



Shield

Date

late 19th to early 20th Century

Primary Maker

Topoke

Medium

Palm bark and pigment

Description

This rectangular shield was made by the Topoke people of Kinshasha, or Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Topoke, also called So or Eso, were an ethnic group that lived in the Kisangani region. The unique V shape of the Topoke shield is created by tightly weaving together plant fiber strips and binding them with pieces of lightweight palm bark. The anterior surface of the shield is divided by thin rattan braids generating quadrilateral patterns. These patterns are often painted with red, black, blue and white pigments. Shields of this kind were carried by members of the community's army. The local militia consisted of all male adults: ranging from young boys to older men and

including slaves. Topoke shields were regularly used during physical quarrels subsequent from non-payment of debts incurred at large regional markets. These shields, along with iron javelins and knives, were the primary currency at such markets; however many transactions were on credit. As a result, the items meant to be barter with would be utilized as weapons during trade disagreements. In some instances, these disputes would result in war between highly militarized villages.

Dimensions

42 × 17 1/2 × 3 1/4 in. (106.7 × 44.5 × 8.3 cm)