



Breast ornament

On display

Title/Description: Breast ornament

Object Type: Pendant

Materials: Clam shell, Fibre, Turtle shell

Measurements: h. 230 x d. 165 x d. 10 mm

Accession Number: 745

Historic Period: 19th/20th century

Production Place: Oceania, Pacific, Santa Cruz

This distinctive form of breast ornament, locally called *tema*, was worn by men and was suspended round the neck on a cord, which in this case is made of twisted cloth (see Koch, 1971: pls. 15-16 for photographs of men in full ceremonial costume). The pendant is composed of two main parts: a white disc ground from the hinge section of a large clam shell (*Tridacna gigas*) and pierced through

the centre, to which is fitted a filigree overlay carved in turtle shell obtained from the hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*).

The turtle shell designs on tema usually show the silhouette of a frigate bird with angled wings and forked tail, above which are a series of triangular elements, generally interpreted as fish (see Beasley, 1939, for a variety of designs). As in the neighbouring Solomon Islands (see nos. 57 and 58), the frigate bird is associated with fishing prowess, strength and endurance.

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. 15.
