



Spoon Currency

Date

mid-20th Century

Medium

Shell

Description

Shell spoon collected from the Admiralty Islands, Bismarck Archipelago, Manus Province, Papua New Guinea and dates to the 20th century. In many Melanesian

communities, shells were utilized as a form of currency and simultaneously as supplies for high-priced commodities. As a form of currency, shells were used in trades along the coast and nearby islands. The further distance a shell traveled, the higher their value would increase. Therefore, the price and social value of a shell-made object increased depending on the inclusion of a well-traveled shell. A shell will signify important qualities about the wearer their wealth, initiation level within a clan membership, and ideas of ritual practice. As a bride price exchange, the use of particular shell may indicate the bride new family’s financial and social influence in the community.

Dimensions

4 × 4 5/8 × 1 1/4 in. (10.2 × 11.7 × 3.2 cm)