

List of Forster's South Sea Artifacts (1799)

Abstract

The South Sea artifacts listed below were given to the Academic Museum in Göttingen by the heirs of Johann Reinhold Forster (1729–1798), who served as the official naturalist on James Cook's second Pacific expedition from 1772 to 1775. During the voyage, Forster collected artifacts made by Polynesian peoples. His goal in doing so was twofold: first, he wanted to document the Polynesians' manners and customs; second, he hoped to sell the artifacts upon his return to Europe. Shortly after the expedition docked in England, Forster changed his mind and gave a large portion of his collection of South Sea artifacts to Oxford University (today the collection is held in the Pitt Rivers Museum). He kept the remaining items for himself.

The list includes the artifacts that were on display at Forster's home in Halle, where he lived and worked as a professor of natural history. Most of the items came from the Society Islands (especially Tahiti), Tonga, and New Zealand; other items came from the Marquesas, the New Hebrides, and New Caledonia. The artifacts were divided into three categories: weapons, tools and natural specimens, and clothing (mostly in poor condition). The list also names different components of a Tahitian mourning dress, including three pieces made of mother of pearl, a collar (also mother of pearl), and a bundle of feathers from tropical birds.

Source

A. Weapons.		
1) a long patu.	from New Zealand.	
2) 4 shorter patus	" "	
3) a wide mallet.	from the Friend-	
4) 4 rectangular mallets	ship Islands.	
5) 4 mallets with rounded tops		
6) 2 bows made from white wood from Tierra del Fuego.		
7) one long bow from black wood from New Zealand.		
8) 8 shorter ones from brown wood.		
9) 2 arrows with iron heads.		
10) 20 darts and shooting arrows.		
11) 15 of the same.		
12) 2 large stone axes	from Tahiti.	
13) 2 smaller ones	" "	
14) a shield.	"	"
15) a drum	" "	
16) a conch shell trumpet from New Zealand.		
17) 3 long sticks, 3 short ones, 3 pipes from Tanna Island.		

18) 1 slingshot	from Mallicolo [Malakula]	
19) 1 sack with stones	"	"
20) 2 short, hand-held patta patus from New Zealand.		
B. Tools and Natural Specimens.		
1) 2 benches.	from Tahiti	
2) a wooden box.	" "	
3) 2 large and 4 small baskets.	" "	
4) 2 drinking bowls made of coconut.	" "	
5) one mallet for preparing tree bark for clothing.	" "	
6) 3 short oars.		
7) 1 anvil		
8) 2 fishing nets.		
9) a nest (of the Jupujuba bird) of the <i>Loxia persilis</i> from Madagascar		
10) 2 ropes from coconut fibers.		
11) 12) 13) a comb, a fishhook, and an idol from wood.		
14) 2 long flutes and 2 pan flutes.		
15) 2 instruments for tattooing.		
16) one comb and 2 fishhooks.		
17) a chisel.		
18) 2 little sticks for eating, as knife and fork.		
19) a basket from New Zealand.		
20) a wooden bowl for bread dough.		
21) a grass basket with teeth woven in.		
22) a coconut. The 14-pound fruit nut of <i>Borassus Sonnerati</i> from the Seychelles [?]		
C. Clothing. NB. Much of this is in poor condition.		
1) 3 large collars and a smaller one from Tahiti.		
2) a breastplate from mother of pearl	from the Tahitian	
3) 3 pieces of mother of pearl	mourning dress.	
4) a collar made from pieces of mother of pearl.	" "	
5) a bundle of feathers from tropical birds.	"	"
6) a headdress.		
7) a belt made of teeth.		
8) woven plumes and reeds.		
9) 3 pieces of mother of pearl with feathers.		
10) a tiny bundle of flax.	from New Zealand.	

11) one piece of mother of pearl, for a choker	" "	
12) a headdress made of grass.		
13) Dog hair from a New Zealand costume.		
14) A kind of rosary for praying; made of teeth.		
15) 2 coat hooks made from seal teeth.	from New Zealand	
16) a headdress.	" "	
17) flax bundles from New Zealand.	" "	
18) raw flax.	" "	
19) A poncho from a Tahitian costume.		
20) A mat from Tahiti.		
21) A piece of colorful fabric Madagascar.		
22) " "	red winter fabric.	from Tahiti
23) " "	white, thinner fabric.	
24) " "	miscellaneous fabric.	From tree-
25) " "	yellow fabric.	bark
26) a mat.		
27) a dress from New Zealand.		

Source: List of Forster's Artifacts from the South Sea in the Institute Archive and the Ethnological Collection, Göttingen. © Ethnological Collection of Georg August University Göttingen.

Translation: GHI staff

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