

Basic Detail Report

00030164

Title

Carved sternpiece (maddi) from the NARA TENA

Date

1990s

Medium

Wood

Dimensions

Overall: 270 × 367 mm, 550 g

Name

Maddi

History

The coastal village of Lamalera is situated on the remote Eastern Indonesian island of Lembata. As the island of Lamalera offers little soil for crop cultivation, the community relies on whale hunting for subsistence. Fishing vessels are integral to local commerce and livelihood and each vessel is owned and managed by a clan. The catch is shared according to a system of rights and obligations which rewards everyone who has had a part in building, equipping, maintaining and operating the boat. Each clan has its own system for each different species. The clans of Lamalera hunt whales and other 'charismatic megafauna', keeping alive sailing and hunting technologies that have vanished elsewhere. Whales and giant manta rays, boats and the sea are interwoven through village life, belief, ritual and art. Genuine subsistence whaling, such as that undertaken at Lamalera, is exempt from the International Whaling Commission's ban, because of the village's cultural, nutritional and economic dependence on it. With no arable land to grow food, Lamaleran's depend on trading dried whale meat and fish for vegetables, fruit, staple cereals and tobacco grown in the hills inland. They also trade for cotton needed to spin thread for making ropes and cloth, and for pigments to dye thread for weaving ikat cloth. The ancestral religion of the Lamaleran society was animist, involving the belief that spirits dwell in every object, and ceremonies often entailed animal sacrifices. Conversion to Catholicism began in the 1890s but it was not until the 1920s that a German priest, Vater Bernadus Bode, brought the whole village into his fold. Bode persuaded the clans to substitute holy water for blood sacrifices in their ceremonies. Each fishing vessel is therefore decorated with carved and painted decorations and spiritual motifs, some Christian and some from pre-existing ancestral beliefs, emphasizing the importance of whaling and fishing to the Lamaleran community.