

Basic Detail Report



Shield

Date

20th Century

Medium

Wood and paint

Description

This exceptionally tall shield was collected from Gahom Village in the Hunstein Mountain region near the end of the Sitipa River, a tributary of the April River. It was likely traded from upriver or collected as the spoils of battle, as it very closely resembles examples typical to the Bahinemo people residing just northwest of Gahom in the middle April River region. The second image in this record shows the shield with its artist. Papuan shields were designed to protect warriors both physically and spiritually from the chaos of battle. Their bulky forms could easily deflect projectiles like arrows and spears, as well as block attacks from clubs. Carefully carved

sculptural elements and painted designs helped warriors to magically draw strength and protection from their ancestors, the spirits of animals, and the land itself. When wars were declared, men repainted their shields with dazzlingly vibrant colors to distract and threaten their enemies. Their designs signaled the status of the carrier, his prowess as a warrior, and his connection to the spiritual world. War, a constant realigning of relationships between opposing tribal neighbors, is woven into the tapestry of daily life in New Guinea. Its three leading causes are all key factors in being the dominant group in a region: disputes over land borders, stolen pigs, and the ownership of women. Both the location and times of battles were scheduled, and the ensuing hostilities could often go on for months culminating in someone being hurt or killed in battle. Once all parties agreed that a fair battle had taken place and reparations were settled, usually in the form of pigs given to the family of the deceased, life would go on until another issue arose.

Dimensions

79 x 19 1/4 x 3 1/2 in. (200.7 x 48.9 x 8.9 cm)