



### **Nsaguo Tapa Dance Apron**

An extremely rare and fine tapa cloth from a nsaguo dance costume. The double motif is quite rare on a single piece of tapa. These panels were used as loincloths by the main dancers wearing the huge nsaguo coif. The design elements on this piece seem to be anthropomorphic which is not unusual however they appear to be gendered with the lower one possibly representing a vulva.

During the Jupna ceremonial dance known as nsaguo konggap (nsaguo: bird with precious feathers) each of the dancers (all of whom are male) sings his own konggap ("death spirit's voice") song repeatedly all night long until he feels the presence of the ancestors. The men are decorated and carry an umbrella-like structure, nsaguo, representing the world tree (kwombu) and move in a counterclockwise circle, bending alternating knees with each beat of the accompanying large drum.

Yupno (Jupna) language group, Jupna River Valley, Finisterre Mountains, Huon Peninsula, PNG, Melanesia. Tapa (probably Mangrove tree) and traditional pigments. 86 x 43 cm. Late 19th to early 20th

century.

A group of six or seven nsaguo tapa from which the present example comes from were originally acquired by Dadi Wirz in 1956/1957 in Madang, PNG from a local supplier. They were subsequently described in error as being collected by Paul Wirz by a subsequent owner who marketed them thus.

This misunderstanding is consistently repeated in the recent works on these tapa as can be seen in Meyer 1998 fig. 9 and 10 where two examples are mis-described as collected by Paul Wirz and miscatalogued at the time as New Britain. Another example is the one illustrated in Hamson, 2016, pp. 298 - 299, cat. n° 163, which was previously in the Baron Rollin collection and the Jolika Collection and sold by Sotheby's Paris on 12 December 2024 as lot 57.

## FROM DEPICTION OF PRIMEVAL EVENTS TO TODAY'S KASTOM OBJECT: TAPA AMONG THE YUPNO IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Traditionally, the Yupno of the Finsterre Range in Papua New Guinea used barkcloth not only as everyday clothing (as for plain belts or cloaks) but also as carrier of indigenous cosmology and mythology. These tapa were decorated with earth colours and used to depict important primeval beings. They were worn together with large feather wheels at the nsaguo konggap dance festivals, held at night.

Today, with the increasing loss of indigenous knowledge, these tapa have nearly lost their function of passing on cultural knowledge and prehistoric events. However, they are transferred to new contexts. Using an altered iconography, they are an important part of kastom, the proud, cherished, but also nostalgic return to local traditions and ways of living of the ancestors, and an expression of cultural identity.

Presentation by Verena Keck (Germany) for "Made in Oceania" Tapa – Art and Social Landscapes, Interdisciplinary Symposium on Oceanic Tapa, Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum, Köln, 6.-17.01.14.

### Literature:

Ref. :

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Hamson, M. (Ed.) : Between the Known and the Unknown: New Guinea Art From Astrolabe Bay to Morobe, Palos Verdes, 2016,

Oliver Lueb und Peter Mesenhöller (Eds.) : Made in Oceania: Tapa – Kunst und Lebenswelten | Art and Social Landscapes. RAUTENSTRAUCH-JOEST-MUSEUM, Köln, 2014

Meyer, Anthony JP. : TAPA – Bark cloth of Oceania. Catalogue d'exposition. Galerie Meyer, Paris. 1998. Text by Pascal Cusenier.

Schmitz C. A. : ZUR ETHNOGRAPHIE DES JUPNA-TALES IM NORDOSTEN VON NEU-GUINEA, Ada Ethnographica, 7, 1958.