



Fiji Priestly Sedre ni Waiwai Oil Dish Ex Bulmer coll.

A superb and very rare form of sacred priestly oil-dish or sedre ni waiwai. This example is of the rare crescent format also described as « delta wing ». It probably represents a stylized canoe or possibly a stylized open-winged bird. The sacred perfumed coconut oil, or waiwai was used to anoint the bodies of the chiefs and priests for ceremonial and devotional occasions. The dish sits on three short cylindrical feet, the front one incorporates a suspension loop. The cultural significance of the wood known as vesi is diverse and is embedded in many Fijian cultural expressions and beliefs. The tree itself was sacred among ancient Fijians, and its hardness and seemingly indestructible nature embodied admired human qualities. The tree was used as the main pole to hold up traditional temples and chiefly bures (traditional houses), to build the drua or waqa tabu (sacred canoe) reserved only for those of noble birth, and to make the traditional gong (lali) used to announce important events as well as for the manufacture of sacred containers and objects.

Fiji, Polynesia.

Vesi wood (*Intsia bijuga*) with a superb glossy patina and traces of wear and usage.

The remains of an old inscription on the underside between the feet.

38 cm.

18th/19th century.

Literature:

See a very similar example in the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge: 1931.213, collected by Alfred Maudslay, 1875–80.

Ref. :

CYCLOPEDIA of FIJI 1907. Reprint by Fiji Museum, Suva, 1984, p. 286

Gordon Cumming, C. F. (Constance Frederica) : AT HOME IN FIJI 1837-1924. Armstrong & son New York, 1883, p. 206.