



## Armband Currency (Mwali)

### Date

late 20th Century

### Medium

Wood, beads, shell, and plant fiber

### Description

Mwali are part of the kula trade system. These shell armbands travel the islands in a counterclockwise

direction and are considered to possess elements that characterize them as female. Throughout the mwali's life cycle within the kula trade network, the armbands are constantly redecorated and embellished which increases their complexity and importance. Due to this constant redecoration and the continuation of the kula trade to the present, there has been an increased use of modern materials added (i.e. plastic beads are being used instead of glass ones and various plastic pieces have been used instead of natural materials). The suspended elements of the piece give it a rattle sound when an individual walked with it. The arm shell ring is made by knocking out the circular base along the rim of the shell with a stone. A groove is made parallel to the knocked-out base with a stone which creates a cross section which is then polished on the outside by rubbing it on a flat sandstone and the interior is polished with a long cylindrical piece of stone. Arm shells were used primarily as ornaments and never for everyday wear. They were worn with only the most elaborate dancing dress only on very festive occasions like big ceremonial dances, great feasts and large gatherings where several villages were represented.

### Dimensions

13 3/4 × 12 × 3 1/2 in. (34.9 × 30.5 × 8.9 cm)