

ART
NÈGRE
& Mers du Sud

MARTIN DOUSTAR

ARTS D'AFRIQUE, D'ASIE, D'OCÉANIE ET DES AMÉRIQUES



1 "STARGAZER" FIGURE

Ga'anda people, Adamawa State, Nigeria, 19th century
Wood, pigments
Height : 42 cm

Provenance Dr. Jean-Pierre Lacoste collection, Paris

Bibliography "*Central Nigeria Unmasked : Arts of the Benue River Valley*"
Fowler Museum at UCLA, 2011, p. 550-559

This astonishing and quite unique figure collected from the Ga'anda tribes belongs to a group of extremely scarce sculptures originating from the Eastern Gongola Valley, in northeastern Nigeria. Scholar Marla C. Berns gave us an insight on the art and culture of the various peoples living in this region in a well documented study titled "Vestiges in Wood : Ancestor Sculptures of the Eastern Gongola Valley" published in the book of reference "*Central Nigeria Unmasked : Arts of the Benue River Valley*", Fowler Museum at UCLA, 2011, p. 550-559.

Heavily eroded, the present figure has become almost an abstraction. The oval-shaped head, with eyes and mouth hardly suggested, looks in delicate balance, in suspension on a thin and elongated body. Elegant and enigmatic, his gaze turned towards the sky, short arms resting on his torso, the figure seems to be in a pleading posture...

The Ga'anda believe in the existence of a supreme being whom they refer to as *Farta*, the same name also apply to the sun. There is however no direct *Farta* worship, they worship *Farta* through some fetishes as intermediaries spread across the entire area. The most important fetish is called '*Yera*' which literally means rain. Their chief priest use the rain cult as his principal object of authority, he is therefore the most important person in the whole tribe. He is also in charge of *wan-mirta* spirit (Bringer of Death) to whom he makes sacrifices every year in April; and finally there is the *Mbirthleng-nda* which is the protector of the Ga'anda people.

2 HORNBILL MASK

Dogon people, Mali, 19th century
Wood, pigment
Height : 84 cm

Provenance Alfons Bremel, Berlin

Very long ago, according to Dogon mythology, a woman stumbled across a group of masked supernatural beings. Startled, they fled and left behind their masks and costumes, which the woman brought to her village. The men grew jealous, stole the masks from her, and made masking an exclusively male prerogative. The woman, called *Yasigine* ("sister of the masks"), is remembered by this type of mask—that's her on top—representing the hornbill, whose picking of grains and stirring of dust is mimicked by the dancer during his performance.

The present mask, almost fossilized, appears to be an extremely ancient and fine example. The hieratic figure gives the impression to have climbed on top of the mask and overlook the ground with his head slightly turned down.

A comparable mask is visible in the collection of The MET, New York, accession n°1977.394.48a-b. Another variant of the same type of mask is in the Minneapolis Institute of Art, accession n° 95.1.





3

DJENNENKE FIGURE

Bandiagara Plateau, Mali, circa 1075 AD (C14 tested)
Wood, pigment, palm oil
Height : 47 cm

Provenance Julius Carlebach, New York
Guilhem Montagut, Barcelona
Liliane and Michel Durant-Dessert, Paris

Publication *Ancêtres du Mali*, Barcelone, Galerie Guilhem Montagut, 2011, s.p.
Un choix, Barcelone, Galerie Guilhem Montagut, 2015, p. 5-6



4

FEMALE FIGURE

Lake Tanganyika, Democratic Republic of the Congo/Tanzania, 1800-1900
Wood, pigment, palm oil
Height : 42 cm

Provenance Jacques Gansler collection, Virginia
Michael Rhodes, New York
Cole Harrell, New York
Olivier Castellano, Paris

This female figure appears to be quite a unique sculpture, showing stylistic elements and aesthetic influences from various tribes living in the vicinity of the Lake Tanganyika, located between southeastern Congo and northwestern Tanzania. However, the overall appearance and posture seems to suggest a probable Rungu origin; while the wood used by the artist and its deep carmine sweating surface are reminiscent of Bembe workshops, and could possibly steer to an itinerant Bembe master carver producing for neighboring communities. According to Marc L. Félix, these figures were carved in pairs, male and female of usually much smaller size, but always depicted on a similar short stylized throne. Few examples are known and published and it seems the present figure is a major artistic testimony from this rare corpus.





