Finch & Co



A FIJIAN BREAST ORNAMENT 'TABUA' MADE FROM THE TOOTH OF A SPERM WHALE

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THE TWO ENDS PIERCED FOR A BRAIDED COIR CORD
MID 19TH CENTURY
SIZE: 15 CM LONG – 6 INS LONG (TOOTH)
63.5 CM LONG – 25 INS LONG (CORD)

LITERATURE

ALTHOUGH THE PRESENCE OF THE WHALING SHIPS IN THE EARLY 19TH CENTURY MADE ACCESS TO SPERM WHALE TEETH MUCH EASIER, IT IS PROBABLE FROM THE IMPORTANCE GIVEN TO 'TABUA' THAT THEY HAD BEEN USED BY THE FIJIANS FOR A MUCH LONGER TIME. IT IS UNLIKELY THAT SUCH SIGNIFICANCE WOULD HAVE BEEN SO QUICKLY ATTACHED TO AN INTRODUCED OBJECT. WHALES DO STILL STRAND ON FIJI AND POSSIBLY MORE OF THEM DID SO IN THE 18TH CENTURY WHEN THEIR NUMBERS WERE NOT SO DEPLETED.
THE PRESENTATION OF A 'TABUA' TO AN OFFICIAL OR DIGNITARY ON THEIR LEAVING THE DISTRICT WAS A STANDARD ACT OF COURTESY AND MANY OLD 'TABUA' FOUND THEIR WAY TO EUROPE IN THIS WAY.