



Wrist ornament

On display

Title/Description: Wrist ornament

Born: 1750 - 1799

Measurements: l. 41 x h. 20 x d. 100 mm

Accession Number: 196

Historic Period: 18th Century - Late

Production Place: Hawaiian Islands, Pacific

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

Captain Cook's visits to Hawaii in 1778 and 1779 during his third voyage were the first made by European ships to the group, although trading vessels had been crossing the north Pacific between the Americas and Asia since the sixteenth century. David Samwell, surgeon aboard Cook's ship the *Discovery*, observed that Hawaiian women he saw wore 'little Images of turtle made of bone on their fingers like we do seals, and some wear them on their wrists' (Beaglehole, 1967: 180). Several turtle ornaments were collected at this time (Force and Force, 1968: 95; Kaeppler, 1978: 97) and although no collection history exists for the present example, it is closely comparable to documented turtles and certainly dates from this contact period.

The turtle, an animal of ritual significance in many Polynesian cultures, is beautifully rendered here in bone (probably human), with features clearly defined and eyes inlaid with tiny pieces of turtle shell. The underside is pierced three times for bracelet cords of 8-ply braided human hair, a highly valued material, which may have been provided by the locks which were cut off during mourning for an eminent person or after a woman's marriage or first childbirth.

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. 29.

Provenance

Acquired by the Sainsbury Family in 1964. Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.
