

Basic Detail Report



Finger Cutter

Date
early to mid 20th Century

Primary Maker
Dani

Medium
Stone and fiber

Description

A finger cutter collected from the Baliem Highlands in the Papua Province (Irian Jaya) of Indonesia. The object dates back to the early and mid-20th Century. The Dani people of this region believe that physical representation of emotional pain is necessary to the grieving process. It is a ceremonial ritual that some tribe members cut off the tops of their fingers upon attending the funeral of a loved one. This is commonly seen in the women population of the Dani tribe when they lose a child. It is believed that such an action will both gratify and drive away the spirits. According to the tribe members, the spirit of the deceased would remain in the village and linger in spiritual turmoil unless driven away. Additionally, the physical pain is seen as an expression of sorrow and suffering and provides solace. This finger cutter consists of knitted fiber wrapped around a charcoal black stone. The stone has been chiseled and sanded to sharp flat end. One side of the stone is flat and the opposite side is concave. There are many gouges in the stone on the front, both sides and the back. These gouges may result from pieces being chipped off. The woven wrap about the handle consist 3.5" of dark brown fiber, about 1" of green colored fiber, 1" of pink colored fiber and about 1/2" blue colored fiber. This color pattern continues to the end. Within the woven wrap are a few bright yellow materials that look like it was used to repair the weaving. There is also a 1" loop at the end of the cutter.

Dimensions

11 7/8 × 2 1/8 × 2 1/8 in. (30.2 × 5.4 × 5.4 cm)