



Maori Wahaika

A superb and early, full bladed wahaika, a short, bill-hook shaped war-club used by chiefs and great warriors. This example is unusual in that it is elongated in format contrary to the wider and shorter examples that are more common. Here, the inner edge of the blade is carved with a large central ancestor figure carved in high relief. The butt or réké is carved as an elongated stylized human head. The central ancestor figure is carved with an elongated head, with the arms and legs organized in a series of opposing curves straddling the edge of the weapon. The left hand is resting on the stomach while the right is curled into a four fingered claw on the side. The figure is thus shown in a position of power and aggression. While the figure is female with a vulva carved in the crotch there is a possibility that it be a hermaphrodite representation as there seems to be a stylized phallus pendant between the arching legs. The face is expressive with an aggressive grin, glaring eyes under arched brows and a short snubbed nose. The mouth offers bared teeth and a laterally projecting tongue, which indicates that the ancestor here was a woman of high political importance with the right of speech. The hole for the wrist (or thumb-string) is carved in a slightly crescent form and well centered. A large channelled gouge is present on the left side of the blade with grouped notches around its rim indicating a genealogical record of previous ancestors linked to the owner of the weapon. This is extremely rare and can be compared to only a few recorded weapons notably a nephrite patu collected by Captain Cook in a private German collection and another wood wahaika from Robert Hales, London offered by Christie's, Paris 7/06/2005 lot 122.

Maori People, New Zealand, Polynesia.

Wood (kauri pine) with a superb patina of age and use.

18th/19th century (possibly pre-contact), Te Puawaitanga period, 1500-1800.

47 x 12,3 x 3 cm.

Literature:

See one other example by the same artist and carved in an identical format minus the genealogical markings in the Te Papa Taonga Māori collection, Wellington, NZ, registration number OL000065, ex Oldman Collection and another in the same artistic style with the genealogical notching to one side N° OL000069.