

Basic Detail Report



Currency (Wamayuwa)

Date
20th Century

Primary Maker
Yangoru Boiken

Medium
Shell

Description

Giant clam shell rings were used as currency in much of Papua New Guinea and especially in the Sepik River region. Shell rings are time consuming and take meticulous care to create. First a tridacna clam shell is found, preferably but not necessarily fossilized. Then a hole is drilled into the center to form a circle. This is widened by using vines or bamboo, coarse sand, and water to erode away the shell. The smaller and more perfect the interior circle, the more valuable. White, pearly iridescence also indicates higher quality. Shell rings are displayed at marriage feasts, used as bride payment, and to buy pigs among some groups. According to the Yangoru Boiken, incisions are made to indicate each time a shell bracelet has been used or displayed in a feast or exchanged as bride wealth. The Kubalia Boiken’s currency is slightly smaller and carves incisions to symbolize the hornbill bird’s beak.

Dimensions

6 1/2 × 7 3/4 × 1 1/4 in. (16.5 × 19.7 × 3.2 cm)