

Basic Detail Report



Currency

Date

mid 20th Century

Medium

Shell and fiber

Description

This piece of shell currency was collected on Rossel Island in the Milne Bay Province and dates back to the mid-20th

Century. The currency piece features a rigid straw-like fiber stick tethered through ten shell discs with holes. The shell discs are multi-colored consisting of white, beige, pink and rose and appear similar to kualia shells. Kualia shells are small circular discs obtained from cutting off the circular end of the marine gastropod shell, known as conus. In many Melanesian communities, shells were utilized as a form of currency and simultaneously as supplies for high-priced ornamentation. 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 an adornment increased depending on the inclusion of a well-traveled shell.

Dimensions

3/4 × 8 1/2 × 3/4 in. (1.9 × 21.6 × 1.9 cm)