



Object type: Feeding Funnel
Indigenous name: Korere
Culture/location: Maori, New Zealand Date: 1700-1850
Materials: wood
Dimensions: H. 6.29 x W. 4.61 x D. 5.75 in
Institution and accession number: Museum of New Zealand, OL000135



Object type: Drinking Vessel
Indigenous name: Saqa Moli
Culture/location: Fiji
Date: pre-colonization
Materials: clay, resin
Dimensions: H. 4.52 x L. 7.68 x W. 7.28 in
Institution and accession number: Museum Victoria, 16326

This summary compares two status objects from the Polynesian islands: the feeding funnel (korere) from New Zealand, and the drinking vessel (saqa moli) from Fiji. In Polynesian cultures, great importance was put on protecting and preserving a social hierarchy of nobles and commoners who possessed varying degrees of mana. Social hierarchy and status needed to be protected and well-maintained in Polynesian culture (Maranda 1964, 301-79). So, through these art objects the Polynesians with the most mana in society could prevent themselves of having their mana released into a normal object. On the opposite spectrum, the more common people were protected from receiving a painful shock of mana from accidentally coming into contact with a higher-ranked person (Bowden 1979, 50-61). I chose these art objects to feature because they refer to the amount of power a chief or noble possessed and they represent the importance of art objects in maintaining a social hierarchy in Polynesian cultures. These objects not only demonstrate the ingenuity of the Polynesian people in making tools for daily use, they also reveal how social hierarchy and mana are infused into every aspect of culture and life.

The korere, known in the Western world as the “feeding funnel”, was an object used to serve blended food to individuals with high levels of mana, usually nobles or chiefs, that had recently undergone traditional ‘moko’, or facial tattooing (Park 2008, 1447-9; Per, Harary, and

Milicic 1996, 335-50; and Park 2008, 1447-9). Native to New Zealand, the korere displays the characteristic Maori spiral design in its ornamentation along with tiki faces protruding from the top lip of the funnel (Archev 1927, 72-5). The intricacy of the design shows that this funnel was full of mana, a supernatural force of power, and therefore was meant to be used only by Maori people who also had high levels of mana. The transfer of mana from a noble to a common object or person was seen as physically dangerous in Polynesian culture, so mediation tools, like the korere, were put into place to protect people from its harmful effects (Bowden 1979, 50-61). Koreres were made from wood indigenous to New Zealand and carved by priests of the Maori tribes. The priests would chant while carving to infuse mana into the korere, making it more valuable and powerful with every stroke. In using this object in the feeding of nobles, it is clear that Polynesian cultures were very wary of accidentally transferring mana to commoners: the noble would be fed without ever having to touch an object that could lower levels of mana or infuse others with it. Not only did it follow the tapu (formal rituals) of the time, it was beneficial in easing the pain of chewing, caused by the recent facial tattooing, by funneling already processed food to its recipient (Bowden 1979, 5061).

The saqa moli was an object used to pour water into the mouths of high-ranking Fijian people in order for them to preserve their mana, a supernatural force or power (Styers 2012, 226-43). Nobles and chiefs in traditional Fijian culture could not drink water themselves because of their high levels of mana, so they would have to be served by a slightly lower-ranked person of society through a saqa moli (Keesing 1984, 137-56). The object being used by the chief, however, had to also be full of mana in order for him to preserve his own. In making the saqa moli, priests would mold clay into art objects that resemble the natural fruits of Fiji, in their process of molding they would chant and carve intricate decorative patterns, which infused the object with mana. The more intricate the object was, as can be seen in the saqa moli's striations and dots, the more value it had in Fijian culture (van der Grijp 2004, 535-50).

This comparison shows that both art objects have the main purpose of maintaining the flow of mana between high-ranking individuals. The korere also serves a dual purpose of easing the pain associated with eating after traditional facial tattooing, while the recipient was still able to preserve their mana. The saqa moli, however, was used solely to preserve the mana of a noble. Both of their intricate designs and embellished figures show that they were meant for people in positions of power, and that they were objects of great value to individuals and societies.

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