



Lime container

Not on display

Title/Description: Lime container

Born: 1900 - 1999

Object Type: Container

Materials: Bamboo, Cane, Cassowary feather, Fibre, Pigment

Measurements: h. 739 x w. 70 x d. 100 mm

Accession Number: 163

Historic Period: 20th century

Production Place: Middle Sepik River, New Guinea, Oceania, Pacific

Cultural Group: Iatmul, Sawos

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

The chewing of betel nuts is widely practised here in New Guinea and the lime container must always be present in the process. Chewing betel nuts was traditionally common across the country and so it was also one of the goods that were traded with other villages for other items. The way this lime container is designed indicates that the container belongs to a chief of a community.

The top part of the container represents a large bird common to the coastal region, as well as a human figure in the middle. This shows that the lime container has a rich association with magic. All kinds of magic are related to the lime container depending on which province and villages it originated from.

Pax Jakupa, February 2023

TO-BE-REPLACED-WITH-A-GAP

'Betel chewing' was, and continues to be, a custom practised widely in Melanesia, in both ritual and recreational contexts. The leaves of the Piper betel bush are chewed with areca nuts and lime, which act together as a mild narcotic. In the Sepik region lime for 'betel chewing' was kept in a bamboo tube, which was sometimes mounted at one end with a wood carving secured with cane binding, as in this example. The other end has an aperture for extracting the lime with a limestick, though in this case it has been sealed off for fitting on to a European mount.

Most initiated men possessed lime tubes, which were flourished on public occasions. Aggressive and assertive behaviour was expected of men, and the rattling and scraping of the limestick in the tube

was regarded as flamboyant manly behaviour, notably during oratory. The theme of aggression is echoed in the lime tube finials, which usually depict a bird clutching a crocodile or human head in its talons (see Kelm, 1966: I: 421—37 for examples). The human head on this example closely resembles the painted ancestor and trophy skulls of the Sepik area. Cassowary feathers and red, white, black and blue paints have been used, the last not a local pigment but acquired after the arrival of Europeans. Blue appears predominantly on the mask and the back of the bird's wings. The cane binding is painted red.

Steven Hooper, 1997

Entry taken from *Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection, Vol. 2: Pacific, African and Native North American Art*, edited by Steven Hooper (Yale University Press, 1997) p. 52.

Exhibitions

'Power Plants: Intoxicants, Stimulants and Narcotics', Sainsbury Centre, UK, 14/09/2024-02/02/2025

Provenance

Acquired by the Sainsbury Family in 1954. Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.
