



Dagger (Ndam Pisuwe)

Date

mid 20th Century

Primary Maker

Asmat

Medium

Cassowary bone, cassowary feather, fiber and Job's tears

Description

This dagger, also colloquially known as Ndam Pisuwe, was collected from the Asmat people in the Papua Province of Indonesia. A Ndam Pisuwe is commonly made from the long bone of a cassowary and in some cases a human bone of a slain enemy. The dagger featured here is made from a dark brown cassowary bone sharpened to a point. At the top of the dagger a light tan woven fiber is braided into tassels with bunches of cassowary feathers attached.

This particular example also has a cassowary claw attached at the point. The use of cassowary and human bone daggers is far more nuanced than the implements of cannibalism and male-exacted carnage first presented by early European anthropologists. Some daggers were used as hunting tools and for carving game. As tools of warfare, they were used in close-range combat to finish off wounded foes or to stealthily end otherwise engaged combatants with a well-placed downward thrust. Due to the prestige and status associated with both cassowary and human bone, the daggers were commonly used for ritual purposes and displayed at initiations and other secret ceremonies.

Dimensions

14 1/16 × 7 × 5 in. (35.7 × 17.8 × 12.7 cm)