



Wave Splitter (Tabuya)

Date
19th to early 20th Century

Primary Maker
Massim

Medium
Wood

Description

This wave splitter (canoe prow), the vernacular name for which is tabuya, was collected from the Massim people of Papua New Guinea's Milne Bay Province. Wave splitters are decorative prows affixed above the actual prow of a canoe and attached under a splashboard (lagim). Each canoe has two wave splitters that are located on both the bow and the stern of the vessel. Boomerang-shaped wave splitters such as this example are commonly found on nagega canoes, which are larger and sturdier Kula vessels that are intended for rougher voyages on open waters. Canoes are the primary language of trade along the Kula ring, a ceremonial trade route in Papua New Guinea's Milne Bay Province. Decorated canoe parts, such as wave splitters (canoe prows), their finials, and splashboards which are transversely socketed into the ends of canoes, signal the arrival of a trader and identify the community they are associated with. Their carvings, black, white, and red palette, and beautiful shell adornments are designed by Massim craftsmen to magically influence one's trade partners into making disadvantageous exchanges. The patterns of carving and painting on these pieces are unique to the various communities that trade around the Kula ring, making fleets easy to identify. However, some motifs like the rolling forms of waves, coiled serpents, and key navigational stars are universal within Massim groups.

Dimensions

12 5/8 × 25 5/8 × 2 5/8 in. (32.1 × 65.1 × 6.7 cm)