



Necklace (Vuasagale)

Date

18th to 19th Century

Medium

Human teeth, twine and fiber

Description

A braided fiber strand holds together the 203 human teeth that make up this extraordinary necklace. Only two types of teeth, the incisors and canines, were used in the necklace's construction; this is to say that the necklace carries nearly 60 (and likely closer to 100) individuals' teeth. Each tooth has been carefully extracted so that the root of the tooth, which has been perforated to allow the passing of the cord, has stayed intact. Teeth from a variety of land and sea animals are commonly used throughout the Pacific region cultures for payment or

trade, personal adornment, prestige items and status symbols. Human teeth are sometimes found embedded in carved objects; Fijian wood clubs, for example, are sometimes inlaid with human teeth signifying a kill made by the weapon. Few human tooth necklaces, especially those with such an accumulation of teeth, have been documented, with known examples coming from Fiji, Kiribati, and New Zealand - three culturally unique island groups separated by thousands of miles of ocean. Several early accounts of Europeans to New Zealand describe encounters with people adorned in human tooth ear pendants and necklaces. Still little is understood about the history or exact meaning of these necklaces, surely the coveted belongings of those who held chiefly or high status. Whether the teeth came from one's ancestors or from the mouths of enemies, each tooth would have been viewed as a representation or an embodiment of the deceased, a power that was transferred to the wearer.

Dimensions

7 in. (17.8 cm)