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OCEANIC & ESKIMO ART



Ramu River Ancestor Figure

A powerfully carved ancestor figure possibly representing a recently deceased person. The male figure is shown in a vertical position with down pointing feet. The elongated head is pierced through the coif for suspension - this is unusual and may be indicative of a hanging figure like those from the Keram River Area or it is possibly for the attachment of an ornamental feathered coif. The face is typical of the Ramu river style with bulging eyes and concentric pupils to either side of a large wide and long hooked nose with flared nostrils. The figure wears a dentate beard and has pierced ears. The face and body show ritual or clan identification body ornaments painted with ochre.

Down pointing feet seem synonymous with the representation of the actuality of a dead person; the feet of the recently deceased tend to point downward as the muscles and tendons distend in death after rigor mortis dissipates approximately 36 to 48 hours after death.

Ramu River, Papua New Guinea, Melanesia. Wood (Alstonia ?), pigments (left foot is an old restoration). 55,5 x 14,3 x 9 cm. 19/20th century.