

Finch & C^o



A RARE AND UNUSUAL DECORATED CEREMONIAL MASK FROM THE BURMESE HILL TRIBE OF THE CHIN

A RARE AND UNUSUAL DECORATED CEREMONIAL MASK FROM THE BURMESE HILL TRIBE OF THE CHIN .

WILD GAYAL OX BONE , DOGS TEETH , WOODEN BEADS AND FIBRE

19 TH - EARLY 20 TH CENTURY

SIZE : 21 CM HIGH , 25.5 CM WIDE , 13 CM DEEP – 8¼ INS HIGH , 10 INS WIDE , 5¼ INS DEEP

LITERATURE

THE KUKI PEOPLES LIVE SOUTHWEST OF THE NAGA AND ARE COMPRISED OF THE CHIN AND LUSHAI TRIBES . THEY ARE RELATED TO THE KACHIN OF THE NAGA HILL AREAS , BUT THEY CLAIM TO BE THE ELDER BRANCH OF THE BURMESE FAMILY OF HILL TRIBES .

THIS MASK WAS IDENTIFIED BY THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM IN LONDON AS BEING MADE FROM THE PELVIS OF A NOW ENDANGERED SPECIES OF WILD OX CALLED THE GAYAL WHICH IS A NEAR RELATIVE TO THE MITHAN OX REVERED BY THE NAGA . ONCE FOUND EXTENSIVELY ACROSS SOUTH EASTERN ASIA AND INDIA THE GAYAL IS NOW RESTRICTED TO A SMALL RANGE IN THE FORESTED HILLS OF NORTHERN BURMA .

THE GAYAL WAS A SACRIFICIAL ANIMAL TO THE CHIN AND WAS A POWERFUL SYMBOL OF THEIR BELIEF IN FERTILITY . THEY BELIEVE WELL BEING IS ACHIEVED BY HUMANS BEING 'IN CONTROL' OF THE NATURAL PROCESS OF FERTILITY ; MISFORTUNE IS THE RESULT OF BEING 'OUT OF CONTROL' . ACCIDENTAL DEATHS SUCH AS BEING KILLED BY A WILD BEAST OR FALLING FROM A TREE ARE A RITUAL AND SOCIAL CALAMITY , THE RESULT OF BEING 'OUT OF CONTROL' . THE MASK WAS WORN DURING CEREMONIES TO ATTAIN OR REGAIN 'CONTROL' OF THE FERTILITY PROCESS .