



Turtle Shell Gobaela Lime Spatula

A fine example of a gobaela (gabaela) type lime spatula made of turtle-shell. These objects were used as money presentation scepters in imitation of the larger wood gobaela and also as wealth exchange items during marriage transactions. The form of the gobaela relates to several essential ideas, which refer back to the origins of the people of the Louisiade Archipelago. Bataglia (1990, p. 129, fig. 7) indicates that if the gobaela is viewed with the spatula blade pointing down it represents a stylized male anthropomorphic being. In this position the gobaela can also be seen as a schematic representation of both the male and female reproductive organs. When Bataglia places the spatula blade pointing upward the gobaela becomes the representation of a single-mast, double-ended canoe. This position can also be the representation of an erect phallus. The decorative representations on this example are the typically repetitive head of a bird possibly the heron, or boi in the local language. The outer curved edge is pierced along the curvature for the attachment of shell money. The lime infill in the incised design elements has altered the state of the turtle shell; oxidizing it a bit and creating a golden edging to the motifs in a most unusual and beautiful fashion.

Louisiane Archipelago?, Massim Area, PNG, Melanesia. Turtle shell (Hawksbill - *Eretmochelys imbricata**) with lime infill and a fine soft patination of age and usage. 22,8 x 13,5 cm. 19th/20th century.

**Eretmochelys imbricata* : statut UICN : CR A2bd. CITES Annex I

Literature:

Published & exhibited :

Meyer, Anthony JP.: SPATULES A CHAUX MASSIM LIME SPATULAS. Catalogue d'exposition.
Galerie Meyer, Paris. 2000. Text by Harry Beran, N° 73, pp. 68/69

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Connecting Lines - Traits d'Union : Between Tradition and Contemporary Creation - Dadi Wirz &
Krassimira Drenska and early Tribal Art from Oceania & the Arctic. Galerie Meyer, 2024/2025, p. 57.

Ref. :

Aldridge, Richard and Hamson, Michael : Art of the Massim and Collingwood Bay. Michael Hamson
Oceanic Art, Palos Verde, 2009.

Bataglia, D. : On the Bones of the Serpent - Person, Memory, and Mortality in Sabarl Island Society.
The University of Chicago Press, 1990.

Meyer, Anthony JP. : SPATULES A CHAUX MASSIM LIME SPATULAS. Catalogue d'exposition.
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