



Necklace Currency

Date

mid 20th Century

Medium

Kina (Pinctada maxima) and fiber

Description

This bride price necklace was collected in Papua New Guinea and dates back to the mid-20th Century. The piece consists of a crescent shaped Kina shell connected to fibrous brand. A Pinctada maximum, commonly referred to as Kina, is a type of gold lip shell used in highly valued adornment pieces. These adornment pieces were used as bride prices— a type of currency in dowry practice. Papua New Guinea islanders primarily retrieved these shells from Manus Island or Thursday Island in the Torres Strait. A Kina's value was based on its size, color, and condition of the shell. A ruddy colored Kina was priced the highest, because it was deemed the finest specimen. The process

of creating such a bride price necklace was quite time consuming and involved various tools. A small drill tool would be used to create the holes on either end of piece for the threaded fiber. The bottom edge of the shell crescent is called the pouwe and would be coated with white tree sap which turns black. The possession of a Kina signified important qualities about the individual's wealth and social influence. In the practice of dowries, all relatives of the bride would receive a bride price. In such cases, a number of Kina necklaces may be used to purchase the bride along with other bride price tokens, such as small pigs or bailer shells. A marker—such as a knot, tooth, or bristled end of a pig tail—could be attached to the shell to record its use for debts, dowries, deaths, or exchanges.

Dimensions

12 3/8 × 8 1/4 × 3/4 in. (31.4 × 21 × 1.9 cm)