



Handle for cord drill

On display

Title/Description: Handle for cord drill

Object Type: handle

Materials: Walrus ivory

Measurements: h. 24 x w. 117 x d. 18 mm

Accession Number: 738

Historic Period: 18th century or earlier

Production Place: Alaska, North America, The Americas

Credit Line: Purchased with support from Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1980

This carving could possibly be the handle for a seal drag (a thong for dragging the dead animal across the ice), but is more likely one of the handles for a cord drill. Related examples are illustrated by Murdoch (1892: fig. 158). The cord drill, an alternative to the bow drill (see object 661), was used south of the Yukon river. A cord was looped round the drill shaft and pulled backwards and forwards by means of handles of this kind, thus rotating the shaft at high speed. Downward pressure on the shaft was achieved by a mouthpiece, gripped between the teeth. The animal heads may represent caribou without antlers, or bears. The eyes are inlaid with wood plugs; the central aperture is broken at the back. Although the simple engraving has some Punuk characteristics, the piece is probably from later in the prehistoric period.

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. 236.

Provenance

Purchased by the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia from Arbutus Limited on the advice of Robert Sainsbury in 1980 out of income from the Sainsbury Purchasing Fund.