5

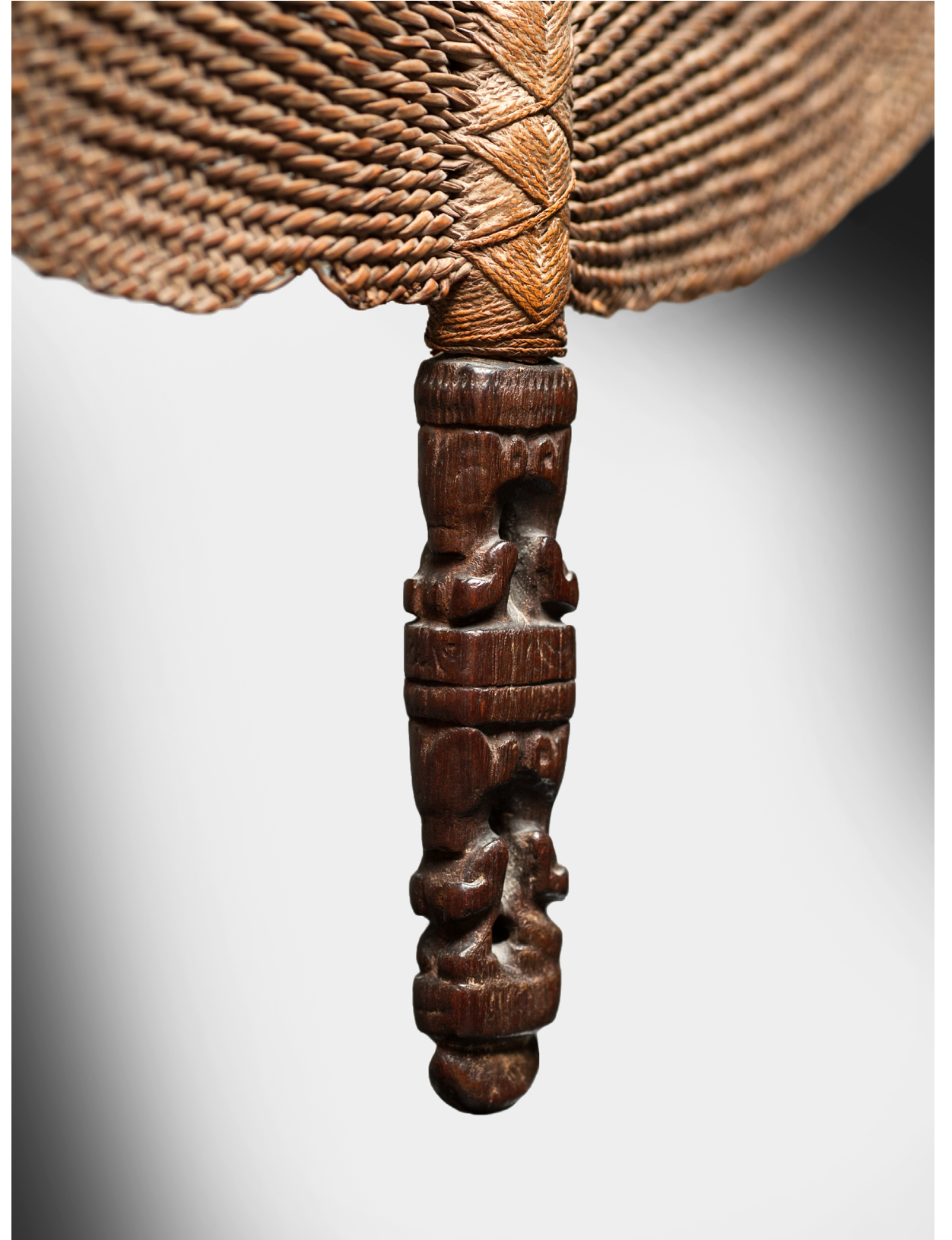
KETE MASK

Kuba, Democratic Republic of the Congo, 1800-1900
Wood, pigments, raffia
Height : 49 cm

Provenance Private collection, Paris

The Kete people farm along the southern border of the Kuba Kingdom and live in independent villages led by family chiefs. They carved figures associated with initiations and helmet masks similar to the Bushoong Bwoon mask with large conical eyes. This hypnotic mask is an early example of helmet mask that intervenes in funerary ceremonies. It has kept its original raffia cloth on top and remnants of laundry blue pigments around the eyes.

