

Basic Detail Report



Head Ornament

Date

mid 20th Century

Medium

Bailer shell, cowrie shells, and textile

Description

A shell headdress collected from the Western Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea. This headdress features one large white bailer shell and rows of small cowrie shells

sewn to a fabric strap. In many Melanesian communities, shells were used as a form of currency and simultaneously as supplies for high-priced commodities. 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 a shell-made object increased depending on the inclusion of a well-traveled shell. A shell will signify important qualities about the wearer's wealth, initiation level within a clan membership, and ideas of ritual practice. As a bride price exchange, the use of particular shell may indicate the husband's family's financial and social influence within the community.

Dimensions

5 × 11 × 2 in. (12.7 × 27.9 × 5.1 cm)