Finch & Co



NEW ZEALAND MAORI WOODEN FLAX BEATER 'PATU MUKA'

A NEW ZEALAND MAORI WOODEN FLAX BEATER 'PATU MUKA'
FINELY CARVED WITH SPIRAL DESIGNS AND MASK HEADS
EARLY 19TH CENTURY
SIZE: 30.5CM LONG – 12 INS LONG

LITERATURE

WHEN CAPTAIN COOK RETURNED FROM NEW ZEALAND 'PHORINMUM TENAX' THE NEW ZEALAND FLAX PLANT WAS MADE KNOWN TO EUROPEANS FOR THE FIRST TIME. IN DUE COURSE IT BECAME MUCH IN DEMAND AND TRADERS OFTEN PAID IN MUSKETS FOR A CARGO OF PREPARED FLAX FIBRE, CHANGING THE LIFE OF MANY MAORIS FOREVER.
FINE GARMENTS SUCH AS FEATHER AND FLAX FIBRE CLOAKS WERE A MARK OF RANK AND ALSO SERVED AS IMPORTANT ITEMS OF GIFT PAYMENT WHEN ARTISTS WERE EMPLOYED FOR CARVING, TATTOOING AND OTHER HIGHLY SKILLED TASKS.
THIS BEATER WAS USED FOR SOFTENING PREPARED FLAX FIBRE, WHICH HAD BEEN RUBBED, WASHED AND BLEACHED. THE LONG SOFT FIBRES WERE THEN FORMED INTO YARN BY SKILLFUL ROLLING OF THEM ON THE BARE THIGH WITH ONE HAND WHILE THE OTHER HAND FED FIBRES INTO THE TWIST. THE MAORI CLOAK WAS BASICALLY A FLAX FIBRE BLANKET SLIGHTLY SHAPED AT SHOULDER AND HIPS BY A REMARKABLE TECHNIQUE KNOWN AS 'BIAS WEFT WEAVING', WHICH INTRODUCES WEFT ROWS INTO THE BODY OF THE CLOAK. MANY OF THESE CLOAKS HAD A SURFACE COVER OF KIWI AND OTHER BIRD FEATHERS EACH OF WHICH WAS TIED INTO THE FABRIC OF THE CLOAK AS IT WAS BEING MADE.