



Yuat - Sepik Figure

A very fine figure representing a male ancestor. The elongated body is shown with the arms akimbo, the hands placed on the stomach. The head is set low on the figures torso and wears a tall conical coif. The powerful facial features are well defined though the wide flat nose is not pierced. The legs are unusually long. The general style of this figure is of that typically found along the banks of the Lower Sepik River however, the aggressive facial features, the sharp V shaped smile, and the slanted eyebrows are of a style found principally along the Yuat River, which runs into the Lower stretch of the Sepik from the South. It is probable that this figure was carved in the immediate vicinity of the Yuat and Sepik junction and it should be noted that art-works showing several distinct stylistic influences are quite rare in New Guinea art.

Yuat river and Sepik River junction, PNG, Melanesia. Alstonia wood with red pigment and a semi-glossy patina of wear and age. Old insect damage and loss to feet and tip of coif, an old stable vertical crack on the rear. 35 x 4,2 x 4 cm. 19th century.

Provenance:

Collected in New Guinea by Arthur Bässeler who acquired it from the Deutch Neuguinea Compagnie headquarters at Potsdamhafen. Inventoried in the collections of the Linden Museum, Stuttgart in 1899 as "Götze, Klein, Potsdamhafen" (Götze can be translated as a heathen God-like figure or Idol). Potsdamhafen today is Monumbo Harbor, located on the North Coast of Papua New Guinea near Bogia. Linden Museum inventory inscription on rear of head : 5730 Potsdamhafen, Dr. A. Bässler, 5730. Collection number 5730 on dorsal area. Later de-acquisitioned by exchange to the Stuttgart collector Herr Seeger in 1956. Ex private German collection. Ex coll. : George Liotard, Marseille.

Arthur Bässeler was one of the earliest and wealthy collectors in German New Guinea. He made a first

stop in German New Guinea at some time between 1887 and 1889. He later traveled in the South Pacific and Australia from 1891 to 1893. During this second period he stayed in New Guinea for the months of April and May 1892. He is recorded by Otto Reche to have collected "...good old pieces from the area of the Sepik delta..." and to have purchased others from ship-captains and colonial travelers. After attempting to place his extensive collections with the Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin it seems he finally gave one group of oceanic material to the King of Württemberg which finally became part of the collections of the Linden Museum. He ultimately was able to give his collections and a lot of money to the Berlin museum which financed the Baessler Archiv - the erudite publication of the Berlin Museum which is named after him.

Literature:

Ref.: Personal communication with Ingrid Heermann, Curator, South Seas Department, Linden Museum Stuttgart.