

Finch & C°



A SUPERB MALAKULA ELONGATED HEAD

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TREE FERN, BONE, PIGMENT, POLYCHROME

NEW HEBRIDES, VANUATU

CIRCA 1900

SIZE: 18CM HIGH, 14CM WIDE, 22CM DEEP - 7 INS HIGH, 5½ INS WIDE, 8¾ INS DEEP

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LITERATURE

TWO SIMILAR OVER MODELLED 'SKULLS' COLLECTED BY EDGAR AUBERT DE LA RUE IN THE 1920'S, NOW HOUSED IN THE
QUAI BRANLY MUSEUM

THE CULTURE HERO AMBAT IS ASSOCIATED WITH THE ORIGIN OF HEAD-BINDING IN CERTAIN COASTAL AREAS OF
SOUTHERN MALAKULA, VANUATU. AMBAT HIMSELF HAD AN ELONGATED HEAD AND A FINE, LONG NOSE. HEAD
ELONGATION STYLES VARIED SLIGHTLY AMONG THE MANY DIFFERENT LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL AREAS OF SOUTHERN
MALAKULA. THE AREA WHERE PEOPLE HAVE THE LONGEST ELONGATED HEADS IS THE NAHAI-SPEAKING AREA OF
TOMMAN ISLAND AND THE SOUTH SOUTH-WESTERN MALAKULAN MAINLAND OPPOSITE. A PERSON WITH A FINELY
ELONGATED HEAD IS THOUGHT TO BE MORE INTELLIGENT, OF HIGHER STATUS AND CLOSE TO THE WORLD OF THE
SPIRITS. EVEN TODAY, THROUGHOUT VANUATU, THE BISLAMA/ PIDGIN ENGLISH TERM, LONGFALA HED (LONG HEAD) IS
SYNONYMOUS WITH INTELLIGENCE.

ON TOMMAN ISLAND AND THE FACING SOUTH SOUTH-WESTERN MALAKULA MAINLAND, HEAD-BINDING BEGAN A MONTH
AFTER BIRTH. EACH DAY THE CHILD'S HEAD WAS SMEARED WITH BURNT PASTE MADE FROM THE NAVANAI-MOLO NUT
(FROM THE CANDLE NUT TREE). THIS SOFTENS THE SKIN AND PREVENTS 'BINDING RASH'. THE HEAD WAS THEN BOUND
WITH NE'ENBOBOSIT, A SOFT BANDAGE MADE FROM THE INNER BARK OF A BANANA TREE. OVER THIS WAS PLACED A
NO'ONBAT'AR (SPECIALLY WOVEN BASKET) MADE FROM NIBIRIP (PANDANUS) AND BOUND AROUND WITH THE NE'EUWVER
(FIBRE ROPE). THIS PROCESS CONTINUED EVERY DAY FOR SIX MONTHS TO PRODUCE THE REQUIRED SHAPE.

PROVENANCE

ACQUIRED IN AUSTRALIA AT AUCTION CIRCA 1968 - 69

NICOLAI MICHOUTOUCHKINE COLLECTION, NOUMÉA

THE N. MICHOUTOUCHKINE-A PILIOKO FOUNDATION, INVENTORY NO. 340

EX: M. DOUSTAR

EX PRIVATE COLLECTION

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