



'Pelican stone' image

Not on display

Title/Description: 'Pelican stone' image

Born: 1700 - 1799

Object Type: Implement

Materials: Asphaltum, Steatite

Measurements: h. 136 x w. 67 x d. 75 mm

Accession Number: 133

Historic Period: 18th century or earlier

Production Place: North America, Southern California, The Americas, USA

Cultural Group: Chumash

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

Objects of this kind have been found at many sites in southern California and on the offshore islands, but very little is known of their former use, nor have they been precisely dated, though the area has been occupied for many centuries. They have been called 'pelican stones' because the hook projection resembles the beak of the pelican, which is an expert fisher. Hudson and Blackburn (1986: 174) suggest that they may have been used as fishing talismans. The Chumash subsisted by hunting and fishing; they did not practise agriculture.

Steatite, a soft stone quarried on Santa Catalina Island, was used by the Chumash for a variety of items, including pipes and zoomorphic images (see Burnett, 1944). Many of these are decorated with shell discs set in asphaltum, which occurs naturally in seeping pools. A disc, now lost, was formerly set into the asphaltum plug in the 'navel' of this image. There is an engraved line across the back of the head. The number 19/30 is written in black ink on the base.

Steven Hooper, 1997

Entry taken from *Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection, Vol. 2: Pacific, African and Native North American Art*, edited by Steven Hooper (Yale University Press, 1997) p. 292.

Provenance

Purchased by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury from K. J. Hewett in 1971.

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

