



Earring Currency (Dimbo)

Date

19th Century

Primary Maker

Waropen

Medium

Glass

Description

For thousands of years, the peoples of Geelvink Bay were part of a vast trading network which stretched throughout Southeast Asia and Oceania, exchanging birds of paradise

plumes and slaves for metal and glasswork objects. Within the greater region, the first examples of this variety of earring was among the Đông Sơn (1000 BC-100 AD) people of Vietnam. Given the nature of the region’s trading routes, it is likely that even 3500 km and thousands of years apart these dimbo, the vernacular word for glass earrings in Waropen language of the Waropen Coast of the East side of Geelvink Bay, would have drawn inspiration from Bronze Age Vietnam. As for their manufacture, the scalloping at the periphery of one of these earrings almost certainly confirms that they were made from glass bottles. Though they had previously been traded for, by the 19th Century Papuans in this region had acquired the forge and bellows technology required to melt glass down, allowing them to make dimbo themselves. Like many objects in Oceania which were acquired by trading, rather than being worn dimbo were generally used as a currency and to pay bride prices.

Dimensions

2 × 1 7/8 × 5/16 in. (5.1 × 4.8 × 0.8 cm) .1-.5 in Stand: 3 5/16 × 9 1/2 × 1 in. (8.4 × 24.1 × 2.5 cm)