



Yaqona Bowl (Tanoa Fai'ava)

Date

early to mid 20th Century

Medium

Wood and fiber

Description

This wooden bowl, known as a tanoa fai'ava, was used for mixing yaqona, a drink made from the root of a pepper

tree, also frequently called kava. On the sprawling island chain, it derived its importance as a ceremonial drink used in social rituals which could vary in formality from an afternoon drink with one's kinsmen to a state welcoming to a foreign dignitary. The ceremonial importance likely derives in some way from the anesthetic and euphoric properties of the root, which numbs the mouth and purportedly gives the imbiber a pleasant sensation throughout the body. Several different dishes and bowls are used to consume yaqona. Multi-legged bowls, such as this one with exquisite craftsmanship, mostly came from the small Fijian island of the Lau Islands. Before these wooden bowls, the yaqona was made in ceramic bowls or in a plantain leaf in a hole in the ground. Bowls that are rather simple like this were for mostly anyone, but the uniquely shaped bowls were specifically used by priests. This large wooden Kava bowl is carved from one piece of wood on multiple supports. The tanoa fai'ava is the largest of the bowls and it is used during formal welcoming ceremonies called eiqaravi vakaturaga—or yaqona vakaturaga if the kava root drink is the only option being offered. This drinking ritual was used in Fiji throughout much of the islands' recorded history, and was adopted from a Tongan ritual. Formal ceremonies involved parties sitting opposite one another across the bowl. A mixer from the chiefly class would be directed by a man from a non-chiefly class. After the yaqona was prepared men would take drinks in order of prestige using small half coconut shell bowls dipped into the tanoa.

Dimensions

10 1/2 × 31 1/4 × 31 in. (26.7 × 79.4 × 78.7 cm)