



Eleven combs (one of eleven)

Not on display

Title/Description: Eleven combs (one of eleven)

Born: 1800 c. - 1900 c.

Object Type: Comb

Materials: Coconut, Coir, Wood

Measurements: l. 178 x w. 52 x d. 3 mm

Accession Number: 424i

Historic Period: 19th century

Production Place: Oceania, Pacific, Tonga

Decorative combs or, more properly, hair ornaments were worn by both men and women in Samoa and Tonga. In Tonga they were usually made entirely from coconut materials. The dried midribs of coconut leaflets were bound with single fibres of coir (coconut husk fibre) in red and black patterns, resembling those used in house beam bindings and basketry. The brownish-red colour is natural, while the black is produced by steeping the fibres in a local black mud.

In Samoa a larger variety of this type was made, having European glass beads threaded on to the coir fibres in decorative patterns. Wood forms with long carved handles were also worn. Combs circulated widely through inter-island exchanges and thus were also used in neighbouring Fiji.

Steven Hooper, 1997

Entry taken from *Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection, Vol. 2: Pacific, African and Native North American Art*, edited by Steven Hooper (Yale University Press, 1997) p. 39.
