

252486

Provenience: Western Caroline Islands; Palau Islands

Field No.

People or Culture: Palauan

Object: pestle for crushing betel nut

55-17

Material: shell (Tridacna gigas)

Description: ground from shell of giant tridacna clam; used for mascerating the betel-nut and the betel-leaf by elders who are lacking teeth. The length of these pestles was frequently correlated with wealth and kin-group prestige. High families had pestles of great length. (over)

Neg. No.

Dimensions:
(in cm.) length: 10.9
circumference: 7.7

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

Acc. 2574

The mortar with which the pestle was used was customarily of wood, though some were of horn. Since animals with horns were late introductions in Palau, this use of horn as mortars must also have been recent.

The term for the pestle and the mortar in the Palauan language is the same. A descriptive qualifier denotes which one of the combination is the referent. The pestle is called orusech el sachal (meaning, "male" part of the combination, as its shape suggests). The term for the mortar is orusech el redil (redil means female; again the shape suggesting the genitalia.)

This pestle was the gift of Reklai of Ngerechelong of the hamlet of Ngabei. These pestles are rare today and are rarely used. The scored end served to crush the nut and leaf better than a flat surface would.

See 252503.