OZEANIEN



6 FAN (*Tahi'i*)

Marquesas Islands, Polynesia, 1700-1800
Wood, Pandanus leaflets, coconut fiber
Height : 45 cm

Provenance : Leo et Karin Van Oosterom collection, Amsterdam (1969)

Tahi'i fans from the Marquesas Islands, with their delicately carved handle (*ke'e*), are among the most beautiful finery in the Polynesian world. Only high-ranking men and women such as chiefs, princesses and high priests, were allowed to possess them: "A sign of peace, a badge of command among warriors, an emblem for chiefs and experts, an ornament for ceremonies and feasts, an object to be gifted or exchanged, the fan retained all its prestige in the mid-19th century" (Ivory, Matahoata. *Arts et société aux îles Marquises*, 2016, p. 118). Passed down from generation to generation within the same family, they were the work of two castes of specialised artists: the *tuhuka aaka tahii*, for the infinitely intricate weaving, and the *tuhuka ketu kee tahii*, for the carving of the handle which was the sacred part of the piece, carved in sperm whale ivory, human bone or hardwood, as is the case here.

The handle "generally represents four of their gods figures - two on top and two below, squatting back to back" (Diary of Captain Porter, 1815, cited by Panoff, *Trésors des Îles Marquises*, 1995, p. 118), and in this piece the wood is covered in an exceptional patina which has softened the reliefs in a very particular way, attesting to its antiquity and prolonged use. This antiquity is further corroborated by the sobriety of the decor, as well as by the welded backs of the *tikis* also to be found on the example made from sperm whale teeth and acquired in situ between 1844 and 1847 by Georges Louis Vinter, a soldier of the 1st infantry regiment in Nuku Hiva.



7 TOGGLES (Ivi pòò)

Marquesas Islands, Polynesia, 1700-1800
Bone
Height : 3,8 cm

Provenance : Sir Jacob Epstein, London
Carlo Monzino, Lugano
Lance Entwistle, Paris

Exhibition : The Arts Council of Great Britain, 1960, London, n° 209

Publication : *The Epstein collection* (1960), W. Fagg, n°209
Jacob Epstein Collector (1989), E. Bassani and M. McLeod, page 141, n° 496-497

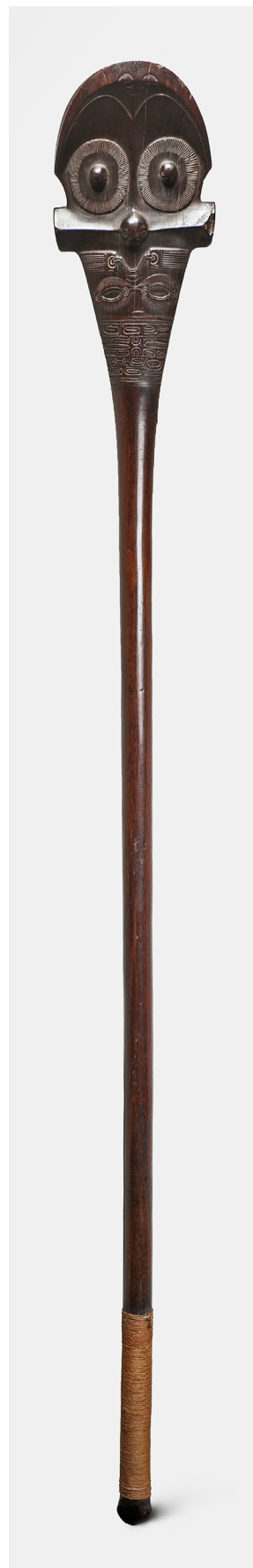
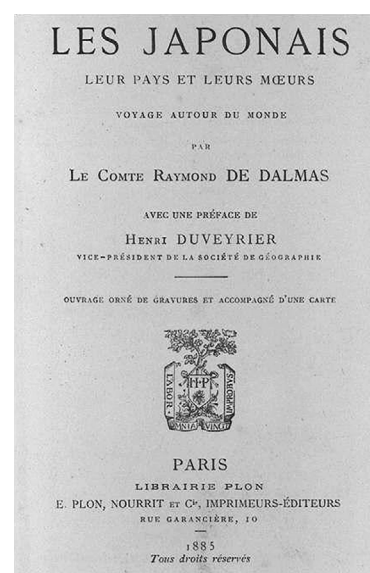


8 WAR CLUB (*U'u*)

Marquesas Islands, Polynesia, 1700-1800
Wood, pigment, coconut fiber
Height : 146 cm

Provenance Collected by Count Raymond de Dalmas before 1912
By inheritance to Henri de Galard Terraube, Toulouse

