



## Currency (handas) "Katanga Cross"

### Medium

Copper

### Description

Cross-shaped copper piece. Copper exchange in the Congo can be traced back hundreds of years. Valued for its scarcity and distinctive color, copper was often reserved for the very wealthy and powerful. By the fourteenth century, this standardized cross form had developed. Found at burial sites and functioning as a sign

of prestige, the crosses were tied to the chest of the deceased. Centuries later, the crosses had become exchange currency. Additionally, through the 18th and 19th centuries competing Katanga peoples used the crosses to symbolize political power, and by 1960, they had become known worldwide as part of the national emblem and the coins minted by the Banque Nationale du Katanga. No two handas are exactly alike. Each is made by pouring molten copper into outlines in the sand. After being exchanged as currency, the copper is often recycled into tools, weapons, or religious or decorative objects. Suggested reading: Karl-Ferdinand Schaedler, *Earth and Ore: 2500 Years of African Art in Terra-Cotta and Metal*. Eurasburg: Edition Minerva Hermann Farnung, 1997.

### Dimensions

7 × 9 × 1/2 inches (17.8 × 22.9 × 1.3 cm)