

4. Pacific display - Speaking to the Gods captions

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1 – 33/1953/26

Ancestor figure

Early 20th century

Huon Gulf, Papua New Guinea

Part of a decorated post for a community men's house, which is associated with initiation and ancestor cults for the purpose of reinforcing kinship links.

2 – E1607

Unspurred club

Made before 1845

Fiji

A very rare wooden club that is carved to represent an animal, likely a flying fox bat. In temple ritual, this club enabled the priest to become possessed by a deity.

3 – 116/1961/1-2

Ceremonial adze

Date unknown

Aotearoa (New Zealand)

This is an unconventional example of a *toki poutangata*. It includes a fine nephrite (*pounamu*) blade which is horizontally bound to a carved haft. It is an iconic emblem of chiefly authority and is treated with reverence.

4 – 33/1953/8b

Ceremonial adze

Early 19th century

Mangaia, Cook Islands

Elaborate adzes of this type were a form of god image, possibly a representation of Tane-mata-ariki, the deity of craftsmen. Missionary conversion made these items available as curios from the 1820s.

5 – 64/1974/9

Standing figure

Collected 1924-5

Rapa Nui (Easter Island)

An unusual later carving of a standing male figure (*moai tangata*) of an ancestor. These figures bear a resemblance to the larger stone *moai*, ancestral chiefs believed to be descended from the gods.

6 – E1827

Standing figure

Early 19th century

Rapa Nui (Easter Island)

This *moai kavakava* is considered a representation of a deceased ancestor, and was displayed during celebrations associated with the harvest. Possibly carved from *toromiro* wood.

7 – E1886

Votive offering

Collected 1852

Cook Islands

The idea of wrapped and bound objects being associated with veneration is shared by many Pacific cultures. Recent CT scans have revealed a central fibrous body bound in pandanus leaf and rope.

8 – E1769

Breastplate

Late 18th/ early 19th century

Tahiti

Decorated with shark teeth, the breastplate (*taumi*) was associated with high-ranking warriors. *Taumi* were presented with other prestigious items at major celebrations to venerate the sacred chief (*ari'i*).

9 – E1271

Turtle-shell hook

Collected 1791-5

Hawaii

Turtle-shell was a precious material being associated with chiefs and divinity. The turtle travels between the land and the sea (a place linked to the dead) and was therefore considered a valued sacrificial offering appearing as substitutes for human sacrifice.

10 – 64/1974/22

Gorget

19th century

Rapa Nui (Easter Island)

Worn as a sign of authority by men on special occasions the gorget (*rei miro*) is decorated with human heads in the form of sea shells.

11 – E1824

Cape

18th century

Hawaii

Sacred objects in Hawaii were adorned with red feathers. This cape (*'ahu'ula*) symbolised power and prestige. It contained the prayers of the priests and the potency (*mana*) of the man who wore it.

12 – E1775

Helmet

18th century

Hawaii

The helmet (*mahiole*) offered the head protection. When worn with a feathered cloak they took on religious and mystical potency, which was passed from the priest to the ruler to the object.

13 – 47/1908

Neck ornament

19th century

Hawaii

An object of potency and status, the *lei niho palaoa* is made from human hair and whale ivory; an object that was reserved for the chiefly class, and worn by both men and women.

14 – 163/1999/2

Tethering ring and pendant

20th century

Aotearoa (New Zealand)

Once snared a kaka parrot was kept and tamed, its movement confined by this nephrite tethering ring (*kaka poria*). During the fowling season, the tame kaka would be taken into the forests where its cries would attract curious wild kaka.

15 – 110/1931/9

Bird snare

Late 19th century

Aotearoa (New Zealand)

Maori weavers needed feathers to create prestigious *kakahu* cloaks. The kaka parrot was first lured into the forest then captured using a snare (*mutu kaka*) where its legs would be trapped.

16 – 11/1900/163

Priest's dish

19th century

Fiji

This dish (*ibuburaunibete*) was used for *burau*, ceremonial *yoqona* drinking. In a trance, the priest (*bete*) drank *yoqona* in concentrated form through a tube and communicated information to the supplicant.

17 – E1629

Cloak

Early 19th century

Aotearoa (New Zealand)

The chief's cloak (*kaitaka*) features in many ancestral stories and was worn on formal occasions. Crafted by specialist weavers from flax (*Phormium tenax*), some cloaks were decorated with kaka feathers. This example has a decorative border (*taniko*) which was made using twining, a finger-weaving technique that introduced multi-coloured strands.

Island case E3 – E1776; E1777; E1778a; E1778b; E1779; E1780a; E1781

Costume of the chief mourner (*heva tupapa'u*)

18th century

Tahiti

Acquired by 1st Lieutenant Francis Godolphin Bond on the HMS Providence, which arrived in Matavai Bay, Tahiti, on 9 April 1792. Bond donated this costume to the Devon and Exeter Institution in 1815, of which he was a proprietor. This gift was recorded in the D&EI committee meeting minutes. The Devon & Exeter Institution presented this costume to the Albert Memorial Museum in 1872.

A Tahitian chief possessed great social status but also charged with great spiritual power called mana. Upon the death of a chief their body was treated accordingly and mounted on biers shrouded in fine white barkcloth. Relatives would gather around the bier and mourn.

A senior relative would appear in a mourner's costume (*heva tupapa'u*) to lead a spectacular procession, accompanied by family members with their skins blackened with soot. Pearl-shell clappers would warn people as the procession approached to withdraw or conceal themselves. Otherwise they could face being attacked or injured with a sword edged with shark teeth.