



Axe Currency

Date

19th Century

Primary Maker

Massim

Medium

Wood, rattan, stone, shell and glass beads

Description

This presentation axe is found within the Massim region in eastern Papua New Guinea. Interestingly, the axe's haft and blade are sourced to different areas. The blade, also referred to as beku, is made from green basalt which was mined in a quarry near Suloga on Woodlark Island until the 1870s. It is the blade itself that is the most valuable part of the axe. When used as exchange items a wooden haft would be carved for the presentation, but was often later discarded. An axe of this quality would be a display of wealth only afforded to a village's most prominent

members—some were heirlooms to never be traded. Their ceremonial usage involved being carried by women in dances at harvest celebrations. The shape of the ceremonial axes represents both the outward form, and symbolically the vitality, of the human arm. The handle is the upper arm, the joint the elbow, and the socket for the blade the greenstone blade the hand. Unlike the form, the designs represent birds and animals.

Dimensions

23 1/2 × 10 × 1 in. (59.7 × 25.4 × 2.5 cm)