Count Raymond de Dalmas (1862-1930) was a French ornithologist and a great traveler. Raised in Croatia, he roams Europe during his childhood, visited Algeria and Iceland. In 1882, aged only of 21 years, he went for a voyage around the world, from Glasgow to New York, then Japan where he stayed for 3 months. This trip would be the occasion to study the Japanese culture and customs, and publish two important books on the subject : *Les Japonais, leur pays et leur mœurs*. *Voyage autour du monde, préface d'Henri Duveyrier*, Plon-Nourrit, 1885 ; and *Japon et Japonais*, H. Gautier, 1895. It is probably during this voyage, more precisely between January 1883 and his return to Paris in March 1883, that he visited the South Seas and acquired a group of Polynesian artefacts, including the present Marquesas Islands war club. In 1912, he made a last trip in those regions and visited New Zealand. This remarkable collection remained in the family since then ; it is exhibited here for the very first time, more than a century after its collection.



9 WAR CLUB (“*Culacula*”)

Fiji Islands, Melanesia, 1700-1800

Wood

Height : 110 cm

Provenance Collected by Count Raymond de Dalmas before 1912
By inheritance to Henri de Galard Terraube, Toulouse

These broad flat bladed clubs had thin edges cutting through bone like an ax rather than smashing it like a club. They were more sword than a club. The serrated edge could act like a saw. They are probably of Samoan or Tongan origin but so widely used by Fijians as to become a Fijian native weapon. The present example is particularly wide and refined, with a beautiful glossy patina.



10 WAR CLUB ("MOUNGALAU")

Tonga Islands, Polynesia, 1700-1800

Wood

Height : 107 cm

Provenance Collected by Count Raymond de Dalmas before 1912
By inheritance to Henri de Galard Terraube, Toulouse

In his reference book "The Art of Tonga", scholar Keith St Cartmail describes a similar so-called "paddle" club - *Moungalau* - from the Oldman collection. Further he explains that the pattern motif and the shape actually depict a crocodile rather than a paddle... "Blade diamond shown in section, the handle round with flared proximal end and pierced lug, the surface finely carved in traditional style in the form of bands and quadrangular compartments containing zigzag, horizontal and longitudinal patterns together with ideographs of birds, turtles and sharks." (page 131, n°88a)

The present example is particularly remarkable as the decorum contains multiple little warriors on each side of the club. A very comparable club was collected by Captain James Cook during his second voyage in 1773-1774.



11 PRESTIGE AXE

Kanak Culture, New Caledonia, 1700-1800
Serpentine, wood, cloth, fiber
Height : 60 cm

Provenance Ex. Edwin Curtis Moffat, London (before 1939)

The different elements composing this remarkably tall and elegant “O Kono” axe, namely the stone blade, the blue cloth and the bindings, are all of extremely ancient and fine quality, and clearly belong together. It is actually quite rare to find an early Kanak axe in such good condition. Symbol of power and objects of prestige kept in a basket of wealth belonging to important lineages, they were only removed on key occasions such as mourning ceremonies and weddings during which affirmation of status occurred. Some early explorers have also observed these object in the context of rainmaking rituals.

Edwin Curtis Moffat (1887–1949), better known as Curtis Moffat, was a London-based American abstract photographer, painter and modernist interior designer. Moffat studied painting in New York and in Paris before exhibiting his work in New York during World War I. He married the actress and poet Iris Tree, and the couple moved to London after the war, where Moffat took up abstract photography. He collaborated with Man Ray and Cecil Beaton on numerous occasions throughout his career. He opened a photographic studio in London in 1925. Four years later, he opened an interior design showroom and gallery, displaying a combination of modern, antique and the first major collections of African tribal sculpture in London. His home became a popular salon for artists, intellectuals and gourmands.





12 MAGIC STONE

Malekula Island, Vanuatu, 1800-1900
Limestone
Height : 24 cm

Provenance Dr. Hugh Gallagher collection, Sydney

This rare and ancient stone head depicts Lengnangoulong, an important mythological figure in the archipelago, who was both a powerful magician and a big eater of wild pigs. These stones are said to procure special powers to those who know how to use them. They mainly intervene during the ceremonies involving the sale and ritual sacrifice of the wild pigs.

A group of similar magic stones are on view in the Musée du Quai Branly, Paris. One of them has been published numerous times and is kind of emblem of the art and culture of Vanuatu Islands.

