

CABINET OF CURIOSITIES

WATER FILTER IN STONE

Ignimbrite

19th century

A. 27 x L. 30,5 cm

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The cleaning and purification of water for consumption, a timeless concern of all communities, was done almost empirically, using traditional processes such as placing small fish, frogs or whitewash in the water that was conserved in cisterns and wells. In the waters that were collected directly in the streams or fountains, the suspended foundations and the filtering proved to be the most effective, being used mainly from the end of the 19th century when it was found that water could transmit diseases such as cholera.

The light grey trachyte and ignimbrite, abundant porous volcanic rocks of the island, allow an effective filtering and therefore around the 1880s, the local construction sites started the production of stone filters that were intended for exportation.

The equipment has a square structure on the outside and is excavated on the center forming a basin or a deposit where the water is poured. From there the water is slowly filtrated, drop by drop, to a bowl that is placed underneath. Installed in wooden or wrought iron rests, the filters with their respective bowls became common and indispensable equipment in many households, mainly in the homes of the Azorean community in Brazil.

The production and exportation of water filters gave way to a successful local craft industry at the firm of Basílio Simões in Angra do Heroísmo, the only producer/exporter, and in Eduardo da Silva Ribeiro, a merchant that was based in Rio de Janeiro, its sole representative. Even though its initial success, by the end of the 1910s such production was already extinct, as well as its memory.