



Qawawaaq (ivory human figure) or alingtiiritaq (amulet or household guardian)

On display

Title/Description: Qawawaaq (ivory human figure) or alingtiiritaq (amulet or household guardian)

Object Type: Figure, Head

Materials: Walrus ivory

Technique: Carving

Accession Number: 455

Production Place: Arctic, North America, The Americas

Cultural Group: Inuit

Games play an integral part of Arctic Indigenous Peoples' lives. Both children and adults were fervent competitors to outwit the other through skills, luck, and athletic prowess. Amongst these games is *meteghlluwaaghet* [1], or *tingmiujang* [2] or *manigaunnat* [3] ('bird game'). [4] Mostly though the figurines are shaped in birds, as the name of the game indicates, but there are examples that game -pieces has a bird body with woman's face. Particularly during bad weather or during the dark winter months, indoor games like the bird game were played on a regular basis. [5] The bird game, like other games, can be found across the Arctic from Chukotka to Greenland and

underscores shared Thule ancestry. [6] There are regional variations on the rules of the game, but the principle is that one player tosses the set of ivory carved birds. [7]

St Lawrence Island Yupik elder Elaine Kingeekuk explains:

Milulluki ukut amalka naghaaghnaqegkumta elpek milulleqaaten.

(By throwing them, say for example we were going to play, you will throw them.)

Napaghngalghiit tugulleqaaten.

(You will take the ones that are standing.)

Taagken whanga.

(Then it's my turn.)

Napaghngalghiit tugulleqanka.

(I will collect the ones standing.)

Taagken Uwhaawen.

(Then Angela Larson's [who is sitting next to Elaine Kingeekuk] turn.)

Napaghngalghiit...

(Those standing...)

Uzimun igleghllequkut napaghngalghiiput tugaaqluki.

(We will go around, taking the upright ones.)

Taagken alla kaaskumi ellnganun ellngan qawaaggani tuguluku pillugutesleqiiit.

(Then if it becomes his turn, he will take the little birds and let them fight.)

Naasqwitgun tuguluki whanga qawaaggaga tugulleqaa nalluniilnguq.

(We will take them by the head. See, my bird can be identified.)

Qawaawaghhaq.

(The little bird.)

Taagken ellngan naasqwa ifkaghlleqa.

(Then it will drop its head.)

Whanga or ellnga nekevghakuma napaghngakumi whanga kayaalqillequnga.

(Hers might be standing, or mine; if mine is I will win.)

Taagken Uwhaawetem ataasiq

(Then Angela Larson will compete with one.)

Kingulighpiigaam naghaaghlllequukut naghaaghlllequkut kingulighpiigaq uglalqaq kayaalqillequq.

(Until the end, we will play and play; and the last one with the most will win.). [8]

During a visit to the Smithsonian's Arctic Studies Center, renowned St Lawrence Island elder Estelle Oozevaseuk shows how the game is played and mentions that those that do not remain upright depict birds that have been 'killed'. [9] Games, however, also entailed elements of divination which can predict hunting success. [10]

This particular walrus ivory carving has a similar base as the bird game pieces but differs in the plump body and the expressive face. Since it is not carved as a conventional bird or bird-woman figure, we have to question whether this unique carving actually was part of the bird game. Instead, perhaps this was a personal hunting or healing charm of a human face with animal body. To an extent, the face shares similarities with those carved into ancestral or more contemporary masks or figures. Perhaps therefore this was a smaller version of *qawawaaq* (carved ivory human figures) or an *alingtiiritaq* (amulet or household guardian) (see UAE 469) and placed inside the house or *qalgi* (men's house or ceremonial space) as a guardian spirit.

Peter Looovers, February 2022

[1] From discussion with John Apassingok, Lydia Apatiki, Ralph Apatiki, Sr., Elaine Kingeekuk, Christopher Koonooka and Merlin Koonoka at the Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center at the Anchorage Museum, January, 2012., <https://alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=339> [accessed 22 December 2021]

[2] Maria von Finckenstein. n.d. Playthings and Curios: Historic Inuit Art at the Canadian Museum of Civilization. https://www.historymuseum.ca/cmhc/exhibitions/tresors/art_inuit/inart15e.html [Accessed 03 December 2021].

[3] From discussion with Jane Brower, Ron Brower, Sr. (Iñupiat Heritage Center), Doreen Simmonds (Commission on Iñupiaq History, Language & Culture) and Kenneth Toovak at the National Museum of Natural History and National Museum of the American Indian, 2/04/2002-2/06/2002. Also participating: Karen Brewster, Wanda Chin and Terry Dickey (University of Alaska Museum) and Aron Crowell (NMNH), <https://alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=442> [accessed 22 December 2021]

[4] Robert McGhee, 'Ivory for the Sea Woman: The Symbolic Attributes of a Prehistoric Technology, *Canadian Journal of Archaeology*, 1 (1977), pp. 141-149 (p.144)

[5] Lincoln, Amber. 2020. Harnessing Weather in Hunting Livelihoods. In *Arctic: Culture and Climate*, Amber Lincoln, Jago Cooper and Jan Peter Laurens Looovers (Eds.). Pp. 102-131, 138-141. London: Thames & Hudson in collaboration with The British Museum. P. 136

[6] Cottie Arthur Burland, *Eskimo Art*. (London and New York: Hamlyn, 1973); Charles C. Hughes. 'Siberian Eskimo', in *Handbook of North American Indians: Arctic (Volume 5)* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1984)

[7] Frédéric Laugrand and Jarich Oosten, 'When Toys and Ornaments Come into Play: The Transformative Power of Miniatures in Canadian Inuit Cosmology', *Museum Anthropology*, 31(2008), pp. 69-84 (p.72)

[8] Elaine Kingeekut during [From discussion with John Apassingok, Lydia Apatiki, Ralph Apatiki, Sr., Elaine Kingeekuk, Christopher Koonooka and Merlin Koonoka at the Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center at the Anchorage Museum, January, 2012.], <https://alaska.si.edu/record.asp?id=339> [accessed 22 December 2021]

[9] Estelle Oozevaseuk in St Lawrence Island Yupik Toy Birds with Estelle Oozevasaseuk and Branson Tungiyang from Gambell, translation by Vera Kaneshiro. (Arctic Studies Center, Department of Anthropology, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, n.d.)

[10] Frédéric Laugrand and Jarich Oosten, 'When Toys and Ornaments Come into Play: The Transformative Power of Miniatures in Canadian Inuit Cosmology', *Museum Anthropology*, 31(2008), pp. 69-84 (p.72)

Provenance

Accessioned into the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia circa 1995.
