grades of the man society Nkum' okunda. Richness and copper currency becomes amongst the Nkutshu an essential element of the social structure. The money is shown as social prestige and not applied to religious or magical reasons but takes a fundamental function: a tool to buy women. In this society, the traditional currency represents a sign of power to obtain women, the social prestige as well, but rarely does it becomes a real economic instrument. A woman becomes a fundamental exchange value as a source of life, rather than an individual. She preserves her quality of a person of high level. Different titles are distinct: slave, sister, and wife. Money, in this society, takes a vast range of functions: ornamental, commercial, religious, political and marital one.

**Dimensions**

2 x 5 in. (5.1 cm)