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CHICAGO NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM—ETHNOLOGY

50-3

252547

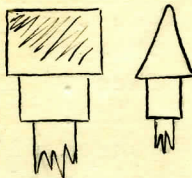
Provenience: Western Caroline Islands; Palau

Hall F

Field No.

People or Culture: Palauan

Object: god shrine



56-49

Material: wood

Description: Made of blaios wood (Cmelina palawensis) which resists decay since termites will not invade it. It is a soft, easily carved wood. The colors used in the painting are all natural ones mixed with water. The yellow and orange are soil bases and the black is a soot base paint.

Neg. No.

Dimensions:

(in cm.)

height: 90.0

(over)

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

Acc. 2574

The head, which protrudes from the head of the sea eel (késebeku) represents the god (chelid) in human form. The term omispis is applied to such a god who has more than one bodily representation. The term means "changing face". The eel is a totemic animal and a common one in Palau. It is a taboo food (delásech) for many houses. Houses with the same totemic animal are considered to be connected by virtue of this fact, but the connections can not be traced. The animal and the supernatural being it represents is not considered an ancestor, just a god. (This last point the collector questions since the religious complex in Palau has so thoroughly disintegrated today that the information may be unreliable.)

Shrines such as this were customarily placed on one end of the stone platform that stands before all old-style houses. See diagram below. Native name: ulengáng.

stone
platform ■

house

■ = position of shrine