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CHICAGO NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM—ETHNOLOGY

50-41

252537

Provenience: Western Caroline Islands ; Palau

Field No.

People or Culture: Palauan

55-146

Object: handicraft story-board

Material: wood with incised and painted design

Neg. No.

Description: This board is an example of the type of handicraft being produced in Palau today. It is adapted from the aboriginal custom of making such drawings and designs on the cross-beam rafters of the council houses and mens' houses.

This specimen depicts the tale of the fish-bearing

Dimensions: tree of Ngiptal (a submerged island
(in cm.) off the east coast of Babeldaob Island

(see other side) 91 X 24.5

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Acc. 2574

Collection: Presented by Roland W. Force; Collector, 1956.
Tri-Institutional Pacific Program Ethnological Expedition
to Palau, 1954-1956.

In olden days there was an island named Mgiptal near the village of Ngiwal, and on its shore an old woman lived alone. The old woman had a son named Mengidabrutkoil, but she never knew where he was or what he was doing, for instead of looking after his mother Mengidabrutkoil used to travel through other villages.

The Mgiptalese used to pass by the home of the old woman each day as they returned from the sea with their fish, but none of them ever offered her any of their catch, and though the old woman was particularly fond of certain fish she was never able to eat them.

One day, after a particularly long absence, Mengidabrutkoil came home to visit his mother, and she took the chance of complaining to her son that while others had plenty to eat she never had a fish for her pot. Mengidabrutkoil listened to his mother's complaint and before setting out on his next trip he went out into the yard of his mother's house.

Coming to a breadfruit tree growing by the water's edge, chopped off one of its branches. Where the →

branch had been cut off water immediately gushed from the tree, flowing spasmodically to the rhythm of the waves on the shore. With each surge a fish leaped out of the tree.

This tree became the envy of all the other people on the island. "White we must go out to sea for our fish, the old woman can get all she wishes by sitting under her tree", they complained, until finally an envious old man stole over to the wonderful fish-bearing tree one night and chopped it down.

The water that had hitherto flowed forth intermittently now burst out in a torrent and very soon the whole island was flooded.

To this day the site of the island, with its paved roadways, its courtyards etc., can be seen from the water's surface off the shore of H iwal.

1. THE FISH BEARING TREE OF NGIPTAL ISLANDS.