



MAST FORK

An extremely rare mast-fork or sawasu from an ocean-going canoe. The fork is used horizontally to support the single, free-stepped mast and keep it upright. It also serves as the stanchion for the sail hoist-rope. The “ears” of the figure are used as cleats for the tying-off of the halyard.

Egum Islet, Egum Atoll, Massim Area, Papua New Guinea, Melanesia. Wood with a weathered maritime patina and functional rubbing and wear. 139,5 x 34 cm. Early to mid 20th century.

This fork is of special interest in that it was carved on Egum islet where there is no canoe-carving tradition - the islet, situated in the center of Egum Atoll, is so small that the people must purchase their canoes from the large neighboring islands. This fork is the replacement for the deficient original fork delivered with the canoe. This may explain the atypical face and animated attitude of the stylized human figure which this fork represents. Only three mast-forks of this type were thought to be in collections outside of New Guinea as of 1987.

Literature:

Illustrated :

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