13 HOOK FIGURE

Sawos, Middle Sepik River, Papua New Guinea, 1700-1900
Wood, pigments
Height : 84 cm

Provenance Collected in situ by Bruce Lawes, circa 1956
Harry A. Franklin, Beverly Hills

Publication *The Primitive Arts of the Sepik River*, New Guinea, D. Scott
Claremont, 1960, n.p., cat. no. 4512
The Art of the Sepik River, A. Wardwell, 1971, p. 68, cat. no. 134

Exhibition The Lang Art Galleries, Scripps College, Claremont,
The Primitive Arts of the Sepik River, New Guinea, Oct. 18-Dec. 17, 1960
The Art Institute of Chicago, *The Art of the Sepik River*, Oct. 16-Nov. 28, 1971

This important suspension hook very clearly relates to an important group of sculptures which were once in the Dambwibit men's house in the Sawos hamlet of Wolombi, in the village of Yamök. The group includes an ancestor figure named Malabi, once owned by Harry Franklin and now in the collection of the Dallas Museum of Art (inv. no. 1974.5.McD; see Pitman, ed., *Dallas Museum of Art: A Guide to the Collection*, Dallas, 2012, pp. 124-125). Malabi was collected for Franklin from Yamök by Bruce Lawes in around 1956, and it seems probable that the present suspension hook was collected at the same time and in the same context. An important figure of the founding ancestor Tulalamun was collected from Yamök by Lawes at the same date; it is now in the collection of the Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery, Port Moresby (inv. no. E.361.1; see Howarth, *Myth and Magic*, Canberra, 2015, pp. 190-191).

The attribution of this suspension hook to Yamök is further supported by its clear resemblance to the ancestor figure named Kurubu, which was collected by the Swiss anthropologist Alfred Bühler from the Dambwibit men's house on July 14, 1959. The figure is now in the Museum der Kulturen, Basel (inv. no. Vb 17703; see Peltier, Schindlbeck, and Kaufmann, eds., *Sepik. Arts de Papouasie-Nouvelle-Guinée*, Paris, 2015, pp. 186-187, cat. no. 69). A closer stylistic comparison with the ancestor figure Malabi now in the collection of the Dallas Museum of Art suggests that this hook was carved by the same artist. The shape of the head and the details of the face have startling similarities.



An important lecture about these Sawos figures collected in Yamok was given by scholar Marian Pfeiffer in the Dallas Museum of Art, in January 29, 1999 :

“In Sawos mythology, the ancestors carry or hold the village up, and this is represented in the men’s houses where the figures are secured to the center post, an Iatmul association which probably originated from the Sawos. They are associated with a particular group of ancestors called waken or wagen, which are potent, dangerous ancestors who are involved in situations of potential advocacy for hunting, headhunting, famine, how the crops are going to be that year, or if people are sick with a disease that’s circulating, or they can also bring harm. (...)”

