



Sea otter image

Not on display

Title/Description: Sea otter image

Object Type: Ornament

Materials: Bone, Stone

Measurements: l. 95 x w. 28 x d. 25 mm

Accession Number: 666

Historic Period: 19th century

Production Place: Alaska, Aleutian Islands, North America, The Americas

Credit Line: Purchased with support from Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1976

The Aleuts fixed attachments of this kind to the inside of their canoes as hunting charms and fasteners (see Liupanova, 1967: pl-1, in Ray, 1981:106). They are usually made of walrus ivory or

bone and depict the sea otter in its characteristic feeding posture, lying on its back in the water. A raised rectangular panel down the back has two transverse holes pierced through it, by which the image was attached to the canoe.

Sea otter pelts were in great demand in the Far East in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and a busy trade developed between traders and local people along the western seaboard of north America. The Aleuts are distantly related to the Inuit people of the adjacent Alaskan mainland, with whom they shared many culture traits and a similar way of life.

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. 249.

Provenance

Formerly in the possession of Captain K. A. Webster.

Purchased by the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia from K. J. Hewett in 1976 out of funds provided by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury.
