



Fiji Bone Sail Needle

A sail-making needle or saulaca. This example is unusual as it retains a small section of the bone's articulation at the thread-hole extremity. Fiji, Polynesia. Human bone (fibula ?) with a fine patina of age and usage. A short length of native fiber is still attached to the thread-hole. 27,3 cm 18th/19th century.

Fergus Clunie (1986) on p.120, notes that the leg bones of cannibalised enemies were needed for the making of sail needles in coastal areas, whereas in the highlands of Vitilevu bones were left in trees as trophies.

Examples in the British Museum were checked by BM physical anthropologist Daniel Antoine on 11.3.10 but as the needles in the BM have been worked down from larger bones, it is not possible to judge if human or not. This applies to almost all of the Fijian bone needles of this type with the notable exception of the present example as one can see the remains of the distal epiphyseal (knee joint) of the shin bone where the eye hole is pierced.

Literature:

See similar examples in the Fiji Museum, the Horniman Museum, the Brooklyn Museum, the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Cambridge & the British Museum.

Ref.:

Clunie, Fergus : YALO I VITI : shades of Viti / a Fiji Museum catalogue. Fiji Museum, Suva, 1986.

Phelps, Steven : ART AND ARTEFACTS OF THE PACIFIC, AFRICA, AND THE AMERICAS, THE JAMES HOOPER COLLECTION. Hutchinson & Co. LTD. and Christies, Manson & Woods, London. 1975.