



Fastener/toggle/buckle

Not on display

Title/Description: Fastener/toggle/buckle

Born: 1800 - 1899

Object Type: Equipment

Materials: Whalebone

Measurements: h. 99 x w. 60 x d. 30 mm

Accession Number: 108

Historic Period: 19th century

Production Place: Greenland, North America, Sermersooq, The Americas

Cultural Group: Tunumiit

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

The lack of provenance or knowledge of the Arctic can sometimes lead to extraordinary fabrications. This aged whale bone toggle with spots of discolouration was previously thought to be a bust. The top two holes were considered to be eyes and the lower hole to be the mouth set in the round face with a lunate body underneath. Bought in the former Ammassalik District (now Sermersooq), an early description mentioned that it might have been souvenir art.

One could imagine that Robert and Lisa Sainsbury were intrigued with the object and might have wondered whether it had any archaeological significance like the Okvik figures or whether it held any spiritual value. This object, however, holds quite a different role. Lars Rasmussen, Director of Ammassalik Museum, explains:

“I have seen similar carvings in two situations (from memory). I think there can be similar carved objects on the kayaks front deck. As I remember it is used to tighten the skin-strings on the front deck. The strings used to hold the kayak-knife etc. I think I have seen a similar object used on one of the eye-screens [snow goggles] from the area as well.”

The multi-purpose use of the object, either as fastener to tighten the strings on the front deck of a *qajaq* (kayak) or for *ilgaak* (snow goggles), illustrates the fluidity of objects.

Peter Loovers, February 2022

Provenance

Purchased by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury from J. J. Klejman in 1964.

Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.
