

Arrow belt

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Arrow belt with lightning motif, in multicolored wool. It is particularly long and wide. It has 14 corridors. Some of its colors seem to be derived from synthetic dyes.

Accession Number 2021.07.16

Date 1899 an

Materials fiber, wool

Technique braided

Measurements 21,5 x 212 cm

Historical context

Because of its length and the large number of corridors (rows of colors, counted from the center), this belt is particularly imposing: often, the size of an arrow belt reflects the prestige of its wearer. The wider and longer the belt, the more it costs.

Arrow belts, created by French Canadians in the 2nd half of the 18th century, became a cultural symbol in Quebec. The Assomption standard, gradually established in the early 19th century, was used as an object of exchange with certain aboriginal nations during the fur trade. Although the motifs on the piece opposite correspond to these standards, certain colors differ. In fact, one corridor is turquoise blue: this is probably a synthetic dye. By the end of the century, synthetic dyes were gradually replacing natural ones.

After 1880, artisanal production of arrow belts declined. Imitations were produced on a large scale in England. Also, the fur trade, which had used handmade belts as an object of exchange with natives, declined.

Arrow belts reflect a multicultural identity. Although difficult to date, they provide us with information on the cultural history of several territories and the socio-economic relationships that bind them together.

Photo by Louis-Etienne Dore