



Shield (Elyáborr)

Date

mid 20th Century

Primary Maker

Mendi

Medium

Wood, pigment, and plant fiber

Description

This war shield, also colloquially referred to as elyáborr, was collected from the Mendi culture in the Southern Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea and dated back to the mid-20th century. Historically the wars waged in the Highlands of New Guinea ranged from mock battles between neighboring groups to bitter feuds constantly at risk of erupting into bloodshed. The relative intensity of each of these conflicts necessitated varying types of weaponry, and so even within the narrow confines of New Guinea's Mendi Valley three different shields were used.

The elyabarr featured here has a U-shaped divot at the top which allowed a warrior to sling it underarm to protect their torso and little else, meaning that it was commonly used in skirmishes. This war shield is dark brown in color with residual reddish-orange, beige, and black pigmentation. At the top of the shield there is squared cut out with punctured holes on each side to accommodate for a twisted rope tide through and used as handle. It is believed that shields channel the power of one's ancestors to give them strength and protect them in combat through their bright pigmentation and often the presence of abstracted anthropomorphic designs. Furthermore, the pigmentation was as much a component of psychological war as anything else. In full scale battles, it was not men so much as a solid wall of white and red pigment promising to crash upon its foes like a wave.

Dimensions

31 1/2 × 16 1/4 × 1 1/2 in. (80 × 41.3 × 3.8 cm)