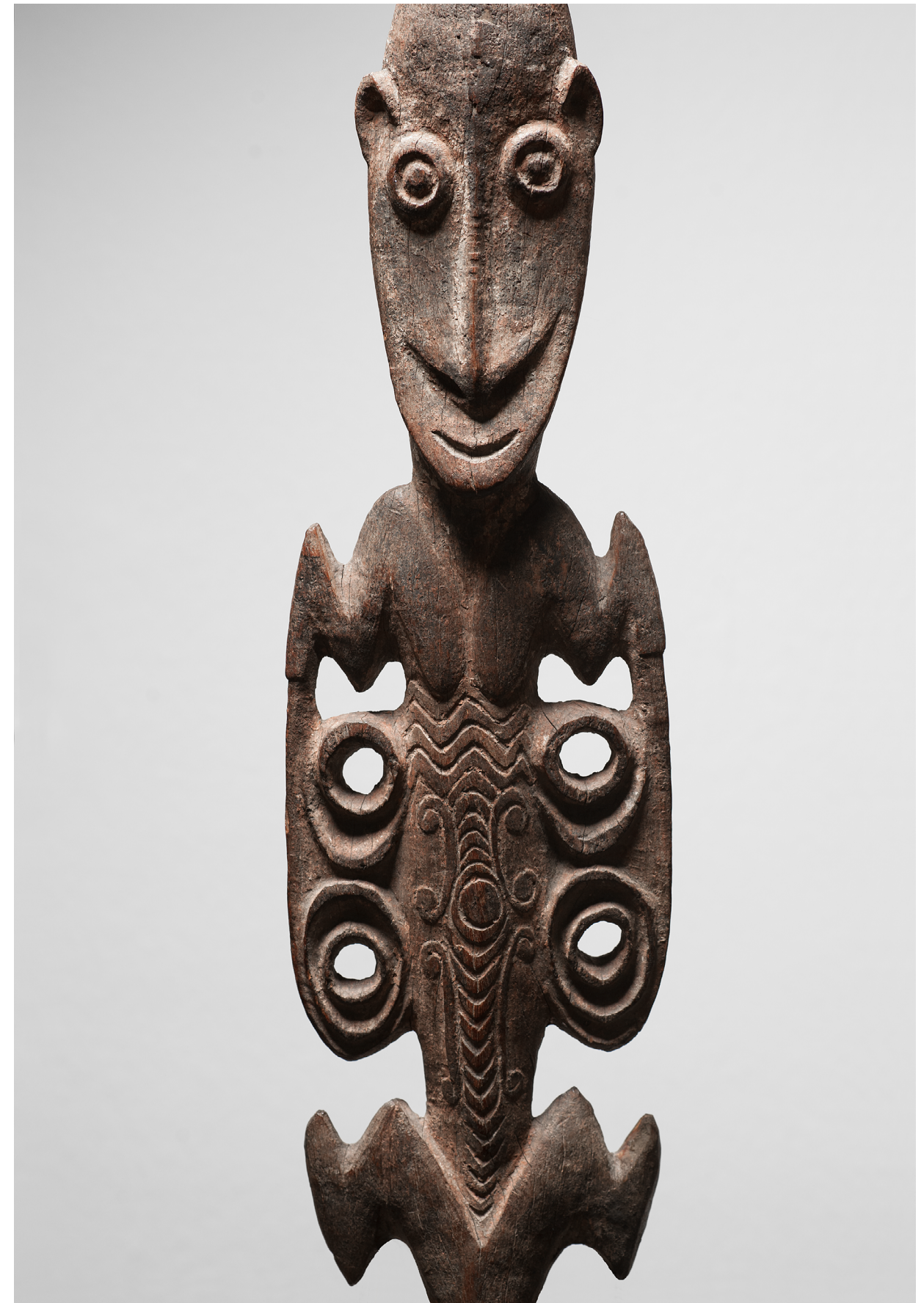
These ancestors represent both the living and they represent the dead, and are connected to the idea that all life is eternal and everything comes from the ancestors. When it dies, it goes back and comes back in another form. (...)

The iconography of these figures is basically associated with a divinity story, a mythological origin myth story, that is, a story of Betman Gambi. During his life he traveled all over the Sepik territories serving up mischief wherever he went, but everybody sort of loved him, too, and he made these pranks. When he died, they tried to resuscitate him.

This other mythological figure, which was a lizard (and some say a crocodile) and its name was Shotkaman, stretched out over the body of the corpse and literally punctured holes, and crept into the body, brought the corpse back to life, and thus the puncture marks of the lizard gliding into the body to give new life.

These figures are also, and this myth, are often associated with the serpentine image, the crocodilian image, or lizard and the Gandju birds which are associated with the serpentine motifs. They are also associated with Kava-mbuangga, which is associated with those rhombic shoulder circles that we looked at on the detail. He is said to have made originally the swampy ground firm, to make the ground able to be lived on and firm. He was a waken as we talked about, that ancestral category of ancestors called waken who set his foot upon the mud and thereby created dry land.

