



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 of Southern Tanzania's Sukuma people is by far their best-known shield. Like other shields from this region it is made from buffalo 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. It would be displayed publicly before ceremonies and was 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. The straps connecting the hide to the wooden supporting beam have become disconnected and there is evidence of repair.

Dimensions

30 × 13 1/2 × 5 in. (76.2 × 34.3 × 12.7 cm)