



Necklace Currency (Bagi)

Date

early to mid 20th Century

Primary Maker

Massim

Medium

Shell and twine

Description

This exchange necklace, also known as a bagi, was collected on Rossel Island in Milne Bay Province and dates back from the early to mid-20th Century. The ornaments on this necklace include large white shells and small multi-colored discs shells. Bagi necklaces are highly valued and used as ritual trade items in the Kula exchange cycle of the Milne Bay Province. This cycle follows a prescribed, clockwise, circular route that involves most of the islands of the Massim Group. Kula has many rules. Example: arm shells only travel in a counterclockwise direction and the

necklaces (like the bagi) only travel in a clockwise direction. When the participants travel to their partner's island they receive their gifts but their partners only receive their gifts when they visit them in return. Much magic and ritual was observed in the preparation of the trip. Kula was an important source of trade and supplied many islands with most of their food needs. 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

20 × 2 1/4 × 1 1/2 in. (50.8 × 5.7 × 3.8 cm)