



Spearhead (Tataumanaria)

Date

late 19th Century

Primary Maker

I-Kiribati

Medium

Palm wood, shark teeth and sennit

Description

This is most likely the head of a longer Gilbert Islands shark tooth spear referred to as tataumanaria or te mangau in I-Kiribati vernacular. Before being cut from its shaft the spear would have been between 12 and 14 feet long and a standard feature of most Gilbertese combat. Spearman always fought alongside attendants to defend them against attackers with swords or clubs. Accounts differ on whether these pronged spears objects would have been used offensively by the primary spearman or by the attendant to parry an opponent's spear. In any case, the effectiveness of Gilbertese armor meant that spears rarely produced the fatal wounds of swords and clubs. The usage of shark teeth seen in this weapon is

very characteristic of Gilbert Island weapons. Immensely sharp and with a tendency to break off in wounds, these teeth were very deadly. Sharks also have important cultural significance in the Gilbert Islands—featuring heavily in the islands' mythological oral history. This and the ferocity of the beasts adds an additional intimidation factor in battle.

Dimensions

35 × 11 1/2 × 7/8 in. (88.9 × 29.2 × 2.2 cm) In stand: 36 3/4 × 11 1/2 × 3 in. (93.3 × 29.2 × 7.6 cm)