

Basic Detail Report



Tray Currency (Toluk)

Date

early to mid 20th Century

Medium

Tortoiseseshell

Description

This is a Palauan tortoise shell tray that was used as a form of women's currency; vernacular referred to as toluk. In the traditional Palauan culture, men and women had different forms of currency which were not allowed to be exchanged between members of the opposite sex. The toluk was highly valued and exchanged between women to mark significant moments in their lives; such as births, marriages, or deaths. In honor of customary events, women whom provided labor or food were rewarded by other women with toluk. They were also passed on as family heirlooms to children in the matrilineal. There is no real monetary value of a toluk in the ordinary sense; but rather a personable value established by the women who view them as treasured objects meant to represent her family's wealth. The process of creating such a piece requires the shell plates of tortoise to be heated and then molded into tray. Afterwards, a carver polishes the toluk and incises ornamentation projections around the edges. These decorations were limited to a repetitive abstract form around the edges of the tray. According to some scholars, these ornate protrusions may be a representation of wings of a frigate bird in flight.

Dimensions

1 x 4 5/8 x 8 1/8 in. (2.5 x 11.7 x 20.6 cm)