Finch & Co



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DARK PATINA, THROUGH USE

WOOD

FIJI

EARLY 19TH CENTURY

SIZE: 40CM LONG - 15¾ INS LONG

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LITERATURE

LOCATED ON THE WESTERN EDGE OF THE POLYNESIAN TRIANGLE, THE FIJI ISLANDS WERE INHABITED BY A WARRIOR RACE WHO MADE MANY DIFFERENT TYPES OF WAR CLUB. KNOWN TO SAILORS AS 'HANDY BILLY' (WILKES 1845), THE 'ULA' OR THROWING CLUB WAS THE MOST PERSONAL WEAPON OF THE FIJIAN WARRIOR. ESSENTIALLY A CLOSE RANGE PROJECTILE WEAPON, EVERY FIJIAN MAN WOULD WEAR AT LEAST ONE 'ULA' THRUST THROUGH HIS WAISTBAND, SOMETIMES IN PAIRS LIKE PISTOLS AND ON OCCASION HE WOULD WEAR THREE, EVEN IN HIS HOME VILLAGE. IN 1884 REVEREND THOMAS WILLIAMS POINTED OUT THE THROWING CLUB WAS A FAVOURITE MURDER AND ASSASSINATION WEAPON IN FIJI MAINLY BECAUSE IT WAS SUCH A PART OF EVERYDAY DRESS THAT IT DID NOT AROUSE OR EXCITE ANY SUSPICION.

A VARIETY OF FORMAL DISTINCT TYPES WERE USED FOR FIGHTING MADE FROM A SINGLE PIECE OF VARIOUS HARDWOODS THAT ARE GROWN AS SAPLINGS AND UPROOTED TO PROVIDE A HEAVY ROUNDED OR FLUTED HEAD FROM WHICH PROJECTS THE SHAFT. THE LOWER SECTION OF THE HANDLE IS USUALLY WORKED WITH THE CHARACTERISTIC 'TAVATAVA' ZIG-ZAG GRIP CARVING OF FIJIAN WEAPONS SOMETIMES EXTENDING RIGHT UP THE SHAFT AND ONTO THE HEAD.

A TALLY OF THE KILLS WAS KEPT BY 'NICKING' OR 'NOTCHING' THE HANDLE, AS BARON VON HUGEL OBSERVED IN 1876 OF A THROWING CLUB HE HAD JUST COLLECTED (GORDON 1897 1:517): 'THERE ARE 50 NOTCHES IN IT AND THE CHIEF ASSURED ME IT IS THE REGISTER OF PEOPLE IT HAS KILLED. ON MY DOUBTING IT, HE GOT QUITE ANGRY, AND ASSURED ME THAT IT WAS 'EDINA EDINA SARA' AND SO I FANCY THERE MAY BE SOME TRUTH IN IT ESPECIALLY AS I HAD GREAT DIFFICULTY IN GETTING IT AT ALL'.

EYE WITNESS ACCOUNTS SPEAK OF THE BRUISING, STUNNING AND THE CRUSHING OF SKULLS BY 'ULA'. IN 1879 HENRY MOSELY ('NOTES BY A NATURALIST ON THE CHALLENGER; PG. 338. 1879') TALKED WITH MEN WHO HAD SEEN THE THROWING CLUB USED IN ACTION: '…. A MISSILE WEAPON WHICH IS THROWN WITH GREAT FORCE WITH THE HAND, REVOLVING RAPIDLY IN THE AIR AS IT FLIES AND STRIKING A VERY FORMIDABLE BLOW, OFTEN IN THE FACE. SETTLERS ON FIJI TOLD ME IT WAS THE ONLY NATIVE WEAPON WHICH THEY FEARED WHEN FIGHTING THE FIJIANS'.

PROVENANCE

BY DESCENT FROM A SCOTTISH MILITARY FAMILY

EX PRIVATE SCOTTISH COLLECTION

EX PRIVATE COLLECTION