

**FIGURE**

Eastern Caroline Islands, Nukuoro
 early to mid-19th century
 Wood; h. 15 $\frac{5}{16}$ in. (39.5 cm.)
 Museum exchange, 1943 (4752)

Within the broad areas of Melanesia and Micronesia are islands inhabited by people who exhibit Polynesian physical and cultural traits. This figure was made on one of these Polynesian "outliers," Nukuoro, an atoll of four hundred acres with forty islets to its north, east, and south, situated in the Eastern Caroline Islands of Micronesia. Micronesian mats, fabrics, and ceremonial bowls, decorated with nonrepresentational designs are well known, but figurative sculpture is rare. The remarkable sculpture of Nukuoro underscores its Polynesian connection.

Nukuoro religious images (*tino* or *dinonga eidu*), representing either primeval gods or deified ancestors and often

kept in a community religious building (*amalau*), are the most highly stylized and geometric of all Oceanic anthropomorphic sculptures. Essential parts of the body are interpreted as formal elements: ovoids, triangles, cylinders. The proportions, clearly displayed in the Academy's piece, were rigidly applied to all figures. The pointed egg-shaped head rests at an angle on the columnar neck. The face of this figure is smooth, but other examples have abbreviated facial features. From the broad shoulders, spindly arms hang down and terminate in strutlike hands resting on the hips. Where the sloping chest meets the rectangular plane of the midsection, a crisply defined ridge is indicated. Deeply incised bands accentuate the pubic triangle. In profile, the exaggeration and stylization of the buttock is evident. The legs taper to the supporting block (on some images the block is incised to indicate toes and feet). The smooth, unadorned surface and the superb craftsmanship of this piece are reminiscent of Mangarevan sculpture and other Polynesian works. However, its austere abstraction lends the piece an elegance and sophistication unique to Nukuoro.

Probably fewer than twenty Nukuoro images are extant; they range in size from about fifteen inches to over seven feet. The Academy's figure was acquired by the Reverend E. T. Doane, an American missionary stationed in Ponape, who sent it to the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in Boston. Doane had visited Nukuoro aboard the ship *Star* in 1874 and may have acquired the piece at that time. RAD