



Shield (Gula)

Date

late 19th to early 20th Century

Primary Maker

Sukuma

Medium

Leather and wood

Description

This is a shield made by the Sukuma peoples of Tanzania sometime in the late 19th to early 20th Century. The saddle/lobe-shaped gula is by far the best-known shield of Southern Tanzania's Sukuma people. While this shield, along with other shields from the region, are made of buffalo hide, they were also often made of hippopotamus hide. Setting themselves apart from other groups in Tanzania, for at least the past 200 years the Sukuma only ever existed as loose clans without a central ruling structure. These shields were used in battle as well as a

symbol of authority for the clans' chiefs. As rule was not necessarily passed down to the eldest heir, to some degree the right to lead had to be earned. A smaller version of this shield (lung-uda) was one of the most important insignias in earning this right. They would be displayed publicly before ceremonies and were in some cases a source of power for a chief's protective magics. Three repairs have been made in the traditional style on the upper half of the shield.

Dimensions

33 × 16 1/2 × 5 in. (83.8 × 41.9 × 12.7 cm)