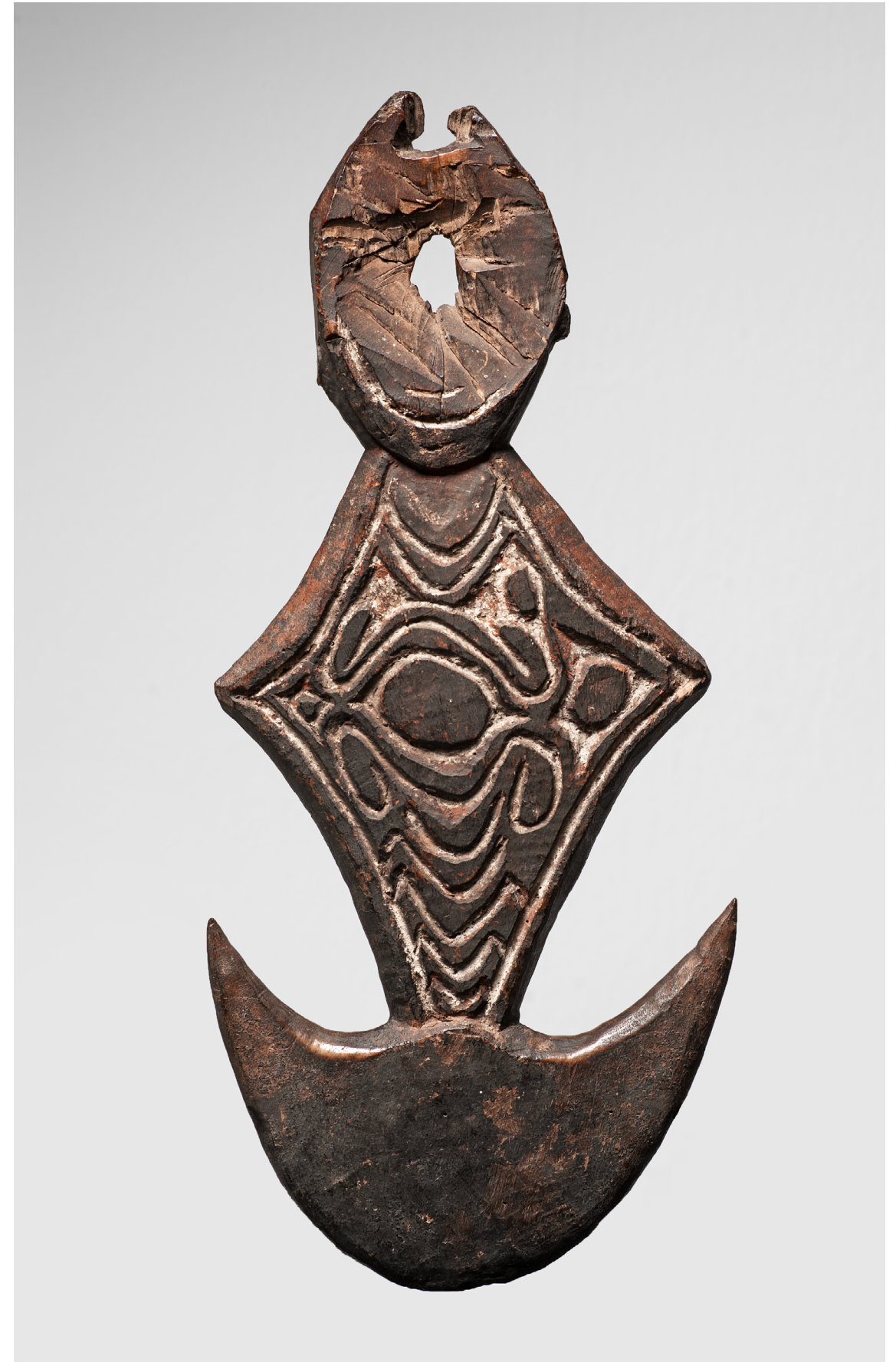
The rich iconography of this hook, its elaborated openwork carving and remarkable state of preservation despite its considerable age indicate it was a highly sacred object kept preciously in the men’s ceremonial house, and possibly destined to receive the skulls of important enemies killed during a head-hunting raid.

