



Necklace

Date

early to mid 20th Century

Medium

Cowrie shell, mother-of-pearl and fiber

Description

This cowrie shell and mother-of pearl necklace was collected in Goroka the capital of the Eastern Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea. Necklaces play a crucial role in adornment for both men and women. Because status is determined by the amount of jewelry and ornamentation one wears on their person. Cowrie necklaces are particularly effective at elevating the wearer's body. Aside from their aesthetic usage, necklaces that feature cowrie shells are utilized as currency for exchanged goods. In the New Guinea Highlands, cowrie shell exchange has been studied by researchers as a way of understanding the economic and

social stratification among banded communities. The cowrie shells featured on this necklace are referred to as "money cowrie"—also known as *Cypraea Moneta*. Money cowrie is the highest value of currency used in the Eastern Highlands. For example a string of money cowrie measuring the wingspan of a father's outstretched arm, could be used to purchase his daughter as a bride.

Dimensions

27 × 12 × 4 1/2 in. (68.6 × 30.5 × 11.4 cm)