



Sepik Crocodile Figure

The crocodile presented here is quite naturalistic. The artist gave it life by finding the clever balance between the realistic head, the simplified body, and the slightly arched and life-like position of the animal. It has been carved from an old canoe with the head as the original prow. One of the myths of the Sepik begins "In the beginning there was water. A giant crocodile lived under the sea. It brought up soil from under the sea and made an island. The island became bigger so that man could live on it." As creator of the universe and primordial "mother" of the clans, the crocodile is closely associated with initiation and war. In each of the Men's House there are several crocodile skulls, some of which are over-modelled like human ones. Effigies of crocodiles are used in many of the initiation ceremonies, especially during the scarification rites where the skin of the young boys is cut to represent the bite marks of the beast. The great war canoes represent the beast and have a ferocious crocodile head as their prow figure. And finally, the frequent earthquakes are, of course, the fault of the giant crocodile as it is still carrying around the island of New Guinea on its back! Angerman Village (?), latmul People, black and reddish ochre paint. 115 cm x 21, 5 cm x 12, 5 cm. Early 20th century.