Finch & Co



RARE CENTRAL ZAIRE LEGA SACRED CEREMONIAL HEADDRESS

A RARE CENTRAL ZAIRE LEGA SACRED CEREMONIAL HEADDRESS FORMED FROM THE BONY ARMOURED SKIN OF A TEMMINCKS PANGOLIN

EARLY 20TH CENTURY

SIZE: 38CM LONG – 15 INS LONG

SEE: FINCH & CO CATALOGUE NO. 12, ITEM NO. 31, FOR A SPECIMEN OF A TEMMINCKS PAGOLIN

CF: A LEGA HAT MADE FROM A PANGOLIN IN THE STANLEY COLLECTION OF AFRICAN ART AT THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA MUSEUM, USA

LITERATURE

THE LEGA LIVE IN EASTERN KIVU PROVINCE, ZAIRE, A DENSELY FORESTED AREA CLOSE TO THE EQUATOR. THEY LIVE BY HUNTING AND GATHERING, FISHING AND SOME SLASH AND BURN AGRICULTURE. WORN BY A HIGH-RANKING INITIATE OF THE LEGA BWAMI SOCIETY THIS DISTINCTIVE HEADDRESS DEMONSTRATES THE STATUS OF ITS OWNER. REGARDED AS A SACRED OBJECT IT WAS USED IN DANCES AND INITIATIONS CARRYING AN IMPORTANT SYMBOLIC MESSAGE. ASSOCIATED WITH POWER AND AUTHORITY, FOR THE LEGA THE PANGOLIN IS ALSO A CULTURAL HERO WHO THEY BELIEVE TAUGHT THEM HOW TO ROOF THEIR HOUSES WITH LARGE LEAVES SIMILAR TO THE ARRANGEMENT IF ITS BONY SCALES. A GREAT MANY AFRICAN OBJECTS ARE DECORATED WITH STYLISED ISOSCELES TRIANGLES, WHICH DIRECTLY REFER TO THE PANGOLIN'S ARMOUR. IT IS ALSO A PATTERN USED IN THE SCARIFICATION OF THE BODY. THE PANGOLIN IS REGARDED AS A SACRED ANIMAL BY THE LEGA AND IS NEVER KILLED. STRICT LAWS GUARANTEE ITS PROTECTION. IF AN ANIMAL DOES MEET WITH AN ACCIDENTAL DEATH, THIS CREATES SUCH A RITUAL DISEQUILIBRIUM THAT IT MUST BE EXPIATED BY EXTENSIVE APPROPRIATE RITUALS AND DISTRIBUTIONS. THUS, PANGOLINS WERE ALWAYS FOUND DEAD BY THE LEGA AND NEVER HUNTED.