Finch & Co



A RARE COLLECTION OF TWELVE POLYNESIAN HAIR COMBS FROM SAMOA, TONGA, AND FIJI

A RARE COLLECTION OF TWELVE POLYNESIAN HAIR COMBS FROM SAMOA, TONGA, AND FIJI
CIRCA 1880 – 1890
SIZE : 32.5 CM LONG – 12¾ INS LONG (MAX) 14 CM LONG – 5½ INS LONG (MIN)

LITERATURE

THESE COMBS WERE USED IN SAMOA, TONGA AND FIJI AND WERE ESSENTIALLY COSMETIC ACCESSORIES, CALLED SELU IN SAMOA, HELU IN TONGA, AND I SERUSASA ON FIJI.THEY WERE DESCRIBED BY GEORGE FORSTER ON COOK'S SECOND VOYAGE : 'THEY HAD THE NEATEST ORNAMENTAL COMBS THAT CAN BE IMAGINED, CONSISTING OF A NUMBER OF LITTLE FLAT STICKS ABOUT 5" LONG, OF YELLOW WOOD LIKE BOX MOST FIRMLY AND ELEGANTLY CONNECTED TOGETHER AT THE BOTTOM BY A TISSUE OF FIBRES OF COCONUT, SOME OF WHICH WERE OF THEIR NATURAL COLOUR, AND OTHERS DYED BLACK'.

THE CUT FRET-WORKED HARDWOOD COMBS WERE WORN AS AN INDICATION OF RANK BY BOTH MEN AND WOMEN AND MADE FROM THE WOOD OF THE MANAPAU TREE ON SAMOA, THEY ARE EXTRAORDINARILY THIN WITH DELICATE PIERCED WORK AT THE TAPERING END. TONGAN AND FIJIAN COMBS WERE MADE FROM THE MID-RIBS OF COCONUT LEAFLETS AND WERE SOMETIMES ORNAMENTED WITH EUROPEAN GLASS BEADS. CAPTAIN EAGLESTON DESCRIBED THE FIJIAN 'I SERU' IN 1834 IN HIS LOG ON THE SHIP 'EMERALD' : 'COMBS ARE VERY FASHIONABLE, THESE ARE MADE OF SMALL REEDS HANDSOMELY LASHED TOGETHER WITH THREAD AND OFTEN ORNAMENTED WITH SMALL BEADS. THEY WEAR THESE STUCK IN THEIR WHISKERS. MOST OF THEM WEAR THEIR BEARDS LONG AND ARE VERY PROUD OF THEM'.