



Rarotonga Adze - Capt. de Frégate Riodel

A rare and early master-carver's wood working adze, or toki, mounted with a long, tanged, basalt blade. The elegance and dimensions of the blade as well as its remarkable state of preservation show that this was a tool of the utmost importance. It is reported that artists would put their favorite adze "to sleep" in the temple on the night before beginning an important sculpture so that the adze would benefit from the powers instilled by the gods. The shaft is beautifully rendered with a complex cross section ranging from the perfectly circular pommel to oval and on to a sharp-ended egg shape towards the heel of the adze. The binding is made of sennit (braided coconut husk) tightly wrapping the tanged blade to its carved-out lodging and buffered with a section of shark or stingray skin (minor old damage to the heel of the adze).

Rarotonga or Mangaia Islands, Cook Islands, Polynesia.

Basalt, coconut fiber, fish skin, wood.

55,65 cm.

18th/19th century.

An inscription in black ink script on the shaft « Indian Adze ».

Literature:

"The stone adzes were secured to their wooden hafts by means of fine sinnet, itself esteemed divine. It was fabled that the peculiar way in which the natives of Mangaia fasten their axes was originally taught them by the gods. A famous god, named Tane-mataariki [the god of craftsmen], i.e., Tane-of-royal-face, was considered to be enshrined in a sacred triple axe [...] to use an adze was to be a man of consequence, the skill necessary in using it being invariably referred back to the gods as its source."

(W. Wyatt Gill, Jottings from the Pacific, London, 1885).