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Santa Cruz Fishing Float

A rare fishing float known as teu malimba and reportedly used for catching flying fish. The body of the float carved in a light boyant wood is weighted at the botton with a stone. The lower section is usually

painted a dark color, usually red, while the top is left plain or possibly painted with lime to whiten it. An owners mark is sometimes carved into the top section. The attachment system for the stone is quite elaborate with a flaring twin flange to retain the string and a complex lashing of bush fiber to hold it in place. The fish are hooked using a gorget or toggle which is a piece of turtle shell cut to form an angular boomerange form and sharpened at both ends. The gorget attached to the float by a longish line is left bobbing in the wavelets at the waters surface. A piece of bait is "hooked" through with the sharp ends of the gorget which the fish then swallows but cannot reject as the gorget catches in its throat. The gorget is one mankinds earliest inventions and precedes the curved pointed fishhook that is used since at least the early neolithic period world wide.

Santa Cruz Islands, Solomon Islands, Polynesian Outliers. Wood, pigment, turtle shell, stone, bush fiber and bush string with a patina of age and usage. 33 cm. 19th/20th century. Ex coll. : Jacques Lebrat, Paris

Literature:

Ref. :

Blau, Daniel; Maaz, Klaus : FISHHOOKS of THE PACIFIC ISLANDS. Daniel Blau, Munich & London, 2012, p. 124/125, Fig. 43.

Meyer, Anthony JP : OCEANIC ART. Könemann Verlage, Köln, 1995, p. 599, fig. 639

The Santa Cruz Islands fishing apparatus known as Teu Malimba (*2), used for catching flying fish, has been documented for a long time. It has a wooden float variously decorated with ornaments, a stone sinker, a tree bast line and a toggleshaped turtle shell hook, and was still in use in 2005. Koch collected the illustrated fishing implements as well as the toggle shaped turtle shell hooks during his stay on the main island of dende. (26): Ill. 30. Fisherman Alfred Lea affirmed that he still used them. Koch states: "The fisherman goes out onto the high seas with several floats, baits the hooks with crab claw meat, and casts them into the water one after another. Weighted by stone sinkers, the floats are vertical in the water, and therefore the upper part remains visible above the water's surface, to the fisherman." The simple unweighted wooden cylinders that Koch did not observe were still used to catch flying fish in 2005.

The first illustration of the Santa Cruz Islands float appears in Codrington's "The Melanesians" in 1891 (*2). The wooden float here is also decorated with engravings. Although it would appear obvious that the fishermen used these marks to identify their equipment, Beasley quotes a Santa Cruz mission boy saying: "that the marks upon them are not ownership marks, but serve to indicate the order in which they are placed in the sea, for they do not throw them in anyhow, but place them in proper sequence. The one with the human figure upon it, he supposed, would be the first, and probably represents the spirit who has charge of the flying fish."

Excerpt from Blau, Daniel; Maaz, Klaus : FISHHOOKS of THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

See the example inv. n° FE001436 acquired in 1916 in the Te Papa National Museum, Wellington, New Zealand (<https://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/object/165432>)