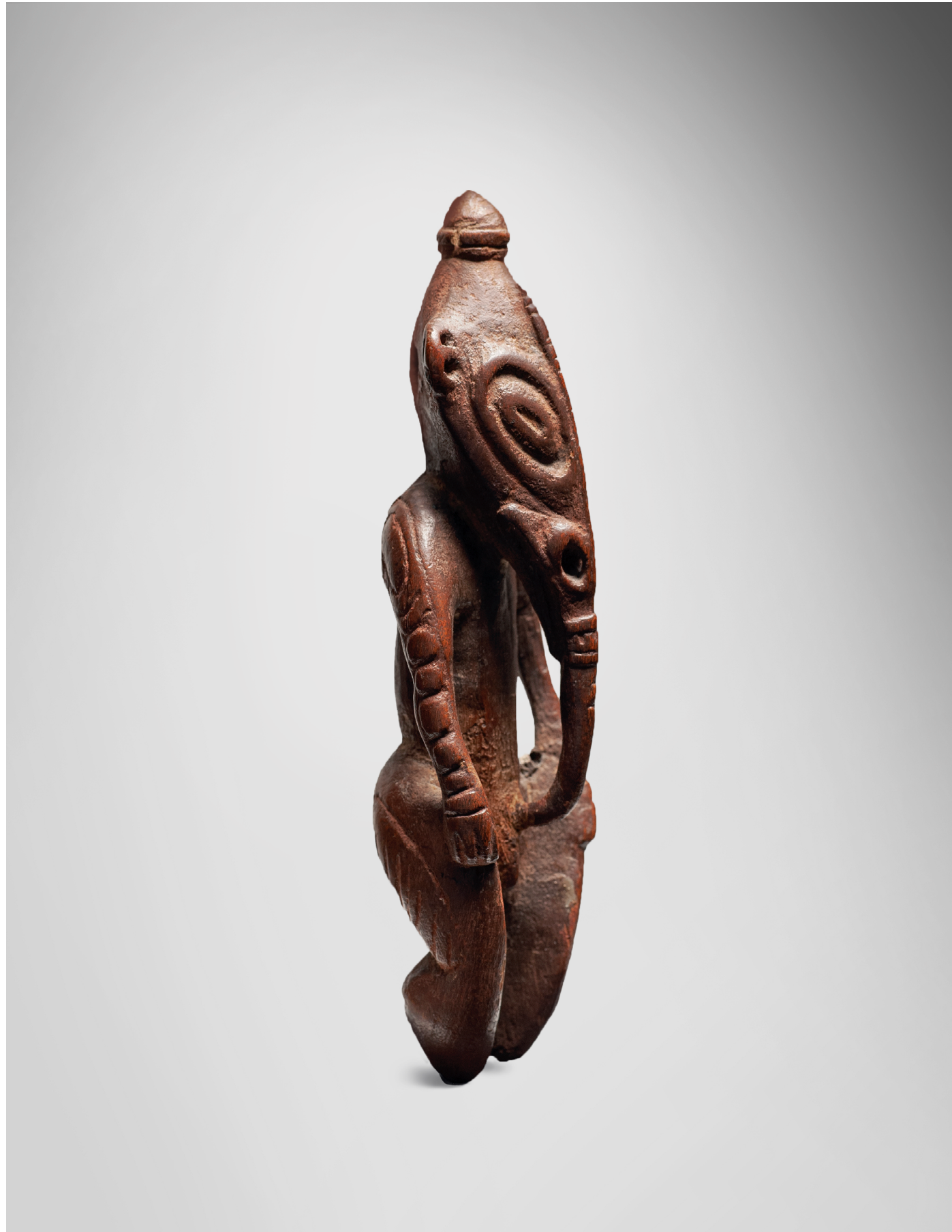


14 HOOK

Middle Sepik, Papua New Guinea, 1700-1800
Wood, pigments
Height : 36 cm

Provenance Ex. Peter Kohler, Ascona





15

ANCESTOR FIGURE

Lower Sepik Figure, Papua New Guinea, 1800-1900
Wood, pigment
Height : 20 cm

Provenance Private collection, Germany

16 AMULETS

Sepik River, Papua New Guinea, 1800-1900
Wood, pigment
Height : 12 cm and 13,5 cm

Provenance Private collection, Germany





17 BETEL MORTAR

Kubalia, Prince Alexander Mountains, East Sepik Province
Papua New Guinea, 1800-1900
Wood, pigment
Height : 18,5 cm

Provenance Michael Hamson, Palos Verdes
Elizabeth Pryce collection, Sydney



18 DRUM HANDLE

Ramu River, Papua New Guinea, 1800-1900
Wood, pigment
Height : 26,5 cm

Provenance Michael Kremerskothen, Dortmund

19 BULLROARER

Wapo area, Papuan Gulf, Papua New Guinea, 1800-1900
Wood, lime
Height : 45,5 cm

Provenance Private collection, Paris



20 KAP KAP

New Ireland / Papua New Guinea, 1800-1900

Tridacna Gigas, clam shell, turtle shell, fiber

Diameter : 6 cm and 7,4 cm (New Ireland) ; 7,3 cm and 13,2 cm (Papua)

Provenance Private collection, Germany



21 SPEARS

Melanesia, 1800-1900
Wood, Bamboo, fiber, pigment

1. Solomon Islands - Ex. Michael Hamson, Palos Verdes
2. Sepik River - La Korrigane, collected in 1939
3. Highlands - Ex. Renaud Vanuxem, Paris
4. Sepik River - Ex. Jean-Paul Morin collection, Paris
5. Vanuatu - Ex. Dr. Francois collection
6. St Matthias Islands, 304 cm - Ex. Jean-Paul Morin collection / Leo Fleischmann
7. Sepik River, 278 cm - La Korrigane, (n°D39. 3 / 1343-2)
8. Sepik River, Ex. Renaud Vanuxem, Paris



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