

## Speaker's Club or Staff

### Date

19th century

### Primary Maker

Artist Unknown

### Medium

wood, stain and shell

### Description

The Tongans and Samoans of Western Polynesia are famous warriors. Their weapons are carved of fine hard wood and covered with overall shallow carving in angular geometric patterns. Many of the patterns appear to have been inspired by the elaborate sennit cord wrappings characteristic of artifacts and architecture in this region. In the hierarchic societies of Polynesia, club makers (tufuga) take their place on the social scale just below the highest rank. In Samoa a club maker may even be a king or a priest. The artfully made and decorated club is so important that battles have been called off because someone was using a club not properly finished by a tufuga. Samoan legend records how Tongan invaders were frightened away when a young man stole the mooring-pole from the canoe of the king of the Tongans and carved it into a club with powerful mana (cosmic might). Clubs were also used in stylized fencing contests and in dances. Heavy, dense and straight-grained wood is used, usually from the *casuarina equisetifolia*. The wood is first charred, then a stone axe is used to chop away the burnt wood and smaller stone adzes shape the final form. For the paddle form of club, a plank must first be rived from the log using stone wedges. Shark's teeth are used for incising the designs because they hold a sharper point than stone tools. Incised patterns may continue to be added over the life of the club. Actual boat paddles may have inspired the form of the paddle club but it was never used for that purpose. The stave club is used throughout



Polynesia in situations where a trained, hereditary speaker addresses the public or when someone needs to address a person of high rank. The speaker holds the staff at a slight angle inclined toward the one addressed; note the ornamentation on the end that would be visible to the speaker's audience. The staff may also have sometimes served as a club.

### **Dimensions**

Overall: 37 x 1 5/8 in. (94 x 4.1 cm)

