Finch & Co



A FINE LARGE FIJIAN PRESENTATION 'TABUA' MADE FROM THE TOOTH OF A SPERM WHALE

A FINE LARGE FIJIAN PRESENTATION 'TABUA' MADE FROM THE TOOTH OF A SPERM WHALE
OLD DEEP ORANGE COLOUR AND SMOOTH PATINA
EARLY 19TH CENTURY
SIZE: 20 CM LONG – 7¾ LONG

LITERATURE

SINGLE WHALE TEETH KNOWN AS 'TABUA' HAVE PROFOUND SIGNIFICANCE TO THE FIJIANS. THEY WERE USED AS PRESENTATION ITEMS AT WEDDINGS, FUNERALS AND OTHER IMPORTANT OCCASIONS. THEY WERE FREQUENTLY ACQUIRED BY FIJIAN CHIEFS FROM EUROPEAN WHALERS AND TRADERS VISITING THE ISLANDS AT THE END OF THE 18TH CENTURY AND AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 19TH CENTURY. 'TABUA' WERE HIGHLY IMPORTANT IN STRATEGIC AND DYNASTIC EXCHANGES BY WHICH CHIEFS INCREASED THEIR POWER AND INFLUENCE.
THE TEETH WERE USED IN VARIOUS WAYS, POLISHED AND UNPOLISHED, LARGE AND SMALL. LARGE TEETH SUCH AS THIS WERE PURELY CEREMONIAL AND WERE PAINSTAKINGLY POLISHED AND SOMETIMES ANOINTED WITH COCONUT OIL AND TURMERIC TO DARKEN THEM, EVEN OCCASIONALLY BEING SMOKED OVER FIRES TO A RICH WALNUT COLOUR.