



Food bowl

Not on display

Title/Description: Food bowl

Measurements: h. 130 x w. 670 x d. 280 mm

Accession Number: 558

Historic Period: 19th/early 20th century

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1978

A unique style of lines and shapes makes up the beautiful design of this wooden bowl, which was collected in the 19th or early 20th century from Tami Island. The image of a female is clearly symbolised on the bowl. It may tell us the story or history about women, food and the surrounding islands of Tami society. The image of the female's face on the bowl relates to women enjoying spending time cooking and preparing food during traditional ceremonies or for the family. Preparing food is part of household work done mostly by women in our society. The image of a woman with open arms on the side of the bowl may be a sign of welcome, of woman sharing food with other people within or across communities. The wooden bowl might have belonged to a chief in the village

before it was collected.

Pax Jakupa, February 2023

TO-BE-REPLACED-WITH-A-GAP

This distinctive form of navette-shaped bowl, used for preparing and presenting food, was made by the Tami islanders of the Huon Gulf. This region has varying natural resources, and food and manufactured goods, including bowls, circulated by exchange among the inhabitants of the mainland and the adjacent islands of the Vitiaz Straits. This exchange network was studied by Harding, who noted that in the 1930s the Siassi islanders also began to make bowls, though of inferior quality (1967: 38).

This example, shown base upwards to reveal the full design, is similar to bowls in Dresden and Leipzig, illustrated by Reichard in her extensive museum-based study (1933: pls. xxm, LXIX). The brown wood has been blackened with a manganite graphite compound and then highly polished. The main design, of which a detail is shown, is stated by Bamler (1911: 490-507) to represent *buwun*, a spirit with human and fish attributes. One side of the rim has a figure with outstretched arms, the other a schematic design resembling a double fish. The best survey of the art of this region is by Bodrogi (1961).

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. 61.
