



Object type: Pole Club
Indigenous name: Akatarā
Culture/location: Rarotonga, Cook Islands
Date: 19th Century
Materials: Ironwood
Dimensions: H. 89.7 in.
Institution and accession number: Raymond and Laura Wielgus Collection, Indiana University Art 64.12



Object type: Beaked Battle Hammer
Indigenous name: Totokia
Culture/location: Fiji
Date: 19th Century
Materials: Wood
Dimensions: H. 8 7/8 x W. 32 7/8 in.
Institution and accession number: The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller 1979.206.1401

Competition for resources among the numerous chiefdoms in Polynesia made warfare commonplace. The populations of these societies, including those on Fiji and Cook Islands, were well known for making unique weaponry. I chose the Pole Club and Beaked Battle Hammer as objects to examine because they are prime examples of the time and effort that would have been put into weaponry. They both had special purposes and forms, and the time and effort invested in displaying the culture through the weapon is a testament to how sophisticated the crafting practices were. The warrior's social rank, physique, and personal preference were determinants of how each of these unique war clubs were crafted. Through close examination of these war clubs, historians and archeologists can make educated assumptions about what the warriors found important when engaging in battle.

The two war clubs were wielded with both hands. The unique *totokia* also known as the Beaked Battle Hammer, from Fiji, will be observed with the purpose of examining warfare culture in Fiji. From Rarotonga, the *akatarā*, also known as the Pole Club, will be observed with

the purpose of examining the warfare culture in Rarotonga. These two war clubs are considered specialized weapons because of their unique features absent on other war clubs from these islands.

The Fijian *totokia* once caused much suspicion amongst historians. The weapon is fundamentally different in its design and function compared to other Fijian war clubs. This observation has led some scholars in the past to assume that this weapon was developed under the influence of Europeans or another external influence. The name *totokia* can be used as an indication that this is false because it is unique to Polynesian dialect. Due to there being no translation into any European languages, the belief that the weapon was developed under European influence can be considered a falsehood (Derrick 1957, 394).

The *totokia*'s appearance draws upon forms common in the Fijian environment. According to Archeologist R.A. Derrick, what was called the "Pineapple" on the club's head is actually derived from the form of the pandanus plant. This relates to a theme prominent in art across the Polynesian islands which is the connection between art and the environment. This pineapple-like structure on the *totokia* is what sets it apart from other war clubs. The pineapple structure varied in size amongst the variations of the weapon. This form would have given the weapon a disproportionate amount of mass at the head. That mass would have given the swing of the weapon a great amount of momentum without the warrior wielding the weapon having to put much force behind the swing (Edler 1990, 50). As some may say, this was a tool that did the work for you.

The spiked part of the *totokia* was attached to the so-called pineapple mass on the weapon. The weapon was specialized to pierce the skull (Bailey 1947, 12). The entire force of the weapon's swing would concentrate into the point of the weapon and easily pierce the skull, inflicting a fatal wound to the victim. According to Derrick, "the *totokia* was therefore a favored weapon for assassination, since the blow could be delivered from behind, without swing likely to warn the intended victim (Derrick 1957, 394)." It should also be noted that these weapons were considered so important that they were given individual names by chiefs and they were even buried with the chiefs (Wardell 1994, 164). It was thought that the weapon would help the deceased in their journey to Bulu, the afterworld.

The Rarotongan '*akatara* is arguably just as unique in design as the Fijian *totokia*. Sir Henry Peter Buck wrote, "The neat workmanship and the fine dark polish make the clubs the most attractive of Polynesia (Buck 1944, 281)." This is a huge claim to make due to the vast variety of war clubs found throughout Polynesia. The '*akatara* was made of *toa*, also known as ironwood. The '*akatara* held at the Masco Collection in Detroit, measures 89.7 inches in length

and one-third of the length was dedicated to the elaborately carved serrated blade (Barrow 1979, 72). Anthropologist Adrienne Kaeppler writes that the 'akatara "incorporated male sexual symbolism, linking virility with warfare" (Kaeppler et al 1997, 539), which is reiterated by Allen Wardell who notes, "The butt end is in the form of a penis (Wardell 1994, 194)." Other variations of the weapon feature zig-zag patterns that can be an indication of a connection to genealogy as it is in the Hawaiian and Society Islands (D'Alleva 1998, 105).

Taking this weapon into battle would have meant that warriors wanted to emphasize their masculinity. A visual display of the warrior's masculinity may have been used to intimidate his opponent. It is also thought that the serrations of the club denoted the teeth of a crocodile which would also be used to intimidate the enemy of the warrior wielding this weapon (Barrow 1979, 75). All of the detail put into crafting would have meant great amounts of mana manifested in this weapon and that it would have been highly effective in battle.

These two weapons would have been fearsome in battle for their own reasons and were durable, hence their presence in present day exhibitions. Contrary to popular belief, a lot of thought was put into these weapons. Never did the people of these cultures just pick up stick and deem them effective due to their mana levels being low. There is no way to objectively say which is more effective because they had their own special purposes and also the real power of the weapon was to be determined by the warrior wielding it. The highly trained Fijian and Rarotongan warriors would have been deadly on the battlefield with either one of these weapons, which is why they can both be equally appreciated for their craftsmanship that included symbolism while maintaining function.

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