

Basic Detail Report



Chest Ornament (Tema)

Date

19th to 20th Century

Medium

Clam shell, tortoise shell and plant fiber

Description

This pectoral ornament, the vernacular name for which is Tema, comes from the Santa Cruz Islands in the nation of Solomon Islands. Men wore these white tridacna clam shell discs on their chests during ceremonies as well as during combat. In recent times, these discs were worn by young men during their initiation rites. Typically, the tema have a turtle shell overlay which likely depicts a frigate bird with abstract fish or dolphins. Shells are often used for decoration throughout Melanesia. Often traded from one family to the next, shells can be traded deeper into the

forest and higher into the mountains over generations. Consequently, some shell ornaments have been dated at several hundred years old. A variety of shells such as bailer or clam shells are used as ornamentation to cover either the chest or pubic area of the body.

Dimensions

13 × 4 3/4 × 1/2 in. (33 × 12.1 × 1.3 cm)