Finch & Co



MELANESIA NEW IRELAND NAMATANAI AREA CEREMONIAL LIMESTONE 'KULAP'

A RARE MELANESIA NEW IRELAND NAMATANAI AREA CEREMONIAL LIMESTONE 'KULAP' A MALE ANCESTOR FIGURE

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TRACES OF ORIGINAL STIPPLED PIGMENTED ORNAMENT

REPAIRS TO WAIST CONSISTENT WITH RITUAL USE

19TH CENTURY

SIZE: 48.5CM HIGH - 19 INS HIGH

LITERATURE

THESE ENIGMATIC CARVED LIMESTONE FIGURES APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN RESTRICTED TO THE NAMATANAI DISTRICT OF SOUTH-EASTERN CENTRAL NEW IRELAND. KNOWN AS 'KULAP' THEY REPRESENT RECENTLY DECEASED ANCESTORS AND WERE CREATED BY SPECIALISTS TO SERVE AS RITUAL TEMPORARY HOMES FOR THE SPIRITS OF THE DEAD WHO MIGHT OTHERWISE WANDER AND CAUSE HAVOC AMONG THE LIVING. THE IMAGES WERE HOUSED IN SMALL SHRINES CONSTRUCTED IN THE FOREST OUTSIDE THE VILLAGE WHERE ONLY MEN WERE ALLOWED TO VIEW THEM, ALTHOUGH WOMEN COULD GATHER OUTSIDE THE SHRINE TO MOURN. AS THEY ALL VARY IN SIZE AND ATTRIBUTES, IT IS THOUGHT

THAT THEY WERE MADE TO PORTRAY SPECIFIC INDIVIDUAL ANCESTORS WHOSE SUPERNATURAL POWERS COULD BE HARNESSED TO BENEFIT LIVING DESCENDANTS.

THE FIGURES WERE BELIEVED TO CONTAIN THE SOUL OF THE DECEASED WHOM THEY REPRESENTED AND WOULD BE REMOVED IN SECRECY FROM THE SHRINE AND RITUALLY BROKEN AND DISCARDED ONCE THE PERIOD OF MOURNING WAS OVER IN ORDER TO SYMBOLICALLY RELEASE THE SPIRIT INTO THE REALM OF THE ANCESTORS.

THE REVEREND GEORGE BROWN PROVIDED THE EARLIEST RECORDED HISTORY OF THESE FIGURES AND NOTED THAT WITH THE ADVENT OF CHRISTIANITY ON NEW IRELAND THE 'KULAP' FIGURES AND ASSOCIATED CULT OF THE DEAD HAD VIRTUALLY DISAPPEARED BY 1910.

PROVENANCE

GENERAL PITT RIVERS DORSET ENGLAND

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