

Basic Detail Report



Currency (Rai)

Date

18th to early 19th Century

Primary Maker

Yap

Medium

Crystalline limestone

Description

Yap stone currency has entranced westerners for hundreds of years. The earliest accounts from Western explorers, particularly German sailors and political officials, present a sense of awe of the size of rai, but also confusion in regards to their use. This led to a fascination with the currency and an interest to assimilate its use into a more western understanding of economics. The Yapese economic system is quite complex and is based on both a detailed traditional caste system as well as a notion of reciprocity. Currency such as this was not assigned a fixed value. Rather, its value depended entirely on the social position of the buyer and the receiver as well as the occasion for use. Rai, both small and large, were used for the exchange of goods, but also ceremonially for rituals associated with birth, death and marriage.

Dimensions

20 1/2 × 18 3/4 × 2 in. (52.1 × 47.6 × 5.1 cm)